

Japan LDP calls for Futenma US military base relocation within Okinawa

Tuesday 24 December 2013, by [IMAI Takashi](#), [KAIYA Michitaka](#), [KAWAKAMI Osamu](#), [Kyodo News](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#), [Yomiuri Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 6 December 2013).

LDP Okinawa chapter backs Futenma base relocation within Okinawa

NAHA — The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)'s Okinawa prefectural chapter unanimously approved a plan on Dec. 1 to relocate U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from the densely populated residential area of Ginowan in Okinawa Prefecture to Henoko in the coastal area of Nago in the same prefecture.

Masatoshi Onaga, head of the LDP prefectural chapter, said at a news conference he will step down to take the blame for failing to make good on his promise to relocate the Futenma base outside Okinawa.

During the prefectural chapter's general council meeting, the chapter leadership explained about consultations with the central government and the LDP which had pressed the Okinawa chapter to approve the Henoko relocation plan. The leadership then proposed being receptive to various options, including relocating the functions of the Futenma base to the Henoko district to remove the dangers surrounding Futenma and preventing the Futenma base from being kept there permanently. The proposal was adopted.

The LDP's Okinawa chapter will brief Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima on the proposal in the near future.

The central government and the LDP have expressed hope that Gov. Nakaima will decide by the end of this year whether or not to approve the government's request to reclaim land off Henoko, a crucial step to move the U.S. base there.

Mainichi Shimbun, December 2, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131202p2a00m0na020000c.html>

Governor renews call for U.S. base relocation outside of Okinawa

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima reiterated his call Thursday to relocate a U.S. Marine Corps air base outside of the island prefecture, noting the existing plan between Japan and the United States to move the facility within Okinawa would take time to realize.

The governor told a plenary session of the prefectural assembly that he will make all-out efforts to realize the relocation, saying that it is a promise he made with the people of Okinawa Prefecture when he successfully ran for re-election in 2010.

"We will make strong calls on the Japanese and U.S. governments to realize the relocation of the Futenma base outside of the prefecture and early return" of its land to Japanese control, he said.

Quickly addressing safety concerns over the Marines' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan is difficult, Nakaima also said, adding that outstanding concerns can be addressed more "reasonably and swiftly" if the base is moved to an existing air facility elsewhere, rather than building a new base in a coastal area through landfill.

On the key question of whether Nakaima would approve the central government's application for the landfill, the governor said he will decide on the basis of whether the feasibility of the existing relocation plan is high or not.

Nakaima has said he is likely to make the decision at the end of this month or later.

There is strong opposition to the proposed construction of a replacement facility in a coastal area of Nago, where the antibase mayor is seeking re-election in January, with two conservative candidates planning to challenge him.

In Tokyo on Thursday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference that Nakaima's expression of his resolve over the base's relocation is "exactly the same" as what the governor has been advocating.

The top government spokesman indicated Tokyo's continuing hope to field a single conservative candidate in the Nago mayoral election, saying that winning a landslide will be difficult if two candidates actually run with the same vision for relocating the base to the coastal city.

With the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ramping up pressure on local officials to accept the existing relocation plan, the Okinawa chapter of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has recently reversed its opposition to the base's relocation within the island prefecture.

The Okinawa chapter of the New Komeito party, which has formed a coalition government with Abe's LDP, has so far maintained its opposition to the central government's relocation plan. But a senior LDP official has recently asked his New Komeito counterpart to put pressure on the local chapter.

Kyodo News, December 6, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131206p2g00m0dm039000c.html>

Okinawa lawmakers agree on backing U.S. base relocation

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Ruling party lawmakers elected from Okinawa met Monday with the party's No. 2 man and conveyed their agreement on a plan to relocate a U.S. Marine base within the southernmost prefecture.

At the meeting, Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Shigeru Ishiba and the five lawmakers reaffirmed the plan to relocate the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station from the densely populated city of Ginowan to the less-crowded coastal area of Henoko in Nago, in line with a Japan-U.S. accord.

The Okinawa chapter of the LDP has been calling to relocate the base outside the prefecture.

Ishiba and the five lawmakers also agreed to seek the authorization from Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima to reclaim land necessary for the planned relocation.

“In order to remove the dangers of the Futenma Air Station, we agreed not to rule out any possibility, including relocating the base to Henoko,” Ishiba said at a press conference.

Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato welcomed the latest development, saying it was “a step forward” toward realizing the relocation agreed by the Japanese and U.S. governments.

Nakaima told reporters he had no comment.

During campaigns for a House of Councillors election held in July, the Okinawa chapter demanded the base be relocated outside Okinawa against the position of the central government and the party leadership.

Kyodo News, November 25, 2013

Reversal on Futenma may influence Nakaima

The effort to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps’ Futenma Air Station should make progress after Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers from Okinawa Prefecture reversed their position and agreed to accept the base’s relocation to the Henoko district in Nago.

After the relocation was decided in 1999, Okinawa Prefecture has been insisting on relocating the air station outside the prefecture and opposing the government and the ruling parties, which hoped to relocate the station to Henoko as quickly as possible.

The LDP’s Okinawa prefectural chapter won the House of Councillors election this summer with pledges to move the air station out of the prefecture in direct opposition to the policy of the LDP headquarters.

However, many observers now expect the LDP’s Okinawa chapter to review its policy after its lawmakers reversed their decisions.

If the difference in policies of the LDP headquarters and of its Okinawa chapter is ironed out, it may influence Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima to give the green light for a land reclamation project in the Henoko district possibly by the end of this year. It will also have an effect on the Nago mayoral election scheduled for Jan. 19.

If the relocation to Henoko is not realized, the Futenma station is likely to remain at its current location, creating a rift in the Japan-U.S. relationship.

It is significant that LDP lawmakers from Okinawa Prefecture reversed their position, bringing the relocation issue closer to a resolution.

Osamu Kawakami, *Yomiuri Shimbun* Staff Writer, November 26, 2013,
<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000823967>

LDP's Okinawa chapter decides to accept contentious U.S. base relocation plan

NAHA — The Okinawa prefectural chapter of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) decided on Nov. 27 to accept a contentious plan to relocate U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from the densely populated city of Ginowan to the less-crowded coastal area of Henoko in Nago in the prefecture.

The prefectural chapter said it would “retain every possible option, including the relocation to Henoko.” The body will make a final decision at its general council meeting on Dec. 1.

After the Nov. 27 decision in Naha, Masatoshi Onaga, chief of the Okinawa chapter, said at a news conference, “There has been strong lobbying by the government, which argues that if the relocation to Henoko is ruled out, Futenma will remain stuck where it is. It’s painful to change the prefectural chapter’s policy, but we have no option but to go back to the basics of eliminating the danger (posed to local residents) by the Futenma base.”

His comments suggested the prefectural chapter had decided to reverse its policy in order to prevent the U.S. military base from remaining in Futenma permanently. He also said the prefectural chapter would urge Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima to approve the central government’s request to reclaim land off the Henoko district — a crucial step necessary for the planned relocation in line with a Japan-U.S. accord.

“As a political party, we will have to call on Gov. Nakaima to make a decision in line with our policy,” Onaga said. The Okinawa prefectural chapter plans to call for extra measures to reduce the burden of U.S. military bases on the people of Okinawa, including steps to scale back on military drills using Osprey aircraft, in return for its decision to accept the plan to relocate the Futenma base to Henoko. Executives of the Okinawa prefectural chapter plan to make requests to the central government and the LDP headquarters when they visit Tokyo on Nov. 29.

Meanwhile, Nago Mayor Susumu Inamine bitterly lashed out at the prefectural chapter for its policy change, telling reporters at the prefectural government’s office, “I can’t think of withdrawing public promises that are vital for politicians.” Naha Mayor Takeshi Onaga, who had served as secretary-general of the LDP Okinawa chapter, told reporters at the city hall, “It is regrettable that the prefectural chapter has moved a bit away from us. I feel sorry for the people of the city and the prefecture.”

The prefectural chapter has also sparked a backlash from Naha Municipal Assembly members of the LDP who support Mayor Onaga — a leading advocate of moving the Futenma base out of Okinawa. During the House of Councillors election in 2010, the House of Representatives election in December 2012, and the House of Councillors election in July 2013, the LDP Okinawa prefectural chapter backed for its candidates in the Okinawa electoral district with the promise of relocating the Futenma base out of the prefecture. As a result, five of its candidates for lower and upper house seats, including proportional representation, were elected. Of the 15 LDP members who won seats in the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly election in June 2012, 14 wooed voters with their firm stance against the plan to relocate the Futenma base to Henoko.

Mainichi Shimbun, November 28, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131128p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Okinawa governor asks Kennedy to work hard to ease base burden

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima asked U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy at their first meeting on Friday to work hard to reduce the perceived burden on the people of the island prefecture stemming from the large, prolonged presence of U.S. forces there.

But Nakaima told reporters that the two did not discuss the stalled relocation of a U.S. Marine air base within Okinawa's main island, a plan agreed on between Japan and the United States but opposed by many locals, including the governor himself, who hope to see the controversial base moved outside Okinawa.

"There is a feeling of excessive burden in the prefecture," the governor quoted himself as telling the new ambassador during their meeting at her official residence in Tokyo.

Nakaima conveyed to Kennedy his hope that she will understand such a feeling and work hard to reduce such a burden in Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of U.S. military bases in Japan, according to the governor.

Kennedy replied that she will work hard on the issue as ambassador, according to the Okinawa prefectural government.

The meeting took place at the Kennedy side's invitation.

Kyodo News, November 29, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131129p2g00m0dm069000c.html>

Focus turns to Nakaima over Futenma plan

All eyes are on Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima's upcoming decision on a plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture, after the Liberal Democratic Party's Okinawa prefectural federation accepted a plan to relocate it within the prefecture, going back on its previous demand to relocate the air base outside the prefecture.

Although Nakaima is facing pressure to approve the plan by the end of this year, he has maintained a cautious stance toward approving land reclamation necessary for the relocation off the Henoko district.

The central government, however, wants to obtain the governor's approval by the end of this year. This is because if it is delayed, the upcoming Nago mayoral election will become a de facto referendum among the prefecture's residents on the plan, and people who oppose it may gain momentum.

The mayoral election will be announced Jan. 12 and the vote will be held Jan. 19.

The central government plans to present measures to reduce the prefecture's burdens associated

with hosting U.S. bases visibly by the middle of December, as a means of further improving the conditions for Nakaima to give his approval.

Yet more hurdles

However, there are still multiple hurdles for Nakaima to clear before he can approve the plan.

One is that it cannot be predicted that a conservative candidate who is pro-relocation will win the mayoral election because two conservative candidates – former Vice Mayor Bunshin Suematsu, who is also an LDP member of the prefectural assembly, and former Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro – have declared they will run in the election. This will pit both of them against Mayor Susumu Inamine, who opposes the relocation plan.

Even if Nakaima accepts the government request and approves the reclamation before the election, work is expected to be halted if the current mayor is reelected. This is because it would be difficult to prevent efforts to block the work, such as sit-ins by activists on the roads used by vehicles for the work, under the anti-relocation mayor. In such circumstances, Nakaima would be the only person to pay a political price. He therefore has reasons to refrain from approving the plan unless one of the conservative candidates emerges as a shoo-in to win the election.

The government and the LDP are striving to have only one conservative candidate run in the election, but it is a tough prospect.

Another reason it is difficult for Nakaima to swiftly approve the relocation plan is that members of the ruling coalition parties hold only 21, fewer than half, of the 48 seats in the prefectural assembly.

If he decides to approve the plan during the regular assembly session, which is being held until Dec. 19, “objections from the opposition parties may stop discussions on the issue,” a senior assembly member said.

Those close to Nakaima are also worried that if an opposition group submits a no-confidence motion, it may pass the assembly.

Yet another cause for concern is the fact that New Komeito’ prefectural headquarters firmly supports relocation outside the prefecture, opposing the policy held by the ruling coalition partner’s national headquarters.

“We fully understand the feelings of [members at] the prefectural headquarters. It will be tremendously difficult for them to approve [our policy],” said Yoshihisa Inoue, the party’s secretary general, at a press conference on Friday.

Michitaka Kaiya and Takashi Imai, *Yomiuri Shimbun* Staff Writers, December 1, 2013
<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000836543>

Chief cabinet secretary says moving U.S. Marine base outside Okinawa ‘impossible’

Moving the controversial U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma out of Okinawa Prefecture is “impossible,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga stated on Nov. 18.

"The move to the Henoko district (of Nago, Okinawa Prefecture) was decided at a Japan-United States leaders' summit, so that's what's going to happen," Suga told Masatoshi Onaga — chief of the LDP's Okinawa chapter and a sitting Okinawa Prefectural Assembly member — during a meeting at the Diet building in Tokyo. Suga added that "moving the base outside the prefecture is impossible."

The LDP's Okinawa chapter has been calling for the Futenma base in the prefectural city of Ginowan to be moved outside of Okinawa. Suga, however, warned that if the LDP "accepted the Okinawa chapter's position, the Futenma base could become a fixture (in Ginowan). We want to avoid that."

Onaga replied that the LDP in Okinawa would "discuss the issue," and said the chapter would likely present a response by the end of November.

After the meeting with Suga, Onaga told reporters, "Unlike past Cabinets, this Cabinet uses clear language on the Futenma issue. The Cabinet's point of view, however, was very hard to hear."

Mainichi Shimbun, November 19, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131119p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Okinawans urged to toe LDP line

Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Shigeru Ishiba has begun negotiating with LDP Diet members from Okinawa Prefecture to obtain their support over the Futenma Air Station relocation issue, as part of the government's efforts to consolidate local support to move forward the long-stalled relocation.

Ishiba met Tuesday with LDP members Konosuke Kokuba, Masahisa Miyazaki and Natsumi Higa at the Diet, and asked them to support the government's policy of relocating the air station from Ginowan to the Henoko district of Nago. Both cities are in the prefecture.

Ishiba's move also reflects the government's belief that obtaining the Diet members' support will help prevent the conservative camp from splitting in January's Nago mayoral election, in which two conservatives have announced their candidacies.

"We must bring the Futenma issue to a conclusion. We're in the last stage. I need your help," Ishiba said to the three. Kokuba, Miyazaki and Higa are all House of Representative members who won seats in the chamber for the first time in last year's election.

All three, who pledged during their election campaigns to relocate the air station outside of the prefecture, were noncommittal when Ishiba asked them to support the government's plan to move it within the prefecture. "I need to talk to my supporters," one was reported as saying. The three are expected to hold meetings with their supporters as early as this weekend.

Ishiba's urgency reflects the fact that there is little time left until the Nago mayoral election, to be held Jan. 19.

So far, three people have announced their candidacies. Incumbent Mayor Susumu Inamine, who opposes the government's plan, will vie with two conservatives – former Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro and Bunshin Suematsu, a member of the Okinawa prefectural assembly.

The task of the conservative camp is to narrow the candidates down to one, as people who accept the government's plan support either Shimabukuro or Suematsu.

Suematsu expressed his hope that the LDP camp will take concerted action on the relocation issue. "I hope [the Okinawa] Diet members and the [LDP's] prefectural chapter will work as one, just as the LDP leadership is doing," he said at a press conference Tuesday.

The LDP's Okinawa prefectural chapter has decided to support Suematsu. Some observers say if the prefecture's Diet members and the chapter can agree on accepting the government's relocation plan, this may pave the way for the conservative bloc to narrow its choice for mayoral election candidate to Suematsu.

The LDP-led government hopes to obtain approval from Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima on land reclamation work in Henoko for the relocation of the air station by the end of this year. They also expect that if the prefectural chapter and conservative mayoral election candidates agree to the government's plan, it could influence Nakaima's decision.

After Tuesday's meeting with the three Diet members, Ishiba met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Diet Building over the progress of Futenma issue negotiations. Abe urged Ishiba to speed up the negotiations, reportedly encouraging him to deal with one issue at a time.

Yomiuri Shimbun, November 21, 2013

<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000811279>
