

Japan's Willing Military Annexation by the United States — "Alliance for the Future" and Grassroots Resistance

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The Riddle: Patriotic Traitors

It is hard to believe that it happened but it did. In an 18-month working process begun in February 2005 and completed in June 2006, Japan willingly surrendered command over its military forces to the United States, committing itself unconditionally to the American empire's global strategic imperatives. It is surprising that the Japanese government made this commitment at a time when the U.S. war chariot was sinking into the bog of a "long war" it had unleashed.

If military command is the most essential element of national sovereignty, one could argue that Japan having made its military an integral part of a foreign power can no longer be considered a sovereign state. Has then Japan become a new U.S. colony? Certainly not. Nor is it ruled by the U.S. occupation as it was in the 1940s. What then is taking place?

The situation is made all the more bizarre by the fact that the political force that willingly agreed to surrender the most essential component of national sovereignty is basically the same force that glorifies Japan's imperial past and preaches patriotism and national pride to the Japanese people. Former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro did not hesitate to destroy neighborly relations with China and South Korea by continuing to visit the war-glorifying Yasukuni shrine. His successor, Abe Shinzo, is notorious as one of the most articulate mouthpieces in the government of the far-right's movement against the "masochist view of history." According to the views openly expressed by the rightist caucus of which Abe is a top leader, the Pacific War was a war for the liberation of Asia from Anglo-American imperialism. How can their "patriotism," with its anti-American connotations, be compatible with the counter-patriotic act they have committed?

This riddle in fact is the key to understand the dynamics of the Japanese situation. As I have pointed out on various occasions, the postwar Japanese state is a historical construction based on three mutually contradictory principles — the U.S. imperial doctrine, the continuity (justification) of the

Japanese imperial past, and the postwar constitutional pacifism. This peculiar, schizophrenic statehood came into being as the result of the postwar Japanese ruling elites “embracing defeat” so aptly stated by John Dower. Postwar Japan, created as a subsystem of the U.S. Empire, internalized the United States as a defining element of its statehood. The military alliance with the U.S. and the presence and incessant growth of the U.S.-created armed forces (Self-Defense Forces) in violation of the Constitution represented this aspect of statehood. The same state, however, has surreptitiously though obstinately retained the principle of continuity from the pre-1945 Japanese empire at its very core. This second principle, basically concealed from foreign eyes for most of the postwar years for fear of its negative political effects, has in recent years begun to be more and more openly asserted not only by the traditional ultra-right movement but also by a host of leading mainstream conservatives in power. This drive has largely succeeded in undermining the once broadly shared moderately pacifist public consensus, especially among the youth. In fact, the revisionist discourse has become close to being mainstreamed in media and political circles.

Rightists and Empire

But how can these two heterogeneous principles be reconciled at the state level? The two vectors — the thrust of the American imperial principle and that of the imperial Japan principle — if they had met horizontally, would have clashed head-on and destroyed each other.

In the actual political context, both have been deflected from the frontal collision course in the direction of fighting their common foe. The common foe is the force representing the constitutional pacifism of postwar Japan. To fight it, the two vectors fell into a V shape, producing a resultant force, turning the V into a Y. In this manner, the two political vectors, differently motivated, in effect are working together in carrying out their common project — changing the nature of the postwar Japanese state by abolishing the pacifist principle embodied in the preamble and Article 9 of the constitution.

During the past 10 years, the two horns of the Y have been extending at rapid but often uneven paces. In the past few years, it was the horn of the ultra-rightist drive that took the lead in shaping the political and ideological climate. The campaign of historical revisionists from above and “below” culminated in the rightist- and media-machinated outburst of anti-China chauvinism in May and June 2005 in the face of Chinese mass “anti-Japan” protests over Koizumi’s Yasukuni shrine visit and other signs of Japan’s lack of repentance of the past.[1] The issue of abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Korean intelligence in the 1970s, admitted by Kim Jong-il in 2002, provided a rallying point for mobilization of chauvinist sentiments and victim mentality that effectively silenced voices in Japanese society calling for clear settlement of the past.[2]

But the rightists’ surge lost some of its momentum in August 2005 when their intensive drive for the adoption of their textbooks fell far short of their professed goal of getting at least 10% of the public junior highs to adopt it (in fact only 0.4% adopted it). In spite of open LDP support, they suffered this disgraceful defeat in the face of vigorous activities by local citizens and their movements to influence local boards of education. Facing this eventuality, the Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsukuru-kai), the rightist campaign center on the textbook issue, became split up by factional struggles. On the other hand, the worsening of Japan’s relationship with China and South Korea on account of Koizumi’s bigotry on Yasukuni shrine visits became a source of serious worries for big business, which badly needed better relations with China as its largest potential market. Moreover, the U.S. government, learning about the view of the last war held by the Yasukuni Shrine, felt uncomfortable with it and also began to express concern over Japan’s worsening relations with China.

Not that the rightist thrust has waned or retreated. The ascension of Abe to the prime ministership shows that the far-right has now captured the helm of state. But after October 2005 the U.S. imperial thrust emerged on the stage as the looming character wielding a sledge hammer to destroy the basic assumptions of the postwar Japanese state.

Let us see what happened.

Reorganization into a Global Partnership

On June 29 2006, Bush and Koizumi met in Washington D.C. and issued a joint statement titled, "The Japan-U.S. Alliance of the New Century." This marked the ceremonial conclusion of the intense planning process that had gone into full swing in 2005 to annex Japan militarily into the U.S. global imperial rule. The alliance of the new century, according to the statement, is not just to meet common threats but par excellence "for the advancement of core universal values such as freedom, human dignity and human rights, democracy, market economy and rule of law." This expression, innocent as it may appear, meant Japan's unconditional commitment to whatever military venture the United States would undertake ostensibly for the sake of these "core values." This venture is precisely what President Bush called a "long war" in his 2006 state of the union address. Japan promised to be an automatic part of it.

The press conference in June was the finishing touch to the new alliance making process that had produced three bilateral agreements: the "common strategic objectives" made as of February 19, 2005, "U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future" (hereafter referred to as T&R) signed on October 29, 2005, and the "Roadmap for Realignment Implementation" dated May 1, 2006. All these instruments worked out at the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee, were signed by "two-plus-two," namely, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for the United States and Minister of Foreign Affairs Machimura Nobutaka (Aso Taro for the Roadmap) and Minister of State for Defense Ohno Yoshinori (Nukaga Fukushima for the Roadmap) for the Japanese government.

The legality of this process is extremely dubious as the commitment resulting from it practically repudiated the 1960 security treaty. The contents of the new arrangement therefore are of a nature that should require a formal revision of the treaty through attendant parliamentary procedures. All such legal procedures were skipped by dint of the two-plus-two expediency so that the people and their elected representatives were not to be consulted.

The major change that has been made is that under the new arrangements the alliance is to cover the "Arc of Instability" running from Korea to the Middle East, instead of just the East Asian region, as the area of U.S. military operation from Japan covered by the alliance. It should be remembered that under the 1960 treaty, the United States was "granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan" only "for the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East." The Far East was defined by the Japanese government as the area north of the Philippines. The "U.S.-Japan alliance in the world" under the new arrangements has repudiated this restrictive clause and turned Japan to a major hub for American military operations all over the world and transformed the Japanese military forces into part of the globally deployed U.S. military forces.

Ten Year Process of Alliance Redefinition

While the 2005-2006 arrangement is a drastic breakthrough, it should be noted that it has resulted from a 10-year process of redefinition of the U.S. global military strategy in the U.S. search for the construction of its post-Cold War global empire. In the Pacific and East Asia, the redefining process began around the mid-1990s, and was made clearer in 1996 through the “redefinition of the U.S.-Japan alliance” in the Clinton-Hashimoto joint statement, in which the U.S.-Japan alliance was described as an “alliance in the world.” Then the U.S. made it clear that, though the Cold War had ended, it would remain militarily in Asia-Pacific and would not withdraw. The Japanese commitment to this post-Cold War strategy was described as “the cornerstone” of the security setup in Asia-Pacific.

It was in 1997 that the Clinton administration adopted its national security strategy and the Pentagon its Quadrennial Defense Review, launching the “defense transformation” process to reorganize the U.S. global military posture away from the Cold War period. The key concepts of the post-Cold War U.S. strategy such as “shape, respond, and prepare” to counter “asymmetrical enemies” as well as the notion of “full-spectrum dominance” preventing the emergence of any potential hegemonic rival in the foreseeable future were already formulated in this period. The redefinition of the U.S.-Japan alliance involving ever increasing pressure on Japan to share more of the “burden” proceeded along the line of the U.S. defense transformation.

Along this line, the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation were made in 1997, replacing the 1978 Cold War version, detailed measures for the mobilization of Japanese military and civil resources in the event of contingencies arising “in areas surrounding Japan.” This was already a great leap from the 1960 security treaty restriction, as the “area surrounding Japan” was defined not as a geographical concept but a situational one that can cover even the Persian Gulf if events involving Japanese security interests break out there. To implement the Guidelines, the Japanese government in 1999 railroaded through the Diet the so-called “surrounding area situation” law providing for measures to mobilize Japanese resources and systems for logistic support for U.S. military operations.

But Washington felt that these Japanese domestic arrangements still fell far short of the new strategic requirements of the United States. In October 2000, the Pentagon’s special committee chaired by long-time Japan hand, Undersecretary of Defense Richard Armitage, produced a report titled, “Mature Partnership” that openly urged Japan to remove its restraints on the exercise of the right to “collective defense” as unconstitutional. According to the established government interpretation of the constitution, Japan has the right to defend itself but cannot exercise the right to fight in case its ally (the U.S.) is attacked (the right to collective self-defense). The Armitage report said this restraint was a major impediment to a mature alliance to be shaped after the model of the Anglo-American alliance and therefore should be removed. This was tantamount to demanding that Japan remove Article 9 by revising its constitution.

A Breakthrough to a “Mature Partnership”

After George Bush Jr. and Koizumi Junichiro came to power one after another in 2001, and especially after 9/11, Japan’s military commitment to the U.S. went forward by leaps and bounds. Koizumi readily supported Bush’s invasion of Afghanistan and made a special law to send a Japanese navy fleet to the Indian Ocean. When the United States invaded Iraq, he parroted the Bush rationale of the war — WMDs — and in a political blitzkrieg made legislation to send Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force troops to Iraq as part of the “coalition of the willing.” All this would have been

unimaginable a few years earlier when there was still a broad consensus that the dispatch of troops to battlefields was 100% unconstitutional. Koizumi did not even bother to plead for the constitutionality of his new military commitment, saying that the Japanese troops were sent not to war and sent only to areas where there were to be no battles. When asked how he defined such areas, he appalled the interpellator by saying, "that is (defined as) where the SDF troops are."

In the three years from 2001 through 2004, the Koizumi government forced one war-related law after another through the Diet — a package of draconian laws providing for emergency measures to facilitate U.S. and Japanese military operations in and around the Japanese territory in the event of an armed attack on Japan. They include the Armed Attack Situation Law (2003), the law to facilitate the smooth operation of U.S. forces in the event of armed attack (2003), and the law allegedly for the protection of the people in emergency (2004). As a set, these wartime and emergency laws give the government the right to suspend some of the constitutional rights, and allow it to requisition public and private properties for military purposes and force residents to evacuate as military and other emergency needs dictate. These constitute a new wartime legal system that is alien to, and certainly incompatible with, the rest of the legal system that stems from the peace constitution.

With these legal and institutional receptacles having been readied on the Japanese part, the United States in January 2003 set out to remake the alliance relationship with Japan in what was called the Defense Policy Review Initiative. The full negotiation on alliance reorganization began only in October 2004 when then Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Tokyo, pressuring Japan into a reexamination of its strategy. Powell was followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith who flew to Tokyo in November to tell the Japanese government that maintaining the alliance with Japan would become difficult if Japan failed to adapt to the new situation.[3] Earlier in the year, the U.S. government adopted a "Global Posture Review" providing for "reshaping America's global military footprint" through reorganization of bases and alliances.

The new alliance making process went into full swing. It should be remembered that this process was integral to the Pentagon's new QDR making process, as a Kyodo dispatch exposed. Assistant Secretary of Defense Feith, the Kyodo report said, disclosed that the QDR would be made in consultation with Japan and other allies. "This is the first time," it said quoting Feith, "that the United States is consulting its allies in reviewing its defense systems." (Kyodo, March 18, Washington DC)

It should be noted in this context that the United States in this same process was pursuing a trilateral military arrangement. Testifying before the Senate Armed Service Committee in March 2006, Adm. William Fallon, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, said that the United States planned to "launch trilateral military cooperation with Japan and South Korea to deal not only with North Korea but also with China and terrorist threats in Asia." In the same process as the U.S. was talking with Japan, "the United States has been working to transform its bilateral defense alliances with the two nations to deal with regional and global issues and develop them into a stronger trilateral initiative." (Japan Times, March 6, 2006). The slogan for the South Korean part of the U.S. military restructuring is "strategic flexibility" under which the consolidation of U.S. bases in South Korea on a huge base complex in Pyongtaek is being carried out, involving the forced relocation of farmers, leading to fierce resistance by the victimized farmers and peace and anti-base groups.

It was in the context of this grandiose U.S. military transformation and "position review" that Japan was prescribed new, heavy military roles in the previously mentioned 2+2 documents.

Of the three documents, "U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future" (T&R) should be considered the most important, as it redefines "the roles, missions, and capabilities of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the U.S. Armed forces" allegedly to pursue their "common

strategic objectives.” The “common strategic objectives” here referred to had been written in the February 19 2+2 statement, where the known diplomatic policy goals of the two countries are enumerated, including as the top global common objective the promotion of “fundamental values such as basic human rights, democracy, and the rule of law,” the professed goal of Bush’s war. In this document, there is also repeated mention of China, along with U.S. support for Japan’s posture on the North Korea kidnapping issues and permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council.

Taking over Japanese Command

The T&R is an exacting, no-nonsense document. It lists a whole gamut of strengthened military cooperation ranging from Japan’s commitment to full participation in ballistic missile defense, counter-terrorism, search and destroy operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, through response to attacks by weapons of mass destruction and joint use of bases and facilities in Japan with the SDF to the U.S. use of seaport and airport facilities, roads, water spaces, airspaces, and frequency bands.

But the greatest emphasis of this document is on “close and continuous policy and operational coordination.” “Recognizing the Government of Japan’s intention to transform the SDF into a joint operations posture,” the document states, “the Headquarters, U.S. Forces Japan will establish a bilateral and joint operations center at Yokota Base.” It goes on, “The shared use of this center will ensure constant connectivity, coordination, and interoperability among U.S. forces in Japan and the SDF.”

Here is the basic philosophy and practice running through the new alliance arrangements — the unification of the SDF and U.S. forces under the U.S. command. It is surprising to learn from this document signed by the two Japanese leaders that the Japanese government is willing to “transform the SDF” into this “posture.” Given the power relations between the U.S. and Japanese military which are to be inter-connected, there is little doubt that these “joint operations” must end up as operations that are totally commanded by the United States.

Along with the coordination center in Yokota for the whole SDF and U.S. forces, the integration of the air force command will also be carried out. T&R reads:

Japan’s Air Defense Command and relevant units, currently located at Fuchu, will be collocated with the headquarters of the U.S. 5th Air Force at Yokota Air Base, strengthening the coordination between air and missile defense command and control elements, and sharing relevant sensor data through the bilateral and joint operations coordination center.

This step is considered essential to Japanese participation in the ballistic missile defense system, one of the top priority tasks assigned to Japan under this arrangement. The BMD system deployed in Japan is of course intended to protect the American mainland and for this the new U.S. X-Band radar system is to be introduced at Shariki base in Japan.

One step in this document that sheds light on the nature of the overall reorganization process is the upgrading of the Zama Camp to a global U.S. army command headquarters. “The capabilities of the U.S. Army Japan’s command structure in Zama Camp will be modernized to a deployable, joint task force-capable operational headquarters element,” the document states. This jargonized expression simply means that the U.S. is moving the headquarters of the First Army now located in the state of Washington to Zama to command its global operation. “The transformed command structure will provide an additional capability to respond rapidly for the defense of Japan and other contingencies.” Moreover, the SDF will establish the headquarters of a Ground SDF Central

Readiness Force Command in the Zama Camp for mobile operations and special tasks “thereby strengthening the coordination between the headquarters.”

Another major step provided for in the document is the relocation of a carrier air wing from Atsugi Air Facility to Iwakuni Air Station. Atsugi is near Zama, both in Kanagawa Prefecture adjacent to Tokyo, where the local community has been conducting a decades-long struggle against destructively noisy night landing exercises by carrier-born planes. In successive lawsuits filed by the local citizens, the courts have repeatedly sided with the plaintiffs and the Japanese government has had to pay compensation for the noise damage. But the T&R-provided relocation of the exercise to Iwakuni Air Station is being done not in consideration of the voices of the local people. The purpose of the transfer, according to T&R, is simply “to ensure the viability of a long-term forward-deployment of the U.S. Aircraft carrier and its air wing” by using the Iwakuni base which “will have the necessary facilities and training airspace.”

The single major political focus of the strategic realignment is Okinawa, where 75% of U.S. bases in Japan are concentrated causing perpetual suffering to the local people who are overwhelmingly opposed to the U.S. and Japanese military presence. As is well known, one long-contested issue is the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station located in the midst of densely populated Ginowan city. After the 1995 crisis triggered by the rape of a 12-year old girl by U.S. soldiers, Washington and Tokyo organized a special action committee (SACO), on the pretension that it would do something to meet Okinawan people’s demand for alleviation of the burdens of the bases, centering on the closure of the Futenma base. SACO came out with the decision that Futenma base would be closed in exchange for a replacement base to be built off the coast of Henoko beach. This step, which would simply move the base from one location to another within Okinawa, called forth another wave of protest. Local people organized sustained non-violent action on the sea to prevent the initial sea bottom drilling and succeeded in paralyzing the construction work. In the meantime, in 2005 a U.S. helicopter from Futenma crashed at a nearby university campus, again dramatizing the danger of the base and further spurring anti-base feelings and activities. Earlier in 2003, Rumsfeld himself, visiting Okinawa to make an on-the-spot investigation, had flown over Futenma base and found it utterly impossible to continue to use it. This was the situation the U.S. and Japanese governments were facing in designing the alliance reorganization.

In the 2005 thrashing out process, the two governments found it impossible to go ahead with the original Henoko offshore base project due to the fierce opposition. Instead of abandoning the project, they improvised a new plan to build a larger base located partly inside Camp Schwab, the U.S. marines’ huge training base, and protruding into sea areas on both sides of Cape Henoko. The proposed new base is to have two runways arranged in a V shape, complete with a large naval port and other facilities created through the reclamation of sea areas. The abrupt announcement of the new plan, which is far worse than the original Henoko offshore plan, set the Okinawan people aflame, spreading anti-base movement to new groups and sectors as Yui Akiko details.

The Tokyo government was certainly speculating that it could appease the Okinawans by promising to relocate 8,000 U.S. marines and their dependents to Guam Island. The government slogan justifying the whole realignment business is “alleviating burdens while keeping deterrence intact.” But it could not deceive the Okinawan people. The movement of marines, having nothing to do with “burden alleviation,” was solely motivated by the desire to strengthen the U.S. marine’s crisis response capability by increasing flexibility. T&R introduces the transfer of part of marines to Guam as follows:

As part of its global posture realignment effort, the U.S. is making several changes to strengthen its force structure in the Pacific. Among these changes are a strengthening of Marine Corps crisis response capabilities and a redistribution of those capabilities among Hawaii, Guam and Okinawa

that will provide greater flexibility to respond with appropriate capabilities according to the nature and location of particular situations.

The false rhetoric of burden alleviation for the sake of Okinawans is useful to the U.S. side, too, in the most peculiar manner. It serves to present a perverted picture of the situation — the United States is on the side of obliging Japan by agreeing to move the marines to Guam.

In fact, the United States demanded that Japan meet most of the cost involved in the relocation of the marines from Okinawa to Guam, calling initially for 75% the estimated \$10 billion expenditure covering the construction of the marine headquarters, other base facilities, roads, ports, and recreational facilities for use by the marines. The Japanese government negotiated a reduction of its share and finally agreed to meet 60% but no questions were raised as to why Japan should be the host of marines stationed in Guam, a territory under U.S. administration. This U.S. assumption that Japan should pay for the cost of moving American marines to Guam as well as the idea of locating the headquarters of the First Army for global deployment in Zama Camp in Japan betrays the prevailing American understanding behind the alliance realignment — Japan is an extension of the U.S. territory across the Pacific and the Japanese budget part of the American budget.

In this context, the T&R emphasizes general joint use of military and civilian facilities by U.S. and Japanese forces and their joint exercises. “Recognizing the limited access that the SDF have to facilities in Okinawa,” the T&R states as though Okinawa were a U.S. territory, “the U.S. underscored its willingness to implement shared use of Kadena Air Base, Camp Hansen, and other U.S. facilities and areas in Okinawa in cooperation with the Government of Japan.”

While on the basis of Japan’s new contingency legislation, the “use by U.S. forces and the SDF of facilities, including airports and seaports” has become possible, more “detailed surveys of civilian and SDF air and seaports” will be conducted to validate the “laning work through strengthened bilateral exercise programs.” Also provided is “increasing mutual use of U.S. and SDF training facilities and areas throughout Japan” while “the training of SDF personnel and units in Guam, Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. mainland will also be expanded,” particularly in Guam where the U.S. plans to expand its training infrastructure.

Community-Based Resistance Rises a New and Links Up

The Japanese government conducted the process of the new alliance making silently, if not totally secretly. Nor did media follow the process with sufficient attention. So, when the “Transformation and Realignment” document was disclosed in October, it came as a sheer surprise to the public, and particularly to the local communities, their people and local administration, who were going to be affected by the new arrangements. “This is abrupt; we were not consulted” was the unanimous angry response coming from practically all the local governments in the base-bordering areas and regions.

Okinawa: Anger Mounts against the U.S. and Yamato Governments

The most vigorous opposition of course came from Okinawa. As Yui Akiko points out in her detailed report,⁴ Japan’s new commitment to the global U.S. strategy has “meted out a yet more cruel fate to Okinawans” and “the treatment of Okinawa in this series of arrangements is reminiscent of the historical incident called the Ryukyu annexation (Ryukyu Shobun) in which the Meiji government abolished the Ryukyu Kingdom and annexed it as a prefecture of Japan.” This was an affront to Okinawa, a blatant expression of discrimination against Okinawans by the Yamato (mainland Japan) government. Governor Inamine Keiichi categorically rejected the new plan. The Tokyo government

responded by threatening to make a special law to deprive the governor of the powers to issue permits for the use of sea area. On the other hand, the Tokyo government promised new subsidies which would be disbursed in accordance with the progress of the base construction. Nearby communities and Nago city asked that the projected location of the base be moved a little bit further away from the populated areas. Koizumi's response was that there was no room for negotiation on the siting. "We may move it if at all by a few centimeters," he said.

As righteous anger and a growing sense of crisis take hold of the majority of Okinawans, the anti-base movement in Okinawa is gaining momentum, incorporating new groups and segments of people. Even many of those who had accepted the Henoko offshore base project changed sides in the face of the Yamato government's haughty attitude.

Simultaneously, the Okinawan anti-base movement has strengthened solidarity relationships with the Asian and Pacific sisters and brothers. For years close, day-to-day relationships have developed between Okinawa and South Korean anti-base groups and struggles through frequent mutual visits and reciprocal participation in action. Korean activists participated in the Henoko struggle and Okinawa activists joined Pyongtaek farmers' anti-base actions. It is significant that since 2005, solidarity ties have been reinforced between Okinawa and Guam (and Hawaiian) activists as well as between the Japanese and South Korean anti-base movements.

Zama-Sagamihara: Whole Cities Stand up for the Closure of Bases

Kanagawa Prefecture, adjacent to Tokyo, is next only to Okinawa in its concentration of U.S. military bases and facilities. It has been forced to be the host to strategic U.S. bases and facilities in Zama, Sagamihara, and Yamato, and the largest U.S. naval port overseas, at Yokosuka. In mainland Japan, the Zama-Sagamihara area and Iwakuni near Hiroshima are two current focuses of local communities' resistance. There, the local governments headed by the mayors have taken the initiative in expressing opposition to the imposition of the military projects, mobilizing municipal resources and powers, in collaboration with grassroots anti-base groups. These and other local movements support each other through mutual visits and exchanges of information.

Camp Zama encompasses two cities, Zama and Sagamihara, while Sagamihara also has a U.S. Sagami Depot. In the adjacent cities of Yamato and Ayase is located the Atsugi Airbase. Citizens' movements and the municipalities involved have long been working together to get rid of the bases and their terrible effects on communities. Kaneko Tokio, a local leader of anti-base movement and a Zama municipal council representative, says that the anti-base and anti-military struggle had a long history since before the end of the war.[5] Sagamihara people suffered seriously from Imperial Japanese Army's confiscation of land for Imperial Army facilities and military base in the 1930s and then saw the U.S. bases imposed in the postwar years. Camp Zama was formerly the Japanese Army's Military Academy and Sagamihara Depot was an Army's arms factory. "People feel that they have suffered enough. Bases are there for 70 years. They feel they have the right to demand the return of the base sites," Kaneko noted.

Moreover, Sagamihara is where in 1972 a powerful and imaginative struggle was organized by anti-Vietnam War groups against the use of the U.S. armory for the Vietnam War. The groups attempted to block by non-violent direct action the transportation of American tanks repaired at the depot back to Vietnam from the nearby port of Yokohama. Sagamihara was turned to an arena of intense confrontation. When the tanks were being carried on lorries along Route 16, crowds of people blocked their passage before a bridge to Yokohama with the support of the Yokohama municipal government. The mayor of Yokohama invoked the traffic law that prohibited the passage of heavy weight vehicles through the bridge and on this ground banned the tanks from crossing it. The tank transportation was halted for four months.

The memory of this struggle, overwhelmingly supported and joined by local people, is still vivid in the minds of Sagamihara and Zama citizens as well as the municipal officials as a source of pride. We asked Kaneko whether the mayors and the majority of the municipal council members were not conservatives. "That's right," Kaneko said, "But they lead the action for the return of the bases." According to him, many citizens, who disagreed with the conservative mayors on various other issues, are now backing their mayors because they are determined to struggle to the end. In Sagamihara, there is a broad citizens' coalition demanding the return of U.S. bases. The mayor is its president and the coalition has as members the municipal office, municipal council, local PTA, and most influential local organizations. This coalition has been actively campaigning against the return of the bases for thirty years ever since the 1972 Sagamihara struggle.

This coalition has recently proposed a campaign of sending postcards to the Japanese Defense Agency director and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to convey citizens' opposition to the base reinforcement. The municipal office printed and distributed to all local households 150,000 postcards and leaflets urging them to join this campaign. The city office also printed 4,500 campaign posters that have been put up on all information billboards in the city's streets. Interestingly, the municipalities and grassroots groups in Zama and Sagamihara are competing with each other in carrying out original activities. In Zama, the municipal office organized a signature campaign against the stepping in of the First Army headquarters and collected more than 60,000 signatures out of a population of 120,000. The city of Sagamihara followed suit and got 210,000 out of 620,000 citizens to sign.

Iwakuni: the Community Expresses its Will by Referendum

In Iwakuni city, it was more than a signature campaign. It was a statutory referendum by all citizens that was called to express the people's will vis-à-vis the government's decision. The U.S. air base in Iwakuni began to be expanded in 1996 and already a reclamation of vast sea areas has been completed where carrier-based airplane landing exercises are due to begin. Informed of the plan, the city council at first expressed opposition to it, but under strong pressure from the LDP national headquarters, conservatives soon changed their attitude in favor of accepting it. Faced by their about-face, Iwakuni Mayor Ihara Katsusuke decided to go to a referendum over whether the proposed land exercise plan should be accepted or not. Ihara's term of office was going to expire in March 2006 as the result of the scheduled consolidation of Iwakuni city with six neighboring cities, requiring the election of a new mayor for the enlarged Iwakuni city. The pro-base forces were scheming to use the post-consolidation election as the opportunity to kick out the anti-base mayor. Mayor Ihara forestalled this move by proclaiming that a referendum would be held on March 12, immediately before the expiry of his term. This called forth vehement opposition from pro-base forces. They launched an intensive boycott campaign against the referendum. According to the city regulation, a referendum fails to take effect unless more than the majority of the eligible voters cast votes. If the number of voters did not reach the majority of the eligible population, the votes would not even be tallied. To defeat the boycott campaign, "Go to the polls" became the main slogan of the peace groups and the municipal office. Support for the referendum campaign came not only from nearby Hiroshima and Kobe but from all over the country. On March 5, 1,500 people from Iwakuni, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, and neighboring cities gathered in a spacious riverbed in Iwakuni and lined up in human letters: "3/12 Go (to vote)!" appealing the importance of participating in the referendum. The sky views of the human letters were televised all of the country.

The result was a resounding victory for the anti-base camp. Despite the anti-referendum drive by pro-base groups, close to 60% of the eligible voters cast votes, making the referendum valid. Moreover, 87% of them voted against the government scheme. This means that 51% of all the eligible voters (84,000) opposed the U.S. plane landing exercises in Iwakuni. On top of that, in the subsequent mayoral election in the expanded Iwakuni city held on April 28, Ihara came out

victorious and became mayor again. This election became a national focus as the crisis-minded Tokyo government and the Liberal Democratic Party had sent their top leaders into Iwakuni to support their pro-base candidate Ajimura Taro. Among the big shots coming down to Iwakuni were Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo, Foreign Minister Aso Taro, and LDP Policy Board Chief Nakagawa Hidenao. Their defeat was shattering as Ihara won 54,000 votes, more than double Ajimura's 23,000.

Yuasa Ichiro, a leading peace activist based in the nearby naval port city of Kure who played a key role in this struggle, remarked that this victory represented an historic moment in Iwakuni's modern history. "[6] The citizens of Iwakuni, he said, by demonstrating their unequivocal rejection of the central government's policy, declared that the future of Iwakuni would be made by Iwakuni citizens themselves.

Yuasa is right that what is happening in Iwakuni, Zama-Sagamihara, and Okinawa embodies the assertion of people's sovereignty at the grassroots level and defies the central government's claimed monopoly of decision-making on defense matters and external relationships. While the Tokyo government and the LDP leave no room for local level decisions by referenda or other means on the big national issues, Yuasa argues that local citizens have the right to participate in the decision making on issues like military bases because they are bound to affect local people's daily lives. Kaneko also makes the point that local governments nowadays do not hesitate to skip the Tokyo government and negotiate base issues directly with Washington. The Zama municipal government in fact negotiates directly with the United States government while anti-base Mayor Iba Yoichi of Ginowan city (where the Futenma base is located) flew to Washington more than once to present his city's demands directly to the U.S. government. In fact, more and more local governments are now speaking up and taking action, refusing to leave decision making to the central government on matters of security treaty and defense. "This is entirely new in the history of local autonomy in Japan," Kaneko observed.

In this climate, one recent development is worth special mention. That is the launching of a nationwide network of anti-base community groups in February 2006. At the call of Ashitomi Hiroshi from the Nago Council against the Helicopter Base Construction in Okinawa and Kaneko Tokio from the Association of No Welcome to the First Army Headquarters in Zama, 23 local community-based anti-base groups got together on February 3 in Naha, Okinawa. Coming from Iwakuni, Hiroshima, Yokota, Zama, Sagami-hara, Yokosuka, Kadena, Futenma, and Nago cities, they set up a National Liaison Council to Struggle Against U.S. Base Reorganization and Reinforcement with Ashitomi and Kaneko as coordinators. This is a loose network for cooperation in action, information sharing, and for dissemination of information about Japanese activities to anti-base activities in other countries. This is the first time that anti-base groups of different places and backgrounds have come together on an equal footing in a single network.

Linking Hands beyond Borders

It should also be noted that peace and anti-base activists based in communities struggling against bases have created, sustained and strengthened links beyond national borders in the past few years. Activists are constantly coming and going, participating in each other's struggle and actions, between Okinawa and South Korea as well as between mainland Japan and South Korea. In 2005 and 2006, activists from Guam were invited to attend the June 22 Okinawa international action events. This is an important solidarity link at a time when the U.S. and Japanese governments are trying to drive a wedge between Okinawan and Guam people using the relocation of marines. On this basis, preparation has begun to link the anti-base activities in Japan with those of neighboring Asian

Pacific countries and territories, South Korea, the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii in particular, and an Asia-Pacific Consultation is scheduled in November in Tokyo. This will be part of a global anti-base network that originated in an anti-base conference at the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai. A global anti-base network will be formally inaugurated in March 2007 in Ecuador.

The so-called defense transformation and alliance realignment of the United States is for Japan a vicious process that involves the remaking of the Japanese statehood, civil society, culture, and ideologies. While rising local resistance is a hopeful sign, we have yet to create a viable political front to cope with the whole weight of this process to break it up. At the moment, the issue is still seen and reported on by the media from the angle of problems faced and suffered by the specific local communities involved. On the basis of the spreading local resistance, we need to make it a sharp national political focus of broadly based people's action addressing the central issue of this country today — Where Japan is going. (October 2006)

Notes

[1] Muto Ichiyo, "Revise the Peace Constitution, Restore Glory to Empire!" *Japonesia Review*, No.1. On ESSF website: ["Revise the Peace Constitution, Restore Glory to Empire!"—Ultra-right Takes Initiative in Changing the Postwar State](#)

[2] Ota Masakuni, "North Korean Abductions: Rampancy of the Right and the Silence of the Left," op.cit.

[3] Umebayashi Hiromichi, *Beigun Saihen* (U.S. Military Reorganization), Iwanami Booklet No. 676.

[4] As regards Okinawa, Yui Akiko systematically reports in the *Japonesia Review*. See "Okinawa Anti-Base Movement Regains Momentum," *JR* No.1, 2006 and also "Okinawa Disagrees: A Historic Turning Point in the Struggle for Peace and Dignity," in this issue of *JR*.

[5] Interview with Kaneko Tokio by Muto Ichiyo and Shirakawa Masumi, *The Quarterly People's Plan*, No.34, 2006

[6] Yuasa Ichiro, "A New Page of History Turned for Iwakuni," op.cit.

P.S.

* Published on the website of "Japonesia Review".

* Muto Ichiyo is an activist/writer on political and social affairs, national and global; born in 1931 in Tokyo, he joined student movement and peace movement in the 1950s; active in the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s; founded the English journal AMPO(1969) and the Pacific-Asia Resources Center (1973), initiated the People's Plan 21 in the 1980s, and founded the People's Plan Study Group (PPSG) of which he is a co-president; taught at the sociology department of State University of New York at Binghamton in the 1980s-90s.