



# The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa and the Futenma Base Controversy

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## Summary

Although the U.S.-Japan alliance is often labeled as “the cornerstone” of security in the Asia Pacific region, local concerns about the U.S. military presence on the Japanese island of Okinawa have challenged the management of the alliance for decades. The Japanese archipelago serves as the most significant forward-operating platform for the U.S. military in the region; approximately 38,000 military personnel, 43,000 dependents, and 5,000 DOD civilian employees live in Japan. With the United States pledging to rebalance its defense posture towards Asia, the uncertainty surrounding the medium and long-term presence of American forces on Okinawa remains a critical concern for national security decision-makers.

Due to the legacy of the U.S. occupation and the island’s key strategic location, Okinawa hosts a disproportionate share of the continuing U.S. military presence. About 25% of all facilities used by U.S. Forces Japan and about half of the U.S. military personnel are located in the prefecture, which comprises less than 1% of Japan’s total land area. Many observers assert that Tokyo has failed to communicate effectively to Okinawans the necessity and benefits of the alliance. However, Okinawa has received millions of dollars in subsidies from the central government in exchange for the burden of hosting U.S. troops. This year, Tokyo awarded a large amount to Okinawa for the prefecture’s economic development plan.

In 2006, as part of a broad realignment of U.S. basing in Japan, the United States and Japan agreed to relocate Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to a less-congested area on Okinawa, a move that would have triggered the redeployment of 8,000 Marines to U.S. bases in Guam. The arrangement was designed to reduce the local community’s burden of hosting a loud air base that has generated safety concerns and, eventually, to return control of the Futenma land to local authorities as a way to boost economic development in the area. The controversy surrounding relocation of MCAS Futenma has overshadowed progress in the largely successful implementation of other elements of the realignment agreement.

Implementation of the Futenma relocation plan has stalled, due largely to political turmoil in Tokyo and resistance in Okinawa. Former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama had made a campaign pledge to close Futenma and transfer its functions off Okinawa, a position he maintained in office until reversing himself in May 2010. Since then, his successors also have endorsed the plan, but the opposition in Okinawa has hardened, and all the major political figures involved in approving the new base construction have publicly opposed the plan.

In addition, the U.S. Congress has raised major concerns about the ballooning costs of moving the Marines to Guam and blocked funds dedicated to the realignment in military construction legislation. The initial estimate was for an expense of \$10.3 billion to move 8,000 marines and their dependents to Guam, but the GAO reported that the actual costs would be more than double the DOD estimate at \$23.9 billion. Senators Carl Levin, John McCain, and James Webb have led the scrutiny of the existing plan and continue to question its affordability and practicality, along with other elements of the U.S. defense posture in the Asia-Pacific.

After six years of paralysis, the United States and Japan officially adjusted the policy in April 2012 by “de-linking” the transfer of marines with progress on the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF). Although both capitals remain officially committed to the construction of the new base, numerous political and budgetary obstacles remain that make progress in the near term highly unlikely. The Futenma base remains in operation, raising fears that an accident similar to a

helicopter crash in 2004 might inflame Okinawan opposition. The U.S. military plans to deploy MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor transport aircraft to Futenma as early as fall 2012, a move expected to draw local protests because of safety concerns. Meanwhile, unstable political leadership in Tokyo further threatens the chance of implementation. On the U.S. side, defense officials have not fully alleviated congressional concerns about the funding requirements and feasibility of the plan.

This report will be updated as circumstances warrant.

## **Contents**

Overview.....	1
August 2012 Status: Logjam on Agreement Endures .....	2
Okinawa’s Strategic Importance .....	2
Background: Okinawan History and Grievances.....	3
Contemporary Okinawan Views.....	4
Policy Background to Base Realignment .....	6
Overall Progress on Realignment Process.....	7
The Politics of U.S. Basing in Okinawa .....	8
Tokyo-Okinawa Relations .....	8
Role of the Prefectural Governor.....	9
Nago City Political Dynamics .....	10
Heightened Congressional Involvement.....	11
Funding Cuts and New Requirements in FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act.....	12
CSIS Assessment.....	12
Implementation Challenges in Japan .....	13
Political and Financial Obstacles in Tokyo .....	13
Ongoing Risks of Futenma Operations .....	14
Deployment of MV-22 “Osprey” Aircraft to Futenma.....	15

## **Figures**

Figure 1. Okinawa’s Strategic Location.....	3
Figure 2. Selected U.S. Military Installations on Okinawa .....	6
Figure 3. Location of Proposed Futenma Replacement Facility.....	10
Figure 4. MCAS Futenma.....	15

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information.....	16
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## Overview

Despite the prominence of the U.S.-Japan alliance in America's overall strategic posture in the Asia-Pacific region, local concerns about the U.S. military presence on Okinawa have challenged the management of the alliance for decades. In recent years, Okinawan resistance has crystallized around the relocation of a U.S. Marine Corps Air Station. The Japanese islands serve as the most significant forward-operating platform for the U.S. military in the region. With the United States pledging to rebalance its defense posture towards Asia, the uncertainty surrounding the medium and long-term presence of American forces on Okinawa remains a critical concern for national security decision-makers. Many regional analysts have posed the question of whether this issue is at its core simply a real estate dispute, or if the controversy threatens the fundamental sustainability of the alliance.

The relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma) is the largest and most problematic part of a broad overhaul of the stationing of U.S. forces in Japan and changes in how the Japanese and American militaries operate. A 2006 agreement between the U.S. and Japanese governments to relocate the Futenma base from its current location in the crowded city of Ginowan to Camp Schwab in Henoko, a less congested part of the island, was envisioned as the centerpiece of a planned realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. The proposed air station is often referred to as the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF). The arrangement was designed to reduce the local community's burden of hosting a loud air base that has generated safety concerns and, eventually, to return control of the Futenma land to local authorities as a way to boost economic development in the area. In addition, the relocation would have triggered the transfer of roughly 8,000 marines and their dependents from Japan to new facilities in Guam. Japan agreed to pay around 60% of the \$10.3 billion estimated costs.

The agreement was struck at a moment when the bilateral relationship was seen as at its strongest point in decades, but implementation has been a struggle, due largely to political turmoil in Tokyo and resistance in Okinawa. In the watershed August 2009 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had held power nearly continuously since the mid-1950s. Incoming DPJ Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama had pledged in his campaign to close MCAS Futenma and remove its functions from Okinawa, a position he maintained in office until reversing himself in May 2010. Since then, his DPJ successors also have endorsed the 2006 plan, but the opposition in Okinawa has hardened. In addition, the U.S. Congress has raised major concerns about the ballooning costs of moving the marines to Guam and blocked funds dedicated to the realignment in military construction legislation.

Essentially conceding that the existing agreement appeared unlikely to move forward, the United States and Japan officially adjusted the policy in April 2012 by "de-linking" the transfer of marines to Guam with progress on the new base in the Henoko village area of Nago City. The announcement also stipulated that arrangements to return some land used by U.S. forces would not be contingent on the base relocation. In order to ease the burden on Okinawan residents, about 9,000 U.S. marines would be transferred to locations outside of Japan: 4,700 marines to Guam, 1,800 to Hawaii, and 2,500 on a rotational basis to Australia. Alliance officials packaged the move as in line with their goal of making U.S. force posture in Asia "more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable." Although both capitals remain officially committed to the construction of a new aviation facility at Camp Schwab, numerous political and budgetary obstacles remain that make progress in the near term highly unlikely.

## August 2012 Status: Logjam on Agreement Endures

At the time of this report, the base relocation agreement appears to be at an impasse, with several outstanding issues on both the U.S. and Japanese sides. Okinawan authorities seem no closer to granting authority to begin construction in Henoko as anti-base activists organize protests against upcoming deployments of the MV-22 Osprey aircraft to Futenma. On the U.S. side, restrictions on funding remain in place as the Department of Defense (DOD) fulfills legislative requirements imposed by Congress. On the other hand, officials from both nations have succeeded in removing Futenma as the all-consuming problem on the bilateral agenda, re-asserted the strength and commitment of the security relationship, and moved forward with several other important initiatives. The policy adjustment in April 2012 may provide some political “space” on Okinawa and in Tokyo to overcome resistance, while DOD officials and congressional Members try to resolve funding and strategic planning concerns. Meanwhile, some regional analysts fret that without forward movement on a key security agreement, the credibility of the alliance will suffer.

## Okinawa’s Strategic Importance

Okinawa’s key strategic location has become more important over the past few decades. (See **Figure 1**.) In the post-World War II environment, Japan’s northern islands were seen as a bulwark to contain the Soviet Union’s Pacific fleet. Post-Cold War security threats include the potential flashpoints of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, while more recent assertiveness by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the South China Sea and East China Sea has drawn growing attention from Defense Department planners. The U.S. military presence in Japan, and particularly Okinawa, allows it to fulfill its obligations under the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security to not only defend Japan but to maintain security in the Asia-Pacific region. The forward-deployed presence of the U.S. Air Force and Navy also allows for response to humanitarian disasters in the region, as demonstrated by the massive response to the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan.<sup>1</sup>

Although most strategists agree on the importance of Okinawa’s location for U.S. security interests in East Asia, there is less consensus on the particular number of marines necessary to maintain stability. For example, two prominent analysts suggested a rethinking of U.S. military basing in light of cuts to the U.S. defense budget and Okinawan obstacles; they argue that leaving a force of 5,000-10,000 marines on Okinawa while also pre-positioning supply vessels in Japanese waters and bringing most of the marines home to California would amply serve U.S. rapid response and deterrence needs.<sup>2</sup> Defense officials continue to assert the need for substantial numbers of U.S. marines to be positioned in Asia, but have offered a degree of flexibility in their exact location; recent plans would deploy marines on a rotational basis through Guam and Australia. Congressional concerns, as discussed below, have focused on cost and implementation, but have not argued that the Marine presence itself is unnecessary.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the U.S. response, see CRS Report R41690, *Japan 2011 Earthquake: U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Response*, by Andrew Feickert and Emma Chanlett-Avery.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Mochizuki and Michael O’Hanlon, “Rethink U.S. Military Base Plans for Japan,” CNN.com Global Public Square. November 4, 2011.

Figure I. Okinawa's Strategic Location



**Source:** Map created by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) using data from the U.S. State Department, 2009; and ESRI Data 10, 2009.

**Notes:** Distances measured using Geodesic line measurement tool in ArcGIS; rounded to tens place.

## Background: Okinawan History and Grievances

The attitudes of native Okinawans toward U.S. military bases are generally characterized as negative, reflecting a tumultuous history and complex relationships with “mainland” Japan and with the United States. Okinawans are ethnically distinct from most Japanese, which may heighten a sense of discrimination. The Ryukyu island chain, once a semi-autonomous kingdom ruled from Okinawa, was first officially incorporated into the Japanese state around the time of the Meiji Restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These southern islands were largely neglected by the Japanese central government until World War II, when they became bloody battlegrounds in the final stages of the “island-hopping” campaign waged by the U.S. military. The Battle of Okinawa from early April through mid-June 1945 resulted in the deaths of up to 100,000 Japanese soldiers and 40,000-100,000 civilians, many of whom were forced to commit mass suicide by the Imperial Japanese Army.<sup>3</sup> A total of 12,281 Americans were killed, the highest total

<sup>3</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 185.

of any battle in the Pacific campaign.<sup>4</sup> Many Okinawans remember this battle as a dark episode in a long history of the Japanese central government sacrificing Okinawa for the good of the mainland.

The United States maintained possession of the Ryukyu islands in the peace settlement ending World War II. The U.S. military appropriated existing Japanese military bases on Okinawa and built several more large bases on the strategically located island. The United States paid locals for the acquired land, but in some cases this purchase reportedly involved deception or outright coercion, using bulldozers and bayonets to evict unwilling residents. During the period of American sovereignty, Okinawans had no political authority or legal redress for crimes committed by service members—though the worst crimes were prosecuted through court martial. The Korean War and Vietnam War eras brought an influx of thousands of additional U.S. soldiers and added grievances to local residents, along with a major increase in revenue for businesses catering to GIs.<sup>5</sup>

After the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972, the pattern of crimes by American service members abated, but was nevertheless a major concern for the local population. The Japanese central government took measures to placate Okinawans, for example by increasing the rent paid to owners of land on U.S. military bases and by prosecuting eligible crimes in Japanese courts. Despite these steps and increased funds for prefectural development, many Okinawans continue to perceive themselves as the victims of policies drafted in Tokyo and Washington with little regard for their communities.

## **Contemporary Okinawan Views**

The views of Okinawans are far from monolithic. Many residents of base-hosting communities appreciate the economic benefits, whether as employees on the bases, local business owners who serve American customers, or as landowners of base property. Some locals resent the actions of outsiders who focus on environmental issues at the expense of economic development; pro-relocation authorities point to the village of Henoko (in Nago City municipality) as an example of where the local citizens are more in favor of additional U.S. facilities than the broader population, though this may have to do with the reported monetary compensation that Tokyo provides to specific host communities. There is also a “generation gap” between older Okinawans with personal memories of past incidents and younger residents that are not as involved in the anti-base activist movement. Reliable opinion polls that might illuminate the extent of the opposition to U.S. presence across demographic categories do not appear to be available.

The anti-base movement remains strong and vocal in Okinawa. Opposition to U.S. military bases derives from two main areas: one, quality-of-life issues such as personal safety, noise, crime, and environmental degradation; and two, pacifism and anti-militarism. These two strands are often interwoven in the rhetoric of the anti-base movement, but not all residents oppose the U.S. military presence on principle. There are those who support the U.S.-Japan security alliance while objecting to the significant and disproportionate “burden” imposed on Okinawa.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Parrish, Ed. *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978. p. 458 and Chas S. Nichols and Henry I. Shaw. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956. p. 260.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Rabson, “Henoko and the U.S. Military: A History of Dependence and Resistance,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 10, Issue 4 No. 2, January 23, 2012.



These long-held grievances burst into the forefront of Okinawan political life after a 12-year-old girl was raped by three service members in 1995, inciting a massive anti-base protest. In response, the bilateral Security Consultative Committee (composed of the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense and their Japanese counterparts, also known as the “2+2”) established the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) to alleviate the burdens of the base-hosting communities. SACO led to concrete changes that improved conditions on Okinawa,<sup>6</sup> but these occurred alongside more distressing incidents; for example, a U.S. military helicopter crashed on the campus of Okinawa International University near MCAS Futenma in August 2004. Ultimately, the unwillingness of Tokyo and Washington to close Futenma without a replacement facility has fostered the perception that the two governments are discriminating against Okinawans.

Media outlets in Okinawa contribute to this narrative by viewing many developments in the base negotiations as further evidence of mainland discrimination. The two main daily newspapers, the *Ryukyu Shimpō* and the *Okinawa Times*, are generally seen as left-leaning and deeply unsympathetic to Tokyo’s security concerns. For example, in November 2011 the chief of the Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) Okinawa Defense Bureau was forced to resign after a local newspaper reported an off-the-record comment that could be interpreted as comparing MOD actions to “rape” of Okinawa. Regional observers pointed out that the U.S. military’s humanitarian response to the devastating March 11, 2011, tsunami and earthquake in northern Japan received scant coverage in local Okinawan newspapers compared to the mainland press. Although the decision to “de-link” the realignment of marines to Guam and the relocation of MCAS Futenma was designed to improve the political climate, the media’s reaction on Okinawa was rather negative; leaders voiced widespread concerns that the base would now remain in Okinawa indefinitely.<sup>7</sup>

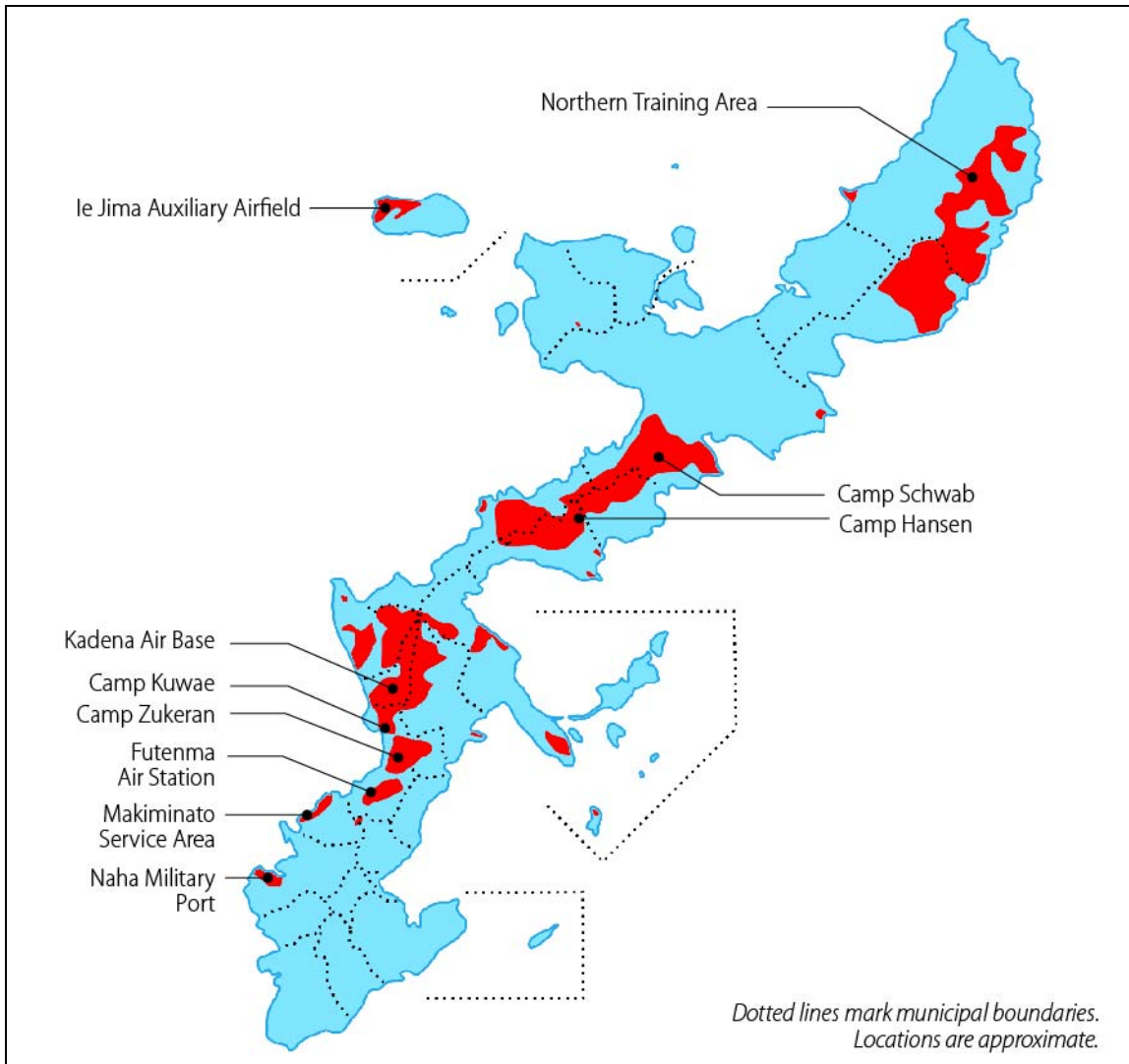
The concerns of environmental groups stem from the possible degradation of natural habitats caused by construction of the proposed FRF at Henoko. The offshore landfill design for the runways could involve the destruction of coral reefs and could have a negative impact on the health and biodiversity of Oura Bay ecosystems. Activists are particularly concerned with the plight of the dugong, a manatee-like endangered species in the Henoko Bay. The environmental impact study conducted by the Japanese government concluded that the proposed base construction would not do significant damage to the dugong’s natural environment, but academics at Okinawan universities and elsewhere have disputed the report’s findings.

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<sup>6</sup> Noise reduction initiatives at Kadena Air Base reduced noise pollution for nearby residents. Six land reversion initiatives have been completed, totaling about 1,000 hectares of the approximately 6,000 hectares slated to be returned. The U.S. military relocated some live-fire exercises to mainland Japan, parachute drop training exercises from Yomitan Auxiliary Airfield to Ie Jima Auxiliary Airfield, as well as some aviation training from Okinawa to Guam.

<sup>7</sup> “Defense Minister Denies that Futenma Air Station Will Become a Permanent Fixture,” *Ryukyu Shimpō*, February 19, 2012.

Figure 2. Selected U.S. Military Installations on Okinawa



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Notes: Not all U.S. military facilities are labeled.

## Policy Background to Base Realignment

Attempts to make the U.S. presence in Okinawa more sustainable have been underway for years. As mentioned in the previous section, the 1996 SACO arrangement included measures “to realign, consolidate and reduce U.S. facilities and areas, and adjust operational procedures of U.S. forces in Okinawa consistent with their respective obligations under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and other related agreements.” The 1996 SACO Final Report mandated the release of thousands of acres of land that had been used by the U.S. military since World War II back to Okinawa, including MCAS Futenma.<sup>8</sup> (See **Figure 2** above.) Although the work was

<sup>8</sup> Various documents explaining the land reversion scheme from American and Japanese sources differ on the exact (continued...)

slated to be completed within a year, political gridlock and local resistance prevented significant progress on the agreement, a pattern that would repeat itself on a range of Okinawa basing issues in subsequent years.

Efforts to adjust the U.S. military presence in Japan were given new impetus in 2002 by the Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI), a bilateral initiative to enhance the U.S.-Japan security alliance after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. Through the DPRI talks, the United States and Japan reviewed U.S. force posture, examined opportunities for practical cooperation, and developed common strategic objectives. The 2005 Security Consultative Committee joint statement listed 19 areas for alliance transformation, such as improving interoperability, shared use of military and civilian facilities in Japan, and cooperation on ballistic missile defense. The 2005 statement endorsed the realignment of U.S. marines from Okinawa to Guam and the relocation of Futenma Air Station operations to a new base on the shoreline of Cape Henoko.

The implementation plan for the DPRI is laid out in the May 2006 “U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation,” a document that has been endorsed in three joint statements of the 2+2 meetings, including one in June 2011. This document establishes the “linkages” that had been a central point of debate until the policy adjustment in 2012: first, that the Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) relocation from Okinawa to Guam was dependent on “tangible progress toward completion” of the Henoko base at Camp Schwab and Japanese financial contribution to the development of facilities on Guam; and, second, that land return for areas south of the Kadena air base was dependent on completing the relocation of the III MEF personnel and dependents from Futenma to the FRF and Guam. The April 2012 agreement removes the linkages but continues to endorse the Henoko FRF.<sup>9</sup>

## **Overall Progress on Realignment Process**

The controversy surrounding relocation of MCAS Futenma has overshadowed progress in implementing other elements of the DPRI. With the exception of the Okinawa-Guam realignment, the initiative has been largely successful. The Aviation Training Relocation program reduces noise pollution for local residents by having U.S. aircraft conduct training in Guam, away from crowded base areas. As another base impact mitigation measure, U.S. Carrier Air Wing Five (CVW-5) will be relocated from Naval Air Station Atsugi to MCAS Iwakuni (both located on Honshu, Japan’s largest island), where a new second runway is now operational. Beginning in December 2012, Iwakuni will open a runway for commercial flights to and from Haneda Airport in Tokyo.<sup>10</sup>

Other elements of DPRI have greatly enhanced interoperability and joint command and control. In 2010, U.S. Army Japan established at Camp Zama (about 25 miles southwest of Tokyo) a forward operational headquarters, which can act as a bilateral joint headquarters to take command of theater operations in the event of a contingency. The headquarters of the Japan Ground Self-

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amount of land to be returned, but the figures are generally within the range of 12,500-16,000 acres of land. Futenma Air Station occupies about 1,200 acres.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, reference CRS Report RS22570, *Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments*, by Shirley A. Kan.

<sup>10</sup> “Iwakuni to Open Runway for Commercial Flights to Tokyo,” *Stars and Stripes*, June 14, 2012.

Defense Forces (JGSDF) Central Readiness Force will move to Camp Zama in late 2012 to take advantage of this new capacity.<sup>11</sup> The Japan Air Self-Defense Forces (JASDF) Air Defense Command facility at Yokota Air Base has been completed, enhancing coordination with United States Forces in Japan (USFJ) headquarters. The Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Center at Yokota allows for data-sharing between the Japanese and U.S. air and missile defense command elements. This upgraded facility was used to coordinate the disaster relief mission Operation Tomodachi, the joint U.S.-Japan military response to the earthquake and tsunami that devastated northern Japan in March 2011. In June 2011, Japan announced an agreement to allow the transfer of jointly developed missile defense components to third countries, representing an exception to Japan's ban on arms exports.

## **The Politics of U.S. Basing in Okinawa**

The politics surrounding basing issues in Japan are complex and ever-shifting, and involve politicians from local village wards up to the Prime Minister's office. In 2009 and 2010, Prime Minister Hatoyama's involvement in the Futenma controversy elevated the issue to a major U.S.-Japan point of contention and, some assert, may have irrevocably shifted the political landscape in Okinawa by raising and then dashing the hopes of the anti-base movement. However, his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) predecessors had made little progress in decades of trying to resolve the fundamental challenges of the U.S. military presence on Okinawa. In the postwar period, when the LDP dominated Japan's political scene, alliance security arrangements tended to be negotiated between political-military elites in Washington and Tokyo, often ignoring local concerns.<sup>12</sup> Even as democratic practices deepened and the anti-base movement became more empowered, many leaders in Tokyo were unable or unwilling to invest enough political capital to reduce the strains of hosting foreign troops on Okinawans.

### **Tokyo-Okinawa Relations**

Although Washington-Tokyo relations play a role, the controversy over bases is seen by many as largely a mainland Japan versus Okinawa issue. Due to the legacy of the U.S. occupation and the islands' key strategic location, Okinawa hosts a disproportionate share of the continuing U.S. military presence. According to the Okinawan government, about 25% of all facilities used by U.S. Forces Japan are located in the prefecture, which comprises less than 1% of Japan's total land area,<sup>13</sup> and roughly half of all U.S. military personnel are stationed in Okinawa. Many observers assert that Tokyo has failed to communicate effectively to Okinawans the necessity and benefits of the alliance. However, Okinawa has received millions of dollars in subsidies from the central government in exchange for the burden of hosting U.S. troops. This year, Tokyo awarded a large amount to Okinawa for the prefecture's economic development plan as part of the government's FY2012 budget: 290 billion yen (\$3.7 billion USD), with 150 billion yen (\$1.9 billion USD) designated as lump-sum grants without restrictions.<sup>14</sup> Although the money is not

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<sup>11</sup> "Camp Zama, I Corps FWD HQ, The Organization and Mission," accessed at [http://www.usarj.army.mil/news\\_home/2010/2010-02-04-1-D.pdf](http://www.usarj.army.mil/news_home/2010/2010-02-04-1-D.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Lind, as quoted in "Okinawa and the Future of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance." The National Bureau of Asian Research, Policy Q&A, May 11, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> "U.S. Military Base Issues In Okinawa," on prefectural website, <http://www3.pref.okinawa.jp/site/view/contview.jsp?cateid=14&id=592&page=1>

<sup>14</sup> "Okinawa Governor Eager to Use Budget Boon," *Daily Yomiuri*, May 17, 2012.

explicitly linked to the basing issues, many insiders say that this year's generous sum is intended to influence the governor's decision on whether to issue the necessary permits.

## **Role of the Prefectural Governor**

The Okinawan governor's office wields significant influence over developments inside the prefecture. The governor has the authority to approve or reject off-shore landfill construction, which effectively gives him a veto over any FRF that relies on a landfill, such as the Henoko plan. The landfill permit itself requires an environmental impact statement (EIS) that the governor's office reviews to ensure that the project does not significantly damage the natural environment. In the case of the Henoko FRF proposal, the EIS has become a major point of contention. It has been suggested that the Diet could pass a law to circumvent this approval process, but the current governor, Hirokazu Nakaima, has threatened to lead mass protests against any base construction that defies his authority.

In the latest Futenma controversy, Governor Nakaima has played a pivotal role. Elected in 2006 with the backing of the LDP and Okinawa's business community, he has been seen as a pragmatist rather than an anti-base ideologue. In his first term, Nakaima agreed to the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko with specific conditions, including moving the base slightly more offshore. However, when Hatoyama revisited the FRF relocation plan in 2009, the political calculus changed. The Okinawan movement against the FRF proposal was rejuvenated and gained strong support on the island. Nakaima modified his position, taking a stronger anti-base stance during the 2010 gubernatorial campaign against a resolutely anti-base opponent, calling for the base to be located out of the prefecture. Nakaima justified the position by arguing that alternate sites elsewhere in Japan would be more politically feasible and relocation could be accomplished faster due to the many obstacles facing the FRF plan in Okinawa.

Although Governor Nakaima offered a series of stern rebukes to Tokyo officials in 2011 and 2012, he has been careful not to categorically reject the Henoko FRF plan. Rather, he has made statements such as, "I want to hear an explanation that would be convincing to the mayor of Nago City [the municipality in which Henoko is located] and prefectural residents."<sup>15</sup> It appears that the governor's goal is to close Futenma as soon as possible, whether that involves relocating marines within the prefecture, to mainland Japan, or elsewhere. Some observers think that Nakaima would agree to the Henoko FRF plan if the base-hosting municipality consents, but other analysts point to past examples of foot-dragging and argue that Nakaima would not act against the opinion of a clear majority of Okinawans. He stated in February 2012, "Relocation to [Henoko] is virtually impossible and the rational option is to relocate the facilities to another region in Japan."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> "Okinawa Governor: Plan to Relocate Futenma to Henoko 'Impossible,'" *Asahi Shimbun*, February 21, 2012.

Figure 3. Location of Proposed Futenma Replacement Facility



Source: Google Maps.

## Nago City Political Dynamics

Camp Schwab and the proposed new aviation facility are located in Henoko, a ward of the larger Nago City. The politics of Nago City mirror that of Okinawa in their complexity and tangle of interests. A 1997 city referendum revealed a majority opposed to the new base construction, but despite this result successive mayors declared their conditional approval.<sup>17</sup> In January 2010, the city elected as mayor Susumu Inamine, who strongly opposes any increased military presence. The majority of current city council members are against the FRF relocation plan.

On the other hand, the residents who would be most directly affected have mixed, and even positive, feelings about the proposed base, possibly due to the economic benefits for the hosting community. A small mountain range about seven miles wide separates the designated base site in Henoko village from the densely populated area of Nago City (see **Figure 3**). It is unlikely that most people living in Nago City would experience the noise of helicopter overflights. In May 2010 the administrative council of Henoko village, where the base would be built, passed a resolution accepting the relocation of Futenma on the conditions that the runway site be moved

<sup>17</sup> Mayor Tateo Kishimoto announced his conditional approval of a reef-based land reclamation plan with a short runway on September 20, 2005, and Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro gave his approval for the land reclamation plan with a V-shaped runway on April 7, 2006. Source: Brooks, William, *The Politics of the Futenma Base Issue in Okinawa: Relocation Negotiations in 1995-1997, 2005-2006*. Asia-Pacific Policy Papers Series, No. 9, Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, 2010.

further into the sea and that the government provide additional compensation.<sup>18</sup> Henoko village residents are reportedly more focused on the economic benefits of the new base and irked by the intrusion of environmentalists.<sup>19</sup>

## Heightened Congressional Involvement

In the past few years, Congress has exercised its oversight function on the military realignment initiatives in Japan and voiced its growing doubts about the viability of the 2006 agreement. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee have questioned witnesses closely about the Defense Department's plans in the Asia-Pacific in a series of hearings, sent letters to the Secretary of Defense outlining their reservations, and inserted language and specific provisions into legislation to ensure that the executive branch heeds their concerns.

In May 2011, three Senators (Carl Levin (D), Chairman of the Armed Services Committee; John McCain (R), ranking minority member of that committee; and Jim Webb (D), Chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs) released a joint statement that called the U.S. military realignment plans in East Asia, and particularly those on Okinawa, "unworkable and unaffordable." They recommended alternatives, including transferring Marine Corps assets to the Kadena Air Force base on Okinawa (see text box below) and moving some Air Force assets to Anderson Air Base in Guam. Senator Webb further proposed in subsequent letters to Secretary of Defense Panetta that co-basing arrangements with the JSDF be explored, as well as the use of aviation facilities on Okinawa during military contingencies.

### **Kadena Integration Alternative**

Over the years, folding some Marine Corps operations into the large Kadena Air Base has been suggested as a way to shut down the problematic Futenma base. The idea first arose and was rejected during SACO talks in 1996. During negotiations in 2005-2006, then-Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless reportedly explored the possibility of moving helicopter operations to Kadena, but encountered opposition from the Air Force. Some analysts have long suggested that interservice rivalry plays a significant role in stymieing the Kadena option. In the same round of negotiations, the Japanese side also re-proposed the Kadena plan, only to be dismissed because of a lack of tolerance from the communities surrounding Kadena, who already had complaints about existing noise and safety risks from the base. Senators Webb, Levin, and McCain again suggested the alternative in 2011.

The Kadena integration plan appears to have gained little traction on either side, due to two main reasons: local resistance and objections from the U.S. military on operational grounds. Analysts have argued that Kadena is already at capacity and adding Marine helicopter operations would double the daily flight operations for routine training, which would likely exacerbate the surrounding communities' objections to the base. The space limitations may be particularly strained in the event of a military contingency or humanitarian disaster response. In addition, some observers have posited that spreading some Air Force operations to other positions in the region would weaken deterrence and response flexibility. Some military analysts assert that Kadena's capabilities are essential to U.S. power projection capability in the Pacific and that adding more operations could risk causing a backlash that would undermine acceptance of the base.

<sup>18</sup> William Brooks, *The Politics of the Futenma Base Issue in Okinawa: Relocation Negotiations in 1995-1997, 2005-2006*. Asia-Pacific Policy Papers Series, No. 9, Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Rabson from Inoue (2007) and <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20100609a5.html>.

Concurrent with the Senators' statement, in June 2011 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report commissioned by the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, Senate Appropriations Committee. The report concluded that the Department of Defense has not adequately estimated the costs involved in transforming its military posture in Japan and Guam nor analyzed the alternatives to existing initiatives.<sup>20</sup> The initial estimate was for an expense of \$10.3 billion to move 8,000 marines and their dependents to Guam, but the GAO reported that the actual costs would be more than double the DOD estimate at \$23.9 billion.<sup>21</sup> (The DOD cost estimate for the latest plan, to move roughly 5,000 marines and their dependents to Guam, is \$8.6 billion.)

## **Funding Cuts and New Requirements in FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act**

Increasing alarm about the overall U.S. fiscal situation drove further scrutiny of existing plans. Concern about the ballooning costs of the Guam construction and the uncertainty surrounding the realignment led Congress to reject the Administration's request for related military construction funding in the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act, P.L. 112-81. Section 2207 prohibits funds authorized under the act, as well as amounts provided by the Japanese government, from being obligated to implement the planned realignment of Marine Corps forces from Okinawa to Guam until certain justifications and assessments are provided. These requirements include the Marine Corps' preferred force lay-down in the region; a master plan for the construction involved in the plan; a certification by the Secretary of Defense that "tangible progress" had been made on the Futenma base relocation; the submission of the independent assessment required by Section 346; and a series of plans involving the planned infrastructure and construction costs on Guam.

The April 2012 "de-linking" agreement did not appear to assuage congressional resistance. After the announcement that the original policy would be adjusted and the base relocation and marine redeployment de-linked, Senators Levin, McCain, and Webb wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary Panetta that, "... we have serious questions that have not been fully addressed regarding the emerging agreement between the administration and the Government of Japan. These questions pertain to the core details of this or any basing arrangement, including cost estimates, military sustainment and force management, and how it would support a broader strategic concept of operations in this increasingly vital region. Congress has important oversight and funding responsibilities beyond its traditional consultative role for this basing agreement, and any new proposal should not be considered final until it has the support of the Congress."<sup>22</sup>

## **CSIS Assessment**

Section 346 of the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act requires an independent assessment of the U.S. strategic posture in the Asia-Pacific. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) was commissioned by the Secretary of Defense to provide the report; CSIS delivered it in mid-July 2012 to the Secretary, who then forwarded the report with his

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<sup>20</sup> Full report can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11316.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Travis J. Tritten, "Cost to Rrelocate Marines off Okinawa a Moving Target," *Stars and Stripes*, May 15, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> "Senators Levin, McCain and Webb Express Concern to Secretary Panetta Regarding Asia-Pacific Basing," April 24, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-express-concern-to-secretary-panetta-regarding-asia-pacific-basing/?section=alltypes>.



comments to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. In its unclassified version, the report broadly supports DOD's strategy to enhance U.S. defense posture in East Asia and recommends, with caveats, the implementation of the April 2012 agreement, including the FRF.<sup>23</sup> While asserting that the Henoko plan is the best way forward geostrategically and operationally, it also acknowledges the budgeting and political obstacles that confront the FRF, concluding that other alternatives should still be explored. Among those other alternatives are Kadena Integration, stationing of Marine air operations on an off-shore island, construction of a second runway at Naha Airport, and remaining at the current Futenma base. The report also recommends prioritizing infrastructure improvements on Guam that would facilitate the transfer of marines. In a statement, Senators Webb, Levin, and McCain said that, "We agree with CSIS's emphasis on the need for DOD to articulate the strategy behind its force-posture planning more clearly. Congress must also be confident that the DOD force planning and realignment proposals are realistic, workable, and affordable."<sup>24</sup>

## **Implementation Challenges in Japan**

Beyond Congressional concerns, significant obstacles remain in Japan as well. Public opposition has hardened considerably in Okinawa, with all the major political figures involved in the landfill permit process declaring opposition to the plan. The fundamental problem of hosting foreign troops in a crowded urban landscape, and the sense of grievance that the Okinawans in particular have harbored for decades, seems unlikely to fade. On the other hand, proponents argue that the April 2012 policy adjustment could allow political breathing room for figures in Okinawa who are relatively sympathetic to the U.S. basing needs, or who see the potential for economic development from the returned land.

## **Political and Financial Obstacles in Tokyo**

Japanese politics have been in a state of flux since 2006, with six different prime ministers in as many years.<sup>25</sup> Parliamentary politics have been characterized by paralysis and obstructionism, making coherent policy decisions difficult. Still, the last three prime ministers have endorsed the FRF plan and the government of Japan has been able to muster the funds for the Guam relocation agreement. Obstacles from the U.S. Congress and continued Okinawan resistance may discourage such cooperation from Tokyo, however. Japan is facing its own fiscal crisis, particularly given the pressing reconstruction needs in the Tohoku region, which suffered the most damage from the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Japanese legislators may be resistant to continue appropriating funding for the Marines' relocation in the absence of U.S. political and financial commitments. Current Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's hold on his post is tenuous and the opposition parties are pushing for new parliamentary elections, which could bring new leadership to Tokyo. If progress remains essentially frozen, other alliance negotiations such as Japan's

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<sup>23</sup> "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 27, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/-statement-of-senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-on-csis-report>.

<sup>24</sup> "Statement of Senators Levin, McCain and Webb on CSIS Report," July 27, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/-statement-of-senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-on-csis-report>.

<sup>25</sup> For more, see CRS Report RL33436, *Japan-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Emma Chanlett-Avery.

contribution to the costs of hosting U.S. troops, known as host nation support, could interfere with the agreement.

## **Ongoing Risks of Futenma Operations**

As Tokyo and Washington have struggled to overcome paralysis on the agreement, the problematic base at the center of the controversy has remained operational but in need of serious repair and maintenance. In recognition of the pressing repair needs, U.S. and Japanese government officials committed to “contribute mutually to necessary refurbishment projects” at MCAS Futenma in the joint statement issued by the Security Consultative Committee in April 2012. Although these projects are vital to continued operations at Futenma, Okinawans may interpret the repairs as a sign that the United States and Japan do not intend to fulfill their goal of closing the base.

The base is located within a dense urban area, surrounded by schools and other facilities that are subjected to the high noise levels that accompany an active military training site. (See **Figure 4**.) A new equipment accident or crime committed by a U.S. soldier could galvanize further Okinawan opposition to the U.S. military presence on the island. The risks are heightened by the anticipated increase in activity as units that have been deployed to conflicts in the Middle East return to Okinawa. Despite the April 2012 agreement to move about 9,000 marines off Okinawa, the absolute number of personnel and aircraft could actually rise at Futenma and other facilities in the near term.

Figure 4. MCAS Futenma



Source: Google Maps.

### Deployment of MV-22 "Osprey" Aircraft to Futenma<sup>26</sup>

The U.S. military plans to deploy MV-22 Osprey transport aircraft to Futenma as early as fall 2012, a move expected to draw local protests because of safety concerns. The aircraft were unloaded in late July at MCAS Iwakuni. The U.S. military first announced its intent to deploy the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft to MCAS Futenma in the 1992 "Master Plan for Marine Corps Air Station Futenma" and reiterated this aim in the 1996 SACO draft. The Marine Corps plans to replace the 24 CH-46E "Sea Knight" helicopters stationed at Futenma with 24 MV-22 Ospreys by 2014. The new aircraft will fly training missions in six routes over Japanese territory, including hundreds of flights over the main island of Honshu. The introduction of these advanced aircraft to Okinawa reportedly will enhance the operational capability of the III MEF, particularly in a rapid-response scenario.

Japanese politicians and civil society groups have voiced opposition to the introduction of MV-22 to Japan due to the aircraft's safety record. The crashes of V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft in training exercises in Morocco and Florida in early 2012 reminded Okinawans of the U.S. military helicopter crash on the grounds of a school near MCAS Futenma in August 2004.<sup>27</sup> The governor

<sup>26</sup> For more, see CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

<sup>27</sup> It was a CV-22, the Air Force version of the Osprey, that crashed in Florida on April 13, 2012.

of Yamaguchi Prefecture, where MCAS Iwakuni is located, has asked that the U.S. military not deploy Ospreys at Iwakuni until safety concerns are fully addressed. On July 1, 2012, Governor Nakaima told Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto, “We will absolutely oppose the plan [to deploy the MV-22 on Okinawa].”<sup>28</sup> However, the Japanese central government has not requested that the Marine Corps cancel deployment, and local governments do not have authority to interfere. Defense Minister Morimoto has demanded to see the full results of accident investigations by the U.S. military. Despite the two crashes, the Osprey was not grounded and continues to fly in the United States and elsewhere.

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<sup>28</sup> “Okinawa Gov. Adamant on Osprey,” *Daily Yomiuri*, July 2, 2012.