

March 2, 3 2017

Dear Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Members,

Veterans for Peace- Ryukyu/Okinawa Chapter Kokusai (VFP-ROCK) respectfully requests your help in persuading the US Federal Government, especially the Department of Defense, to abandon their project of building a newly expanded US Marine Corps base at Henoko Bay and corresponding helipads at Takae, in northern Okinawa. Here are just a few reasons why:

- **It is anti-democratic.** The people of Okinawa have unequivocally expressed their opposition to more military facilities, having already suffered under disproportionate military “bootprints” on their congested island. The conservative party Governor of Okinawa - elected by a landslide - along with the Mayor of Nago City (where Henoko Village is located), all five National Diet members from Okinawa and no less than 80% of the Okinawan people according to innumerable polls are united, across political parties, in opposition to these government impositions. A non-violent 24/7 sit-in at Henoko that began on April 19, 2004, entered its 4,680th day this 2017 Valentine’s Day. Forcing these projects against the will of the citizenry flaunts a blatant disregard for the democracy the US and Japanese governments claim they are protecting.
- **It is discriminatory.** Okinawa comprises just six - tenths of one percent of Japan’s territory, yet is burdened with almost 75% of US military bases in Japan. Japan unilaterally seized Okinawa- historically and culturally the sovereign nation of Ryūkyū - in 1879, in the initial formation of the Japanese Empire. US bases in the “backyards” of mainland Japan constituents are very unpopular- so the Japanese government concentrates them in Okinawa. The Okinawan experience is one of continued colonial rule, and second-class citizenship at best, as US troops occupy Okinawa now beyond 70 years.
- **Bases do not bring security to Okinawa.** Rather than deterring conflict, base concentration has exacerbated the very regional instability Japan & the US are concerned about in the first place. Rather than mere defense, the bases have been used for forward deployment to other conflicts, including the Middle East.
- **Bases are crippling the local economy.** US bases occupy almost 20% of prime land, yet contribute less than 5% to the local economy. Even the Okinawan Chamber of Commerce is frustrated by the hindrance the bases pose, as data demonstrates productivity has multiplied 10 to 200 times in areas returned to civilian use from former base facilities. Moreover, most Okinawans object to an imposed dependency on an economy destabilized by wars and militarism.
- **The project will trigger an ecocatastrophe.** The Henoko base is to be built by filling part of Oura Bay - home to one of the world’s last undamaged coral gardens, a multitude of endangered and internationally protected species - with 3.5 million truckloads of foreign soil, while an estimated 30,000 trees have been clear-cut for helipads in Takae- a world heritage site candidate. This continued destruction and contamination of Okinawa’s scarce natural resources that have sustained these islanders for millennia is a security threat to the sustenance and lives of the people.

- **Henoko/Takae is not an isolated event.** Rather, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, it is the most recent in “a long train of abuses and usurpations.” Okinawa’s tragic history of colonization and wars- not necessarily political ideology - inspires the Okinawan people to mobilize against war. Almost 1/3 of the civilian population was slaughtered in the Battle of Okinawa between the US and Japan. This was followed by 27 years of foreign rule as a US military colony, where much of the present base lands were seized by decree via bayonets and bulldozers. In seven decades of military occupation, official records reveal an on-going legacy of toxic waste into local resources, debilitating noise pollution, inevitable accidents (41 annual average), and crimes (150 annual average including heinous violence). Henoko cannot be understood without historical context: the Okinawan people have had enough.
- **It is not “the only solution.”** There are no compelling strategic or geographical reasons for putting this base in Okinawa. Not only is Okinawa distant from vulnerable Japan, new policies and technology have transformed troop mobility and options. Many joint-use airports in mainland Japan can accommodate the 1st Marine Air Wing (scheduled to be moved to Henoko). The political “problem” to which Henoko is the “solution” is: How to relocate the 1st Marine Air Wing without increasing the US military burden on Japan itself? Answer: stick it in the colony.
- **It is not in the US interest.** Far from being a deterrent, it is rather seen by regional rivals as foreign interference and provocation, as is shown by Chinese and N. Korean activities. Imposing this project- with the force of hundreds of riot police dispatched from Japan proper, the US and Japan are further angering and alienating the Okinawan people, putting the entire US presence there at risk- not just Henoko. The sit-in movement has already expanded to Kadena Air Force Base, with discussions shifting to abolishing all bases. There are no signs that show this human rights movement is weakening; on the contrary it is growing. Relocation of Futenma MCAS to Henoko was decreed by Japan & the USA in 1996- yet two decades later, it remains stalled by local activism- legal action & civil disobedience- that is growing with increased international support.

It would be very much in the US’s interest to resolve this issue by abandoning this boondoggle project, and to utilize other options for the 1st Marine Air Wing- preferably to the continental US where some communities are protesting military sequestration in their regions, or failing that, to request that the Japanese Government find a more equitable location somewhere in Japan proper, upon a community that welcomes them.

We appreciate your representation, consideration & feedback.

Respectfully,

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