

Okinawan Message to President Obama: Withdraw the Marines

Study Group on Okinawan External Affairs

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バラク・オバマ米大統領へ ー沖縄からの声ー

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(English and Japanese text)

On Friday 13 November, US President Obama flew in to Tokyo. The unresolved issue of "replacing Futenma US Marine Air Station has been removed from the talks agenda, because the two sides cannot agree on how to resolve it. Festering for more than 13 years, the issue has risen gradually to a head since the Hatoyama Government took office at the beginning of September calling for a redefinition of US-Japan relations.

The one proposal that nobody in either Tokyo or Washington has considered is the one advanced below by a representative group of prominent Okinawans: that the US simply close and withdraw from all its Okinawan bases. For 65 years, US forces have dominated Okinawa, beginning with the 1945 and continuing through protracted military occupation to the present. Until Okinawan views are taken into serious consideration, the problem cannot be settled.

The Okinawan "Open letter," reproduced below

both English and Japanese, was released on 9 November.

November 9, 2009

President Barack Hussein Obama,

We are residents of Okinawa and we would like to express our views regarding the United States Marine Corps Futenma Air Station and the current agreement to build a new base in Nago City, Okinawa.

We urge you to withdraw all of USMC from Okinawa. The people of Okinawa have been and will continue to be firmly opposed to the current US plan to relocate the dangerous Futenma Air Station to another location within Okinawa. We demand that the Futenma Air Station be shut down and returned unconditionally. The USMC has been stationed in Okinawa since the mid 1950s. The only real solution to the Futenma problem is a total withdrawal of the USMC from Okinawa.

Here we respectfully state the reasons for our demand. First, the current agreement between the US and Japanese governments regarding the construction of a new USMC base in Nago City was reached without consultation with the

government or the people of Okinawa in 2005 and 2006. As many recent election results and public opinion polls show, Okinawa's people have been calling for relocating Futenma out of Okinawa.

Second, the sea area of the new base, located off shore of USMC Camp Schwab in Nago City, is a habitat for various endangered species, including dugong, the Asian manatee. It is unacceptable to destroy the highly valuable ocean environment with the construction of a military base.

Third, the US and Japanese governments agreed to close the USMC Futenma Base and return its land to Okinawa in 1996, with the condition that a replacement facility be constructed in Okinawa. However, the new facility has not yet been built. The fourteen years since have proven that it is simply not possible to squeeze a new military base in Okinawa, which has long suffered an overburden of US military presence.

Finally, when the closure of Futenma Air Station was first discussed, it was assumed that the ground combat element and logistic combat element would remain in Okinawa. However, since there is virtually no possibility of building a new air station in Okinawa, the USMC should relocate both the ground combat element and aviation combat element out of Okinawa. Indeed, it would be more logical and beneficial for the USMC if all the elements of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force were relocated together. Our

proposal of a total withdrawal of USMC from Okinawa would actually fit the necessity of the MAGTF's integration of elements most effectively. By withdrawing from Okinawa, the USMC could avoid the unreasonable arrangement of keeping some troops in Okinawa and stationing others in Guam or Hawaii. It would be more desirable for the USMC, while at the same time preserving the highly valuable ocean environment and satisfying the demands of the people of Okinawa.

In conclusion, we wish to urge the United States and Japanese governments to begin the process of planning for a total withdrawal of the USMC from Okinawa. Now is the time to act for "CHANGE" to create a better relationship between Japan and the United States. Both countries would benefit from a break with the status quo and a fresh perspective on the Futenma issue.

Sincerely yours,

Seigen Miyasato
Chairman
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Filmmaker Linda Hoaglund's video of the November 8, 2009 Ginowan anti-base demonstration that preceded the Obama visit to Japan is here (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3wRDcDfMCA&feature=player_embedded).

バラク・オバマ米大統領へ

—沖縄からの声—

オバマ大統領へ沖縄からの声を届けたく、この書を記しています。

わたしたちは、オバマ大統領の訪日の機会に、米海兵隊の沖縄からの全面撤退を検討するよう求めます。沖縄の人々は、一貫して、危険な普天間基地の沖縄県内での移設を中心とする米軍再編計画に反対し、無条件で普天間基地の閉鎖ないし返還を求め続けてきています。もともと米海兵隊は、1950年代半ばに日本本土から沖縄へ移駐してきたものです。この問題の根本的な解決は、米海兵隊の沖縄からの全面撤退しかありません。

第一に、2005年と2006年に合意された日米合意は、沖縄の人々への説明を一切行っておらず、理解を得ていません。沖縄の民意は、普天間基地の県外ないし国外への移設を要求しています。

第二に、この日米合意による普天間基地の移設先として埋め立てられる名護市にあるキャンプ・シュワブ水域は、多様で希少性の高い生物が生きる空間なのです。つまり、地球環境を守る上で死滅させてはならない海なのです。

第三に、日米両政府は、1996年4月、沖縄県内に代替施設を建設することを条件として普天間基地の返還に合意しましたが、その代替飛行場の建設は、今なお実現しておりません。14年近い時間が経過してもその移設が実現していないという事実は、誰もが認める過剰な負担にあえでいる沖縄の地には新たな基地を受け入れる余地がないことを物語っています。

第四に、普天間基地を代替する飛行場建設の場所を沖縄県内に探し出せる可能性がない以上、地上部隊とあわせて航空部隊を、沖縄県外ないし国外へ移設するのが最適な解決なのです。これまで普天間基地の返還を検討する際に、米海兵隊の地上部隊や支援部隊が沖縄に存続することを前提としてきました。今こそ、その前提を見直すときなのです。

私たちが要求する米海兵隊の沖縄からの全面撤退は、地上と航空の部隊を一体として作戦行動をとるという米海兵隊の論理に従っても、妥当な選択ではないでしょうか。そうすることにより、一部の部隊を沖縄に残し、他の部隊をグアムやハワイに配置する非合理性を排除できます。

これは、同時に、地球にとって貴重な海を残し、沖縄の要望を満たすことができる選択なのです。

普天間基地の移設問題について早期に終止符を打つために、日米両政府は沖縄からの米海兵隊の全面的な撤退の検討へと移るべきです。より良い日米関係へと進化するために、チェンジに向かう挑戦が必要なのです。これまでの前提から自由となる発想こそ、日米両政府が学ぶべき沖縄での教訓なのです。

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