

# **Japan: Continuation of the controversies around the US military bases - the construction of a new airfield “virtually impossible” for Okinawa Gov.**

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## **Okinawa gov. to declare base relocation ‘impossible’ in opinion**

NAHA (Kyodo) — Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima will describe as “virtually impossible” the planned construction of a new airfield for the U.S. Marine Corps in a coastal area of the prefecture, in his opinion soon to be submitted to the Defense Ministry, local government sources said Thursday.

The opinion will be Okinawa’s response to an environmental impact assessment report submitted by the ministry for the planned construction of the Marine base to replace the Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa.

The central government’s plan to construct a new airfield in the Henoko area of Nago has met strong opposition from local people, who are demanding that the Futenma base be moved outside of the prefecture.

The opinion is expected to be submitted to the ministry’s Okinawa bureau on Monday. Defense Minister Naoki Tanaka will visit the prefecture for two days from Friday, during which he will meet with Nakaima on Saturday to brief him on the latest developments in Japan-U.S. talks, the ministry said.

The governor’s response to the environmental impact report would note the urgency of removing the risks posed by the Futenma base, located in a densely populated area, and call for the transfer of its functions outside of the prefecture and the early return of the land on which the base sits to Japanese control.

Nakaima’s opinion would also rule out the possibility of building a base in the Nago area from the standpoint of environmental protection, likely concluding that conservation measures stipulated in the assessment report would be insufficient to protect the environment for those living nearby and nature, according to the sources.

The prefectural government is due to submit its opinion on the reclamation aspect of the relocation project by March 27.

The central government is able to make changes to its environmental assessment based on the governor’s opinion, but if it makes major changes, they would have a large impact on the progress of the project.

The relocation project is part of a bilateral deal forged in 2006 on reorganizing U.S. forces in Japan. The central government submitted the report in December to move forward the stalled project.

**Kyodo Press**, February 17, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/17/20120217p2g00m0dm018000c.html>

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## **Okinawa: Sakima wins mayoral race in Ginowan, home to U.S. base issue**

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — Atsushi Sakima, a former member of the Okinawa prefectural assembly, won Sunday's mayoral election in Ginowan amid controversy over a U.S. military base issue.

Sakima, 47, beat former Ginowan Mayor Yoichi Iha, 60, in the closely contested race in which the top issue was the Japan-U.S. plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station from the city to Nago in northern Okinawa.

The victory by Sakima, who was backed by Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima as well as the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party and its ally the New Komeito party, marked the first time in 26 years for the conservative bloc to regain control of the city administration.

Iha was supported mainly by the smaller opposition Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party.

"I will take a firm stand against (the Futenma facility) becoming permanent in its present location," Sakima said after winning the election. He added he wants to "start the negotiation on the return (of the land) as soon as possible."

Sakima garnered 22,612 votes, while Iha received 21,712. Voter turnout was 63.90 percent, 3.23 percentage points lower than in the previous mayoral election in 2010. There were 69,926 eligible voters in Ginowan as of Sunday, according to the city election board.

During the campaign, both candidates called for the U.S. Marine base, which occupies a quarter of the city's total land area, to be moved out of the prefecture.

Sakima is seen as more soft-line on the issue as he had formerly accepted relocating the base within Okinawa, putting priority on the early return of the land currently used by the base. Iha, who served as Ginowan mayor for seven and a half years until 2010, is strongly opposed to the heavy U.S. military presence in Okinawa and has even questioned the effectiveness of the Japan-U.S. security alliance.

But the future of the planned relocation of Futenma to the northern Okinawa city of Nago is still unclear as Sakima, like Okinawa Gov. Nakaima, insists on moving it outside the prefecture.

According to Kyodo News exit polls that covered 739 voters at 16 polling stations across the city, a total of 61.7 percent said "elsewhere in Japan outside Okinawa" and "overseas" as a possible relocation site for the Futenma facility. Only 10.3 percent said "Henoko district" in the coastal area of Nago, the site stipulated in the latest Japan-U.S. accord reached in May 2010.

Nago Mayor Susumu Inamine, who was elected to the post in January 2010, is also strongly opposed to the Japan-U.S. plan to move the Futenma facility to his city. And a majority of the members elected to the Nago city assembly in last September's election also oppose the plan.

Sunday's election in Ginowan was held to choose the successor to Takeshi Asato, who resigned as mayor for health reasons.

The polling was held amid a local backlash over a senior Defense Ministry official's alleged meddling in the election. That allegation dealt a fresh blow to the central government's efforts to push forward the long-stalled relocation of Futenma within Okinawa despite strong local opposition.

The election was held just four days after the Japanese and U.S. governments announce a new realignment plan for the U.S. military in Japan, in which the two governments agreed to proceed with the transfer of Marines in Okinawa to Guam, separate from the relocation of the Futenma base within the prefecture. Under the 2006 accord, the two events were to occur in tandem.

The revised plan instantly sparked concern in Okinawa that the change could lead to the marine base in Ginowan becoming permanent.

The DPJ did not field a candidate or officially endorse any of the candidates as the party is seeking to relocate the U.S. military base within Okinawa in line with the Japan-U.S. accord.

**Kyodo Press**, February 13, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/13/20120213p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

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### **Okinawa: Gov't keen on cooperating with new Ginowan mayor over U.S. base issue**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The government said Monday it is keen to work together with the new mayor of Ginowan to move the long-stalled issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station from Ginowan to another location within Okinawa Prefecture.

"I hope to be in close cooperation" with new Ginowan Mayor Atsushi Sakima, Defense Minister Naoki Tanaka told reporters, a day after Sakima, a former member of the Okinawa prefectural assembly, won Sunday's election.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said at a parliament session that he sees the latest election outcome as an "expression of the latest popular opinion" and renewed his resolve to prevent the Futenma base from remaining in its present form and to make efforts to ease the base-hosting burden on Okinawa.

The Ginowan election attracted attention as the city is home to the Futenma base, which is at the center of controversy over a Japan-U.S. accord on realignment of U.S. military forces in Japan.

Under the deal, the Japanese government has been pushing for Futenma to be moved from a crowded residential area in Ginowan to a less densely populated area in Nago, but local residents remain opposed to moving Futenma within Okinawa.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said in a news conference that the government will continue to listen to views of people in Okinawa and seek local consent over the current relocation plan.

Unlike his close rival, former Ginowan Mayor Yoichi Iha, Sakima is seen as more soft-line on the

base relocation issue as he had once accepted relocating the base within Okinawa, which some governmental officials see as an opportunity to break the stalemate, political analysts say.

In Ginowan, Sakima, who was backed by the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party and its ally New Komeito, told a news conference that he plans to visit Tokyo to hold talks with the central government, saying, "No result can be expected if we do not start with dialogue."

According to a senior prefectural government official, Sakima is expected to fly to Tokyo as early as Friday together with Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima and heads of base-hosting municipalities within Okinawa to request that the Futenma base be relocated outside Okinawa.

For the government's part, sources close to the premier said Noda is thinking of making a visit to Okinawa in late February and holding talks with Nakaima to explain the Japan-U.S. talks concerning a recent review of the realignment of the U.S. forces in Japan.

However, the outlook for settling the relocation issue is still bleak as Sakima is backed by Nakaima, a proponent for moving Futenma outside Okinawa.

Sakima himself said, "At this point, I am opposed to relocation within the prefecture."

The Ginowan election came after Tokyo and Washington released a joint statement last week, adhering to the existing Futenma relocation plan, saying it is "the only viable way forward."

**Kyodo Press**, February 13, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/13/20120213p2g00m0dm135000c.html>

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## **Gov't mulls test flights of controversial U.S. aircraft in Okinawa**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Defense Minister Naoki Tanaka said Tuesday the government will look into conducting test flights of the MV22 Osprey vertical takeoff and landing aircraft at a U.S. base in Okinawa Prefecture before their full deployment there later this year.

Local residents have expressed concerns over the plane's noise and safety given the aircraft's history of fatal crashes during test flights. The envisaged test flights are unlikely, however, to change a U.S. plan to deploy it at the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station within this year, political analysts say.

Tanaka told a parliament session that he views as "necessary" such test flights to check noise, and will consider this after consulting with the U.S. government and local residents, accepting a suggestion by opposition lawmaker Nobutaka Machimura to do so.

As part of steps to "assure the local community" about the safety of the aircraft, Tanaka said Hideo Jimpu, parliamentary vice defense minister, will be sent to the United States soon to fly on the Osprey.

The local community in Okinawa, which has long hosted the bulk of U.S. forces in Japan, is also deeply opposed to a Japan-U.S. accord to relocate the Futenma base from the populated city of Ginowan to a coastal area in Nago, both within Okinawa.

Tanaka said the Defense Ministry is reflecting on whether its local bureau's decision to deliver to the Okinawa prefectural government late last year an environmental impact assessment report on the relocation was appropriate.

The incident early on Dec. 28 further angered local people, who were already upset by offensive comments the former head of the ministry's Okinawa bureau made in connection with the relocation plan and the burden Okinawa has faced in hosting U.S. forces.

The bureau, whose former chief was recalled in November over the comments, came under fresh fire Tuesday for recently meddling in an upcoming local election, after Seiken Akamine, a lawmaker from the Japanese Communist Party, pointed it out during the lower house Budget Committee session.

The bureau instructed its various divisions by e-mail to find out about its personnel's Ginowan-based relatives eligible to vote and created a list of them earlier this month. Those on the list were called on to listen to a "lecture" by the bureau chief, Ro Manabe, according to Akamine, who cited e-mail messages he had obtained.

Akamine said this action constitutes "interference" by the government in the mayoral election in Ginowan on Feb. 12.

Tanaka responded that this "should not be the case" and that he would swiftly examine the matter. The ministry sent three officials to Okinawa the same day to shed light on the incident.

**Kyodo Press**, January 30, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/01/31/20120131p2g00m0dm080000c.html>

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## **Okinawa: Japan, U.S. agree to delink Futenma transfer from Marines' move**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan and the United States have agreed to move 4,700 Marines in Okinawa to Guam, delinking the troops' transfer from the contentious plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station within the southern island prefecture as stipulated in a road map for the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, diplomatic sources from both countries said Saturday.

The transfer of around 8,000 Marines and 9,000 dependents from Okinawa to the U.S. territory of Guam has been a pillar of the 2006 bilateral accord on the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, in which progress on relocating Futenma is a precondition for the troops' move.

However, the U.S. Department of Defense is now considering shifting the remaining 3,300 Marines to elsewhere in the Pacific, such as Hawaii, Australia and the Philippines, the sources said.

Tokyo and Washington plan to stick to the accord to move the Futenma airstrip, located in a crowded residential area of Ginowan, to a less populated coastal zone in Nago, both in Okinawa. Local residents remain fiercely opposed to the plan.

But the United States has conveyed to Japan its plan to conduct repair work at the Futenma facility, assuming its relocation will not realize soon, the sources said.

The two countries will likely officially announce the transfer of the 4,700 Marines to Guam on Feb. 13, the sources said.

With the Marines' Guam transfer delinked from the base move, chances are growing for the entire road map for the U.S. forces repositioning in Japan to be drastically reviewed, observers say.

Subsequently, the return of six facilities and land occupied by the U.S. military and located south of the Air Force's Kadena base in Okinawa will be also reconsidered, according to the sources.

The road map says land south of the Kadena base will be returned to Okinawa after the Futenma base is relocated to Nago and the Marines are transferred to Guam, as agreed by the two countries.

Senior foreign and defense officials of Japan and the United States are expected to discuss, in Washington on Monday, the issue of revisiting the return of U.S. military facilities and land areas south of the Kadena base.

They will also consider reviewing the 2006 bilateral accord that says Japan will provide \$6.09 billion of the \$10.27 billion cost of relocating the Marines to Guam. Washington could ask Japan to pay additional costs to slash its own defense spending amid budgetary constraints, the sources said.

The 2006 accord stated the Futenma relocation would be completed by 2014. But in the face of difficulties, Japan and the United States agreed to drop the deadline at security talks last June between their defense and foreign ministers in Washington.

**Kyodo Press**, February 5, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/05/20120205p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

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### **Okinawa: U.S. tells Japan of need for continued Marine use of Futenma base**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A senior U.S. official told Japanese officials in late January that the U.S. military will have to continue using the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture, for the time being due to the standoff over its relocation, sources close to bilateral relations said Sunday.

The development suggests that the use of the base in the crowded city would be prolonged, despite a long-standing bilateral agreement that the site of the controversial base should be returned to Japanese control after its functions are transferred elsewhere in the prefecture.

Japan and the United States have already agreed to separate the planned transfer of Okinawa-based Marines to Guam from the issue of relocating the Futenma base by moving 4,700 of the roughly 8,000 Marines in Okinawa to the U.S. territory in the Pacific without waiting for the relocation of the base.

The U.S. official's statement regarding the continued use of the Marine base has increased the likelihood that the Futenma relocation would be relegated to the backseat, a prospect that is likely to upset the public in Okinawa.

While the people of Okinawa have called for the base to be relocated due to safety concerns and

noise, they oppose moving it to a coastal area on the same main Okinawa island, as agreed by the two countries, and are instead calling for its relocation outside of the prefecture.

The United States believes it is crucial to retain an air facility in Okinawa to station Marines, and will therefore maintain its strong hope to see Japan follow through on a bilateral deal to build a new air facility in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, to transfer functions from the base in Ginowan, the sources said.

During high-level talks involving defense officials from Japan, the United States and South Korea on the South Korean island of Jeju at the end of January, the U.S. official told Japanese officials that use of the Futenma base would have to continue for the time being, the sources said.

The U.S. official also expressed the view that no progress can be expected on the relocation of Futenma anytime soon, the sources added.

The U.S. side has been planning repair work at Futenma in the belief that the base will continue to be used.

Both governments plan to accelerate consultations with a view to reviewing the accord stipulating that Japan share the costs of relocating Okinawa-based Marines to Guam.

Given that the planned transfer of Marines to Guam from Okinawa has constituted a pillar of the 2006 Japanese-U.S. agreement on the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, there is concern that the latest development could force a change in the overall framework of the accord.

The planned transfer of thousands of Marines to Guam without progress on the base relocation is part of an ongoing U.S. strategy to quickly adjust to China's military buildup, defense observers say. The strategy also involves stationing Marines not just in Guam but in Australia and the Philippines, among other countries, in rotation.

Neither Japan nor the United States has changed its stance that around 10,000 Marines will remain in Okinawa even after the relocation plan is reviewed.

The central government submitted an environmental impact assessment report to the Okinawa prefectural government at the end of last year in an effort to move the relocation project forward.

**Kyodo Press**, February 5, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/05/20120205p2g00m0dm104000c.html>

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### **Okinawa: Conserving habitat impossible if Futenma moved to Nago: panel**

NAHA (Kyodo) — A panel of the Okinawa prefectural government has concluded that it would be impossible to conserve the living and natural environment if an airfield is constructed in the Henoko coastal area of Nago for the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, both in the island prefecture, sources close to the matter said Tuesday.

The panel will present a report on its findings to the prefectural government on Wednesday afternoon as it has completed examining an environmental impact assessment report presented by

the central government for the relocation of the base within the prefecture.

Based on the panel's report, Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima is expected to present his opinion to the central government, saying the relocation of the Futenma base to the Henoko area is extremely difficult, the sources said. The central government may subsequently be required to substantially revise the assessment report.

The panel report says the central government's surveys covering 25 areas, including the impact on the habitat of the dugong, an endangered marine mammal, are insufficient and the survey results underestimate the environmental impact, the sources said.

Under a Japan-U.S. accord, the Futenma air base located in a densely populated residential area in Ginowan will be transferred to the less populated coastal area in Nago.

The central government submitted the environmental impact assessment report in December. Nakaima is required to present his opinion to Tokyo regarding the construction of the replacement facility by mid-February and on the reclamation project for the relocation by late March.

**Kyodo Press**, February 8, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/08/20120208p2g00m0dm025000c.html>

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### **Okinawa: Okinawa finds gov't report on U.S. base relocation problematic**

NAHA, Japan (Kyodo) — A panel of the Okinawa prefectural government decided Tuesday to underline problems of an environmental assessment impact report on the planned relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station within the prefecture in its recommendations to be presented to Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima.

The group examined the key assessment report on the long-stalled base transfer that was submitted by the central government in December and found it problematic. Nakaima is required to present to Tokyo his opinion on the report based on the panel paper to be put forward by mid-February.

At a panel meeting Tuesday, a draft report prepared by Okinawa prefectural officials said surveys conducted by the central government to examine the environmental impact in 25 areas were insufficient and underestimated adverse effects on the environment.

The 25 areas include the habitat of the dugong, an endangered marine mammal, and possible impact from the deployment of the MV22 Osprey vertical takeoff and landing aircraft.

The paper especially noted that the introduction of the Osprey aircraft, which has a record of crashes during test flights, could trigger serious problems.

It also criticized the central government for including Osprey's deployment in its report without hearing opinions of local municipalities in advance, saying Tokyo went through "inappropriate procedures."

Kuniharu Miyagi, a professor at Okinawa International University and head of the group, told reporters that panel members expect Nakaima to seek the Marine base relocation out of the



prefecture in presenting his opinion on the environment impact assessment report.

Under a Japan-U.S. accord, the Futenma airstrip located in a densely populated residential area in Ginowan is set to be transferred to the less populated coastal area in Nago, both in Okinawa.

The deadline for the governor's opinion is set at Feb. 20 on the part of the report regarding the construction of a replacement airfield in Nago and at March 27 on the reclamation project for that purpose.

Nakaima has repeatedly said the Futenma relocation within the prefecture is "effectively impossible."

**Kyodo Press**, February 1, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/01/20120201p2g00m0dm115000c.html>

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### **Okinawa: Okinawa Pref. to start own analysis of security info from April**

NAHA (Kyodo) — The Okinawa prefectural government will set up a new division in April to collect and analyze security information on its own to help settle the long-stalled U.S. base relocation issue within the prefecture and other problems involving U.S. military presence, senior prefectural officials said Wednesday.

The 12-member section on regional security policy will be launched so that the local government can look into the situation without depending solely on information provided by the foreign and defense ministries.

It is a rare move by a local government to try to tackle the security issue, which is considered as something to be handled only by the central government.

The division officials, currently in divisions in charge of the return of land occupied by the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan and port facilities in Naha operated by the U.S. Army, will exchange information with Japanese and American experts and study ways to address problems related to U.S. bases in the prefecture, the senior officials said.

Responses to crimes committed by U.S. military personnel and noise pollution will continue to be handled by the existing Military Base Affairs Division, they added.

The Okinawa government is also planning to establish an office in Washington to collect security information in the future, the officials said. The island prefecture has long hosted the bulk of the U.S. forces in Japan.

**Kyodo Press**, February 1, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/02/02/20120202p2g00m0dm025000c.html>

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## **Okinawa review board finds Defense Ministry's environmental assessment report insufficient**

NAHA — Members of an Okinawa prefectural board reviewing a Defense Ministry report pertaining to the relocation of a U.S. military base have suggested that the report is lacking and warrants further investigation.

Late last year, the Okinawa Prefectural Government received an environmental assessment report from the Defense Ministry relating to the proposed relocation of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to the city of Nago. In the report, the ministry concludes that "in terms of environmental conservation, there are no particular problems" with building a replacement for Futenma in Nago's Henoko district.

However, in discussions on Jan. 19, the review board asserted that the ministry's assessment of the effects of the MV-22 Osprey aircraft is insufficient.

The board also found that the 502 points brought up by Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima in 2009 regarding an earlier brief submitted by the ministry are not sufficiently addressed in the key report, and is expected to point out the report's shortcomings across a range of issues from a scientific standpoint. Meanwhile, Gov. Nakaima has not wavered from his stand for a relocation of the base out of Okinawa, and is also expected to respond harshly to the report.

The environmental assessment report predicts that in the Abu district of Nago, low-frequency sounds produced by the Osprey would exceed the ministry's maximum allowable level, potentially having psychological and physiological impacts on local residents. The report adds, however, that "flight frequency will be low and flight duration short," and as such, "the Osprey's activities in Nago will not necessarily have" psychological and physiological effects."

Low-frequency sounds, which are difficult to detect as distinct sounds, are said to affect sleep, among other things, depending on their frequency. The negative health impacts of noise pollution from activities based in the Futenma air station have been recognized in a July 2010 court ruling.

In its environmental assessment, the Defense Ministry reports that noise levels will be higher than it predicted in its preliminary brief. Additionally, flight paths were changed from its original trapezoidal paths in the earlier report to ellipsoidal paths in the most recent report, but the reasons for the change are not explained.

The report then states that "the noise issue will be addressed by aircraft avoiding airspace directly above neighboring areas, which will significantly reduce their effects."

Although Gov. Nakaima requested in response to the preliminary brief in 2009 that the flight paths of aircraft from Henoko to other bases be provided, the information is not included in the recent report, with the ministry mentioning only that actual operations will be conducted by the U.S. military.

The review board expressed the most concern over the Osprey, which was not mentioned until the final stage of the Defense Ministry's assessment procedure, which began with its "measures for relocation" report in August 2007.

By the time a preparatory brief was compiled by the ministry in 2009, the U.S. military had revealed its plans to deploy the aircraft to Okinawa. However, the Japanese Defense Ministry's latest report states that the U.S. Department of Defense announced its Osprey deployment plans in June 2010, to justify the delay in mentioning the aircraft in its own assessment process.

Review board members brought up the lack of data in the ministry's environmental assessment report, including the effects of high-temperature emissions on ecosystems, and the effects of wind pressure. Many reviewers harshly criticized the ministry for waiting until the last stage of the assessment process to mention the Osprey; one remarked that the change in flight paths is a major problem, and another called for the ministry to take the assessment process back to its initial stage and incorporate the views of local residents. Approximately 120 local residents observed the review board's discussions in the gallery, with some applauding the panel members' criticisms of the report.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Act and prefectural ordinances stipulate that the assessment procedure can be started over only in cases where the proposed area of a facility has expanded, or a proposed runway has been extended. Changes in equipment models, as in the case of the Osprey, are not subject to an assessment do-over. Following the review board's deliberations, however, Junichiro Tsutsumi, a researcher at the University of the Ryukyus and deputy chair of the review board told reporters that the board intends to seek an additional investigation by the ministry.

"While it would be difficult to take the assessment back to the 'measures for relocation' stage, the environmental impact assessment has not been sufficiently carried out and we can request that its insufficient parts be redone," Tsutsumi said.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, January 20, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/01/20/20120120p2a00m0na007000c.html>

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