

Japan, the US bases and Okinawa ongoing issue

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Nakaima defies Nago base plan advocates

OSAKA — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima resisted pressure Tuesday by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera to allow the Futenma base relocation to move forward.

But Nakaima, who must decide whether to approve a central government application to begin the necessary landfill work at Henoko in northern Okinawa Island, may find it harder to go against powerful Okinawan corporate lobby groups whose members stand to benefit greatly from Henoko-related contracts.

Along with the central government in Tokyo, they are pushing the governor to approve the new base despite strong political opposition throughout Okinawa.

Following Tuesday's meeting involving Nakaima, Kishida and Onodera, the first official meeting by the three since December when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to power, 10 local business groups met with Kishida in Naha to offer their support for the Henoko plan.

The groups were led by Yukikazu Kokuba, head of Kokuba Gumi Co., Okinawa's largest general contractor and a major business and political force in the prefecture.

Kokuba heads the Okinawa Defense Association, a group of politicians and businesses that support the U.S. bases, as well as the Naha Chamber of Commerce.

It was in this latter position that Kokuba told Tuesday's gathering he supported the plan to replace the Futenma base with a planned new airstrip in Henoko, saying that demanding the replacement facility be relocated outside Okinawa would mean no progress on closing Futenma, which is in the crowded city of Ginowan.

However, all 41 Okinawa local governments, including Naha, have officially voiced opposition to the current Henoko plan. On Tuesday, Nakaima once again told the two Cabinet ministers that in terms of speed, a Futenma replacement base outside of Okinawa would be quicker than building the Henoko base.

Eric Johnston, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, October 9, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/09/national/nakaima-defies-nago-base-plan-advocates/#.UltU41NjbRY>

Japan, U.S. to promote Osprey training transfer from Okinawa

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan and the United States are set to unveil on Thursday a string of measures aimed at mitigating the impact of U.S. forces on Okinawa, including promoting the transfer of U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey training flights outside of Okinawa or abroad, sources close to bilateral ties said Monday.

The measures to be finalized at a ministerial meeting in Tokyo also include allowing fishing boats to enter waters east of Okinawa's main island in the Pacific, designated as a training area for the U.S. military, which are effectively off-limits to such vessels today.

The move is aimed at helping to pave the way for the construction of a replacement facility elsewhere on the island for the U.S. Marines' Futenma Air Station, given the need to obtain authorization from Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima for a landfill in a coastal area designated for the future facility.

In Japan, it has been closely watched whether the governor, who has been opposed to the transfer of the air station within Okinawa, will grant permission for the proposed landfill sometime between the end of this year and early next year.

Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and their U.S. counterparts, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Secretary of State John Kerry, are expected to agree to steadily promote the transfer of training flights for Osprey hybrid aircraft stationed at Futenma to locations outside of Okinawa or abroad.

But the bilateral document is not expected to provide details on locations or countries to which such training would be transferred because of a lack of coordination between the Japanese and U.S. sides, according to the sources.

Until now, fishing boats have effectively been barred from entering waters east of the main Okinawa island known as the "Hotel/Hotel training area."

On Thursday, Japan and the United States are likely to confirm that the U.S. military will notify the Japanese side ahead of time whenever it does not use the area and that fishing boats would be allowed to enter part of the area during that period.

According to people with knowledge of the matter, such a system for prior notification has existed but has never been put into practice, effectively barring fishing boats from navigating in the area.

The two sides are also expected to note in the document that they will start reviewing the existing guidelines on bilateral defense cooperation, which were stipulated in 1997, with a view to reaching a conclusion on them at an early date.

Kyodo News, October 1, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131001p2g00m0dm036000c.html>

U.S. completes deployment of additional Osprey aircraft in Okinawa

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — The last of an additional batch of MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft being deployed in Japan flew Wednesday from a U.S. air base in western Japan to Okinawa Prefecture.

The last Osprey joined the 11 others in the batch that arrived last month at the U.S. Marines' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa, where opposition to their deployment remains strong due to safety concerns. Twelve Ospreys were deployed at the Futenma base last October.

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima voiced concern Wednesday, saying the deployment of Ospreys "should not be concentrated in Okinawa but dispersed throughout Japan."

"The anxiety of Okinawan people has not been dispelled" regarding the Ospreys, Nakaima told reporters.

The 12 additional Ospreys were temporarily unloaded at the Marines' air station in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in western Japan in late July. The 11 other planes in the batch had been deployed at Futenma by Aug. 12.

The Ospreys are being deployed to replace aging CH-46 helicopters.

But the presence of the tilt-rotor aircraft, which can take off and land like a helicopter and cruise like a fixed-wing airplane, has sparked concern and anger in Okinawa, following a series of accidents overseas from its development stage.

Local concern about the safety of the Ospreys was heightened later that month after an MV-22 aircraft made a hard landing and caught fire in Nevada.

Kyodo News, September 26, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130926p2g00m0dm046000c.html>

U.S. Futenma base relocation hits new stumbling block: dugongs

Dugongs, an endangered marine species, in 2012 were inhabiting the reclamation site in Okinawa chosen for the relocation of the U.S. Futenma base, the first time their presence has been confirmed there in three years, a survey by the Okinawa Defense Bureau revealed Saturday.

Only a small number of dugongs live in waters near the Japanese archipelago. But a survey report obtained by Kyodo News through a freedom of information request confirmed seaweed had been eaten by dugongs at the planned reclamation site between April and June last year.

Similar traces of seaweed eaten by the mammals were found near the area in June 2009, but no

further evidence indicated that they had since inhabited the site.

The bureau submitted an application for the reclamation work to the Okinawa Prefectural Government in March, saying there would be little impact on the environment, but it chose not to disclose the survey results.

The finding could affect Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima's decision on whether to approve the requested reclamation site off the coast of the Henoko district in Nago, on Okinawa Island.

The waters off Henoko are known for abundant seaweed that dugongs eat. The bureau's survey suggests the mammals have repeatedly visited the area as a feeding site.

Tokyo and Washington have agreed to relocate U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from the crowded city of Ginowan to the coastal area of Nago as part of the realignment of American forces in Japan. But the plan has been stalled for years by vehement opposition in Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of U.S. military bases in the nation.

A bureau official said the survey findings do not affect its environmental assessment of the reclamation project and that it does not intend to review the relocation plan.

Kyodo News, September 21, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/21/national/u-s-futenma-base-relocation-hits-new-stumbling-block-dugongs/#.UkAhT39jbRY>
