

A New Vision for Okinawa and Asia-Pacific Security:

A Recommendation
from the New Diplomacy Initiative (ND)

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Map source : Okinawa Prefectural Government



About the New Diplomacy Initiative (ND)

The New Diplomacy Initiative (ND) was established in August 2013 as a think tank for advancing a “new diplomacy” that directly engages the governments, legislators and media of Japan and other countries in order to foster diplomacy that takes into account perspectives not reflected in conventional diplomacy. Since its founding, ND has organized and dispatched delegations to the United States by Okinawan and other Japanese lawmakers, and in June 2015 and February 2017 coordinated and attended delegations by Okinawan lawmakers accompanying Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga to the United States.

In 2015, the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) under deliberation by Congress referred to Henoko as the only option for relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma, but ND visited the offices of many Congressmen and Senators and succeeded in getting that wording dropped from the bill.

For the past three years, ND has hosted study sessions for diplomacy, defense and security experts to analyze and research the military role of the U.S. Marines in Okinawa and the state of “deterrence.” In 2014, ND compiled the fruits of that research into a book titled “*Kyozo no Yokushiryoku (The Pretense of Deterrence)*” which was published by Junposha.

Since February 2016, ND has continued its research on the deployment of the U.S. Marines in Okinawa, using as sources U.S. documents and facts about Marine operations, and has held regular study sessions to compile a counterargument against the assertion that Henoko is the only option for the Futenma relocation. This report contains the results of those discussions, and sets forth a solution that will equally benefit Japan, the United States and Okinawa.

Japanese-Language Books by the New Diplomacy Initiative (ND):

“*Kyozo no Yokushiryoku: Okinawa, Tokyo, Washinton hatsu anzen hoshō seisaku no shinkijiku* (The Pretense of Deterrence: A New Direction for Security Policy from Okinawa, Tokyo and Washington)” (Tokyo: Junposha, August 2014)

“*Amerika wa nihon no genshiryoku seisaku wo dou miteiru ka* (How Does the United States View Japan’s Nuclear Energy Policy?)” (Tokyo: Iwanami Publishing, October 2016)

“*Atarashii nichibei gaiko wo kirihiraku: Okinawa, anpo, genpatsu, TPP, tayo na koe wo Washinton he* (Paving the Way for a New Japan-U.S. Diplomacy: Okinawa, Security, Nuclear Power, TPP—Conveying Diverse Views to Washington DC)” (Tokyo: Shueisha, October 2016)

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Overview

Current Japanese government policy shakes the foundations of Japan-U.S. security

If the Henoko relocation is coercively pushed forward despite current political circumstances, resistance to the U.S. bases among Okinawans will grow and extend beyond opposition to the Marine Corps. Opposition may extend to other U.S. military installations, including the highly important Kadena Air Base. This could clearly undermine the U.S. presence in Okinawa and shake the foundations of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The Japan and the U.S. have agreed to relocate U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (“Futenma” or MCAS Futenma), currently based in Ginowan City (Okinawa Prefecture), to Henoko in Nago City in the northern part of Okinawa. However, ever since the Japanese government began moving forward with the plan to relocate Futenma to Henoko, election results in Okinawa have continuously shown that the Okinawans’ opposition to the new base construction in Henoko is unwavering. Candidates opposing Henoko base construction have been victorious in the mayoral election in Nago as well as the Nago City Council election, the Okinawa gubernatorial election, the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly election, and elections for both the national House of Representatives and the House of Councilors in the National Diet.

These election results reveal a shared recognition among Okinawans that their lives have been continually threatened, from the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, in which 120,000 Okinawans were killed, through the era of U.S. military occupation. Even though Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972, they remain fearful due to the concentration of U.S. bases on their land and numerous accidents and crimes involving the U.S. military there. In recent years, Okinawans have come to widely share the perception that these events even represent “Okinawa discrimination”.

The governments of Japan and the United States must acknowledge the discontent and disappointment of Okinawans toward U.S. military rule, which are rooted in Okinawa’s historical experience, and immediately implement a solution that does not involve relocation of Futenma within Okinawa.

It is crucial to overcome the illusion that if the construction is pushed forward, creating a *fait accompli*, Okinawans will give up, and that all they actually seek is money. As to the threat that if Okinawans oppose the Henoko relocation, then Futenma, notorious as the “most dangerous airfield in the world,” will remain in operation, that only serves to increase Okinawans’ anger and incur their resentment. No base built atop a foundation of resentment can stand strong.

Marines’ peacetime Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) activities need not be based in Okinawa

The governments of Japan and the United States plan to relocate the main Marine forces in Okinawa, the 4th Marine Regiment and the 12th Marine Regiment, to Guam and elsewhere. This will leave only the command element of the III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), which includes the aviation unit stationed at Futenma, as the only U.S. Marine forces in Okinawa. The 31st MEU is deployed alternately for periods of roughly six months in a year, patrolling Southeast Asia on amphibious assault ships belonging to the Navy and stationed at Sasebo in Nagasaki, approximately 430 miles (700 kilometers) away. Their primary roles in the Pacific are bilateral and multilateral joint training focusing on Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR). They stay in Okinawa to train and recuperate, on average remaining there for less than one third of the year.

HA/DR activities certainly help improve the security environment in East Asia. Upon examination, however, one finds that facilities in Okinawa provide a place to rest and maintain readiness. Therefore, the 31st MEU does not need to be stationed in Okinawa. What is required is a location with convenient access to

the amphibious assault ships at Sasebo, a requirement that could be met through an appropriate selection of transport means. Therefore, the 31st MEU could be stationed anywhere in the U.S. mainland, Hawaii, Guam, or even Australia.

The Japanese government has pledged to spend a significant sum of money for construction of the new facility in Henoko. If these financial resources were instead spent on a high-speed ship to transport 31st MEU personnel and supplies, the same effect could be achieved at far lower cost than that required to reclaim a vast area of ocean to build a base.

Japan and the U.S. should think beyond simply deciding on a relocation site for Futenma and come up with a realistic solution that is achievable through technological and operational innovation

Deepening the U.S.-Japan relationship through U.S.-Japan joint MEU for HA/DR

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have sophisticated capabilities when it comes to HA/DR, which constitute the peacetime duties of the 31st MEU. Taking advantage of the JSDF's HA/DR capabilities in East Asia would increase collaboration with the militaries of other countries in the region and would help improve region's security environment. Japan and the United States should consider developing a system in which the JSDF participate in HA/DR currently being performed by the 31st MEU.

The command element of the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) that will remain in Okinawa is expected to serve as a joint center for HA/DR efforts in East Asia, in which various countries in the region will participate. Participation in these collaborative regional efforts should be expanded to include landlocked regions and ASEAN nations that similarly suffer damage from earthquakes, typhoons, droughts and water damage.

If these efforts are promoted in conjunction with the total relocation of the 31st MEU off Okinawa, with the presence of the III MEF, the flag of the U.S. Marine Corps will remain planted in Okinawa, and trust-building achieved through HA/DR heretofore conducted by the 31st MEU alone can be developed even further through the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The foundation of the Marines' emergency assistance--effective deterrence of incident escalation

There are widespread concerns that withdrawing the Marines from Okinawa could send the wrong message to China. But when it comes to territorial conflicts over islands in the South China Sea, it is in the fundamental interest of the United States to maintain flexible options that prioritize diplomatic means.

Given this fact, overemphasizing the deterrent function of the Marines could send the wrong signal to China and its allies and friends in the region; namely, it would indicate that the United States is committed to sending in the Marines in the event of a territorial conflict with a third nation. This would not only increase tensions in the region but also carries the risk of tying the hands of the United States.

Even so, the United States must maintain the ability to provide assistance, including sending in the Marines, in the case of an ally's territory being directly attacked militarily. Such circumstance would require forces far greater than the 31st MEU's 2,000 Marines. The deterrence value of the Marines is not in their preparedness for limited conflict over uninhabited islands, but in their preparedness to act if and when an incident develops into a full-scale invasion.

Thus, what is important is not for the 31st MEU to remain stationed in Okinawa, but for preparations to be in place so that large-scale forces can be deployed as reinforcement if necessary. The U.S. can show its intent by visibly maintaining the capacity to aid in times of emergency, both by accumulating the necessary equipment (which the Marines have conventionally done) and by improving means of transportation as suggested in this report.

After the Marines' combat troops are moved out of Japan, Japan and the U.S. should commit to a contingency-ready Japan-U.S. cooperative framework and pursue an effective deterrence policy by continuing regular joint training with the JSDF, using both U.S. and JSDF bases in Okinawa and other parts of western Japan.

Introduction

Okinawans Will Not Accept the Henoko Base

The U.S. and Japan have agreed that MCAS Futenma, which is situated in Ginowan City, will be relocated north along Okinawa Island to Henoko, Nago City. The current Futenma relocation plan involves constructing a base in Henoko equipped with an integrated ammunition loading area not currently provided at Futenma. It also calls for reclaiming land off the coast of Henoko and building two runways and a port at which amphibious warships can dock.

However, since Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale agreed in April 1996 to return MCAS Futenma to Okinawa, the plan to reclaim land off the coast of Henoko and to build a base there has been met with resistance from Okinawans. Now it stands that after more than 20 years the plan has yet to be implemented.

The need for the 1996 agreement was spurred by an incident the year before in which a 12-year-old local girl was raped by U.S. servicemen. The incident sparked protests, including a gathering of 85,000 citizens, a human chain encircling MCAS Futenma, and much more local participation overall in the Okinawa anti-base movement. In an effort to maintain a stable U.S. military posture of 100,000 troops in East Asia, the U.S. and Japan were compelled to accomplish the return of MCAS Futenma as well as the consolidation and reduction of U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

MCAS Futenma was constructed on land seized by “bayonets and bulldozers” (a term for the U.S. military practice of expelling landowners at bayonet point and bulldozing their land) following a land battle in 1945 that claimed roughly 120,000 Okinawan lives. As such, the base stands as a symbol of the U.S. military occupation and its accompanying dangers. Densely populated residential areas with numerous schools and daycare centers surround MCAS Futenma. Its return to Okinawa therefore continues to be an urgent issue for local residents.

For Okinawans to accept the presence of Kadena Air Base, the largest U.S. Air Force base in the Far East, and other U.S. bases in Okinawa, the closure of Futenma has become a necessary condition.

At the end of 2013, then-Okinawan Governor Hirokazu Nakaima approved land reclamation off the coast of Henoko in order to build a base there. Current Governor Takeshi Onaga, who opposes the reclamation, cancelled former Governor Nakaima’s approval. However, the government of Japan did not recognize Governor Onaga’s authority to cancel the approval and continues to push forward with land reclamation work.

In the 2014 gubernatorial election Okinawans showed their resistance to incumbent Governor Nakaima and his approval of the land reclamation. They elected Onaga, who earned the support of more than 60% of the Okinawan electorate, including Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) voters. Onaga, who once functioned as the LDP leader of Okinawa, was moved to change his stance by a renewed recognition of Okinawa’s identity. He found that the excessive burden of the bases on Okinawa is a symbol of Okinawa’s virtual military occupation and discrimination by the governments of both the U.S. and Japan. Onaga now believes that in order for Okinawans to be able to determine the future of Okinawa, the building of more bases cannot be allowed.

Since the end of 2015, there have been several ongoing lawsuits between the Okinawa prefectural government and the Japanese government regarding Governor Onaga’s cancellation of approval for land reclamation. In one suit the two parties came to a settlement that acknowledged the need for good-faith consultations, but ultimately the Japanese government failed to show understanding of the Okinawa prefectural government’s claims. This only deepened Okinawa’s opposition. In December 2016, the Supreme Court of Japan ruled that Onaga’s cancellation of approval for land reclamation was unlawful, and

the Japanese government resumed work off the coast of Henoko. However, large-scale reclamation work will inevitably require design changes, each of which will require approval by the governor. Onaga intends to reject all of these, which will pose an even greater obstacle to the base construction.

Additionally, in May 2016, a former Marine was arrested on suspicion of brutally raping and murdering a young Okinawan woman the month before. This further enraged Okinawans, and the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution demanding that the Marine Corps be withdrawn from Okinawa. In June, 65,000 people gathered for a prefectural rally, where participants adopted a resolution demanding complete withdrawal of the Marine Corps from Okinawa. Then, in December an Osprey aircraft from MCAS Futenma crashed into the ocean off the coast of Nago, causing general fear and yet greater public demand for removal of Ospreys from the prefecture.

The U.S. and Japan are pushing forward with the Henoko relocation plan, and the authorities assert that if the plan is not realized, they will not return MCAS Futenma to Okinawa. This stance incurs even greater anger among Okinawans. Given this vicious circle, any chance that Okinawans would accept a base in Henoko and the stationing of U.S. Marines there has already been lost.

The Security Environment Has Changed

In the roughly 20-year period since the 1996 agreement to return MCAS Futenma to Okinawa, the military situation in East Asia has changed significantly. The U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific region have been reorganizing into a structure that places greater importance on mobility, and have begun setting up new deterrents to overcome geographic constraints. Maintaining a consistent 100,000-troop military presence in the region no longer bears the importance it did 20 years ago.

Of the 19,000 Marines stationed in Okinawa, roughly 9,000 will be transferred. This includes the main-force 4th Marine Regiment destined for Guam, and 12th Marine Regiment for Hawaii. The 31st MEU will be the sole combat force remaining in Okinawa. Aside from using Okinawa for short-term training they will spend most of their time touring around Southeast Asia. The cost of Henoko land reclamation was a massive 350 billion yen according to the Japanese government's preliminary calculations. These expenses will be further swollen by modifications to the construction method. Including all the construction of needed facilities, the budget will reach roughly one trillion yen. From the perspectives of military strategy, cost-effectiveness, and above all feasibility, it is illogical to push forward with base construction that Okinawans do not accept and that would be used only for the 31st MEU's training and recuperation.

Insisting on Henoko will Endanger the U.S.-Japan Alliance

Two facts must be faced head-on. First, Okinawans have reached the end of their fortitude. Should a base be constructed by force as is currently being pursued, it will become a new symbol for base opposition. Surely the U.S. government does not wish to substitute a base built through use of "bayonets and bulldozers" under U.S. occupation forces with one that pollutes the ocean and requires Japan's police to openly repress the opposition movement. Okinawan anger has reached a boiling point.

Second, the keys to deterring Chinese maritime adventurism are the U.S. Air Force stationed at Kadena Air Base and the U.S. Navy based in Yokosuka. As such, the reality is that stable use of these bases is a top priority. Insisting on the construction of a new facility in Henoko could intensify Okinawan resistance to all U.S. military bases, including Kadena Air Base, which could damage the foundation of the U.S.-Japan alliance rather than strengthen it.

Given this context, the New Diplomacy Initiative (ND) has conducted research over the past three years to find a realistic alternative to Henoko. This report presents the results.

Part 1: An Alternative to Henoko

Okinawa Angry about Injustices by the Japanese and U.S. Governments

In September 2015, Okinawa Governor Onaga stated at a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva as follows: “After World War II, the U.S. military took our land by force and constructed military bases in Okinawa. We have never provided our land willingly. Okinawa covers only 0.6% of Japan. However, 70.6% of U.S exclusive bases in Japan exist in Okinawa. Over the past 70 years, those bases have caused many incidents, accidents, and environmental problems in Okinawa.”

Okinawa has been plagued with a number of problems deriving from the U.S. bases, including noise pollution and blasts from U.S. military aircraft, aircraft crashes, brush fires, pollution from leakage of harmful materials, sex-related crimes, and murders. The crime rate of U.S. military personnel in Okinawa is high, even after administrative rights were returned to Japan in 1972. From 1972 to 2013, 5,833 crimes were committed by U.S. military personnel (142 cases per year on average), and 10% of these were serious crimes such as murder, theft, rape, and arson. In the same period there were 594 aircraft accidents (14 cases per year on average). It is conceivable that the over-concentration of U.S. bases is related to the number of crimes committed.

Furthermore, in accordance with the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), entrance to U.S. bases is extremely limited. Dioxins, PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) and regular oil spills cause highly toxic pollution on the bases – environmental pollution that can directly affect the health and lives of Okinawans, yet local government bodies are prevented from direct involvement. This situation is utterly inappropriate in terms of local self-governance.

In Okinawa, sometimes called an “island of bases,” about 20% of the main island is covered by U.S. bases. These bases were constructed during the U.S. military occupation in World War II and in the 1950s-60s when the U.S. relocated bases from mainland Japan, and they continue to be used today.

The History and Current Situation Surrounding the Bases

MCAS Futenma was constructed during World War II. In June 1945, after landing on Okinawa, the U.S. military occupied what was then the farming village of Ginowan and built the base to be used as a forward operating base for bombing the Japanese mainland. In August of the same year, after the war ended, residents returned home from prison camps and evacuation areas to find that their land had been acquired by force and turned into runways, with residents prohibited from entering.

Even after World War II the U.S. occupation continued in Okinawa, and the U.S. military continued to seize land following a proclamation by the U.S. occupation authorities stating that residents’ land could be taken by force.

After the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, public opinion turned against the bases in mainland Japan. In order to appease public opinion as well as reduce U.S. military expenditures, U.S. Marine Corps units were moved from mainland Japan to Okinawa. The Marine units currently deployed to Okinawa were formerly located in Gifu, Yamanashi, and Shizuoka prefectures. This situation has not changed since 1972, when Okinawa was returned to Japan.

The people of Okinawa are strongly opposed to the relocation of MCAS Futenma within Okinawa, and have mounted a large-scale opposition movement. The sit-in at the Henoko construction site that started in April 2004 has continued for over 12 years. In order to remove protesting residents, the Japanese government has called in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department’ s Riot Police Unit, Tokyo’ s unit for maintaining public order.

Thus under the pretext that it is a precondition for the return of Futenma to Japan, the Japanese and U.S.

governments are using the same methods as before to force a new base on Okinawans, evoking in them many negative memories.

Henoko Option Based on Flawed Logic

At a meeting of the Security Consultative Committee (SCC, 2+2) in April 2012, Japan and the U.S. agreed that a Futenma relocation site would have to meet the following criteria:

1. Be operationally viable
2. Be politically feasible
3. Be financially responsible
4. Be strategically sound

1. Operational Viability

Operational viability means that the scale and facilities of the base must satisfy the operational needs of aircraft that will visit or be located there, with no flight restrictions.

Plans for the new base currently being constructed in Henoko call for two runways to be built so that aircraft will not fly in the airspace over surrounding residential areas. With this design, however, sudden weather changes could impede flexible execution of operations. Looking at the issue in terms of scale and facilities, all that is needed is to secure acreage that is suitable for the type and number of aircraft deployed. Viable candidates for such land exist all over the world, and need not be sought on a small island such as Okinawa.

Another operational criterion is that the base be located an appropriate distance from the ground forces transported by Osprey aircraft. But what ground forces need are barracks and training grounds; if we regard relocation of the 31st MEU Ground Combat Element and Aviation Combat Element as a package, there are more suitable geographical candidates all over the world.

2. Political Feasibility

Political feasibility means that local government bodies and local communities will accept the base.

Plans for the base construction in Henoko were unveiled 20 years ago. Ever since, it has continued to trigger political confrontation, dividing the prefectural government, Nago City, and residents in the area around Henoko.

Even those residents in favor of the new base do not actively welcome it. Rather, they simply cannot stand the state of conflict dividing residents, or they feel they have no alternative but to accept the plan to realize the return of Futenma, known as “the most dangerous base in the world.” Even if the base were to be built on the grounds of such reluctant support, not only would support for base operations be insufficient, but it is likely that accidents or incidents would quickly turn public sentiment toward opposition. Moreover, the anger of residents opposed to the base’s construction is tremendous, making stable operation of the base unlikely.

For these reasons, politically Henoko is a highly infeasible place to build a base.

3. Financial Responsibility

According to the Japanese government’s calculations, the relocation to Henoko will cost 350 billion yen (approx. 3.5 billion USD). It is possible that the cost will grow even further with future design changes. This amounts to 7% of Japan’s annual defense-related costs and is by no means insignificant, yet the Japanese government has determined it to be financially feasible.

If there were a viable plan costing less than 350 billion yen, it would actually be financially feasible. The 270 billion yen (approx. 2.7 billion USD) being spent by the Japanese government to move the main Marine

forces to Guam, for example, is less than the cost of building a base in Henoko. An alternative plan along the lines of the Guam relocation plan, which involves expansion of existing facilities and construction of new facilities not requiring large-scale land reclamation, would entail a smaller financial burden than the plan currently being implemented. Many such facilities already exist not only in the continental U.S., but in the Asia-Pacific region as well.

4. Strategic Soundness

The biggest problem with the Henoko proposal is that there is no case for it being strategically sound. As we will discuss in detail below, Marine ground forces move slowly and lack defenses against missile attacks. Positioning them within firing range of Chinese intermediate-range ballistic missiles could open the weakest “window of vulnerability” in the U.S. government’s rebalance strategy in the Asian region. By no stretch can it be said that this is a sound strategy for the U.S.

The Marines Should Not be in Okinawa for a U.S. Strategic Advantage

In 1996, when the agreement was made to return MCAS Futenma, the U.S.’s strategy was primarily focused on the two Major Regional Conflicts in the Middle East and Northeast Asia. Their strategy involved maintaining 100,000 forward-deployed troops in Europe and the Far East respectively.

Currently, 20 years later, the U.S. government is still involved in prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in the face of a massive fiscal deficit has endeavored to force down defense spending. The plan is to cut back on large-scale military intervention and also reconsider the placement of forward-deployed troops, requiring cooperation from Japan, NATO, and others.

Recently, with China’s rapid military development, the U.S. is aiming to enact a rebalance strategy in order to maintain the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region over the long term. The rebalance strategy is characterized by the following four features:

1. Aim not to contain China, but to co-exist under shared rules.
2. To hedge against the unlikely event that military action against China becomes necessary, strategic objectives will be made explicit, and military force will be used expressly to meet these objectives.
3. In order to achieve this, the U.S. military’s stance is to maintain the superiority of C4ISR (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) in realms including space and cyber, and to build a network of bases with transportation capacity and accessibility, enabling deployment of appropriately scaled military forces when needed and to the locations involved, rather than maintaining a large-scale forward deployment of troops,
4. Raise the self-reliance of allies and friendly nations.

This progressive element in military strategy is necessary in order for the U.S. to maintain its own security-related national interests over the long term, even in case the U.S. attempts to reduce its role as the “world’s policeman.” Furthermore, it is rational for the U.S. to reduce its burden in the long term.

Positioning the Marines

Deployment of the Marines must be considered within the context of this strategic trend. In doing so, the following points should be considered:

1. The focal point of the rebalance in East Asia is the maintenance of a power balance in the broad regional theater comprising the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the western Pacific.
2. Naval and air powers are key to holding control in maritime areas; threats to these powers are missiles and submarines targeting bases or aircraft carriers.

3. The defense of land bases and the surrounding ocean should mainly be the role of the host country. The JSDF are developing their abilities in terms of air defense operations, anti-surface-ship operations, anti-submarine operations, and missile defense alongside the U.S. military.

With those points in mind, having the Marines stationed at Okinawa is not a necessity for maintaining the balance of power in East Asia and the western Pacific. Furthermore, Okinawa is within firing range of Chinese intermediate-range ballistic missiles, making ground forces including the Marines vulnerable to the threat of missiles. If a forward deployment of Marines must be maintained in East Asia and the western Pacific, it would be rational to put them in Hawaii or Australia, outside the range of China's missiles.

A Message of Deterrence

Parties involved in the Japan-U.S. security relationship tend to express concern that if the Marines withdraw from Okinawa, it will send the wrong message to China. Viewed objectively, however, this is not a rational concern.

According to the agreements made between Japan and the U.S., ultimately the only operational Marine unit left in Okinawa will be the 31st MEU. The “wrong message” concern presupposes the notion that leaving a unit with the scale and function of the 31st MEU will be enough to deter China.

In addition, in Japan many believe that stationing the Marines in Okinawa is necessary for defending the Senkaku Islands. This is based on the assumption that the U.S. government will undoubtedly commit to defending the Senkaku Islands, potentially a cause for conflict between Japan and China, and that the 31st MEU remaining in Okinawa will act as a deterrent when defending the Senkaku Islands.

However, these assumptions contradict what is defined in the 2015 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation. In these guidelines, the JSDF will have primary responsibility for defending Japan's outlying islands, including the Senkakus, with the U.S. military's role being simply to “support and supplement.”

Furthermore, if the notion that the U.S. government will undoubtedly use the Marines to intervene in a conflict over the Senkaku Islands prevails, even though the islands represent a territorial conflict that affects only Japan and China, it will sharply impinge on the U.S. government's freedom in dealing with potential conflicts and may hurt U.S. national interests.

Meanwhile, the Ground Self-Defense Force has plans to create a new Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade in fiscal year 2018. The Brigade would comprise 3,000 personnel and utilize Ospreys, with the goal of defending outlying islands, including the Senkakus. This brigade would be larger in scale than the 31st MEU and its main mission would be the defense of Okinawa's outlying islands.

This unit would be able to participate in long-distance operations, and could also engage in HA/DR in the Southeast Asia region by boarding the Air Self-Defense Force's transport aircraft or the Maritime Self-Defense Force's transport vessels with landing capabilities,.

Accordingly, if it is necessary to consider how to avoid sending the wrong message to China, Japan's own defense efforts can provide a substitute for stationing the Marines in Okinawa. In fact, it must be considered that insisting upon stationing the Marines in Okinawa could send the wrong message within Japan; namely that “as long as the Marines are there, defense of the outlying islands is covered.”

Addressing a Full-Fledged Armed Conflict

Should there be a full-fledged armed conflict that exceeds a territorial conflict over outlying islands, if the 31st MEU is in Okinawa, it would be able to reach Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula in a relatively short time. However, a full-fledged armed conflict would require large-scale military force, on the scale of a division or brigade of troops numbering in the tens or hundreds of thousands mobilized from the continental U.S. The 2,000 troops constituting the 31st MEU remaining on Okinawa would not change the course of the war.

What is indispensable to U.S. deterrence is not to continue to place small-scale, rapid-response military forces on China's doorstep, but to maintain the infrastructure required to bring in large-scale military forces for assistance when necessary. This is the true symbol of the U.S. selective commitment. Self-Defense Force bases, posts, and maneuvering ranges, which exist all over Japan, can provide the infrastructure for bringing in assistance from the U.S. military in an emergency.

If the U.S. Marine Corps, having withdrawn from Okinawa, use these facilities for joint training exercises, the U.S. can continue to express its commitment to Japan.

The Marines as Common Assets for Security in East Asia

Security concerns in East Asia are limited not only to China's maritime expansion or North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. The Asia-Pacific is one of the regions in the world with the most frequent large-scale natural disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

The 31st MEU not only plays a major role in addressing these disasters, but also regularly visits each country in the region to conduct bilateral and multilateral training, contributing to each country's capacity building and trust building, and generally improving the security environment. This is one of two pillars that support stability in the region, the other being the military deterrence provided by the Navy and Air Force.

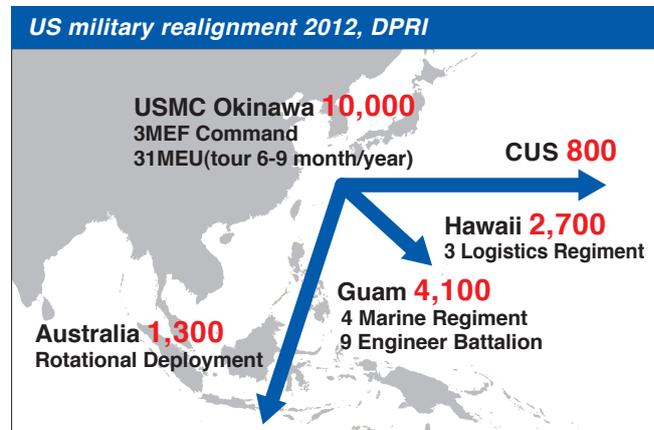
In the area of HA/DR, the JSDF are making use of their advanced capabilities to work alongside the U.S. military, and there is even room for further strengthening cooperation between the two forces. The "Japan-U.S. Joint MEU for HA/DR" described in Part 2 provides the optimal chance to build a Japan and U.S.-led multilateral cooperative security relationship that includes China in order to address disaster response, a very real threat in the region.

Also, Japan is supporting capacity-building related to managing maritime safety by providing patrol ships to the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Through this series of measures, the Japan-U.S. alliance further deepens as a core public good for regional security.

Part 2: Proposal of a New Rotational System for the U.S. Marine Corps

Current State of the U.S. Marine Corps

The United States Pacific Command (PACOM) currently has approximately 100,000 troops stationed in the Asia-Pacific region. Roughly 25,000 soldiers (one quarter of the total command) are stationed in Okinawa. According to the U.S. military realignment (a troop redeployment plan agreed upon by Japan and the U.S. in 2006 and revised in 2012), approximately 9,000 of the 19,000 U.S. Marines, which account for roughly 60% of the U.S. forces stationed in Okinawa, will be relocated to Guam and other locations. The relocation will include moving 4,100 troops to Guam, including the 4th Marine Regiment (Infantry) and supply units, moving 2,700 Marines from the 12th Marine Regiment and logistical supply units to Hawaii, and moving 1,300 to Australia and 800 to the continental United States. All of the regiment-sized forces will be moved out, while the III MEF command element and the 31st MEU will remain in Okinawa.



The Marine Corps comprises three functions: a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, and a logistics support element. When conflicts arise, depending on the scale and circumstances of the conflict, units will be selected and deployed from these three elements. There are also three levels of organization based on size: the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF, approx. 45,000 troops), the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB, approx. 17,500 troops), and the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU, approx. 2,000 service members). There is one MEF each in California, North Carolina, and Okinawa for a total of three; however, the only troops that will remain in Okinawa following the realignment will be the MEU, the smallest Marine unit, which boards naval vessels for its expeditions. Under this framework should a conflict arise, reinforcements will need to be sent from the continental U.S.

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There are three MEUs in California, three in North Carolina, and one in Okinawa for a total of seven. The areas of operation for the MEUs are as follows: California MEUs cover the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and the east coast of Africa; North Carolina MEUs cover the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean, and the rest of Africa; and the Okinawa MEU covers the Asia-Pacific region. Missions include Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), HA/DR, and joint training exercises with allied militaries.

The MEU in Okinawa boards amphibious assault ships in Sasebo, Nagasaki and circulates throughout the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including (but not limited to) Guam and allied states such as Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea, working on trust-building by engaging in joint training exercises and interacting with soldiers in the various countries. Each of the MEUs rotates through a cycle of three parts in their respective regions: deployment, an interim period, and a “work-up” training period. Each part of the cycle is six months in duration.

As such, Marine units need not necessarily be stationed in the region for which they are responsible, as the Marines’ greatest advantage is their ultimate mobility and readiness.

31st MEU and MCAS Futenma

The aviation capacity of the 31st MEU is provided by air units stationed at MCAS Futenma. There are 48 aircraft stationed there: twenty-four MV-22 Ospreys, eight CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift cargo helicopters, three UH-1 utility helicopters, nine AH-1 attack helicopters, one UC-12 operational support

aircraft (for transport of high-priority individuals), and three UC-35 operational support aircraft. Twenty-three aircraft are docked aboard the amphibious assault vehicles (which operate as mini aircraft carriers) integrated with the 31st MEU, comprising twelve Ospreys, four CH-53 heavy-lift helicopters, four attack helicopters, and three utility helicopters (additionally, the 31st MEU has access to aircraft stationed at MCAS Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture, such as fixed-wing F-35 fighter jets and aerial refueling planes).

As shown above, around half of the aircraft stationed at MCAS Futenma accompany the 31st MEU, while the remaining half are kept in reserve. Therefore, it is clear that the basis for continuing the air capacity at MCAS Futenma, as well as the need for base construction in Henoko, is the deployment of the 31st MEU in Okinawa. It is worth noting that during the Persian Gulf War the U.S. Marine Corps deployed two MEFs from Contiguous United States (CONUS), a total of 930,000 Marines with 177 rotating-wing aircraft (helicopters etc.) and 194 fixed-wing aircraft. Taking this into comparison, it becomes evident that the air capacity at MCAS Futenma is extremely small, and exists only to support the 31st MEU.

Proposal: A New Rotational System for the U.S. Marine Corps

The U.S. Marine Corps currently occupies around 70% of the area for bases in Okinawa. Relocating the Corps outside Okinawa is possible as long as there are facilities that meet their operational needs. An alternative proposal to fundamentally resolve Okinawa's excessive base-hosting burden is possible, and needs to be explored immediately.

The "New Rotational System" proposed in this report aims to realize a very beneficial win-win-win scenario for the U.S., Japan, and Okinawa, as it puts no financial burden on the Marine Corps, maintains their operational requirements, does not impose an additional financial burden on the Japanese government, and aims to bring about a beneficial result that deepens the Japan-U.S. alliance. The "New Rotational System" is comprised of the following ideas.

1. Operations – Rendezvous Points and High-Speed Transport Vessels

Marines are stationed on Okinawa for periods of six months as part of a rotation under the Unit Deployment Program. According to the U.S. military realignment, after the main combat forces are relocated to Guam and other locations, only the command element and the 31st MEU are to remain in Okinawa.

The 31st MEU patrols the Asia-Pacific region on U.S. Navy amphibious assault ships from Sasebo, Nagasaki. For six to nine months each year they visit allies and friendly countries, conducting joint training exercises. They are tasked with the important mission of building a security network by strengthening military interaction while maintaining the U.S. military's presence in Asia.

This mission is not bound to Japan's defense, which includes issues like the Senkaku Islands dispute, a great concern for Japan. Rather, it should be understood that Japan's defense and security are part of the larger mission to maintain and oversee security throughout all of Asia. If we fail to keep that mission in mind, we risk getting tied down by geography, misunderstanding the reality of the Okinawa base problem, and even failing to understand the actual state of affairs, even though such an understanding is crucial to finding a solution.

Rendezvous Points as Key to Marine Deployment

The key is to secure a rendezvous point where troops that deploy on rotation from the Marine bases in Okinawa converge with the amphibious assault ships from Sasebo. Currently, in addition to the amphibious assault ships in Sasebo, the Marine Corps charters a high-speed passenger ship from a privately-held Australian ship company.

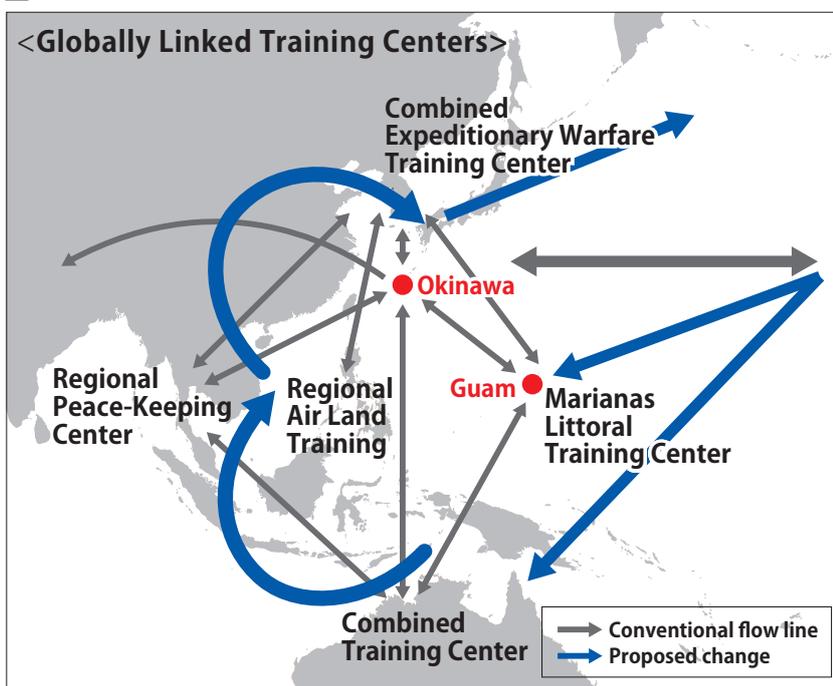
Okinawa is convenient for the Marine Corps because it is the foothold from which the 2,000 troops in the 31st MEU patrol the Asia-Pacific region on three or four landing ships. If they were to retreat to the

continental U.S. their travel distance would increase significantly, lowering efficiency. Since the main purpose of the patrol is to maintain a U.S. military presence, in case personnel or equipment are insufficient a reasonable move would be to deploy naval destroyers and even temporarily deploy the Army and Air Force to bases in the Asia-Pacific region.

Using a firefighting analogy to explain the Marines in Okinawa, currently the fire trucks (i.e., the amphibious assault ships) are in Nagasaki, while the firefighters (the Marine Corps troops) are in Okinawa. The fire trucks go to Okinawa to pick up their firefighters and then leave for their area of responsibility, the Asia-Pacific. The firefighters are also being switched out in a rotation from the continental U.S.

Considering this type of troop movement, the rendezvous point for the ships and the troops does not need to be Okinawa. One possibility would be to dispatch the Marine troops from the continental U.S. by aircraft to Japan and have them rendezvous with the ships at Nagasaki. This logistical revision only changes the rendezvous method, yet it would be a major factor in resolving the Okinawa base problem, including the

■ Future USMC Pacific Presence



MCAS Futenma relocation.

Hypothetically if the central hub for the 31st MEU were to move to the continental U.S., the patrol budget for Asia would likely increase. The only problem this could cause would be how to handle this expense.

Under the U.S. military realignment, troop dispersion means that the Marine Corps require high-speed transport ships. If Japan were to supply such ships, there would be no financial burden on the Marine Corps; moreover, it would allow them the greater benefit of being able to move rapidly.

High-Speed Transport Vessels as Key to Alleviating the Marine Corps Budgetary Crunch

The Marine Corps faces a rather severe reality. Large-scale defense budget cuts under the Obama administration have had an especially large impact on the Marine Corps, which are under the umbrella of the U.S. Navy. The Marines face uncertainty regarding their future staffing and equipment needs.

“We are on our way...to a less-than-300-ship Navy,” said Gen. John M. Paxton, then Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, on April 7, 2014 at the Navy League’s conference. “We are on our way to a 175,000-man Marine Corps. Do we have enough people and enough ships to do it?”

In order for the Marine Corps to continue their current mission, they will need 54 amphibious assault ships. This number of ships can move three MEBs, one of which is one structural level above an MEU. However, in the current Navy/Marine plan, any expected contingency will be handled by only two MEBs, and they are looking to reduce the number of ships to 33. Furthermore, due to defense budget cuts, it appears that the number of operable amphibious assault ships will be cut to less than 30. As a result, the number of MEBs that can be quickly deployed by overseas transport decreases to 1.5, and even if the Marine Corps were to rent a large transport ship there are numerous combat operations they would not be able to handle.

Gen. Paxton gave one such example. When Super Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in 2013, three

of the four Marine Corps amphibious assault ships deployed to the Asia-Pacific region were docked for repairs. This meant that initial operations had to be done only by Ospreys, which required mid-air refueling by KC130s. It took two weeks for the ships to return to base.

If the Marine Corps is relocated to Guam and Australia, there will be increased need for high-speed transport ships in order to cover the added distance. Therefore the Marine Corps is hoping for additional deployments of said high-speed transport ships. Had they been able to use such vessels in the wake of the Philippine typhoon damage, the response to the disaster would have been completely different.

The U.S. Marine Corps currently charters a high-speed transport ship for 13.4 million USD annually. Also, a U.S. military realignment mid-term report titled “Transformation and Realignment for the Future”, agreed upon by Japan and the U.S. on October 29, 2005, states that “Transportation cooperation includes expanding and sharing airlift and sealift, including the capability provided by high-speed vehicles (HSV).” Furthermore, with regard to such ships, in March 2016, the Japanese Ministry of Defense signed a contract with a private company good until the end of December 2025 for an additional transport ship for JSDF training and emergency dispatch, with a total contract price of roughly 25 billion yen (approx. 250 million USD). Currently, the construction of one new high-speed transport ship costs over 50 billion yen (approx. 500 million USD) per ship.



Considering the above numbers, even in combination with expenditures such as contributions to the facility improvement program, Japan can greatly reduce its current expenditure.

2. Shift of Financial Burden – Host Region Support

Within Japan’s annual contribution of around 372.5 billion yen (roughly 3.7 billion USD) to the stationing of U.S. military in Japan, around half of this expense is for base periphery measures such as soundproofing outside of the bases, training relocation, compensation for fisheries, etc. A large portion of costs incurred inside bases consists of employee salaries; the funds for the facilities improvement program used directly by the U.S. military is around 22 billion yen (more than 220 million USD) per annum for the entirety of the U.S. military stationed in Japan, accounting for a mere 5% of the total amount. Within this amount, the allocation for the facilities improvement program for bases in Okinawa is around 5 billion yen (over 50 million USD), and the portion allocated to the Marine Corps bases is even smaller. If the Marine Corps were to relocate out of Okinawa, and if the same amount of financial assistance could be invested in the country or region to which the Marines relocate, the Japanese government’s contribution to the Marine Corps could be maintained.

By transferring the Marine Corps, which accounts for around 70% of the base land used in Okinawa, Japan’s expenditure for base periphery measures can be greatly reduced. Using the financial resources thus saved, the Japanese government could increase its expenditure for the Marine Corps while still reducing the total cost of its host-nation support contribution.

In order to accomplish this, new legislation by the Japanese government would be required. However, this measure would take the contribution to the stationing of U.S. military in Japan (Host Nation Support), viewed as part of the cost of Japan’s defense, and put it to use for the security of the Asian region as a whole (Host Region Support). This would be strong evidence of the role of the Japan-U.S. alliance in contributing to the security of the region.

3. Strengthening the Alliance – Joint MEU for HA/DR

As stated earlier, the role of the U.S. Marine Corps in the Asia-Pacific region is to improve the security

environment in the region, rather than solely to defend Japan. Specifically, in addition to joint training with friendly nations, the Marines have played an important role in emergency response for large-scale natural disasters that have frequently plagued the Asia-Pacific region in recent years. This is an area of specialty for the JSDF, for which it is highly regarded throughout the world. The joint training exercises and HA/DR conducted by the U.S. Marine Corps are areas in which the JSDF is increasingly being expected to play a larger role.

It would be desirable to see the U.S. Marine Corps and the JSDF cooperate on HA/DR training and missions in the Asia-Pacific region, using the Marine Corps command stationed in Okinawa for seamless communication and coordination. Alternatively, perhaps a new framework for cooperation could be created called the “U.S.-Japan Joint MEU for HA/DR” by creating a system in which operations are performed on the basis of a division of labor in the region.

In addition to the 2,000 U.S. Marines of the 31st MEU, the JSDF is capable of providing at least as many troops for HA/DR, and they would be able to respond to the rescue and training needs of the region around Japan flexibly and effectively. Or perhaps, if a natural disaster and a combat mission were to occur simultaneously, the JSDF could take on the rescue mission in place of the Marine Corps, which prioritizes combat missions, making a cooperative strategy that focuses on each party’s respective abilities.



The JSDF’s Proven Track Record

The 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Sumatra resulted in 270,000 victims, and approximately 10 million people losing their homes. The JSDF dispatched 900 troops, three ships and two transport aircraft to the province of Aceh in Indonesia and engaged in rescue operations throughout the region.

In 2013, when a typhoon wreaked havoc in the Philippines, the JSDF dispatched forces to conduct medical treatment and disease prevention, and to transport relief supplies. This dispatch included over 1,000 troops, two KC-767 aerial-refueling and transport aircraft, seven C-130H transport aircraft, a U-4 multi-purpose support aircraft, three CH-47 transport helicopters, three UH-1 utility helicopters, a transport ship, a naval escort, and a supply vessel.

Furthermore, the JSDF participates in an annual humanitarian assistance deployment hosted by the United States Navy called the “Pacific Partnership.” Here, cooperation and mutual understanding is enhanced among participating countries, as well as cooperation with private organizations, improved medical treatment, facility repair, and transportation for international peace cooperation operations and emergency assistance activities.

This employment of JSDF capabilities is possible under Japan’s current legal framework.

Examples of HA/DR

After the previously mentioned earthquake in Sumatra, the United States contributed 950 million dollars in financial aid and dispatched 20 ships, including the USS *Abraham Lincoln* aircraft carrier, 60 planes, and a total of 12,600 troops for a two-month rescue and assistance operation.

Starting in 2009, ASEAN began conducting a Disaster Relief Exercise (DiRex) at their regional forum. However, countries in the Asia-Pacific region prepared to handle HA/DR are limited to Japan, the U.S., China, and Australia. This type of international cooperation remains insufficient but indispensable.

In the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the Chinese government was quick to respond. In addition to the millions of dollars the Chinese donated, they dispatched rescue crews and medical teams and provided

electric generators, water purification systems, tents, and clothing. China has also contributed 16 million USD in humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

In 2013, the super typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, taking some 7,000 lives. The rapid response of the United States took less than 48 hours, and the U.S. provided 86 million USD in relief. The U.S. military then deployed rescue operations that cost 14 million USD in only two weeks. Japan also dispatched its largest-ever international emergency assistance operation, involving around 1,000 people. Initially, the Chinese government contributed only 100,000 USD in assistance, but after being criticized as uncaring toward the rest of Asia, it offered an additional 1.75 million USD and dispatched the hospital ship *Peace Ark*.

Asian Security and HA/DR

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, the U.S. PACOM made HA/DR a new security challenge and began full-scale involvement in that area. Thereafter, it has responded rapidly to almost all major disasters in Southeast Asia. Also, in recent years the Chinese military has recognized major disasters as a non-traditional security threat as part of their doctrine, designating them as a high-priority mission. Thus, expanding the cooperative relationship between the U.S. and China through HA/DR shows promise as an infrastructure for building trust and creating regional stability.

There is, for instance, an opportunity for cooperation between the hospital boats owned by both the U.S. and China. The U.S. naval hospital ship USNS *Mercy* (1,000 beds), requires five days of preparation for departure and an additional seven days to cross the Pacific Ocean. During this 12-day period, the Chinese hospital ship *Peace Ark* (300 beds) can make a first response, and if the Chinese coordinate with the U.S. many more lives could be saved. This would go a long way toward alleviating tensions, and could become a pillar of support for security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The United States conducts numerous annual joint training exercises, including Balikatan and the Philippine Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHIBLEX), Cobra Gold in Thailand, and Keen Sword in Japan. In 2008 HA/DR began receiving greater emphasis in the joint training exercises, and is proactively pursued not only by the U.S. Marine Corps but also the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force deployed to the Asia-Pacific region. Although President Duterte of the Philippines says he plans to reduce U.S.-Philippine training exercises, he seems inclined to continue joint training exercises that center on HA/DR.

While the U.S. was initially reluctant to engage in joint training exercises with China, the success of bilateral naval action in the Gulf of Aden in 2013 managed to deepen cooperation between the two countries. In the summer of the same year, the navies of both the U.S. and China deployed naval destroyers, helicopters, and special forces to conduct anti-piracy training. This was also the first year that China participated in the multilateral joint exercises in the Philippines. Moreover, in November 2013 China hosted its first aerial HA/DR training, paving the way for its participation the following year in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC).

According to UN estimates, in the Asia-Pacific region the probability of suffering damage from a natural disaster is 3.2 times higher than in Africa, 5.5 times higher than in Central and South America, 9 times higher than in North America, and 67 times higher than in Europe. Creating an international system to deal with major disasters should be considered one of the most important topics in contemporary security policy.

Although some say that the Japan-U.S. Security Agreement involves a unilateral duty on the part of the United States to defend Japan, when it comes to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief the JSDF is highly capable, and HA/DR is an area in which Japan can contribute to security in Asia while staying true to Article 9 of its constitution. Modern security challenges, coupled with the restructuring of the Japan-U.S. alliance, have us looking toward a new horizon. That is where the solution to the Okinawa base problem can be found.

Conclusion

As explained above, a high-speed transport vessel would eliminate the inconvenience posed by dispersing the Marines upon relocation. Host-nation support would be expanded to regional support, and the JSDF would take on a shared role in the Marines' trust-building and HA/DR activities in the region. These measures would demonstrate the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance as a foundation of regional security. If the 31st MEU were to be relocated out of Okinawa after these three conditions were met, there would be no need to construct a replacement facility for MCAS Futenma. Relocation of the Marines would merely mean repositioning their rendezvous point to a location in Guam, Australia, or elsewhere outside of Okinawa and Japan.

Just as the I MEF deploys an MEU from California across the Pacific and into the Indian Ocean, the 31st MEU could similarly be deployed from Hawaii or the continental U.S.

Regarding the Marines (III MEF) Command Element

This proposal refers only to the relocation of the 31st MEU. Future discussion is needed to determine what will be done regarding Marines' command-element function. Given that HA/DR activities constitute the Marines' primary role in the Asia-Pacific region, it is possible to envision a scenario in which Okinawa is used as a hub for Asian countries to address pressing security challenges such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. It is worth considering a framework in which representatives from each country gather in Okinawa and use it as a center for coordinating humanitarian assistance activities and the like. It could be meaningful to establish an "international cooperation center" in Okinawa, thereby providing Okinawa as a space for various countries, including China (whose military has actively participated in multilateral joint exercises in recent years) to engage in peaceful dialogue regarding Asian security. The U.S. Marine Corps command element in Okinawa could play a leading role in such coordination and dialogue.

Final Statement

The purpose of this report's proposal to relocate the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit outside of Okinawa is to promote a large-scale reduction in the base burden borne by Okinawa. In this regard, it is consistent with the realignment, consolidation, and reduction of bases in Okinawa agreed upon by Japan and the U.S. We want to emphasize that our proposal merely presents a posture modification and in no way contradicts the Japan-U.S. security arrangement. From the perspective of Okinawa, which for 72 years since the end of World War II has borne, virtually alone, the heavy burden of Japan-U.S. security, a defense posture review that involves relocation of the 31st MEU out of Okinawa is a small thing to ask.

Even without the 31st MEU, Kadena Air Base, will remain as the largest U.S. Air Force in the Far East. The combined area of Kadena Air Base and the adjacent Kadena Ammunition Storage Area exceeds the total area of the six major U.S. bases on the Japanese mainland: Misawa Air Base in Aomori, Yokota Air Base in Tokyo, United States Fleet Activities Yokosuka and Naval Air Facility Atsugi in Kanagawa, Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni in Yamaguchi, and United States Fleet Activities Sasebo in Nagasaki. Even hosting just the Kadena facilities will remain a heavy burden on Okinawa, which also hosts U.S. Army and Navy facilities. After an incident in April 2016 in which a former U.S. Marine and then-military contractor raped and murdered a young woman, the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the total withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Okinawa. If Okinawa's calls fall on deaf ears, it could endanger the stability of the Japan-U.S. security framework.

We understand that Japan and the U.S. have formed an agreement on this issue that constitutes a bilateral pledge, which cannot be easily changed in response to a unilateral request. However, if we recognize that implementation of the plan agreed upon by the two governments is becoming unfeasible, and readjust our focus to the matter of ensuring that the Marines can fulfill their roles and duties, a variety of options come into view.

The choice is between a path of eternal confrontation with Okinawa represented by the current plan, and an all-win solution that can be accepted by Okinawa, the governments of Japan and the U.S., and the U.S. Marine Corps.

Policy Recommendation

Okinawans cannot accept the plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to Henoko, Nago. If the governments of Japan and the U.S. push forward with the land reclamation at Henoko in order to maintain a Marine Corps airfield in Okinawa, they could inadvertently be sacrificing the stable maintenance of the Air Force's Kadena Air Base. The present recommendation, by rethinking U.S. Marine Corps operations in Okinawa, potentially enables the return of MCAS Futenma without building a base in Okinawa or elsewhere in Japan. More specifically, there is no need to build a base in Henoko, Nago, Okinawa.

This outcome can be made possible by implementing the following measures:

1. Cancel the Futenma relocation plan, revise the U.S. military realignment plan and relocate the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (31st MEU) outside of Okinawa;
 2. Establish a Japan-U.S. joint MEU for HA/DR;
 3. Mandate Japan to provide a high-speed transport ship to support a joint MEU for HA/DR activities; Japan will continue to provide host-nation financial support for facility maintenance expenses at the alternative Futenma relocation site;
 4. For Asian countries involved in HA/DR and HA/DR joint training, establish a liaison and coordination center in Okinawa as a hub for security in Asia
- The U.S. military realignment should be revised and a new rotational strategy should be developed that expands current rotations and deploys MEUs to Asia from Hawaii and other parts of the United States.
 - The United States military carries out HA/DR joint training exercises in places such as the Philippines and Thailand. China and other countries have also dispatched ground units to participate in such exercises. In order to sustain such military diplomacy and cooperative relationships, a liaison and coordination center should be established in Okinawa for the III MEF command element to coordinate joint HA/DR training with representatives of other countries. Okinawa could be used as a place for Asian countries, including China, to debate security issues such as the easing of tensions in the East and South China Seas. We can leave behind the old era of military competition and develop a new era of Asia security centered on soft power, extending from Okinawa through the rest of Asia. Given the great sacrifices made by Okinawa during and after World War II, this would be a suitable role for it to play in the 21st century.
 - The Japanese government should provide a high-speed transport ship to be used by the 31st MEU for HA/DR and other peacetime missions. In response to the needs associated with the diverse training activities carried out in Asian countries, Japan would permanently cover the expense of providing a high-speed transport ship for assorted transport needs. This would enable the Marines to reduce costs and would contribute to the Japan-U.S. alliance goal of peace and security in Asia.
 - A new framework would enable the facility maintenance costs borne by the Japanese government at Marine Corps bases in Okinawa to be used instead at whatever site becomes the new home of the 31st MEU.
 - The 31st MEU in Okinawa spends more than half the year deployed throughout Asia to engage in activities such as joint training with allies and friendly countries. Southeast Asian countries have a particularly high need for HA/DR activities, and therefore establishment of a new role for the Japan-U.S. alliance in this domain would be highly significant for security in Asia.

Brief History of the U.S. Marine Corps and Okinawa

- 1775 The Marine Corps founded to augment the Navy during the Revolutionary War. After the Americans won, in time the Marine Corps was made independent of the Navy.
- WWII During World War II the Marines are assigned chiefly to the capturing of islands occupied by Japan's armed forces in the Pacific region (Saipan, Guam, Iwo-jima, Okinawa).
- 1945 MCAS Futenma established (originally used by the U.S. Army).
- 1950 Marines deployed for the Battle of Inchon during the Korean War. It was the most recent large-scale amphibious landing operation.
- 1955 One of two subordinate units in the 3rd Marine Division relocated to Okinawa.
- 1960 Marine Corps begin using the Futenma base.
- 1971 After the Vietnam War, III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) stationed in Okinawa.
- 1988 III MAF re-designated as the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF).
- 1990 III MEF was active in Southwest Asia and Iraq when Iraq invaded Kuwait.
- 1991 III MEF transferred from Okinawa to the Middle East to participate in the Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm, Desert Shield).
- 1992 [September] 31st MEU stationed in Okinawa.
- 1995 [September] Servicemen rape 12-year-old Okinawan girl.
- 1996 [December] Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) delivers final report.
- 1999 Portions of 31st MEU support authority transition from International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) to United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).
- 2004 [August] 2,200 servicemen of 31st MEU participate in the Iraq War, and in November take part in the Second Battle of Fallujah (with 50 killed and 221 wounded).
- [December] 31st MEU provide relief assistance after Sumatra earthquake and tsunami.
- 2005 [February] 31st MEU mission in Iraq completed, unit returned to Okinawa.
- 2006 [February] Relief assistance after the landslide in Leyte, the Philippines.
- [May] U.S. Forces Japan introduce U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment and Implementation.
- 2009 Humanitarian and disaster relief operations in Luzon, Philippines after typhoon.
- 2010 Earthquake relief assistance on Sumatra Island.
- 2011 [March] Disaster relief and recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake.
- 2012 [February] U.S.-Japan release joint statement on status of U.S. military realignment in Japan.
- 2013 [November] Disaster relief operations in Leyte, the Philippines after typhoon.
- 2016 [April] Relief assistance after the Kumamoto earthquake.

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