

Okinawans protest against deployment of Ospreys at US Futenma military base and over chopper crash

lundi 9 septembre 2013, par [AOKI Mizuho](#), [KUROKAWA Mika](#), [Kyodo News](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 30 août 2013).

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Okinawans protest against deployment of additional Ospreys

GINOWAN, Okinawa — Protesters assembled in front of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma here on Aug. 12 to express their opposition to the deployment of additional MV-22 Osprey aircraft following the fatal crash of a U.S. military helicopter a week ago.

About 150 citizens and others had gathered in front of the Nodake gate of the Futenma base by around 9 a.m. to urge the U.S. military in Japan to halt the resumption of Osprey deployment in Okinawa Prefecture.

Gathering on the sidewalk in front of the gate, the protesters hoisted red banners saying "Osprey No !" and chanted, "Don't come, Osprey !" and "Go back to America !" When news of the arrival of eight more tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft in Okinawa reached them, some protester registered surprise and others screamed.

Keiko Itokazu, a House of Councillors member who heads the Okinawa Social Mass Party, said the U.S. military and the Japanese government were forcibly proceeding with the deployment of additional Ospreys in Okinawa Prefecture without fully probing the crash on Aug. 5 of a U.S. Air Force HH-20 rescue helicopter at the Marines' Camp Hansen.

Hiroshi Ashitomi, co-leader of a civic group against the construction of a heliport in the Henoko district in Nago to succeed the functions of the Futenma air station, said the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is trying to force the Ospreys on Okinawa without caring about the feelings of Okinawa residents. He also called on the protesters and other Okinawans to join him in trying to reduce the number of U.S. bases in Okinawa Prefecture.

About 50 riot police from Okinawa Prefectural Police were deployed and some of them scuffled with protesters who tried to sit on the street.

Film depicts Okinawans' fight against Ospreys

« The Targeted Village, » a documentary on the fight by Okinawa residents against the deployment of MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor transport aircraft at the Futenma air base, is showing in Tokyo theaters.

Released Saturday, the 91-minute film is based on an award-winning TV program produced by Chie Mikami for an Okinawa station in 2012.

It focuses on the residents of Takae, a community in northern Okinawa Island, who speak of feeling « targeted » by the U.S. military and its plan to build six heliports in the surrounding area.

The film takes its title from the fact the village was used as a mock target in the 1960s to train U.S. forces for the Vietnam War. The U.S. military set up a mock Vietnamese village there and had residents of Takae dress up as Vietnamese farmers to lend a semblance of realism to the guerrilla warfare training drills.

The area is still being used for training for jungle warfare, including guerrilla attacks, infantry training and helicopter drills.

The film concentrates on the deployment of the Osprey as a symbol of the huge U.S. military presence in Okinawa, home to about 75 percent of all U.S. military facilities in Japan.

The crash of a U.S. Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter in a mountainous area within U.S. Marine Corps Camp Hansen in Okinawa on Aug. 5 may bring the film further attention.

« I wanted to reflect the feelings of the people of Okinawa, who are opposed to the deployment of Ospreys, » said Mikami, 48, a newscaster at Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting, the TV station in Okinawa known as QAB. A Tokyo native, she joined QAB in 1995.

The film closely follows a court battle between the central government and the residents of Takae, as well as sit-ins and other protest activities by the residents aimed at blocking the construction of the helicopter landing zones in the U.S. military's Northern Training Area in the subtropical mountain forest district.

Construction of the heliports started in 2007 under an agreement reached in 1996 between the Japanese and U.S. governments. The project has stalled due to opposition from residents fearing accidents and environmental destruction.

The central government sought a provisional injunction in 2008 to ban 15 residents, including a 7-year-old girl, from obstructing traffic, and eventually filed a lawsuit in 2010 against two of the residents.

The film calls the lawsuit a « strategic lawsuit against public participation, » or SLAPP. Such lawsuits have been defined in legal circles as retaliatory lawsuits intended to silence, intimidate or punish people who have used public forums to speak, petition or otherwise move for government action on an issue.

The court battle is ongoing, with the residents appealing a recent high court ruling that ordered one resident to halt sit-ins and other protest activities.

Mikami uses footage taken in September 2012 when Okinawa residents, including Diet members and mayors of local cities and towns, blocked all three gates of the Futenma base over the pending Osprey deployment. By parking cars and sitting in front of the gates, the protesters temporarily halted vehicle traffic in and out of the base.

They were later forcibly removed by police in scenes most major networks never aired. It was this fact that triggered Mikami's desire to reach a wider audience.

She used the footage of the protesters' removal as it « showed well who the people of Okinawa are fighting against and why they are forced to fight such a battle. »

Mika Kurokawa, Kyodo News, August 12, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/12/national/film-depicts-okinawans-fight-against-ospreys/#.Ug1c3H9jbRY>

Okinawa governor presses for review of Marine Osprey deployment

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima renewed his call on Thursday for the reconsideration of the deployment of MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft at a U.S. Marine Corps base on the prefecture's main island, telling senior government officials to take steps acceptable to local residents.

He made the call just days after a hard landing by an MV-22 near a military base in Nevada, raising fresh concern among the people of the southern island prefecture about the safety of the combat troop carriers.

« The anxieties of the people of the prefecture have not been addressed at all, » Nakaima said at a meeting with Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida as he and several Okinawa municipal chiefs handed a petition to the minister.

The governor urged the central government to take steps acceptable to people in his prefecture, proposing that the newly deployed Osprey aircraft at the Marines' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture, be stationed at bases outside the prefecture.

In response, Kishida told Nakaima that the Japanese government has pressed the U.S. side to swiftly come forward with information about Monday's incident, adding that Tokyo intends to brief Okinawa on the matter once it is supplied with the information.

On the controversial plan to build a new Marine airfield in the coastal area of Nago, also in Okinawa, to replace the existing base in Ginowan, Nakaima told Kishida that it would take « too long » to realize.

Kishida did not reply to the remark, according to Nakaima.

Japan and the United States have agreed to move flight functions from the Futenma base, located in a densely populated area, to a new airfield to be built in Nago, a less densely populated area, but the

construction project has run into trouble amid stiff local opposition.

Nakaima made a similar case at a meeting with Senior Vice Defense Minister Akinori Eto earlier in the day.

The Marines deployed 12 Ospreys at Futenma last October and have been in the process of deploying 12 more of the aircraft at the base since the beginning of this month.

The presence of the tilt-rotor aircraft, which take off and land like helicopters and cruise like fixed-wing airplanes, has unnerved many people in Okinawa, in part because of a series of accidents overseas involving the aircraft and their variant.

Kyodo News, August 30, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130830p2g00m0dm002000c.html>

U.S. restarts Osprey delivery to Okinawa, igniting local criticism

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — The U.S. military on Monday resumed the delivery of MV-22 Osprey aircraft to Okinawa, triggering criticism from local people over the move that comes only a week after a fatal helicopter crash on the southern island.

Japan's Defense Ministry informed relevant regional governments that the U.S. Forces have restarted moving the newly shipped tilt-rotor aircraft to the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture from its base in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture.

Nine Ospreys arrived at the Futenma base during the day. They are part of the second batch of 12 aircraft, of which two were moved to Okinawa earlier.

The Marines will have a total of 24 Ospreys in Okinawa when the remaining one in Iwakuni is transported. The U.S. military started deploying the aircraft in Okinawa last October to replace aging CH-46 helicopters.

But it was forced to suspend the transfer of the Ospreys on Aug. 5 in the wake of a crash involving an HH-60 helicopter in Okinawa that killed one of the four crew members.

The U.S. military is still investigating the cause of the crash. Resuming the transport of the Ospreys just a week after the incident led to criticism from people in Okinawa, where memories are fresh of past accidents involving military aircraft since the 1972 reversion of the island to Japan.

« It is regrettable that the (latest) deployment comes at a time when people's concerns have yet to be addressed, » Atsushi Sakima, mayor of Ginowan, which hosts the Futenma base, told reporters, while Okinawa Deputy Gov. Kurayoshi Takara said the local government will continue to ask the central government to reconsider the deployment of the Ospreys.

Kyodo News, August 12, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130812p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

U.S. deems HH-60Gs safe, resumes flights

NAHA, OKINAWA PREF. — The U.S. Air Force resumed flights of the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter in Okinawa on Friday, saying they had found no abnormalities in other choppers of the same type following a fatal accident last week.

The cause of the Aug. 5 crash, which occurred on a mountain in U.S. Marine Corps Camp Hansen and killed one crew member, has yet to be identified.

Local governments and residents have been quick to voice their opposition to the resumption of flights.

« We cannot allow the helicopters to fly again until we know why the crash happened, » said Atsushi Toma, mayor of Ginoza village, which hosts part of Camp Hansen.

Susumu Matayoshi, head of Okinawa governor's executive office, said new safety measures should be introduced before flights are resumed.

An HH-60G took off just before 10 a.m. from Kadena Air Base, making it the first flight of the rescue helicopter since the crash, which killed 30-year-old Tech. Sgt. Mark Smith. The three other crew members were rescued.

The U.S. Air Force said Wednesday that no abnormalities had been found during a 96-hour check and the helicopters are safe to fly, with the media and local government officials being shown one of the choppers to ease safety concerns.

Tokyo and Washington have been trying to ease safety concerns about U.S. military operations as local anti-base sentiment is casting a shadow over the thorny issue of replacing U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma with a new airstrip in the city of Nago, also in Okinawa.

However, opposition to the deployment of the MV-22 Osprey aircraft shows no signs of weakening. The marines began the deployment of the tilt-rotor aircraft last year and aims to complete the transfer of all 24 Ospreys to the Futenma base in Ginowan soon.

Kyodo News, August 16, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/16/national/u-s-deems-hh-60gs-safe-resumes-flights/#.UhPf0n9jbRY>

Okinawa residents hold protest rally over chopper crash

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — Okinawa residents protested Tuesday following the crash of a U.S. military helicopter the previous day in the southern Japan prefecture, calling for the suspension of exercises by U.S. forces and the removal of military bases.

About 200 protesters gathered in front of a gate at the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan following the crash on Monday of the HH-60 rescue helicopter in a mountainous area within the Marines' Camp Hansen, about 2 kilometers from a residential area outside the base.

Ryokichi Chinen, 74, from the town of Chatan in Okinawa, said the U.S. forces « leave people's lives on a back burner and give priority to military training. »

Chinen, who survived a ground battle in Okinawa in the final days of World War II in 1945 when he was 6 years old, said training flights by U.S. fighter jets near his home reminded him of a strafing run during the war.

« U.S. military aircraft crashes could occur anytime. The military bases should be removed, » he said. Okinawa hosts the bulk of U.S. military bases in Japan.

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima urged the Japanese government Tuesday afternoon to ensure safe operations of U.S. military aircraft and to work to prevent similar incidents. He met with Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo.

Atsushi Toma, mayor of Ginoza village, which hosts part of Camp Hansen where the accident occurred, urged the head of the Japanese Defense Ministry's Okinawa branch to try to prevent such accidents and to clarify the cause of the crash.

Hirofumi Takeda, chief of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, told Toma it is « regrettable » that the accident occurred despite Tokyo's request to the United States to ensure the safety of military flight operations.

The Ginoza village assembly unanimously adopted Tuesday a resolution demanding that U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos and U.S. forces in Japan stop helicopter training flights immediately.

« Similar accidents have occurred in the village in the past. We strongly protest at the danger faced by villagers, » the resolution said.

Meanwhile, three officials of Ginoza, Okinawa, and two subcontractor workers entered Camp Hansen on Tuesday to examine if the crash had affected a nearby dam, the source of drinking water for the village, after the U.S. forces gave approval for the inspection.

In the crash that occurred at around 4 p.m. Monday, three of the four crew members aboard the helicopter were confirmed safe but one remains unaccounted for, according to Japan's Defense Ministry.

The U.S. Kadena Air Base, where the crashed HH-60 helicopter was based, said Tuesday human remains had been discovered at the crash site but that they have yet to identify the body. The three crew members recovered Monday are all in stable condition and have received appropriate medical care for their injuries, it added.

The 18th Wing Public Affairs of the air base said the Wing leadership has suspended flying activities for Tuesday except for operationally required missions and that flight operations for fixed-wing aircraft are scheduled to resume Wednesday.

It is not yet known when the rescue squadron involving HH-60 helicopters will resume flying, according to the base.

A U.S. military helicopter poured water Tuesday morning over the mountainous area where the

chopper crashed and fire trucks and ambulances of the U.S. forces were seen at a gate at Camp Hansen.

In front of the Futenma gate, Okinawa residents have been holding a rally daily to protest at the additional deployment of MV-22 tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft to the Futenma base due to the poor safety record of the model.

After the crash of the HH-60 helicopter, U.S. Marines said Monday they would postpone the deployment of 10 more Osprey transport aircraft to the Futenma facility for the time being.

Ginoza Mayor Toma and Naha Mayor Takeshi Onaga called for the suspension of the Osprey deployment to the Futenma base.

« Okinawa residents are opposed to the deployment. Can't they make their voices heard unless an accident happens ? » said Toma.

Toshiyasu Shiroma, mayor of Haeburu town in Okinawa, said he will go to Tokyo with other municipality heads in the prefecture to protest at the chopper crash and the planned additional Osprey deployment in Futenma at the foreign and defense ministries.

At present, 14 Ospreys are deployed at the Futenma base to replace aging CH-46 helicopters. The 10 remaining aircraft that can take off and land like a helicopter and fly like an airplane are temporarily stationed at Iwakuni Air Station in Yamaguchi Prefecture.

Yamaguchi Gov. Shigetaro Yamamoto told a press conference Tuesday that the western Japan prefecture hosting a U.S. military base believes the chopper crash was « a grave accident. »

The governor said it « can't be helped » if the Ospreys stay at the Iwakuni base longer than expected so that the U.S. forces can investigate the cause of the chopper crash.

Kyodo News, August 6, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130806p2g00m0dm073000c.html>

Two more Ospreys arrive at Futenma

GINOWAN, OKINAWA PREF. — The U.S. Marine Corps in Okinawa said two more Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft arrived Saturday at the Futenma base from Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture.

The Ospreys, part of a batch of 12, were expected to fly out of Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni on Saturday morning, but the U.S. military delayed their departure, saying requirements for the flight had not been met. It denied there were any technical problems with the aircraft.

The 12 Ospreys, which can take off and land like a helicopter and fly like an airplane, are the second batch to be deployed to Japan, following the arrival of the first dozen last summer.

The aircraft is replacing aging CH-46 helicopters in Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of U.S. military forces in Japan.

According to the U.S. Marines, two or more Ospreys were set to fly to U.S. Marine Corps Air Station

Futenma on Saturday and the rest would follow soon.

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima has repeatedly called for the cancellation of the deployment in his prefecture due to the aircraft's history of crashes and other safety concerns.

About 200 people staged a rally Saturday morning, with about 60 of them taking part in a sit-in in front of the Futenma main gate to protest the Osprey deployment. Due to their actions, traffic in and out of the base was temporarily halted starting at around 7 a.m.

Local police removed the protesters at around 9:30 a.m. and arrested one man for obstructing officers in their duties after he grabbed an officer by the collar and tore buttons off his uniform.

The protesters moved to a site across from the gate.

Kyodo News, August 3, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/03/national/two-more-ospreys-arrive-at-futenma/#.Ugv4i9gSrlc>

Okinawa governor angrily says U.S. military chopper crash 'shocked' local community

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima has urged the central government to demand the United States clarify the cause of the crash of a U.S. Air Force helicopter in Okinawa and take preventative steps, saying that the accident « shocked the people of Okinawa Prefecture. »

Nakaima made the statement when he met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera, and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on Aug. 6.

Following the accident, the U.S. military decided to postpone the transfer of additional U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey aircraft to Okinawa from Air Station Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture and suspend operations for the time being of eight HH-60 rescue helicopters stationed at U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa.

After meeting with the three Cabinet ministers, Nakaima angrily told reporters, « Unless they conduct a thorough investigation into the cause of the accident, it will be very difficult to use bases in a stable manner and set them up. » On the planned deployment of additional Ospreys to Okinawa, Nakaima said, « The insecure feelings of the people of Okinawa Prefecture are growing all the stronger. Aircraft could crash onto private residences. » On the resumption of operations of HH60 helicopters, he said, « It is insane to resume operations without clarifying the cause. » Defense Minister Onodera kept a low profile during a meeting with Nakaima, saying, « The thing that worries the people of Okinawa happened. »

Worried about the possible effects of the accident on the controversial plans to deploy more Ospreys and move U.S. Marine Corps' Air Station Futenma from the Okinawan city of Ginowan to the less populated Henoko area of Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, the central government asked the U.S. military on Aug. 5 — the day of the crash — to postpone the deployment of additional Ospreys and suspend operations of HH60 helicopters. The U.S. military accepted the requests immediately. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said at a news conference on Aug. 6, « We understand that (the U.S. side) acted in light of Japan's requests. » Nakaima, looking a bit surprised, said, « As opposed to the way they usually do, they responded swiftly. »

Kyodo News, August 6, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130807p2a00m0na011000c.html>

U.S. military helicopter crashes in Okinawa

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — A U.S. Air Force helicopter crashed Monday in a mountainous area within a base in Okinawa Prefecture, an accident that could further erode local sentiment toward the U.S. military presence.

Japan's Defense Ministry, informed by the U.S. forces of the crash about 2 kilometers from a residential area outside the base, said three of the four crew members aboard the HH-60 rescue helicopter had been confirmed safe. No other details were provided.

There were no reports of injury to local people due to the accident at the U.S. Marine Corps' Camp Hansen, according to Okinawa prefectural police.

The U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa said there were at least four people aboard the Kadena-based helicopter, which was conducting a training mission.

Following the crash, the U.S. Marine Corps decided to temporarily halt the transfer of more MV-22 tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft to Okinawa from Iwakuni Air Station in Yamaguchi Prefecture, where an additional dozen Ospreys recently arrived from the United States.

Local police received an emergency phone call at around 4:45 p.m. reporting that smoke was rising from Camp Hansen.

Initial media reports on the crash triggered speculation that it may involve an Osprey tilt-rotor plane, the deployment of which has been opposed in Okinawa due to its checkered safety record.

On Saturday, two Ospreys arrived at Okinawa's Futenma Air Station, part of a second batch to be deployed in Japan.

Monday's accident was the 45th crash by U.S. military aircraft since the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan from postwar U.S. control, and 17th by helicopters. Okinawa is home to about 74 percent of U.S. military facilities in Japan.

A U.S. Air Force F-15 fighter crashed in waters off Okinawa in May and its pilot was rescued unhurt.

In August 2004, a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter crashed at Okinawa International University, leaving three crew members injured.

Kyodo News, August 5, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130805p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

Gov't sees close election race in Okinawa as sign of public split over Futenma

Cabinet officials believe Okinawan public opinion is split over the relocation of a controversial U.S. Marine base after a ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) candidate in the July 21 House of Councillors election was only narrowly defeated by the anti-base incumbent.

One seat was up for grabs in Okinawa Prefecture — host to many U.S. military installations including U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, scheduled for relocation to the prefectural city of Nago — and the LDP candidate Masaaki Asato lost to the incumbent and anti-relocation candidate Keiko Itokazu. However, in Nago there was only a difference of around 150 votes between the two candidates.

In a press conference following a July 23 Cabinet meeting, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said, « We will do all in our power to remove the dangers of Futenma air base, » but indicated that the government will stick to its plan to relocate the base to the Henoko district of Nago despite the election outcome.

Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said at a press conference on the same day that the difference in votes between the two candidates in Okinawa had been « minimal. »

« We will respect that there are a variety of opinions in Okinawa, » Onodera said.

While the LDP clearly wrote in its party platform for the upper house election that it would « promote the relocation of the Futenma base to Henoko in Nago, » the party's Okinawa chapter promised to try and relocate the base outside the prefecture.

In March, the government sought Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima's agreement to fill in stretches of the Henoko coast in preparation for the base relocation. The government is seeking agreement from Nakaima within the year.

Upcoming elections in Okinawa Prefecture include a race for mayor of Nago in January next year, and a race for the Nago Municipal Assembly and the Okinawa governor in fall 2014.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 24, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130724p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Candidate strongly opposed to Futenma relocation in Okinawa elected to 3rd term

NAHA — Keiko Itokazu, a regional party leader strongly opposed to the planned relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma within Okinawa Prefecture, was elected to a third term in the July 21 House of Councillors election.

Itokazu, 65, leader of the Okinawa Social Mass Party, beat Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) candidate Masaaki Asato, 45, and other candidates in the Okinawa prefectural constituency where only one seat was contested this time.

The results highlight Okinawa residents' stiff opposition to efforts by the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to relocate the base to the Henoko district of Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, as agreed upon by Tokyo and Washington.

« Public opposition to the relocation to Henoko and the deployment of Osprey (vertical takeoff and landing aircraft to Futenma base) was clearly shown to the Abe administration and the U.S. government, » Itokazu told her supporters in Naha. « Everything the Abe government is doing is unacceptable to prefectural residents, whose clear will brought me votes. »

During her election campaign, Itokazu bitterly criticized two LDP-backed candidates for breaking their pledges in earlier elections. The candidates had voiced opposition to shifting the Futenma base within the prefecture during their campaigns, but declared support for the relocation once they were elected.

Itokazu gained the backing of opposition parties including the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party, as well as support from labor unions. She also won over Democratic Party of Japan supporters and those who back no particular political party.

LDP candidate Asato incorporated opposition to the relocation of Futenma base within Okinawa in the LDP local chapter's campaign pledges, running counter to the party headquarters' call for relocation within the prefecture. As a result, he came under fire from local voters for being « double-tongued. »

Asato gained support from the LDP's coalition partner New Komeito and Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima, as well as from local business circles. Moreover, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Okinawa to deliver a campaign speech for him. Still, Asato was unable to win enough support from local voters.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130722p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Okinawa : Okinawa gov. calls for cancellation of new Osprey deployment plan

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima called on the central government on Monday to reconsider the planned deployment of 12 more MV-22 Osprey combat-troop carriers at a U.S. Marine Corps base in Japan's southwestern island prefecture, including its cancellation, citing continuing local concern about the aircraft's safety.

In a meeting in Tokyo, the governor handed Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida a list of written requests, including redistributing the existing 12 Ospreys at the Futenma Air Station on Okinawa's main island to multiple bases in the country.

Kishida replied that he will do his utmost about the requests, with Nakaima pressing for an answer to the requests.

« The anxieties felt by the people of Okinawa Prefecture about the Ospreys have not been addressed at all, » the governor told reporters after the meeting, criticizing the planned deployment of 12 more tilt-rotor aircraft at the Futenma base, which sits within the densely populated city.

Nakaima plans to meet with other senior officials of the central government on Tuesday, including

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga and Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera.

The Defense Ministry said last week that a second batch of the tilt-rotor aircraft will be shipped to a Marine base in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in late July, for eventual deployment at Futenma expected as soon as early August.

A dozen Ospreys have been deployed at the Okinawa base since last October despite concern among Okinawa people about their safety performance due to a series of accidents abroad involving versions of the Osprey.

Using its tilt-rotor wings, the Marine transport aircraft can take off and land like a helicopter, and cruise like a fixed-wing airplane.

Kyodo News, July 9, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130709p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

Okinawa : Futenma question decisive factor for prefecture's voters

NAHA, OKINAWA PREF. — Scanning the sky earlier this month, Yumi Kuniyoshi, 52, notes it's a rare quiet day : no U.S. military aircraft are flying over her house in Urasoe, a small Okinawa city next to Ginowan, home of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

Even with all the windows shut, the noise of a jet overhead drowns out all conversation and the TV. It's not unknown for military aircraft to streak by at 3 or 4 in the morning, she said.

Though not opposed outright to U.S. installations in Okinawa, she has felt let down many times by news of Osprey night flights or another arrest of a drunken serviceman suspected of a crime.

« I hope the central government will demand more strongly that the U.S. not let such things happen again, » the mother of three daughters said. « I feel that the voice of Okinawans hasn't reached Tokyo. »

It's a common sentiment in the prefecture, which shoulders an outsize burden of the U.S. military presence in Japan. Not only is the dream of closing the Futenma base and having its operations moved outside the prefecture all but dead, the plan to replace the facility with a new airstrip in the less-populated city of Nago farther north on Okinawa Island has stalled too.

What's more, despite strong opposition to the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, which many believe is unsafe, 12 more are expected to be deployed to Futenma next month.

Two major candidates from Okinawa running in the July 21 Upper House poll have pledged to close the base and move its operations outside the prefecture. One, Masaaki Asato, a 45-year-old first-time Liberal Democratic Party candidate, stands in opposition to his own party, which has agreed to build the replacement base in Nago, on the Henoko coast at Camp Schwab.

But for many locals, promises like Asato's ring hollow. They've heard similar pledges from politicians before.

« Whoever wins the upcoming Upper House election, things will stay the same. To be honest, I have no expectation (for political parties), »h said Kuniyoshi, adding she hasn't made up her mind which candidate or party to vote for.

While the LDP is enjoying a favorable wind nationwide thanks to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic policies, the situation is different in Okinawa, where anti-Tokyo sentiment remains strong.

According to media polls, LDP candidates are leading in most of the 47 prefectures, but in Okinawa, Asato is trailing incumbent Keiko Itokazu, 65, chairman of Okinawa Shakai Taishuto (Okinawa Social Mass Party). Itokazu is backed by opposition parties, including the Social Democratic Party.

In a bid to woo voters, Asato is vowing to turn around Okinawa's economy, which has high unemployment and the lowest average annual income of all 47 prefectures, rather than focusing mainly on his pledge to rid the prefecture of the Futenma base – a position that puts him at odds with his party.

« Turning around the economy, creating more jobs, and increasing the income of all the citizens are the things people are expecting the government to achieve, » Asato, a former social welfare officer, told his supporters in late June in the town of Nishihara. « The tide of economic recovery may not have reached here in Okinawa, but I believe it will certainly reach here eventually. »

At the gathering, Asato failed to touch on the Futenma issue.

Nevertheless, the LDP's Okinawa chapter admits it's not an issue that can be swept entirely under the rug in the poll campaign.

« With so many media reports about the policy difference with LDP headquarters, we cannot say the Futenma issue is not the most important issue » in this Upper House election, Satoru Kinjo, director general of the LDP's Okinawa chapter, told *The Japan Times*. « The Futenma issue will be a point of contention. . . . And although our policy is different, (Asato) won't change his pledge. We will seek possible sites for relocating the Futenma air base outside the prefecture. »

But not all voters oppose the government's Henoko plan.

Yukikazu Kokuba, president of Kokuba-gumi Co., the largest construction company in Okinawa and someone with close ties to Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima, believes replacing Futenma with a new airstrip at Camp Schwab is the only realistic solution, and it's time Okinawans accepted it.

« Over the years the government has looked for other sites for the Futenma air base outside Okinawa, but the conclusion was that there was nowhere but Henoko, » said Kokuba, who also heads the Okinawa Federation of Commerce and Industry and is a vocal supporter of the government's plan to replace the base.

« It's been 17 years since the decision was made to replace the Futenma base. For how many more years are we going to oppose the plan, and who is going to take responsibility for keeping the base at Futenma as a result ? » Kokuba said.

Although the LDP's Kinjo admitted some Okinawans support the government's plan to relocate to Henoko, he notes the majority of locals are against it. And as long as this fundamental reality is ignored, the LDP has little chance of triumphing in Okinawa.

« A silent majority also wants the Futenma base out of Okinawa. I know that by being in politics in Okinawa, » Kinjo said. « There is no way for us but to go along with locals » wishes."

Opposition to the Nago airstrip plan remains strong in the prefecture, which accounts for just 0.6 percent of Japan's territory yet hosts nearly 74 percent of U.S. military facilities.

No progress has been made since 1996, when the late Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto agreed with then-U.S. President Bill Clinton to close Futenma, alleged by some as the most dangerous military base in the world, and build the replacement airstrip at Henoko.

To break the impasse, Abe's government submitted an application to Okinawa Prefecture to begin fill work for the planned Henoko airstrip, whose runways are expected to extend offshore.

Nakaima, who as governor has the authority to approve the application, is expected to reach a decision after studying the plan for about eight to 10 months. The central government hopes the decision comes before the Nago mayoral election next January.

Activist Hiroshi Ashitomi, 67, believes incumbent Itokazu must win the election to stop the state from building the airstrip in Henoko.

« Keiko Itokazu must win the upcoming House of Councilors election so Okinawans » voices can be heard. Then, we need to win the Nago mayoral election. We also need to keep on pressuring Gov. Nakaima to say « no » to the central government's request (for permission to allow land reclamation work in Henoko),"h Ashitomi stressed.

He and his peers have staged a sit-in spanning more than 3,000 days, since April 2004, in a tent set up at the bay where the government hopes to build the airstrip, which, Ashitomi claimed, would spell the end of the endangered Okinawa dugong, whose feeding grounds are located around the bay.

« We will continue our nonviolent protest. We won't give up, » he said.

Although media polls suggest Itokazu is leading, her party isn't counting its chickens just yet.

« Asato is young. And there is a current trend to give a chance to a young candidate. So we have a sense of crisis, » said Katsutoshi Toyama, secretary-general of Itokazu's party.

But he stressed that Asato's difference with the LDP is likely to work to Itokazu's advantage.

« (Asato) says he will »seek to relocate« the Futenma base outside Okinawa. He did not say he will »realize« it. . . . He says he will not allow the Futenma base to be stuck in Ginowan. And the LDP's headquarters says it will promote relocation of the base to Henoko. They're poles apart. »

Mizuho Aoki, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, July 11, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/11/national/futenma-question-decisive-factor-for-prefecture-voters/#.Ues0TkrS-gM>

Okinawa : Gov't mulls deploying GSDF unit in Okinawa's Henoko district

The government is mulling deploying a Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) unit in Okinawa Prefecture's Henoko district in order to swiftly respond to emergencies near the southernmost prefecture, government sources have revealed.

As part of measures to beef up defense around the Nansei Islands, the government started considering deploying a new GSDF initial response unit along the coast of the Henoko district in the Okinawa Prefecture city of Nago, within the compounds of a planned facility to replace the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in the prefectural city of Ginowan. The move is also aimed at bolstering cooperation with the United States.

In a joint statement issued after a Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee meeting in May 2010, Tokyo and Washington agreed to « consider opportunities to expand the joint use » of the facility replacing the Futenma airstrip. The government's current plan, therefore, has gained some positive responses from the U.S. side, with one source close to the U.S. forces saying the plan will reinforce a system under which the SDF and the U.S. forces carry out operations in an integrated manner.

Local residents, however, are likely to oppose the plan because it could further boost the burden on Okinawa if the SDF, on top of the U.S. forces, were to use the planned replacement facility in Henoko. While Tokyo and Washington envisage putting the facility to use in fiscal 2022, it is expected that the plan will be pushed back.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 13, 2013
