

Japan - Deployment of Osprey aircraft: Okinawan leaders protest, Abe government plans to go ahead

Sunday 10 February 2013, by [Kyodo News](#) (Date first published: 2 February 2013).

Contents

- [Okinawa leaders protest in \(...\)](#)
- [Abe tells Nakaima Futenma \(...\)](#)
- [Government may apply to \(...\)](#)
- [Pentagon — Okinawa may get \(...\)](#)

Okinawa leaders protest in Tokyo over Osprey deployment

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Leaders of all 41 municipalities of Okinawa Prefecture gathered in Tokyo on Sunday to protest the deployment of tilt-rotor Osprey transport aircraft at a U.S. base in the southern prefecture.

The group of about 140 people, including city mayors, local assembly chairs and other representatives, also called for scrapping a long-stalled plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station within Okinawa and closing the base itself.

Speaking before over 4,000 people gathered at Tokyo's central Hibiya Park, Masaharu Kina, chairman of Okinawa prefectural assembly, said the deployment "further threatens the future of our children" in addition to the existence of U.S. bases.

After marching through the Ginza district later in the day, the group is scheduled to meet with government ministers on Monday to directly convey their requests.

"I came today because I am concerned that the country is shifting to the right politically after Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe took over," said Michiko Nakamura, a 73-year-old Tokyo resident. "I cannot accept the Osprey deployment in Okinawa or anywhere (in Japan)."

A series of protests have been held in Okinawa, a major host of U.S. bases, since the United States deployed last year MV-22 Osprey aircraft at the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station despite strong local concern over its record of crashes.

Some 101,000 people took part in a protest held on Sept. 9, according to organizers of the protest.

The United States is scheduled to deploy 12 more of the aircrafts this summer and is also planning to deploy the CV-22 variant at the U.S. Air Force's Kadena base in Okinawa, a move that has led to local criticisms that the prefecture is becoming a "test site" for Ospreys.

Kyodo Press, January 27, 2013

Abe tells Nakaima Futenma to be moved within Okinawa as planned

NAHA (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima on Saturday that the central government plans to go ahead with moving a key U.S. Marine base within the southwestern Japanese island prefecture as agreed with the U.S. government.

In remarks at the outset of their meeting at a Naha hotel, Abe said the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station should not become fixed at its current location in a crowded residential district in Ginowan, adding, "We want to proceed within the agreement with the United States."

Nakaima, for his part, urged the national government to move the facility as soon as possible, preferably out of Okinawa. Local opposition remains strong against the plan, agreed by the Japanese and U.S. governments to move Futenma to the less-populated coastal area of Henoko within Okinawa.

Making his first trip to Okinawa since regaining the premiership in December, Abe told Nakaima that the central government will try to reduce the burden of hosting U.S. forces in Okinawa, where the bulk of U.S. military facilities in Japan are located.

The premier also said the government will work on building a second runway at Naha airport at an early time.

Abe apparently aims at moving the long-stalled Futenma relocation issue forward, despite the strong local opposition, before he visits the United States to meet with President Barack Obama, possibly on Feb. 21 or 22.

On Monday, about 30 mayors from Okinawa visited Tokyo and urged Abe to give up on the plan to transfer the Futenma base to Henoko.

While Abe's government was said to be considering applying for land reclamation in the Henoko coastal area ahead of his trip to Washington, the prime minister told reporters after his talks with Nakaima that he is not thinking of doing so.

Such reclamation requires the permission of the Okinawa governor, who remains cautious about giving his approval amid local opposition.

Concerning the deployment of the U.S. military's MV-22 Osprey transport aircraft at the Futenma base last October, Abe said he will try to arrange for training for the aircraft to be held outside Okinawa as much as possible.

The deployment has sparked further anger from local people due to the aircraft's poor safety record.

As part of efforts to improve ties with Okinawa and create an environment to discuss U.S. base issues, the central government recently earmarked about 300 billion yen for measures to help develop the prefecture in its draft fiscal 2013 budget in line with Okinawa's request.

Government may apply to start work on Futenma replacement base before Abe's U.S. trip

The government may apply next month to bring in earth to fill in a coastal area in Okinawa where a U.S. Marine Corps air base is to be relocated, ahead of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's trip to the United States, government sources said Thursday.

Abe, who has criticized the previous government, led by the Democratic Party of Japan, for its handling of the stalled base replacement effort, hopes to showcase his new government's readiness to tackle the issue by proceeding with the planned construction.

The application must be filed with Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima, who has the power to authorize such land filling in publicly owned waters, but the move would most certainly worsen the public opposition in Okinawa to the planned new airbase.

Anger over the concentration of U.S. military installations in Okinawa has risen among local residents following the contentious deployment of MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft at U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma last year and crimes allegedly involving U.S. service members in the prefecture.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida is scheduled to visit the United States on Jan. 18 for a meeting with departing Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Once he returns, Abe plans to finalize when to file the application after weighing America's plans, according to the sources.

Nakaima has made it clear that building the base in the Henoko area in Nago on Okinawa Island, which requires land fill, is virtually impossible due to local opposition. He has instead called for the base to be relocated outside the prefecture.

Nago Mayor Susumu Inamine, whose city is expected to host the Futenma replacement base, has also called for relocation outside of the prefecture. Nakaima reportedly plans to reach a conclusion roughly within a year on whether to authorize the reclamation.

Japan and the United States agreed in 2006 to move the Futenma base, located in densely populated Ginowan, to the Henoko area of Nago adjacent to U.S. Marine Corps Camp Schwab, also on Okinawa Island.

The plan has stalled since the DPJ government of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, which was installed in September 2009, unsuccessfully sought to relocate the Futenma base outside the prefecture.

An environmental assessment for the relocation site was effectively completed in December, when the Defense Ministry submitted assessment documents to the Okinawa Prefectural Government. The plan calls for the replacement base's runways to extend beyond the Henoko peninsula over the sea.

Kyodo Press, Jan 11, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/11/national/government-may-apply-to-start-work-on-futenma-replacement-base-before-abes-u-s-trip/#.UQONsfKto6g>

Pentagon — Okinawa may get USAF Osprey variants at Kadena by 2015

WASHINGTON — A Pentagon official has told a visiting official from Okinawa that the United States is mulling the deployment of tilt-rotor CV-22 Ospreys to the Asia-Pacific region, including the dispatch of 10 of the aircraft to Okinawa.

Susumu Matayoshi, head of the Okinawa governor's executive office, told reporters that Christopher Johnstone, the Pentagon's director for Northeast Asia, touched on the plan during a meeting Friday in Washington. Marc Knapper, director of the State Department's Office of Japanese Affairs, also attended the get-together.

It is the first time a U.S. government official has admitted that CV-22s – the U.S. Air Force's variant of the MV-22 Ospreys used by the Marine Corps – could be deployed to the region. Washington has also notified Tokyo of its plan to possibly begin stationing around 10 CV-22s at the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa in about two years' time, according to the sources.

U.S. Air Force Secretary Michael Donley also suggested the Pentagon is considering this option.

But Matayoshi said that during his meeting with Johnstone and Knapper, he informed them in no uncertain terms that the Okinawa Prefectural Government cannot permit the deployment of CV-22s to Kadena.

Matayoshi also told them the prefecture has found that the MV-22 Ospreys based at U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma on Okinawa Island violated an earlier bilateral agreement on their flight operations. Johnstone, however, argued the U.S. military has abided by the accord and reiterated Washington's view that the aircraft are completely safe, according to Matayoshi.

Following their meeting, Pentagon press secretary George Little issued a statement saying: "As part of the planning process, the Department of Defense evaluates a range of possible basing options for our forces. That process is currently ongoing and includes multiple locations in the Asia-Pacific region." (But) any deployment of the (U.S.) Air Force CV-22 to the Asia-Pacific region is years away, and no construction has begun to support such a deployment."

Last year's deployment of 12 MV-22s at the Futenma base triggered a storm of opposition due to its spotty safety record, and the plan to send over CV-22s will anger local residents even more.

Concerns over the aircraft have grown in Japan since the fatal crash of an MV-22 in Morocco last April and a June training crash of a CV-22 in Florida that injured five crew members. The Pentagon's official investigations stated that human error was a factor in both crashes, and that no technical glitches had been detected.

Under the bilateral accord on Osprey flights over Japan, the hybrid transport aircraft should only be in vertical takeoff and landing mode within U.S. military facilities and training areas, and avoid

flying over such places as hospitals and schools as much as possible.

Kyodo Press, Jan 12, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/12/national/pentagon-okinawa-may-get-usaf-osprey-variants-at-kadena-by-2015/#.UQOdcPKto6g>
