

OBAMA vs OKINAWA

FOR THOSE PONDERING the decline of American hegemony and rise of East Asia, recent events in Japan offer food for thought. In August 2009 the centre-left Democratic Party of Japan won a landslide election victory with a swing of over 11 per cent against the Liberal Democratic Party which had ruled almost continuously since 1955. Hatoyama Yukio, the new Prime Minister, had set out a new course for the country. 'As a result of the failure of the Iraq war and the financial crisis, the era of US-led globalization is coming to an end', he argued. 'We are moving towards an era of multipolarity':

The recent economic crisis resulted from a way of thinking based on the idea that American-style free-market economics represents a universal and ideal economic order, and that all countries should modify the traditions and regulations governing their economies in line with global (or rather American) standards. But globalization has progressed without any regard for non-economic values, or for environmental issues or problems of resource restriction.

The financial crisis, Hatoyama continued, 'has also raised doubts about the permanence of the dollar as the key global currency'. In this context, Japan 'must not forget our identity as a nation located in Asia':

I believe that the East Asian region, which is showing increasing vitality, must be recognized as Japan's basic sphere of being . . . We should aspire to move toward regional currency integration as a natural extension of the rapid economic growth . . . We must spare no effort to build the permanent security frameworks essential to underpinning currency integration.¹

Hatoyama spoke of working towards an autonomous East Asian Community, based on his notion of fraternity—*yuai*—as 'a strong, combative concept', and towards a 'more equal' relationship with Washington.² His party's pre-election pledges included a democratization of Japan's governmental process: instead of permanent civil servants setting agendas for ministers to ratify, elected representatives themselves would



establish priorities and take decisions. There would be greater devolution of government power to the local prefectures.

The DPJ is more of a broad umbrella grouping than a party. Founded in 1998, its adherents range from neo-liberal ‘modernizers’, represented by Hirano, Okada and Kitazawa, to a social-democratic Manifesto group, focused on education, welfare and poverty; it is supported by the 6-million-strong Rengo trade-union bloc and by a layer of independent-minded intellectuals.³ In 2003, the DPJ was decisively strengthened by fusion with Ozawa Ichiro’s Liberal Party. As leader of the DPJ from 2007 until May 2009, Ozawa gave shape and force to what had been a rather vague foreign-policy agenda: fighting tooth-and-nail in the Diet against the extension of Japan’s Indian Ocean re-fuelling mission for US forces in Afghanistan and against the plan for a new American military base on the far-south Japanese island of Okinawa.

Ozawa is that rare Japanese politician, an effective operator with a shrewd sense of both strategy and tactics. Born in 1942, the son of an Iwate businessman, he was a rising star of one of the key LDP factions in the 1970s and 80s, having taken over his late father’s seat in the Diet. He became the Party’s General Secretary in 1989. Four years later, with his factional enemies closing in, he confounded them by leading a split that ousted the LDP from power for the first time since 1955. Ozawa was a key behind-the-scenes figure in the short-lived anti-LDP government of 1993. If he has asserted a consistent principle since then, it is that Japan should become a ‘normal’ sovereign state, able to determine its own foreign policy. After a chill encounter with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in February 2009, when the two did not see eye-to-eye on the new US base on Okinawa, a vicious media campaign erupted against him based on an ancient corruption charge. As a result, Ozawa stepped down as

¹ Hatoyama Yukio, ‘A New Path for Japan’, *New York Times*, 27 August 2009.

² Born in 1947, Hatoyama is a scion of a famous Tokyo political family: his great-grandfather was Speaker of the Diet in the Meiji era, his grandfather Prime Minister in the 1950s, his father Foreign Minister in the 1970s. He took a Stanford PhD in engineering in 1976 and was elected as an LDP member of the Lower House in 1986, quitting the Party in 1993 and sitting as a member of various small groupings. He was a founder of the DPJ in 1998.

³ In the early 2000s the DPJ received a degree of support from the business federation, Keidanren, though only around \$1m, compared to \$22m for the LDP. From 2005 Keidanren reverted to sole support for the LDP. It was highly critical of the DPJ’s labour policy after Ozawa took over as party leader in 2007.

the DPJ's parliamentary leader in favour of Hatoyama. But as General Secretary he remained its key strategist and 'shadow shogun'.

Ozawa positioned the DPJ as the champion of those alienated by Koizumi's fervent neo-liberalism and pro-Bush war policy, and hurting from the deep post-2008 recession. He tapped widespread disgust, not least in the rural peripheries, at the LDP's corruption and incompetence under Koizumi's three short-lived successors, Abe, Fukuda and Aso. In the August election, the DPJ swept 47 per cent of the vote in single-seat constituencies and 42 per cent of the proportional-bloc vote, compared to the LDP's respective 38 per cent and 27 per cent. The DPJ emerged with 308 seats in the Diet's Lower House, against 119 for the LDP. It won overwhelming support in Okinawa. In alliance with the centre-left Social-Democratic Party, the Hatoyama government had the majority necessary to push its radical programme through, over-riding any LDP opposition in the Upper House.

'Top-down leadership'

The first reaction in Washington was astonishment that, as one old 'Japan hand' put it, the DPJ 'seems to really mean' its radical agenda.⁴ The Hatoyama government refused to accept the agreement for a new Marine Corps Air Station at Henoko, Okinawa, that the Obama Administration and the lame-duck Aso government had pushed through three months before the election.⁵ It threatened to cut the \$4 billion annual 'host nation support' fee that Japan paid towards the cost of the US bases on its territory. It wanted a greater say in criminal jurisdiction over American soldiers on its soil, in defiance of the Status of Forces clauses in the 1960 US–Japan Security Treaty. It announced point-blank that it would

⁴ Ambassador Rust Denning, speaking at a Brookings Institution briefing before Obama's APEC visit: 'Obama Goes to Asia: Understanding the President's Trip', Washington, DC 6 November 2009, p. 38.

⁵ In February 2009 Secretary of State Clinton signed an agreement with the Aso government, which pledged Japan to build the new base at Henoko by 2014, to which most of the Futenma-based Marines would relocate. Japan would also pay \$6bn towards building a new base on Guam, to which some fraction of the Futenma Marines would move. Presented as though it were a significant US withdrawal from Okinawa, the misleadingly titled 'Guam International Agreement' was actually a design to expand the American presence there and increase Japan's military contribution to the alliance. In May 2009 Aso rammed it through the Diet as an international treaty, in such a way as to bind the prospective DPJ government then waiting in the wings.

end the Indian Ocean re-fuelling mission for US forces in Afghanistan. DPJ Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya told foreign journalists in August 2009 that it would be ‘very pathetic’ for Japan as a sovereign nation ‘just to follow what the US says’. In mid-October he reiterated to the *Okinawa Times* that ‘the will of the people of Okinawa and the will of the people of Japan was expressed in the elections’, adding: ‘I don’t think we will act simply by accepting what the US tells us.’⁶ At a tri-lateral meeting in Beijing in early October 2009, Hatoyama told Wen Jiabao and Lee Myung-bak, ‘It could be said that Japan has so far depended on the US too much.’⁷ Ozawa was planning to create a National Strategy Bureau to develop government policy, directly under the Prime Minister—cutting out permanent officials of the strategic ministries.⁸

American officials frankly confessed their displeasure. Sidelining the bureaucrats in Tokyo’s Foreign and Defence Ministries was causing ‘confusion’:

Bureaucrats traditionally have been the managers of the [US] alliance with Japan. They have been the shock absorbers. They have been the people we go to to work out issues, and it’s worked very effectively. They’ve been discreet, they’ve been skilful and we’ve gotten through a lot of bumpy periods because of the skill and dedication of Japanese bureaucrats. They have been the primary channel of communication. Now their role is in question. The bureaucrats are still trying to sort out their relationship with the new government and vice versa, and in the first eight weeks it’s not clear who speaks for who, and whether the bureaucrats are operating with real authority.⁹

Joseph Nye, who has long combined theorizing ‘soft power’ at Harvard with a tough-minded defence of the US military presence in East Asia and the need for Japan’s SDF to take on a more aggressive role, derided the DPJ as ‘inexperienced, divided and still in the thrall of campaign promises’.¹⁰ Richard Armitage, Bush’s Assistant Secretary of State, observed that the DPJ was ‘speaking a different language’ to the rest of the world when it came to deterrence; the alliance with the US was clearly ‘in second place behind politics’, in Japan.¹¹ Another East Asia hand, Richard Bush, reminded the Japanese that the US had plenty of experience with

⁶ *The Guardian*, 10 August 2009; *Okinawa Times*, 23 October 2009.

⁷ Keiko Iizuka, ‘Three Keys to Japan’s New Diplomacy’, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC 16 October 2009.

⁸ Itoh Shoichi, ‘Will Japan be Different?’, Brookings Institution, September 2009.

⁹ Denning, in ‘Obama Goes to Asia’, pp. 38–9.

¹⁰ Joseph Nye, ‘An Alliance larger than One Issue’, *New York Times*, 6 January 2010.

¹¹ Richard Armitage, ‘America needs a Plan B’, CSIS Pac Forum, 15 January 2010.

such situations: as with Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, Chen Shui-bian in Taiwan, Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea, Washington's goal should be 'to broaden the views of the new government and shape its policy direction in ways that fit US interests'. There was no objection in principle to Tokyo improving its relations with Beijing, but 'there are core questions of whether it will go too far'. The US should continue to 'shape China's intentions', as it had done since the 1970s, to ensure that the PRC 'has more to gain from cooperation than challenge'. This required both 'engaging and incorporating China' and 'maintaining the strength and willingness to define limits'. The US bases on Okinawa were non-negotiable, since 'an important part of strength is positioning your power in the right places'—here, commanding Japan, Taiwan, Korea, the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. Besides, the hegemon's face was at stake: other countries were watching to see how strong the US–Japan alliance would prove to be.¹²

The Okinawa bases—specifically: relocating the facilities at Futenma to a new base at Henoko—quickly emerged as the focal point of the struggle. Obama's Defense Secretary Robert Gates arrived in Tokyo in late October 2009 to deliver the message in person. He threatened 'serious consequences' if Tokyo tried to renegotiate the agreement—'The Futenma relocation facility is the linchpin'¹³—and instructed Defence Minister Kitazawa Toshimi to get his act together before Obama's scheduled visit to Tokyo on 11 November. 'It's time to move on. Non-compliance on Okinawa will be immensely complicated and counter-productive.' It would be a 'blow to trust' if the agreement could not be implemented.¹⁴ Gates snubbed Defence Ministry aides, refused to attend the welcome ceremony they had arranged for him and blew out the dinner in his honour. The DPJ leaders dug their heels in: 'We don't know when we'll make a decision, and we don't know what that decision will be'.¹⁵ In response, Obama's visit was pointedly restricted to a 24-hour stop-over, en route to the APEC summit in Singapore.

Tokyo officials in the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministries were now mounting a concerted 'rollback' against Hatoyama's position.¹⁶ The media

¹² Richard Bush, 'Okinawa and Security in East Asia', Brookings Institution, 10 March 2010.

¹³ Department of Defense, Joint Press Conference Tokyo, 21 October 2009.

¹⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, 18 October 2009.

¹⁵ 'US pressures Japan on military package', *Washington Post*, 22 October 2009; 'Gates gets grumpy in Tokyo', *Asia Times*, 28 October 2009.

¹⁶ 'Interview—Fukushima Mizuho zendaijin', *Shukan Kinyobi*, 18 June 2010, pp. 14–17.

took the same stand. Funabashi Yoichi, editor-in-chief of the centre-left flagship *Asahi Shimbun*, penned a series of articles in the aftermath of Gates's Tokyo visit: 'There is a limit to Washington's impatience—it would be very unfortunate for both countries if the Futenma issue became blown out of proportion.'¹⁷

Capitulation

DPJ ministers began to crack. Defence Secretary Kitazawa Toshimi was first to suggest that there was no real alternative to construction at Henoko.¹⁸ Next Foreign Minister Okada began to waver. Moving the Marines' base out of Okinawa was *kangaerarenai*—not an option. He did not endorse the Henoko project, but suggested Futenma's functions be shifted to the USAF base at Kadena. The proposal caused shock waves of disbelief in Okinawa: four-fifths of Kadena township was taken up by the USAF base already, and Okada was proposing its expansion. Okinawa's daily paper, the *Ryukyu Shimpo*, lamented the incapacity of the Hatoyama government to counter the 'intimidatory diplomacy' of Gates and the drift towards 'acceptance of the status quo of following the US'. If this was what the new team amounted to, 'then the change of government has been a failure'.¹⁹ DPJ Secretary General Ozawa meanwhile embarked on a spectacular visit to Beijing, taking five plane-loads of Japanese Diet members and businessmen with him. He went on to arrange a special meeting for the Chinese Vice President and heir apparent, Xi Jinping, with Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace.

Visibly wavering, Hatoyama announced in late December that the Futenma base decision would be taken by the end of May 2010. American officials were scathing. A Pentagon press secretary, Geoff Morell, replied bluntly that the US would 'not accept' a negative response. At the State Department, Kurt Campbell said the Japanese public 'would have to understand' the need to keep US forces in Okinawa.²⁰ By March, the Hatoyama government was floating plans for bases on alternative sites to Henoko, even larger and more complex than the original agreement. The US refused even to consider these face-saving diversions. Hatoyama was brutally snubbed at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation summit in

¹⁷ 'Relocating Futenma Base', *Asahi Shimbun*, 23 October 2009.

¹⁸ 'Hatoyama, key ministers split on Futenma', *Weekly Japan Update*, 29 October 2009.

¹⁹ *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 25 October 2009.

²⁰ 'Pentagon prods Japan on Futenma deadline', *Japan Times*, 8 January 2010.

Washington in April 2010. The *Washington Post* described him as ‘the biggest loser’ of all world leaders, ‘hapless’, ‘increasingly loopy’.²¹ When he tried to assure Obama at an official dinner that the May deadline would be met, the President rudely rebuffed him: ‘Can you follow through?’²² The Japanese were apparently ‘so taken aback’ by his tone that ‘they did not draw up a written record of the words exchanged’.²³

The collapse was ignominious. Within a week of his return from Washington Hatoyama had signalled his acceptance of the ‘necessary’ role of the Marines and their need to be in Okinawa.²⁴ Then he proposed an offshore, pier-like version of the Henoko base, which would be less of an environmental ‘sacrilege’ than one based on landfill. Washington remained scornfully silent. From the *Asahi Shimbun*, Funabashi issued an open letter to Hatoyama: ‘I truly hope that you make a bold decision’.²⁵ Finally, as his self-imposed deadline approached, Hatoyama surrendered completely and put his name to Koizumi’s 2006 Henoko design. On 28 May, the agreement was formally incorporated in a US–Japan Joint Statement, and on 2 June Hatoyama announced his resignation. Washington held out for Ozawa also to step down as Secretary General of the DPJ. After a few tense hours that came as well. Hatoyama’s successor Kan Naoto immediately rang Obama to assure him that he would honour the 28 May deal. The attempt at a ‘more equal’ relationship was over.

Island kingdom

What is the meaning of Okinawa within the larger frame of East Asian politics, and why has it proved such a thorn in Tokyo’s and Washington’s sides? The island is the largest of the Ryukyu chain, a broken necklace of coral reefs and rugged, volcanic islets that curves for some 700 miles across the East China Sea, from just below the tip of Kyushu in the north to Yonaguni in the far south, from which on a clear day one can see Taiwan. The Ryukyus were settled by the same mix of seafaring peoples that populated the southern islands of Japan, and the languages have a common parent-stock. Okinawa itself is about 70 miles long, and rarely more than

²¹ ‘Among leaders at summit, Hu’s first’, *Washington Post*, 14 April 2010.

²² ‘US distrust of Japan sharply accelerating’, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 19 April 2010.

²³ ‘Japan moves to settle dispute with US over base relocation’, *Washington Post*, 23 April 2010.

²⁴ *Ryukyu Shimpō*, 22 April 2010.

²⁵ Yoichi Funabashi, ‘Open letter to the Prime Minister’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 11 May 2010.

seven miles wide; it lies in the typhoon path, some 400 miles from the coast of China's Fujian Province, 800 miles south of Tokyo, roughly on the latitude of the Florida Keys. Granite slopes, green with sub-tropical vegetation, rise from clear seas; there are spectacular natural anchorages. The soil is poor, and what little cultivable land there is yields a hard living. Yet for centuries the island thrived as a way-station for maritime trade along the eastern Pacific. Intrepid Okinawan mariners ventured down to Indo-China and up to the Yellow Sea.

Envoys from the Ming Emperor had first reached Okinawa in 1372, and actively encouraged the island's trade. Ryukyuan leaders thenceforth participated in the rituals of the Chinese tribute system: travelling every two years to the Imperial court to make their kowtows, and be royally fêted in return, while taking advantage of the many opportunities for informal trading along the way. Tributary gifts were supposed to be native produce, but an exception was made for the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had so few resources of its own—sulphur, copper, shells—yet could offer such dazzling luxury imports. The warehouses in the harbour town of Naha stored rare timber, spices, incense, ivory and sugar from the Indies and beyond; swords, textiles, ceramics, Buddhist texts and bronzes from Korea or Japan to be shipped to China; brocades, medicinal herbs and minted coins going the other way.

The sailors brought stringed instruments and dances from Malacca and the Indies which the islanders adapted to their own legends. Ryukyuan masonry became a high art, the heavy local stone carved into sturdy yet graceful ramparts and bridges. Above the harbour, the palace complex of Shuri Castle commanded a panoramic view over the ocean and the distant islands. Its steep stone walls and ceremonial gateways enclosed lacquered reception halls, gardens, shrines and the private apartments of the king, his wives, courtiers and concubines. The leading English-language historian of the island, George Kerr, has described the sophisticated society created by a population of perhaps 100,000:

It was a toy state, with its dignified kings, its sententious and learned prime ministers, its councils and its numerous bureaus, its organization of temples and shrines and its classical school, its grades in court rank and its codes of law, all developed in an effort to emulate great China.²⁶

²⁶ George Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, revised edition, North Clarendon, VT 2000 [1958], pp. 15–16.

The Ryukyu Kingdom's trade with Japan—the only power in the region to defy Imperial China—was supervised on the Shogun's behalf by the Daimyo of Satsuma in southern Kyushu. This involved a second set of tributary relations. In the 1590s, the King of Ryukyu politely declined to support Hideyoshi's planned assault on Korea and China. As a reprimand, the Daimyo launched a hundred-strong armada of war junks against the island in 1609. His forces looted Shuri Castle and took King Sho Nei prisoner. The terms of his ransom were an annual tribute, amounting to nearly a quarter of the tiny kingdom's revenue, to be paid in perpetuity to the daimyo of Satsuma. In addition he would henceforth control all the Ryukyu Kingdom's overseas trade—and, after 1634, exploit it freely to circumvent the Tokugawa Shogunate's seclusion edicts, which closed off trade to the rest of Japan. The Ryukyuan turned to Peking for help, but the enfeebled and embattled late Ming court felt neither obliged nor able to inconvenience itself for a subordinate state.²⁷ Ryukyuan merchant shipping declined, weakened not only by Japanese rake-offs and the disruptive effects of the Manchu take-over in China, but by European penetration of the East China Sea, bringing with it missionaries, guns and demands for trade.

Imperial prefecture

By the early 1800s, Western interests—American, Russian, British, French—were converging on Japan, hoping to prise open its ports by diplomacy or force. The Ryukyu Kingdom was an obvious—and defenceless—launch pad for such an attack. In 1853 Commodore Perry dropped anchor in Naha, hoping to establish a military base. The White House thought it would be 'inconvenient and expensive' to maintain such an outpost, however, and the Commodore sailed on to Edo and a larger prize, having granted the little state recognition with the 1854 Ryukyu Kingdom–United States Friendship Treaty. From Japan's vantage point, too, securing Okinawa was the rational first step in a modernizing imperialist expansion that would soon encompass Formosa and Korea. Within five years of the Meiji Restoration, Tokyo had asserted its sovereignty over the Ryukyus and—through a show of arms on Formosa—extorted recognition of this from China. When Shuri demurred, a garrison force was dispatched to the island and a powerful Home Ministry bureau opened there. In 1879 the now-powerless Ryukyuan throne was abolished and an Okinawan Prefecture established, under the command of a

²⁷ Kerr, *Okinawa*, pp. 152–66.

Tokyo-appointed Governor. The deposed king was held under restraint in Tokyo until his death in 1902.²⁸

Imperial rule brought a levelling down for Okinawans as the local aristocracy was displaced by arrogant officials from the north. Land reform in the early 1900s abolished the communal village-allocation system in favour of private ownership, creating tens of thousands of landless labourers. Sugar-cane plantations, run by a monopoly corporation whose principal shareholders were the Imperial Household and the Mitsui and Mitsubishi Companies, came to dominate the local economy. Japanese modes of dress and speech were made compulsory; state Shinto and the Emperor cult were imposed; portraits of the Emperor and Empress hung in every public building. Eventually, in 1920, Ryukyuan representation in the Diet was put on the same footing as that of the rest of the country. Okinawans suffered severely during the inter-war period and Great Depression, which has passed into memory as the time of *sotetsu jigoku* or cycad hell, when people were reduced to eating the fruit or bark of the cycad, a palm-like but toxic tree. They played little role, however, in the militarization drive of the 1930s or invasion of China in 1937. The minimum height and weight requirements for the Imperial forces were above the average for Ryukyuan males, and during the Second World War they were largely confined to the labour corps.²⁹

Facing defeat, Hirohito ‘sacrificed’ Okinawa in a bid to preserve the Emperor System and the home islands, while treating for surrender terms. The Allied land assault was launched in April 1945: the ancient walls of Shuri Castle were subjected to continuous bombardment from air and sea for sixty days, while half a million US troops poured onto the island, five times the size of the defending force. To the Imperial Japanese Army, distraught Okinawans were either a nuisance—competing for scarce resources, hindering troop movements—or a threat, suspected of spying because of the incomprehensible dialect they spoke. In the most extreme cases, grenades were distributed and the people were called upon to sacrifice themselves in ‘collective suicides’. At the same time, many trying to hide in the island’s caves were incinerated by American flame-throwers. More than 200,000 people, half of them civilians, died in

²⁸ Kerr, *Okinawa*, pp. 360–72, 397.

²⁹ Kerr, *Okinawa*, pp. 414–5, 431–2, 424–8, 460–3. In April 1945 General Ushijima had 89,000 troops under his command on Okinawa, of whom only 4,575 were Ryukyuan.

the rain of fire and steel. After the cynical nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had secured an already prostrate Japan's unconditional surrender, Okinawa became 'an immense, neglected military dump':

Towns and villages were rubble heaps; tens of thousands lived in caves, tombs, lean-to shacks, or relief camps . . . Farmers became air-base labourers; fishermen became truck-drivers; the old aristocracy disappeared. Cast-off GI clothing, American soft drinks, cigarettes and canned goods supplied a new luxury trade for a totally impoverished people.³⁰

The memory of 1945 is seared into Okinawan identity and has shaped responses to the security agenda foisted upon the island ever since. Their outrage is especially stirred by attempts to sanitize history, as happened under Koizumi, by deleting from school textbooks their memories of the compulsory mass suicides under the bayonets of the Imperial Army, and the final orders from Tokyo to abandon all thought of survival. They learned, and refuse to forget, that neither the Japanese nor the American armed forces were there for their defence.

American possession

Okinawa's post-war history has been punctuated by what the Ryukyans know as *shobun*, or disposals: deals done over their heads which have determined their fate. In 1947 Hirohito, at American prompting, offered to 'sacrifice' the island a second time, suggesting to General MacArthur that the US might lease Okinawa on a '25, or 50-year, or even longer' basis, as a condition for the restoration of sovereignty over the 'rest' of Japan. The 1951 San Francisco 'Treaty of Peace' gave the US 'all powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction' over the territory and inhabitants of the Ryukyus and their territorial waters. By this time the Pentagon had already undertaken a vast military construction programme on Okinawa—air bases, supply depots, barracks, recreational facilities—for the Korean War; driving islanders off their land with 'bayonets and bulldozers'. The realities of US occupation—an arrogant Military Governor; American 'watchdogs' shadowing the local legislature—led to widespread demands by Okinawans for reversion to Japan.

The US–Japan Security Treaty of 1960, commonly known by its Japanese abbreviation, AMPO, perpetuated Okinawa's subjection to foreign command. The growing Japanese student movement and a revived left

³⁰ Kerr, *Okinawa*, p. 5.

had organized a mass campaign against it, and its passage through the Diet was tumultuous. The LDP Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke rammed the bill through the Lower House in the pre-dawn hours of 20 May, in the absence of the Opposition, as huge protests unfolded outside.³¹ The AMPO system extended beyond the Security Treaty, however. It included various forms of *mitsuyaku*—secret agreements—not least Tokyo’s assurance that ‘no prior consultation is required for US military vessels carrying nuclear weapons to enter Japanese ports or sail in Japanese territorial waters’.³² With the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still vivid in people’s minds, and that of the Daigo Fukuryu-maru incident in 1954—when Japanese tuna fishermen fell victim to radioactive ash from a US H-Bomb test at Bikini Atoll—still more recent, the LDP could not have survived if citizens had known it was allowing nuclear weapons into Okinawa.³³

A decade later, in 1972, Okinawa’s ‘reversion’ to Japan was occasion for a second *shobun*. By this time the huge network of US military bases on the island, together with some in mainland Japan, were being used as an important staging post for the war on Vietnam, in face of stormy protests. The 1969 Sato–Nixon Agreement was presented as an act of American benevolence: at long last, the restoration of Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa; but it came with numerous strings. Although Japan would now administer the Prefecture, the Sato–Nixon Agreement included a proviso that ‘reversion would be accomplished without affecting’ US efforts on behalf of South Vietnam. American bases would remain intact and the pre-eminence of US military interests entrenched.

The process of Okinawa’s ‘return’ to Japan in 1972 involved a triple deception. Firstly, instead of *henkan*—a giving back—it was actually a purchase, for which Tokyo paid Washington a sum of around \$685 million. Included

³¹ Kishi had served in the war-time Imperial government and was held as a Class-A war criminal, 1945–48, before the US helped restore him to one of the highest offices of state. He was forced to resign in the aftermath of AMPO’s ratification, and Eisenhower wanted to cancel a planned visit to Japan for fear of a hostile reception.

³² ‘Record of discussion, 6 January 1960’, US National Archives; quoted in *Akahata* editorial, *Japan Press Weekly*, 5 July 2009.

³³ LDP governments had long denied the existence of the *mitsuyaku*, even though documentary proof had emerged from the US archives. In 2009, however, the DPJ Foreign Minister Okada ordered a search of the archives for relevant materials. His committee’s findings, published in March 2010, confirmed three ‘understandings’, of which most important was that on nuclear weapons. Four former Foreign Ministry vice-ministers had already testified to their existence. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Iwayuru ‘mitsuyaku’ mondai ni kansuru chosa kekka’, 9 March 2010.

in this was \$70 million, supposedly to cover the cost of removing nuclear weapons from Okinawa. But as a Japanese official confessed last year, ‘We decided on the cost so as to be able to say, “Since Japan has paid so much, the nuclear weapons must have been removed.” We did it to cope with the opposition parties in the Diet.’³⁴ The real terms of the ‘return’ were carefully concealed. Though celebrated at the time as *kaku-nuki hondonami*—no nuclear weapons, the same as mainland Japan—and therefore a diplomatic triumph for Sato, it was actually neither. In addition, Japan now began to pay the Pentagon its ‘host nation support’ fee, amounting today to around \$4 billion a year. This ‘reverse rental’, of landlord to tenant, came to be known as *omoiyari*, or sympathy payment. Japanese goods were still given privileged access to American markets; but a fair proportion of the profits made there were directly recycled to the Pentagon. Where other countries tend to ‘permit’ American bases, often extracting substantial sums for so doing, Japan instead pays for the privilege.

Despite the nominal inclusion of Okinawa under the 1947 Constitution of Japan, with its guarantees of peace and human rights, bitter experience has taught the Okinawans that in practice the Security Treaty outweighs the Constitution: AMPO over Kempo. A fifth of the island’s land surface is now occupied by the US military. Among the largest sites are the USAF base at Kadena, hosting 18,000 Americans, with runways 3.7 km long: the launch pad for successive combat operations in Indo-China, the Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as aerial reconnaissance and refuelling missions; the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station in Ginowan, a town of 90,000 with a 2.7 km airstrip running through its centre; and the artillery ranges and training areas at Camp Hansen and Camp Schwab, adjacent to Nago, a town of 60,000. The presence of high-spending Americans transformed the political economy of the island, although it is still the poorest prefecture in Japan. But it brought with it the permanent roar of military aircraft, the dangers of helicopter crashes and misfired ordinance, and the coarseness of a soldiery still accorded semi-immunity under the AMPO Status of Forces agreement.

Clinton’s fix

The end of the Cold War raised hopes that Okinawa might, at last, be able to reap a ‘peace dividend’. In February 1995, however, Clinton’s

³⁴ ‘Cost to remove US nukes from Okinawa exaggerated to dupe public’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 13 November 2009. A detailed accounting of the entire sum involved remains to be made.



Key to Main US Military Installations

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|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------|----|------------------|
| 1 | Ie Jima Airfield | 11 | Army POL Depots | 21 | Naha Port |
| 2 | Yaedake Site | 12 | Camp Courtney | 22 | Makiminato Area |
| 3 | Okuma Centre | 13 | Camp McTureous | 23 | Camp Zukeran |
| 4 | Northern Training Area | 14 | Camp Shields | 24 | Camp Kuwae |
| 5 | Henoko Ammunition Depot | 15 | Ukibaru Jama Area | 25 | Army Depots |
| 6 | Camp Schwab | 16 | White Beach Area | 26 | Kadena Air Base |
| 7 | Camp Hansen | 17 | Tsuken Jima Area | 27 | Torii Site |
| 8 | Gimbaru Area | 18 | Awase Station | 28 | Sobe Site |
| 9 | Kin Beach Areas | 19 | Futenma Air Station | 29 | Yomitan Airfield |
| 10 | Tengan Pier | 20 | Engineer Office | 30 | Senaha Site |

Assistant Defense Secretary, Joseph Nye, produced a strategy document for the East Asia–Pacific region.³⁵ This repudiated the Bush Senior Administration’s plans for troop reductions and called for US forces to be maintained at Cold War levels of 100,000 troops in Japan and South Korea, with these allies also pressed to contribute more themselves. In a *Foreign Affairs* article, Nye justified a policy of ‘deep engagement’ for the post-Cold War era on the grounds that ‘rising powers create instability in the international state system’. A forward-based troop presence ‘ensures the US a seat at the table on Asian issues’ and ‘enables us to respond quickly to protect our interests, not only in Asia but as far away as the Persian Gulf’. For the foreseeable future, Japan and the Okinawa bases would serve as ‘the cornerstone of our security strategy for the entire region’.³⁶ The Governor of Okinawa at the time, Ota Masahide, remarked that Nye spoke of the island as if it were ‘American territory’.³⁷ The US’s East Asian bases, far from being liquidated, as people especially in Okinawa had grown to hope, were to be upgraded.

Within six months of the Nye Report, the Japan hands’ complacency was challenged by an eruption of protest on Okinawa itself. A particularly brutal assault—three US servicemen snatched a 12-year-old girl, duct-taped her eyes and mouth, and serially raped her—occasioned such outpouring of angry protest, not only throughout Okinawa but also in ‘mainland’ Japan, that for the first time the perpetrators were handed over to the Japanese authorities, and in due course sentenced and imprisoned. President Clinton, visiting Tokyo in April 1996, agreed that the US Marines would be moved out of Futenma; but he made the promise conditional on the construction of a new, alternative base.

Initially the Futenma Replacement Facility was to be a modest heliport, some 45 metres in length, located ‘off the east coast of Okinawa’. Tokyo soon specified that this meant the fishing port of Henoko, on Oura Bay, a site that the US Navy had been eyeing for decades. During the Vietnam War, the USAF had even started bombing the seabed in an effort to get rid of the ‘nuisance’ coral.³⁸ In fact the coral and marine resources in the Bay

³⁵ US Department of Defense, ‘United States Security Strategy in the East Asia-Pacific Region’, 27 February 1995.

³⁶ Joseph Nye, ‘The Case for Deep Engagement’, *Foreign Affairs*, July–August 1995.

³⁷ Ota Masahide, interview, Videonews, 11 March 2010.

³⁸ See ‘The Targeted Sea’, a documentary on the evolution of the Henoko site by Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting, October 2009, with English commentary by Satoko Norimatsu: *Asia-Pacific Journal*, on the Japan Focus website.

are of global importance. The internationally protected dugong graze on sea grasses in its waters, turtles come to rest and lay their eggs, and numerous protected birds, insects and animals thrive. A World Wildlife Fund study found an astonishing 36 new species of crab and shrimp in the area.³⁹ LDP governments produced one Futenma replacement plan after another, nearly all centring on Henoko and Camp Schwab, and each more elaborate than the one before. No expense was spared in cultivating and co-opting Okinawan political and business elites. An Open Letter from community leaders complained movingly that the American and Japanese governments ‘have changed their strategy for maintaining the base presence from using force to using money’:

This is very cruel treatment. The people of Okinawa are increasingly dependent on such money. The money has created a system which has corrupted our minds. It has taken away alternatives. The acceptance of US bases is seen as the only way to live . . . It is as if the Japanese government has made Okinawa a drug addict, and the US government takes full advantage of the addiction, in order to maintain its military presence.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, local opposition to the planned new base persisted. The people of Nago rejected it by a clear majority in a 1997 plebiscite, despite massive central government intervention. In a bizarre twist, Nago’s mayor announced that City Hall rejected the voters’ decision. From 1999, Nago City and Okinawan prefectural authorities adopted a position of ‘conditional acceptance’, although popular hostility to the various Henoko plans still ran strong. When environmental survey work in Henoko finally began in 2004 it was met by a protest ‘sit-in,’ both on land and in the water, so effective that Koizumi cancelled the plan in the run-up to the 2005 election. A year later, however, with the election behind him, Koizumi approved a new Futenma replacement plan: it would be land-based, with two 1.8km airstrips, joined in a V-shape, stretching out from Camp Schwab into Oura Bay. It included a deep-water naval port and a chain of helipads, scattered through the forest. It amounted

³⁹ *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 25 November 2009. A suit was launched in 2003 on behalf of the dugong in a San Francisco court. It ruled in January 2008 that the Defense Department had violated the National Historic Preservation Act by failing to take into account the effects on the dugong of a US base in Oura Bay. Hideki Yoshikawa, ‘Dugong Swimming in Uncharted Waters’, *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 7 February 2009.

⁴⁰ Miyazato Seigen and 13 others, ‘Open Letter to Secretary of State Clinton’, 14 February 2009, cited in my ‘Battle of Okinawa 2009’, *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 16 November 2009; Japanese text at ‘Nagonago zakki’, Miyagi Yasuhiro blog, 22 March 2009.

to a comprehensive hi-tech air, land and sea base, far larger and more multifunctional than the outdated Futenma. The cost was estimated at around \$16 billion.

But despite Koizumi's efforts, progress on the project was slow. By 2008 the environmental survey process was still incomplete and the opposition DPJ—increasingly articulate in its resistance to any new base and demanding that Futenma be shut down straight away—was far ahead of the governing LDP.⁴¹ Popular resistance on the periphery was beginning to set the agenda for a national debate. American officials, though never failing to state that the decision was entirely up to the sovereign government of Japan, were determined to pin down agreement before the LDP's warrant ran out. In May 2008 Bush's Deputy Defense Secretary Richard Lawless told the *Asahi Shimbun* that Washington needed 'top-down leadership' from Tokyo: 'Japan has to find a way to change its own tempo of decision-making, deployment, integration and operationalizing this alliance'.⁴² At a Tokyo conference in December 2008, Nye spelled out that any attempt to cancel the Indian Ocean refuelling mission, renegotiate the AMPO Status of Forces agreement or revise the Koizumi plan for Futenma–Henoko relocation would be seen by Congress as 'anti-American'.⁴³

In 2009 the Obama Administration picked up the baton. With few exceptions, the 'Japan specialists' of the Bush Administration were kept in place (many had been in service since the 1990s Clinton Administration).⁴⁴ As noted above, in February Secretary of State Clinton pushed through the misleadingly entitled 'Guam International Agreement', pledging Japan to build the new base at Henoko by 2014 and to step up the Self Defense Forces to a more forward role under US command. It was the culmination of a fifteen-year process, in accordance with the Nye framework. Clinton made clear that it was intended to pre-empt the outcome of the August 2009 election: 'The agreement that I signed today with Foreign Minister Nakasone is one between our two nations, regardless of who's

⁴¹ See the Democratic Party of Japan's 'Okinawa Vision 2008'.

⁴² *Asahi Shimbun*, 2 May 2008.

⁴³ *Asahi Shimbun*, 25 February 2009.

⁴⁴ Kurt Campbell, who conducted the Futenma negotiations under Bush, has become Obama's Deputy Secretary of State for East Asia; Wallace Gregson, Marine Commander in Okinawa under Bush, now heads the Defense Department's Asia-Pacific section; Kevin Maher, Consul-General in Okinawa under Bush, has become Director of the State Department's Office of Japan Affairs. Neither Nye nor Armitage hold official posts, but their influence is indisputable.

in power.⁴⁵ Within nine months of the DPJ government taking office, the combined efforts of the American imperial state and its relays in Japan's bureaucracy and media had proved her right.

Having caved in on Henoko, the DPJ proceeded to capitulate all along the line. Under pressure from the bureaucracy, Kan reversed the DPJ's fiscal policy and moved to raise consumption tax. Support for his government fell by 8 points overnight, and its talk of 'a strong economy, strong finances and strong welfare', rang hollow. The Hatoyama vision of fraternity and an autonomous East Asian Community evaporated, as traditional subservience to Washington returned. The distinctive policies that had underpinned its 2009 electoral triumph have vanished. The DPJ had been 'LDP-ized'.⁴⁶ The Kan government was duly punished by its voters in the July 2010 elections to the Diet's Upper House, with a 16 per cent swing against it. By comparison to the 2007 Upper House election, its share of the vote dropped from 40 per cent to 24 per cent, and from 23 million to 18 million ballots in the proportional sector. In Okinawa it did not dare to field a candidate at all. Occupying 103 seats in an Upper House of 242, it will scarcely be able to govern without some sort of alliance. There is now a distinct possibility of a 'left-right' coalition, as in the mid-1990s when the Socialist Party's Murayama served briefly as Prime Minister, having abandoned the Socialists' core policies. The differences between the two major parties are now minimal.

Outcomes

With Hatoyama's inglorious capitulation, Ozawa's forced resignation and Kan's pledge of submission to Washington, friendly trans-Pacific relations resumed. Once Kan had announced his determination to press ahead with the landfill plan at Oura Bay, he was rewarded by prime photo-time with Obama at the Toronto G-20 Summit. The smiling faces of the two leaders shaking hands on the deal were seen in Okinawa as nothing but 'a cover for the naked violence' that they were planning to direct against the island.⁴⁷ In Washington, a House of Representatives resolution expressed 'appreciation to the people of Japan, and especially on Okinawa', for their continued hosting of the US bases. This was too

⁴⁵ 'Clinton praises strong US-Japan ties', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 18 February 2009.

⁴⁶ As veteran economist Ito Mitsuharu put it: 'Kokoro ni kakutaru taikojiku o', *Sekai*, August 2010.

⁴⁷ Miyagi Yasuhiro, 'Yo ni mo kimyo na monogatari', *Nagonagu Zakki*, 29 June 2010.

much even for the conservative Prefectural Governor, who protested at such insensitivity to the ‘disappointment’ of the Okinawans at the deal Obama and Kan had negotiated over their heads.⁴⁸

From Washington’s perspective, this satisfying outcome also offers an opportunity to press forward with the longer-term project of integrating Japan’s highly equipped armed forces under US command. Already, Japan’s Ground SDF command has moved to Zama, outside Tokyo, where it is merged with US Army I Corps command; its Air SDF command has merged with that of the US Fifth Air Force at Yokota; and its Maritime SDF has long acted as a subsidiary to the Yokosuka-based US Seventh Fleet, regularly engaging in joint exercises under American direction. The chorus from Japan’s elites about the need to ‘repair the damage’ done by Hatoyama suggests that this may now move forward more swiftly. Michael Green, another Washington ‘Japan hand’ closely involved with formulating the 1995 Nye doctrine, recalled that preparations for the Clinton–Hashimoto 1996 Joint Security Declaration began under the supposedly dissident Murayama: ‘history suggests’ that this could be the moment for a new push. ‘The next generation of leaders in the DPJ is made up of realists who want a more effective Japanese role in the world and are not afraid to use the Self Defense Forces or to stand up to China or North Korea on human rights.’⁴⁹ However attractive to Washington the agreement to construct the Henoko base, the prospect of ‘peaceful’ Japan submitting its 240,000-strong armed forces to Pentagon direction must be even more so.

Yet resolve in Okinawa has only stiffened. While the Hatoyama government was floundering, the Okinawan Prefectural Assembly demanded unanimously that Futenma Marine Corps Air Station be closed.⁵⁰ Nago City elected a new mayor, who promised a break with the corrupt and dependent politics of past decades and declared that his city would not allow the construction of any new bases. In March and April 2010, all the town and city mayors followed suit. A mass rally of 90,000 called for Futenma’s unconditional closure and no new base at Henoko. Nago

⁴⁸ ‘Chiji, Nichibei ‘kansha’ ni fukaikan, kengikai daihyo shitsumon’, *Okinawa Times*, 26 June 2010.

⁴⁹ Michael J. Green, ‘Tokyo Smackdown’, 13 October 2009.

⁵⁰ ‘Kengikai, Futenma “kokugai kengai isetsu motomeru” ikensho kaketsu’, *Okinawa Times*, 24 February 2010. A resolution to the same effect had been passed by a majority in July 2008.

Mayor Inamine has said that there is ‘zero possibility’ of the May 2010 Agreement being implemented: ‘It simply will not happen.’ He described the Hatoyama capitulation as marking a ‘day of humiliation’ for the Ryukyus akin to that of April 1952, when the islands were offered to the US as part of the deal for restoration of Japanese sovereignty. A *Ryukyu Shimpo* survey found opposition to the new base running at 84 per cent. At the Henoko village sit-in, 87-year-old Muneyoshi Kayo declared that any monetary ‘thanks’ Tokyo might offer to sweeten the deal should be thrown into the sea.⁵¹ There is no precedent in modern Japanese history for an entire prefecture to unite in saying ‘No’ to the central state authorities. If the movement did not clash with Washington’s strategic agenda it would be acclaimed as an inspiration and given a colourful epithet by the Western media—‘*goya* revolution’, perhaps, after the Ryukyuan bitter melon. But not in Okinawa.

Sixty-five years after its unconditional surrender, the humiliating circumstances in which the terms of the US ‘alliance’ were imposed remain deeply impressed upon Japan’s institutional memory. I have defined it elsewhere as a client state: that is, one that enjoys the formal trappings of Westphalian sovereignty and independence, and is therefore neither a colony nor a puppet state, but which has internalized the requirement to give preference to ‘other’ interests over its own. Over the decades, thick webs of deception have grown around its surrendered sovereignty. Japan’s ruling elite, in place since the Meiji era, has had much to gain from the arrangement, in terms of its own political and economic security. From 1978, with Japan’s economy becoming competitive with America’s, it began to pay for the occupiers’ presence, embracing a strategem of ‘spontaneous servitude’.⁵² With the Cold War over, Germany renegotiated its Status of Forces agreement with the US, dramatically reducing the troop numbers there. Japan, by contrast, has pledged to pay for an expanded US military presence, not for defence against a Soviet threat but as a forward base for power projection across the region.

Terashima Jitsuro, an analyst close to Hatoyama—indeed once mooted as a DPJ foreign minister—has argued that the US–Japan security apparatus is today largely geared towards joint operations in America’s ‘war on terror’, from the Middle East to Central Asia:

⁵¹ ‘Kitai wa maboroshi, Okinawa okoru’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 29 May 2010.

⁵² Nishitani Osamu, ‘Jihatsuteki reiju o koeyo—jiritsuteki seiji e no ippo’, *Sekai* February 2010, p. 126.

From Japan's perspective, it is foolish to place itself in a framework where Islam is seen as a threat to Japan's security . . . In contrast to the US, there are no domestic pressures on Japan to support the Israeli side in the Israel–Palestine conflict. We must be aware of where Japan stands and realize there are things in the world that should be confronted jointly with the US and others that should not.⁵³

Terashima is well aware of the problems that stand in the way of an independent foreign policy. He has written of the mutual dependence between the 'Japan hands' in Washington, who 'make their living from US–Japan security', and the 'US hands' in Tokyo, who sing along in chorus. Recalling Lu Xun's description of the hollow expression worn by those Qing officials so accustomed to toadying to colonial powers that they have lost the capacity to think independently, he has charged that 'slave-faced expressions have become a permanent feature of the Japanese media'.⁵⁴ It will take a more determined leadership than Hatoyama's, and a deeper popular mobilization, if the orientation of Japan's foreign policy is to be altered. In the meantime, Okinawa continues to bear the main burden. In February 2009, Ryukyuan community leaders sent an Open Letter to Secretary of State Clinton, as she nailed down the agreement to land-fill Oura Bay. 'Okinawa, a small island, has lived under great stress for over sixty years', they wrote. 'The presence of US military bases has distorted not only the politics and economy of Okinawa, but also its society and people's minds and pride. We do not need to remind you that Okinawa is not your territory. Your 50,000 military members act freely as if this is their land, but, of course, it is not.'⁵⁵ The sit-in at Henoko continues.

⁵³ Terashima Jitsuro, 'The Will and Imagination to Return to Common Sense', *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 15 March 2010.

⁵⁴ Terashima Jitsuro, 'Zuno no ressun, 100, Nichibei domei wa "shinka" saseneba naranai', *Sekai*, August 2010.

⁵⁵ Miyazato and others, 'Open Letter'.