

Battle of Okinawa Anniversary and the Futenma US Base Issue

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Contents

- [Okinaw: Cool reception for Kan](#)
- [Okinawa: 'Burden' lifted \(...\)](#)

Okinawa: 66th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Okinawa

NAHA, Okinawa Pref. – Okinawa on Thursday marked the 66th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Okinawa that killed more than 200,000 people in the closing days of World War II.

During a memorial ceremony attended by Prime Minister Naoto Kan, Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima reiterated his call on the Japanese and U.S. governments to reduce U.S. bases in Okinawa to lessen the burden on local residents and to “relocate the dangerous Futenma air station outside of the prefecture with no further delay.”

“I strongly urge the Japanese and U.S. governments to conduct a sweeping revision of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement,” Nakaima said in an annual peace message.

He was referring to the bilateral pact that governs the operations of the U.S. military in Japan and grants extraterritorial rights to its personnel.

Okinawa has long called for reducing the heavy U.S. military presence in the prefecture, saying residents have been suffering from aircraft and other noise from the bases as well as crimes involving U.S. service members.

Much to Okinawa’s frustration, however, Tokyo and Washington reaffirmed at ministerial security talks Tuesday a stalled plan to build a replacement facility for Futenma in Okinawa.

After almost 40 years since its return to Japan in 1972 following the Allied Occupation, the prefecture still hosts about 75 percent of all U.S. military facilities in Japan in terms of land area.

Nakaima also pledged Okinawa’s efforts to help people suffering from the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Kan attended the ceremony, held in Peace Memorial Park in the city of Itoman, for the second straight year as prime minister.

This year, the names of 205 people were added to the list of those who perished in the war, bringing the total to 241,132.

Some 94,000 civilians, about a quarter of its residents, died in the three-month battle with U.S. troops in 1945. Okinawa was the only inhabited part of Japan to see ground fighting in the war

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<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110624a2.html>

Okinaw: Cool reception for Kan in Okinawa; U.S. base issue left untouched

The leaders of Okinawa Prefecture have given up on Prime Minister Naoto Kan, despite his statement at a memorial marking the end of the Battle of Okinawa that he will do his “utmost to ease the burden Okinawa Prefecture bears in hosting U.S. bases.”

Attending the ceremony Thursday for people killed in the three-month battle with U.S. troops in 1945, Kan also said he would work to “eliminate dangers associated with U.S. bases in Okinawa.”

His remarks, however, came just two days after Japan and the United States reached an official agreement on a construction method for a new location inside the prefecture for the U.S. Marine Corps’ Futenma Air Station—symbolic to many Okinawa residents of the risks posed by U.S. bases.

The Tokyo-Washington accord reached in security talks Tuesday will never be seen by local residents as something that could mitigate the prefecture’s burden of hosting bases, prefectural officials said.

The prefecture’s distrust of the central government has only become more deeply rooted due to the current administration’s lack of leadership, which followed a string of Okinawa-related fiascos under Kan’s predecessor, Yukio Hatoyama.

‘A light lunch’

“We were told the prime minister is very fond of Okinawan soba noodles, so we enjoyed a meal of our prefecture’s specialty,” Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima told reporters after dining with Kan at Naha Airport Thursday afternoon. “It was just lunch chitchat, we didn’t talk at all [about U.S. bases or promoting Okinawa’s economy].”

The Okinawa governor stressed the luncheon was not the time or place for official talks regarding U.S. military installations in the prefecture and other weighty issues.

The initial plan was for Kan and Nakaima to have unofficial talks on a range of problems facing the prefecture after eating separately following the war memorial, the officials said, but the talks were canceled at the last minute and the airport luncheon was scheduled. The Okinawa governor is known for an aversion to talking about work during meals.

On Tuesday, the Japanese and U.S. foreign and defense ministers held so-called two-plus-two talks in Washington, where they agreed on a final plan for the relocation of the Futenma facility’s functions. Specifically, the allies agreed the new home would be in the Henoko district of Nago in the prefecture, and that the new facility will have two runways in a V-shape.

The officials said local people, who have been steadfastly calling for Futenma to be moved outside the prefecture, will never accept the agreement.

Government sources said Kan had no intention of taking up the Futenma issue with Nakaima. “Kan just wanted to meet the governor in a congenial atmosphere since his trip was for the memorial

ceremony," they said.

In any case, one source close to Nakaima said, the governor has "given up on Kan, since it wouldn't do any good to talk about a messy issue like Futenma with a prime minister who'll be stepping down soon."

Analysts said the prefecture's cancellation of the unofficial talks was likely to avoid having to discuss the two-plus-two accord. The prefectural government's cool attitude toward the Kan administration stems from what officials see as a lack of sincerity and zeal in the state's handling of Okinawa policy.

Although Kan said at the memorial service he would do his best to ease the prefecture's burden in hosting U.S. bases, he has never personally explained to the people of Okinawa why the U.S. bases are necessary from the standpoint of national security. Of his three visits to the prefecture as prime minister, two were for memorial services for war dead, and only one to discuss problems with U.S. bases.

Kan's right-hand man, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, who is also in charge of dealing with Okinawa-related affairs, has visited the prefecture only once since becoming chief government spokesman.

This is in stark contrast with efforts made to settle such issues by government leaders when the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito were in power. Former prime ministers Ryutaro Hashimoto and Keizo Obuchi, and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka were especially active about trying to ease Okinawa's base-hosting load. Each had frequent contacts with senior prefectural officials.

U.S. urges 'visible progress'

The prefecture has reacted strongly to the planned deployment of the MV-22 Osprey at the Futenma base, also agreed on in the two-plus-two talks. There have been numerous accidents in the development of the vertical takeoff and landing transport aircraft, raising safety concerns in the prefecture.

The United States has become increasingly impatient with the glacial progress in the Japanese government's efforts to break the impasse in Okinawa. After the two-plus-two talks, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates in a joint Japan-U.S. press conference emphasized the "importance of concrete progress [on Futenma] over the course of the next year."

During the meeting, Gates and State Secretary Hillary Clinton insisted on the need for "visible progress" on Futenma, citing growing pressure from the U.S. Congress, which has called for cuts in the defense budget, according to Japan-U.S. diplomatic sources.

Gates and Clinton urged the Japanese government to strongly prod the Okinawa governor to give the go-ahead to land reclamation of waters off the Henoko district to build a new site for Futenma within next year.

Almost 40 years have passed since Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972 after the postwar U.S. occupation, but the prefecture's trust in the central government is in tatters.

Hajime Furukawa, Ryuhei Yoshimura and Atsushi Matsuura / *Yomiuri Shimbun* Staff Writers,
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Okinawa: 'Burden' lifted from bases rhetoric

The Japanese and U.S. governments have begun to avoid using the negative term "burden" in official documents when referring to the vast tracts of land occupied by U.S. military bases and facilities on the island of Okinawa.

Instead of "burden," which appears repeatedly in the bilateral agreements of the past decade, they are starting to state the need to reduce the "impact" on Okinawa residents.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said Monday that the term was changed after repeated talks with the United States.

"The government's understanding that Okinawa has had to shoulder a heavy burden because of the high concentration of U.S. military bases in Okinawa has not changed," Edano stressed. But "there have been various discussions on whether or not the term 'burden' was appropriate between the Japanese and U.S. governments, which resulted in the expression to 'reduce the impact.'" "In a statement signed last week by the foreign and defense ministers of Japan and the U.S., both sides" reaffirmed the commitment to reducing the impact on local communities, including in Okinawa, in turn helping to ensure a sustainable U.S. military presence in Japan. "This is the first time" "burden" "has completely disappeared from bilateral documents." "There is a big difference between burden and impact," said Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima, who was visiting Tokyo Monday, where he met with Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other key officials. The governor said he was later going to meet with Foreign Ministry officials and ask them for further details on the change.

By MASAMI ITO, *Japan Times* Staff writer, June 28, 2011

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