

Local Responses to Prime Minister Abe's Attack on Article Nine and the Constitution

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Introduction by the Rikkyo University Institute of Peace and Community Studies

The Abe administration's aim to further weaken the parameters of Article 9 by seeking legal grounds to engage Japan's military in collective self-defense activities sent Tokyo-based Japanese of all ages to the streets in protest this past summer. Tens of thousands of protesters gathered repeatedly in front of the National Diet Building and prime minister's residence to voice their opposition to this to demand, as emphasized by Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs), a politics based on Japan's postwar Constitution. With media focus on events that took place in the nation's capital and at the level of the state, local interests and opinion is sometimes overlooked. This article introduces translations of two opinion pieces published in two local Japanese newspapers, the Okinawa Taimusu (Okinawa Times), out of Naha, Okinawa, and the Kahoku Shinpō published in Sendai.

Both editorials focus on the Abe Cabinet's decision to revise Japan's security legislation to complete a process that has haunted Japanese governments since the first Iraq War in 1991, when Japan faced US derision for its support for the US-led coalition being limited to cash, but not soldiers ("boots on the ground"), to the military effort to drive Saddam Hussein's military out of Kuwait. Yet, as Ōno Akinori writes, the people of Okinawa feel neglected for a number of reasons. The only part of Japan to directly experience hand-to-hand combat in the

Pacific War, an experience that devastated the islands and resulted in the death of more than one fourth of the population, they have been forced to shoulder an unreasonable burden in hosting U.S. troops ever since. While the possibility of Japanese forces returning to the battlefield would increase this burden, it has received little mention in the discussion surrounding the pending bill. Suzuki Mutō's contribution focuses on the rights of the people of a constitutional nation to be engaged in the process of decision making. Alluding to the disaster that his home prefecture experienced in the triple disaster of March 2011, he suggests that Prime Minister Abe should concentrate on responding to real disasters at hand rather than looking for potential disasters of the future far from Japan's shores.



Fresh Worries Over the Military Burden on Okinawa: Further Integration of Japan's Self-Defense Forces and US Forces

Ōno Akinori, *Okinawa taimusu*

May 15, 2015

It was 43 years ago, on May 15, 1972, that the Okinawa Islands were reunified with Japan. It was Japan's peace constitution that encouraged the island people to support this return. The day before this year's reunification anniversary, May 14, the Japanese Cabinet approved four new security-related bills that would enable the government to exercise collective self-defense activity. This interpretation of the Japanese postwar constitution has never been allowed before July 2014. At a press conference Prime Minister Abe Shinzo repeated his mantra: the government is determined to secure the lives and protect the peaceful livelihood of the Japanese people. He also emphasized that the Japan-US security partnership would remain the axis of Japan's security. This means an increase in the number of Japan-US joint exercises. Okinawa, being home to a large number of US military bases in Japan, cannot shed its worries that this new development means it is being asked to shoulder an even heavier military burden and increasing the likelihood that it would be targeted in an emergency.

The goal of the this new security legislation is for Japan to maintain "seamless" cooperation with the United States in times of peace and emergency, which inevitably forces upon Okinawa this greater military burden. The government, however, has yet to detail to the prefecture the kinds of crises it expects and to what extent the Japanese and US militaries will be integrated. "Remote island defense," "self-defense forces deployment," and other highlighted words hardly lessen the concerns felt by the Okinawan people.

The new security legislation clearly strengthens the integration of Japan's self-defense forces with those of the United States. This can only increase Okinawa's military burden, including the effect that the islands will feel from increased joint Japan-US training exercises. This is already obvious today as seen in the facilities that the two forces share at Camp

Hansen.

At a briefing on May 14, the prime minister justified the procedure for drafting this bill by declaring that as the ruling party had "deliberated it 25 times it is the best proposal." Yet, there was no mention of Okinawa in these deliberations. Likewise, during the twelve months of coalition discussions no one considered what damages Okinawa might suffer should this legislation be passed. Nor was any point raised over the premature passage of a bill by a government with high approval rating that called for "radical changes in Japan's postwar security measures."

Japan's Ministry of Defense plans to deploy ground self-defense forces to the islands of Yonaguni, Miyako, and Ishigaki, and to reinforce the F15 fighter unit stationed at the Naha Airbase used by the Japanese air self-defense forces. "It is becoming harder to protect Japan's national security," is another mantra often repeated by Mr. Abe. This also has increased the tension in Okinawa. The prefecture cannot dispel its concern that it would quickly have to serve as a front-line base in the case of military emergency.

The Abe government, however, has placed top priority on keeping on schedule to conclude this legislation while ignoring mitigating concerns held by Okinawan residents. This attitude reminds us of the irresponsible handling of the Futenma Air Station issue. In that case, too, the government dismissed public opinion

Such an attitude reminds us of the irresponsible handling of the Futenma Air Station's return issue where the government completely dismissed public opinion and with the United States jointly declared that the bases relocation to Henoko was necessarily the only possible solution.

"Security bills to Pass the Japanese Diet: 'There is no alternative' is not the

alternative"

September 17, 2015 Suzuki Motō, Chief Editor,
Kahoku shinpō

"There is no alternative," is a phrase frequently used by Prime Minister Abe. He often proudly employs it when discussing his favorite topics, such as "Abenomics" or structural reforms. The Upper House is prepared to railroad security-related bills to allow the government to exercise the right of collective self-defense. Since it received Cabinet approval in July 2014 we have witnessed a political situation fully controlled by Abe with his apparently over aggressive decision-making mission.

I recall a symbolic scene. In August 2014 the prime minister met with representatives of atomic-bomb survivors groups after the Nagasaki peace memorial ceremony. The representatives, who were quite familiar with how World War II started, challenged his plan to gain Japan's right to engage in collective self-defense. "We have here a difference of opinion," the prime minister bluntly replied.

A number of scholars of constitutional law and legal professionals have raised doubts over the legality of the bills. That said, the opinions of those who insist on the government's right to exercise the privileges that they bring should be respected. If Japan, a constitutional nation, wants to enforce these rights the government has the responsibility to review the country's constitution even if this is troublesome. However, Mr. Abe's aim to explore another alternative by reinterpreting Japan's constitution is one that deviates from the views embraced by past governments. This will lead the country down a wrong path.

Mr. Abe claims that the nation's highest officer is not the head of Cabinet Legislation but himself as prime minister. He quotes Mencius to press his case: "Even if it be an army of one hundred thousand, I will go forward." As if

mentally overwhelmed, some Liberal Democratic Party legislators have assumed a so-what attitude believing that we can never protect Japan's peace and security in the way advanced by scholars, [by maintaining and honoring the peace provisions of Japan's postwar constitution].

At a recent press conference, Mr. Abe displayed an illustration that depicted a mother and her children on board a United States ship attempting to escape from a disputed country, to drive home the point that collective self-defense was necessary. Although justifying such a situation would later prove difficult, what was certain was that he aimed to gain public understanding over the concept of "existing crisis," a scenario where an armed attack on a neighboring country may threaten Japan's survival and pose a clear and present danger to the rights of Japanese citizens. We may gain satisfaction by criticizing the petty-minded prime minister for being adamant, but personal criticism does not solve the problem. Bismarck, Prussia's Iron Chancellor, issued a rebuke when he stated, "Politics is the art of the possible," which interprets the emergence of a dictatorship when the leader lacks tolerance toward those expressing disagreement, when a leader does not seek to reach agreement.

In the sad expression worn on the face of the mother in the illustration I saw the faces of many families living in the areas affected by the great earthquake of March 2011 that cannot envision their future. Here we are talking about a crisis happening here and now, rather than a potential one of the future. It is unreasonable, too, in terms of the order of political priority to rigidly cling to collective self-defense on grounds of the ever-changing security environment. The government should either scrap these security bills or at a minimum seek approval of them from the Japanese people by dissolving the Lower House.

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