

Promoting Resolution of Issues Concerning U.S. Military Bases on Okinawa

**November 16, 2003
Okinawa Prefectural Government**



OKINAWA PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT

November 16, 2003

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The United States of America

RE: Promoting resolution of issues concerning U.S. military bases on Okinawa

I would like to express my deepest respect for your devotion in resolving various issues between Japan and the United States.

Okinawa Prefectural Government recognizes the importance of U.S. military bases located on Okinawa, as we understand that the U.S. bases in Japan play a crucial role within the framework of the bilateral security alliance to maintain peace and security in the Far East and Japan.

Also we understand that the issues of military bases are the matters of foreign policy and national security, which must be dealt through bilateral communications on national level.

However, it is also the fact that Okinawa prefecture today still faces the immense and dense U.S. facilities after 58 years since the end of World War II. Incidents and accidents caused by U.S. military personnel and environmental problems stemmed from the bases have created enormous impacts on people's lives, while the facilities became the outstanding hindrance to urban development and economic promotion.

People of Okinawa, who have been shouldering the excessive burden of U.S. bases over long years, have been firmly calling for resolution of base related issues. Representing these people, OPG has made requests to GOJ to work on the issues at every possible occasion, and at this very opportunity we believe that directly conveying the wishes of people to the U.S. government is such an important task for us.

Therefore, OPG would like to petition for the following items, hoping that the reality of Okinawa, who has been shouldering the serious burden, and their sentiment can find some places in your mind, so that resolution of Okinawa's base issues can move forward.

In wishes for your generous understanding and cooperation,

Respectfully submitted,

Keiichi Inamine
Governor
Okinawa Prefectural Government

Items of Petition

1. Steady implementation of the agreements by SACO Special Action Committee on Okinawa and further reduction and realignment of U.S. facilities on Okinawa in a planned and step-by-step manner.
2. Coordination of conditions in regard to relocation of Futenma Air Station
3. Relocation of trainings and exercises by U.S. Marine Corps to the sites other than Okinawa as well as force reduction of U.S. forces stationed on Okinawa.
4. Fundamental review of US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement.
5. Prevention of incidents and accidents that are associated with operation of facilities, military activities and military personnel and their family members, as well as practices of thorough safety management and thorough discipline and education of personnel.
6. Banning the use of the new low frequency sonar made for underwater detection by U.S. Navy in the sea areas around Japan.
7. Prevention measures against aircraft noise.

Explanation of Petition Items

1. Steady implementation of the agreements by SACO Special Action Committee on Okinawa and further reduction and realignment of U.S. facilities on Okinawa in a planned and step-by-step manner.

In order to reduce and realign the U.S. facilities excessively borne by Okinawa prefecture, Okinawa government believes that the feasible and realistic way is to take step-by-step manner by steadily implementing the returning agreements of bases addressed by SACO Special Action Committee on Okinawa in 1996, and by both countries discussing the issue in a sincere attitude so that they can reduce the burden of bases shouldered by people of Okinawa.

However under the SACO report, seven out of eleven items agreed to be returned are conditional, to be relocated within the prefecture, inducing voices calling for assurance to protect environment and lives of communities at relocation sites and to secure safety in regard to military operations.

Here OPG requests both governments to strengthen their efforts in returning facilities, so that the SACO agreements are better promoted toward completion, while we ask for sufficient consideration made for the local people when dealing with the SACO plan.

Also, even after completing the SACO plan, Okinawa will still be the place to hold approximately 70 percent of the land area exclusively used by U.S. forces in Japan.

Therefore, in order to fulfill the wishes of Okinawan people who have been shouldering the burden of U.S. bases for long years, we would like to ask for a special consideration to examine additional plans to further reduce and realign the bases through systematic and phased method.

2. Coordination of conditions in regard to relocation of Futenma Air Station

Futenma Air Station is at issue not only because it impacts the lives of the surrounding communities due to its location at the center of the city, but also because the location of the station and the areas nearby are the key sites for development. On this ground OPG and the local municipalities have been firmly requesting the both governments the return of the station.

After looking into the situation regarding Futenma, the governments of Japan and the U.S. responded our request by presenting the plan to return the whole areas taken by the station under the SACO.

When OPG brought Nago City the relocation proposal, despite the fact that there already existed vast facilities including Camp Schwab, Henoko Ammunition Storage and others in the city, they admitted it after fully considering the Okinawa's long history of holding U.S. bases and other situations including the both governments' efforts on this matter.

In view of mitigating new burden of hosting military facility, OPG is presently requesting GOJ the following items; limitation of the term of use to fifteen years, setting the new base as joint-use air facility for military-commercial aircrafts, consideration of both natural environment and living environment of the local areas.

We would also like to ask the U.S. to provide special attention on these requests we made to the GOJ, so that the returning plan will be realized in the earliest possible time.

3. Relocation of trainings and exercises by U.S. Marine Corps to the sites other than Okinawa as well as force reduction of U.S. forces stationed on Okinawa.

As of September 30, 2002, 25,515 personnel, or approximately 63 percent of members of U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps in Japan are stationed in Okinawa. Especially for Marine Corps, there are 15,910 marines, which account for 62 percent of U.S. forces on Okinawa.

OPG believes that reduction of U.S. military forces in Okinawa, partly by relocating trainings conducted by Marine Corps under the Unit Deployment Program to other sites outside Okinawa, will lead to a mitigation of disproportionate burden of the bases borne by people of Okinawa. We also believe that this will result in decreasing incidents and accidents involving military personnel, civilians and their family members. Therefore we would like to request the two governments to initiate discussion on reducing forces on Okinawa as soon as possible.

4. Fundamental review of US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement

There has been a certain progress made on the US-Japan SOFA in terms of the operational improvement by one of the agreements of SACO. However there are still several issues left unsolved including application of Japanese domestic laws on conservation of environment, custody of suspects by Japanese authority prior to criminal indictment and adequate and prompt legal compensation for victims in cases by off-duty personnel.

OPG believes that fundamental and drastic review of SOFA is indispensable, as it prescribes the provision and operation of U.S. bases, to protect the lives of Okinawan people and their human rights when there are problems of environment or incidents and accidents related to U.S. military. Also, in Japan, it is evident that the social current is moving toward such drastic review of SOFA. Therefore in order to facilitate the environment of resolving issues involving U.S. bases, OPG would like to request the two countries to organize a discussion to review SOFA fundamentally at an earliest time.

5. Prevention of incidents and accidents that are associated with operation of facilities, military activities and military personnel and their family members, as well as practices of thorough safety management and thorough discipline and education of personnel.

In Okinawa prefecture, over the past 58 years of history including the 27 year-period of U.S. administration, there were various problems of incidents and

accidents stemmed from U.S. bases, such as aircraft accidents and crimes and traffic accidents by personnel.

Since 1972, the time of Okinawa's reversion to Japan, through December 2002, the number of criminal offenses committed by U.S. military personnel, civilian employees and their dependents amounted to 5,157, including 533 heinous crimes such as murder, robbery and sexual assault.

Besides, the number of aircraft-related accidents resulted in a large number of 217 cases during the period between 1972 and December 2002, which created an enormous anxiety among the residents in the vicinities of the bases.

OPG views local communities' understanding and cooperation as a vital factor for US-Japan security alliance to maintain and smoothly operate U.S. bases in Japan. On this ground OPG requests further measures to prevent incidents and accidents stemmed from bases and carry out thorough education and discipline on personnel while we seek for improving safety management on bases.

6. Banning the use of the new low frequency sonar made for underwater detection by U.S. Navy in the sea areas around Japan.

It was reported that the U.S. Navy decided to use the new type of low frequency sonar in the sea regions around Japan only. Currently, OPG is working on obtaining detail information to find out the backgrounds of this report.

If the banning of the sonar usage was determined for the areas of the U.S. for the reasons of its potential influence on marine creatures, then we must express that we feel this decision unfair, and wonder why this sonar that is questioned for safety is permitted for use in the areas around Japan. We cannot bear such decision. If the effect of low frequency sonar on marine lives were clear, then we believe that it must be banned from the waters around Japan too.

7. Prevention measures against aircraft noise

The agreement by US-Japan Joint Committee, "Abatement Measures of Aircraft Noise at Kadena Air Base and Futenma Air Station," of March 1997, stipulates that measures must be taken to avoid flights over highly populated areas and to restrict flights in night and early morning hours. However the 2002 monitoring results for noise (see the attached report) showed high values in WECPNLs (or, "noise index") and in frequency of noise occurrences. Also, cases of aggravated noises were reported by inbound flights of aircrafts stationed at other bases outside Okinawa, which was topped on the already existed noises by the aircrafts assigned at Kadena and Futenma.

OPG finds it necessary that the agreed measure for the two air facilities to be strictly abided by, so that fine and healthy living environment can be created for the communities nearby and that Japan's environmental standard can be achieved on the aircraft noise. Therefore we would like to seek for your further efforts in mitigating noises and implementing measures against noises.