

The Bus to Henoko Part II: Riot Police and Okinawan Citizens Face-off over New Marine Base 辺野古へのバス 機動隊と沖縄県民、新海兵隊基地を前に対決

C. Douglas Lummis

This is Part Two of a series reporting on citizen action to block the construction of a new US Marine Base at Henoko, expanding the present base into Oura Bay in Northern Okinawa. Part One is available [here](#).

For a summary overview of the issues see [Ashitomi Hiroshi, Urgent Okinawan Appeal for Help introduced by Gavan McCormack](#)

3 November. When I arrived at 9:30 at the plaza in front of the Prefectural Office Building in Naha for the daily bus to Henoko, Mike Mochizuki was waiting. Mike, who teaches at George Washington University in DC, has had an interest in the Henoko new base issue from some years, has written about it and lobbied in relation to it. He was visiting Okinawa on some other business, but taking the Shimagurumi Kaigi bus from Naha on my recommendation. He is well known in Okinawa, and several people recognized him and welcomed him.

It was a national holiday (culture day) and the bus was pretty full: some of the extra seats had to be folded down in the aisle to seat everyone. Oshiro Hiroko, who is the regular - not "guide"; "moderator" maybe? - gave her regular

introduction, took orders for bento (box lunches), identified the first-timers, and began passing around the mike. First timers are always warmly welcomed, especially if they come from mainland Japan or abroad - though if either of the latter, in their ignorance of the Okinawan situation, say anything dumb or offensive, they are vigorously corrected.

Mike being one of the first timers, the microphone was soon passed along to him, and when he introduced himself he was warmly applauded. But knowing that his position is quite different from that of the others on the bus, he chose his words carefully. He said that he was interested in the Okinawa base question, that he had written about it and would again, that he wanted to experience the atmosphere on the bus and at the gate, and that when he got back to Washington he would tell the people he knew in government and academia what people were thinking and feeling - this last drew applause. He did not mention the compromise proposal he favors, which is to abandon the bay reclamation project, and build helipads inside Camp Schwab to which Futenma Air Station's First Marine Air Wing and its Ospreys could be transferred. That would be a victory for the save-the-bay movement, and a defeat for the movement opposed to transferring the Air Wing within the prefecture. When I told him that the people in the bus would never agree to that, he said that he knew that, but believed, given the stubbornness of the US and Japanese Governments, that this was the best that could be hoped for.

Following the newcomer's self-introductions, debate began. When I started taking this bus back in January, it was pretty much taboo to suggest that Futenma base should be moved to the mainland, in part because to suggest such a thing would be rude to the people who had come all the way from the mainland to support the movement. Now the mood has changed, and the issue is openly debated, with the *ken gai isetsu* (transfer outside the prefecture) proposal, as it is called, slightly in the majority position. The shift is partly influenced by a book published by Tokyo University Professor Takahashi Tetsuya on the subject (Okinawa no Beigun Kichi: "Kengai Isetsu" wo Kangaeru; [Okinawa's US Military Bases: Thinking About "Transfer Outside the Prefecture"], Shueisha) and partly because several groups on the mainland (Osaka, Tokyo, Fukuoka) have come to accept the idea. (This is not the place to set down the whole case for transferring Futenma Base to mainland Japan: the main points that people mention are: 1) Back in the fifties when the Japanese anti-war movement "successfully" kicked out a number of US bases from mainland Japan, in fact they were moved to Okinawa; 2) While opinion polls show that 60% of Japanese support the Peace Constitution, 86% also support the Japan-US Security Treaty and 75% support US bases in Okinawa. This means that most people want to be "protected" by US military power, so long as most (now 74%) of the troops and bases are in Okinawa; 3) Discrimination: for example, in the same newspaper that reported that construction at Henoko was resuming, it was also reported that the planned Osprey exercises at Saga on the mainland had been cancelled "because of course you cannot do such a thing if the people do not approve.")

One of the women also told happily about the day, a month or so ago, when the bus stopped

at a rest station on the way to Henoko and the people saw the notorious Okinawa-baiting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide and campaign-promise-breaking Diet Member Shimajiri Aiko (nicknamed "Shimauri", or "Island seller") walking across the parking lot. Thereupon they piled out of the bus and chased and heckled them back into their cars, in which they made their escape. Retelling this story brought delighted laughter (keep in mind that most of these folks are in their sixties and seventies).

After that the singing began. When they sang the sit-in song, Mike brought out from his pocket one of those do-anything gadgets and recorded it. I expect that when he gets back to DC he will be telling people that these protesters are by no means in the dispirited, depressed loser mode that one might expect from reading the news reports. The singing, clapping and laughing he recorded will help make that persuasive.

At the gate, the mood swings from celebration (singing, dancing, laughing) to resentment and rage. A couple of times each day the people stand up, cross the road, and march up and down outside the fence, then converge on the gate, raise fists, chant slogans, sing songs, and yell at the riot police. Their policy is not to interfere in the regular functioning of the base, but only to block vehicles related to construction. But sometimes when a whole line of gargantuan military trucks appears they break that rule and try to block those as well, or at least delay them. Sometimes they sit down in the street, at which point the riot police climb down from their armored bus and come marching down to the gate. But the affair has become pretty routinized: the police know that after a period of lively shouting and occasional jostling back and forth the people will go back across the street and resume the

rally. (During these happenings Mike Mochizuki stood on the other side of the street and took videos.)



Riot police remove elderly protester from the gate (Photo by Yamaguchi Sueko)

The daytime action is mostly ceremonial, symbolic, and educational. Construction-related vehicles enter the base between 6:00 and 7:00 AM, and the busses don't arrive in time to participate in efforts to block their entry. People who participate in the early morning action either sleep over in the tents or drive there in their own cars, so the numbers are necessarily smaller (The numbers vary. The early morning action draws between a couple score and sometimes as many as a hundred. The daytime action draws at least a hundred, and sometimes as many as two hundred.) One fellow who had been there told me that the action that morning had not lasted long. He also told me - his eyes flashing with anger - that the riot policeman who came to pick him up out of the street said, as though addressing a baby, "Grandpa, it's dangerous out here. Let me carry you over to the sidewalk where it's safe."

Uehara Aki and the police at the gate, November 10, 2015.

Also, one person had been detained. It seems that a policeman pushed him from behind, and as he fell his leg touched ("kicked") another policeman. (He was released three days later) The big thing is that, so far the movement has not found a way to prevent trucks from entering the base. Yet, despite Japanese government statements that Gov. Onaga's attempts to halt construction are invalid, Kitaueda and others claim that thus far, the work is only preparatory because the legal situation remains murky.



(Photo by Yamaguchi Sueko)

In the afternoon the sit-in rally again turned into a lively - sometimes testy - debate about whether Futenma base should be moved to the mainland or whether it should be subjected to something called "tekkyo". The dictionary says this word means "removal" or "evacuation", but that misses something. It seems to imply that the thing "tekkyoed" disappears altogether

from the world. The trouble with moving the 1st Marine Air Wing to the mainland, we are told, is that it will still be able to fight wars, whereas if it is subjected to tekkyo apparently it will not. Little by little people are coming to see that this is an illusion, that, however effective the movement may be thus far in preventing the construction of a new base at Henoko, and even preventing movement of the Air Wing to the mainland, it has no capacity to prevent the U.S. military from deploying the Marines elsewhere.

As we approached town the debate gave way to singing again, so that when we pulled into downtown Naha the singing and clapping on the bus blended together with the strident harangue from the rightists' sound trucks denouncing the demonstrators and the general noise of the city to form quite a symphony: Naha today.

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Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related themes include -

Sunagawa Maki and Daniel Broudy, [Balloons and Tape as Hate Speech: American and Japanese Rightwing Responses to the Okinawan Anti-Base Movement](#)

International Scholars, Artists, and Activists Petition, [The World is Watching: International Scholars, Artists, and Activists Petition to Prevent a New U.S. Military Base in Okinawa](#)