

THE ISSUE OF THE MARINE CORPS AIR STATION FUTENMA'S RELOCATION DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF JAPAN

Asmadi Hassan and Rohayati Paidi

Introduction

In 2006 the United States (US) and Japan signed a Bilateral Accord on Aligning U.S. Forces in Japan. Among the key points of the agreement was the agreement by both parties to the relocation of the US marines' air base (MCAS Futenma) in the heart of Ginowan to the less densely populated area of Henoko, in Nago City. The relocation of the military base into Okinawa was a prerequisite to the transfer of 8,000 out of 18,000 U.S. troops in Okinawa to Guam by 2014. It was also agreed that Tokyo will bear a total of USD 6.1 billion, out of a total cost of USD 10.2 billion for the transfer.

The agreement was a solution to the long and controversial U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Although the agreement was considered the best solution by the central government, dissatisfaction was still abound because majority of Okinawans wanted the MCAS Futenma to be relocated totally out of Okinawa or even Japan. This is proven in the Okinawa Times and Asahi Shimbun poll conducted in June 2009, which found that 68 per cent of residents was opposed to the MCAS Futenma relocation into Okinawa. The Ryukyu Shimpo/Mainichi Shimbun poll in 2009 also found 70 per cent of the Okinawans oppose the construction of U.S. military base in Okinawa to replace MCAS Futenma in Ginowan. This argument was further strengthened when Hirokazu Nakaima, with his stand against the relocation of MCAS Futenma into Okinawa, won the gubernatorial election. Furthermore, majority members of the Okinawa assembly as well as mayors in Okinawa demanded an immediate removal of MCAS Futenma from Okinawa.¹

The Okinawans' hope to relocate MCAS Futenma out of the prefecture was revived when the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) promised in the lower house election campaign in August 2009 to move out the base at least from Okinawa or probably out of Japan should they be successful in their bid to form the government.² Their promises were significant pulling factors in the DPJ acquiring a huge support which lead to their win in the election and success in forming the government for the first time since its inception in 1998. However, until 2012 when the

¹ Eric Johnson, "Opposition to Futenma Move Won't Go Away", *The Japan Times*, 19 October 2009.

² "Hatoyama's Real Sin is Dashing Voters' Hopes", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 Jun 2010: "PM Chains himself to Futenma", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

DPJ administration ended, the controversial problem regarding the relocation of MCAS Futenma remained unresolved and proved to be persistent.³

This article looks at the DPJ administration policy on Okinawa, especially on the relocation of MCAS Futenma under three prime ministers, Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan and Noda Yoshihiko. Researchers argue the significance of national security interests under Japan-U.S. security agreements in explaining why DPJ's prime ministers were not ready to move MCAS Futenma out of Japan. Furthermore, Japan is bound by its constitution to curb the possession of military assets for the purpose of war. In the meantime Japan was facing a threat from neighbouring countries namely China and North Korea. For example, the threat from China as a result of the territorial dispute over Senkaku Islands and military modernization. At the same time, Japan was concerned about North Korea's massive nuclear weapons development which may potentially bring instability to the region.

The Necessity of Relocating MCAS Futenma Out of Okinawa

Many factors motivated Okinawans to demand the removal of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. First was the safety of residents in the prefecture.⁴ A landmark tragedy which served as a reminder of the dangers of U.S. military presence in Okinawa occurred on August 13, 2004 when a helicopter belonging to the U.S. marines crashed in the Okinawa International University campus, located adjacent to MCAS Futenma in Ginowan.⁵ The crash destroyed the university's administrative building and as a consequence and in order to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy, residents demanded the closure of the marine air force base and consequently, for it to move out of Okinawa. Furthermore, MCAS Futenma has long been labelled as a disaster in waiting with regards to errant landing and/or take-offs, with 45 thousand aircraft take-offs and landings occurring each year in an area surrounded by houses and shops.⁶ Errors in military aircraft landings and departures would potentially have terrible consequences.

Rather than a sole occurrence, this was actually part of a string of tragedies involving U.S. forces in Okinawa, triggering outrage amongst the residents. The most horrendous tragedy happened on September 4, 1995 in which a 12-year-old girl was kidnapped and raped by three U.S. military officers.⁷ Although the U.S. military apologized for the incident, deep concerns persist.

Second, discontent among the residents was due to land acquisition for the construction of U.S. military bases. Fertile lands for agriculture have been destroyed to give way for the construction of U.S. military bases.⁸ In addition, the Chairman of Okinawa's house of assembly, Zenshin Takamine stressed that Okinawans have to deal with the burden of stress and anxiety which exceeded levels considered tolerable. Okinawa nowadays hosts in excess of 75 per cent of the total land used by U.S. military bases and nearly half of the 50,000 troops in Japan. At the same time the Okinawa area

³ "Hatoyama's Real Sin is Dashing Voters' Hope", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 June 2010; "PM Chains himself to Futenma", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

⁴ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

⁵ A part of the destroyed building was not cleaned but remain as a memorial for the Okinawans, authors' research trip to the memorial on 18 December 2013.

⁶ George Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa", *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2000, p 36.

⁷ George Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa", p 39.

⁸ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013.

accounts for only 0.6 per cent of the total area of Japan. Out of this relatively small land bank, almost 20 percent of Okinawa is occupied by the U.S. military base. Takamine also slammed the U.S. over pressure on Japan to accept the agreement made in 2006, making claims of Okinawa being a colonial land for the U.S. A poll conducted by the media exhibited a high percentage of Okinawans opposing the relocation of the base into Okinawa. As described above, in June 2009, a poll conducted by the Asahi Shimbun and Okinawa Times found that 68 per cent of Okinawans opposed the relocation of MCAS Futenma into Okinawa compared to only 18 per cent who agreed. Respondents who objected asserted that not only will the transfer to Henoko fail to reduce the overall burden on Okinawans, it can also damage the rich marine life in the islands.

Third, the Okinawans were irritated by the noise caused by military aircraft and weapons during military training.⁹ A study on noise pollution in Okinawa by the Weighted Equivalent Continuous Perceived Noise Level (WECPNL) revealed a figure of 75, higher than the noise from a subway train.¹⁰ The noise prompted the High Court to order the central government to pay 369 million yen in compensation to the 390 residents living near MCAS Futenma in 2010.¹¹ In November 2012 the residents living in close proximity to Futenma proceeded in suing the central government of 470 million yen due to the excessive noise emanating from the military base. The legal actions taken show that residents can no longer tolerate the continued noise pollution in Ginowan. It also serves as a strong indication of the demand for an immediate relocation of the military base out of Okinawa.

Fourth, the removal of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa was backed up by legislation. Article 95 of the Japanese constitution stipulates that any special laws to be adopted in a local entity shall not apply without the approval of the majority of local voters, which deemed construction of new military bases illegal without consent. The central government must therefore get an approval from the governor of Okinawa prior to building a runway in Haneko. The Governor of Okinawa, Hirokazu Nakaima who gained the trust of the Okinawans to address these problems pointed out however that if the central government and the U.S. insist on relocation to Haneko, a situation of unrest entails as majority Okinawans has refused to give consent.

Finally, the environment was also a significant factor for the removal of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. Since 2003, activists have been campaigning against Henoko as a new base for U.S. military. A group consisting of Americans and Okinawans filed a suit against the U.S. Department of Defence in a district court in San Francisco. The group insisted that the plan to build a military base in Henoko which included land reclamation will destroy the habitat of protected animals under the Japanese Register of Cultural Properties such as Dugong.¹² However, the 2003 lawsuit which focused on the preservation of the dugong habitat failed to halt the Henoko U.S. military base construction. Between 2003 and 2008 there were clashes between the central government and kayak-using local activists adamant on preventing the central government from conducting research. The local activists received support from Greenpeace, Union for the Conservation of Nature and WWF in their opposition of the construction of new military bases in Henoko. The groups opposing the relocation insisted on being responsible in

⁹ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa. The authors also felt the level of noise pollution during the research trip, near the base.

¹⁰ "Residents Near Futenma Base Files Noise Lawsuit", *The Japan Times*, 9 November 2012.

¹¹ "MCAS Futenma Noise Compensation Unchallenged", *The Japan Times*, 14 August 2010.

¹² Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

ensuring the dugong habitat in Henoko maintained, so that the next generation would be able to recognize them.¹³

The Administration of Yukio Hatoyama (September 16, 2009- Jun 2, 2010)

During his visit to Okinawa in 2008 for the next lower house election campaign, Yukio Hatoyama promised to Okinawans that should the DPJ manage to form a government and he himself made prime minister, he would move MCAS Futenma at least out of the prefecture or out of Japan entirely.¹⁴ Hatoyama's statement was reiterated by DPJ's senior leader, Seiji Maehara who claimed that U.S. presidential candidate, Barack Obama was willing to review the 2006 agreement if he became U.S. president.¹⁵ Hatoyama and Maehara's promises were the hope for Okinawans who demanded the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa.

In 2009 Hatoyama repeated his promise to relocate MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa when the lower house election campaign reaches its peak.¹⁶ In the manifesto, DPJ insisted to review the Japan-U.S. relations, particularly in term of relations between the two countries as equal partners based on the principle of mutual trust.¹⁷ To achieve the aim, DPJ insisted that the 50 years old Japan-U.S. Security Treaty must be re-evaluated, especially in terms of U.S. military presence in Japan.

Compared to the DPJ which asserted that the base should be moved out of Okinawa or entirely out of Japan, the stand of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in supporting the relocation of MCAS Futenma to other areas in Okinawa was assumed with the signing of an agreement in 2006. DPJ's firm stand on the relocation problem became a significant factor which contributed to the DPJ's great victory in the election with a total of 308 seats out of 480. However, upon his appointment as prime minister, Hatoyama realized the importance of the U.S. military presence in Japan as a strategic deterrence from potential threats in the region.

This can be proved in some of his speeches and statements about the presence of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa. For example, on October 7, 2009 he hinted the possibility of the central government to accept the 2006 agreement to relocate MCAS Futenma within Okinawa, not out of the prefecture as promised. He also pointed out that the promises made in the manifesto were mere promises which can potentially change over time.¹⁸

Recognizing the importance of the U.S. military presence in Japan as part of a deterrence strategy, Hatoyama suggested several sites as an alternative to the Henoko. Among them were the construction of artificial islands near White Beach in the Uruma Katsuren Peninsula in East Okinawa and Tokunoshima in Kagoshima Prefecture.¹⁹

¹³ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

¹⁴ *Saitei demo kengai, dekiru koto nara kokugai he*, Refer to Jinbo Ken, "Gaikou.Anpo: Rinen Tsuikyū Kara Genjitsu Rousen He" in Nihon Saiken Inshiatibu (cho), *Minshuto Seiken Shippai no Kensho*, Tokyo: Chukou Shinsho, 2012, pp 131.

¹⁵ Seiji Maehara was later appointed as Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism as well as minister responsible to Okinawa and Northern region during Hatoyama's administration.

¹⁶ Hisayoshi Ina, "Will Tokyo End Up Using Legislative Step to Settle Futenma Base Issue?", *The Nikkei Weekly* 12 December 2011.

¹⁷ Jinbo Ken, "Gaikou.Anpo: Rinen tsuikyū kara genjitsu rousen he", p 126.

¹⁸ "Shift on Futenma?", *The Japan Times*, 8 October 2009.

¹⁹ "Air Base Issue Frying Nerves", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

However, both of the suggested sites drew objections from residents of Okinawa²⁰ and Kagoshima. In fact, more than half of Tokunoshima's residents marched against the proposal.²¹ This prompted Hatoyama to retain Haneko as the most appropriate site for the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa.

The reality regarding the situation is further consolidated when Foreign Minister, Katsuya Okada insisted that the MCAS Futenma must remain in Okinawa.²² However, Okada disagreed with the plan to relocate to Henoko but suggested to combine the MCAS Futenma with the Kadena U.S. Air Force. While on his visit to Nago City, Okada failed to clarify the plan by the central government to solve the problem and instead stated his agreement with the Japan-U.S. agreement in 2006 to maintain the MCAS Futenma in Okinawa.

In order to continue the construction of MCAS Futenma in Henoko, Okada stressed that the DPJ's election manifestoes were not specifically to relocate MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa, but to review the U.S. military presence in Japan. During his visits, Okada cancelled his earlier plan to incorporate MCAS Futenma into Kadena.²³ Meanwhile, in an interview with the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan, Okada reiterated the common view that he had with the Prime Minister; that of the significance of the Japan-U.S. alliance in Japanese foreign policy.²⁴ Thus, the presence of U.S. troops is significant in ensuring the security of Japan.

In his first visit as the Prime Minister to Okinawa on May 4, 2010, Hatoyama put forth the assertion of moving MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa.²⁵ Whereas on May 27, 2010, Hatoyama stressed that the relocation MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa will become a reality if other prefectures are willing to accept the base.²⁶ This proved to be an impossible course of action as no prefectures will offer a relocation site for U.S. military bases in their respective prefectures. The relocation site thus remains in Okinawa.

Hatoyama and DPJ senior leaders' stand on the relocation issue were at odds with the other members of the coalition government, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the People's New Party (PNP). Representatives of the coalition government, Tomoko Abe of SDP and Mikio Shimoji of the PNP stated during a discussion with Chief Cabinet Secretary, Hirofumi Hirano at the Prime Minister's Office that they were against the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. The two representatives insisted that the central government need to seek suitable locations out of Okinawa instead of relocating to White Beach as proposed by Hatoyama, stating that this move will not lessen the burden of the Okinawans.²⁷ PNP also insisted that the site hosting the MCAS Futenma

²⁰ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

²¹ "PM's Dithering Fuels Distrust of Politics", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 6 May 2010; "Haunting Hatoyama", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 26 April 2010.

²² Gavan McCormick, "Yet another 'Battle of Okinawa'", *The Japan Times*, 11 November 2009.

²³ Miya Tanaka, "Okada's Inconclusive Visit Irks Okinawans", *The Japan Times*, 7 December 2009.

²⁴ Alex Martin, "DPJ Mustn't Lose Reform Momentum: Okada", *The Japan Times*, 8 October 2009.

²⁵ "PM Chains himself to Futenma", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

²⁶ Tomohiro Yara, "Don't Victimize Okinawa over Adrift Security Policy", *The Japan Times*, 2 October 2010.

²⁷ "DPJ's Allies Oppose White Beach Option", *The Japan Times*, 1 April 2010.

must be returned to Okinawans after 10 years of the closure, as well as to move out all U.S. marines within 15 years.²⁸

Hatoyama's decision to keep MCAS Futenma in Okinawa caused the SDP to withdraw from the coalition along with the dismissal of their president, Mizuho Fukushima from the post of Minister of State for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, Social Affairs and Gender Equality in the Hatoyama administration.²⁹ Fukushima's dismissal was the result of her refusal to sign to pass the cabinet resolution in relocating MCAS Futenma from Ginowan to Henoko.³⁰

In April 2010, an estimated 90,000 Okinawans along with several politicians gathered to demand the removal of MCAS Futenma from Okinawa. Most of the 41 municipal mayors in Okinawa along with political parties that opposed the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa participated in the rally.³¹ The governor of Okinawa, Nakaima who was one of the participants demanded the central government to remove MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. His assertion was that the Okinawans has been overburdened with the responsibility of hosting in excess of 75 per cent of the total use of land allocated for U.S. troops in Japan and the placement of almost half of the 50,000 U.S. troops in the country. Nakaima also urged the other prefectures to share some of the burden by allowing military bases to be removed to their area.

Hatoyama's failure to deliver on his promise resulted in the decline of his popularity from 75 per cent³² right after being elected to less than 20 per cent.³³ The poll conducted by Nikkei Inc.- TV Tokyo Corp. on April 23-25, 2010 revealed a mere 24 per cent³⁴ support, and on May 28-30, 2010 showed that the number had decreased to only 22 per cent.³⁵ Similarly, Daily Yomiuri in its June 2010 poll discovered a continued decrease of support towards Hatoyama in which only 19 per cent was recorded.³⁶ Not only did he lose support, but under the Hatoyama administration, the Japan-U.S. relationship deteriorated due to the absence of a solution on the issue of MCAS Futenma.

Hatoyama eventually resigned after 266 days³⁷ or less than nine months in office. His resignation was due to criticisms over his failure to deliver the promises made during the election campaign to relocate MCAS Futenma at least out of Okinawa.³⁸ Hatoyama's failure was very disappointing to many including the Okinawa Governor, Nakaima who trusted his capability to relocate the U.S. military bases. In fact, before Hatoyama resigned, he held a joint press conference with a U.S. representative stating that the plan to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko will remain as per the signed

²⁸ "Futenma issue twists and turns", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 15 March 2010.

²⁹ "Hatoyama's Dithering Caused Coalition Crack", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1 June 2010.

³⁰ Jun Hongo, "Hatoyama Quits as Prime Minister", *The Japan Times*, 3 Jun 2010; "Futenma KO's Fukushima", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 31 May 2010; "Obama -Search using:Obama Nod' Prompted Fukushima Dismissal", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 31 May 2010.

³¹ "Okinawan Rally Against Keeping Base", *The Japan Times*, 26 April 2010.

³² Mai Iida, "DPJ's Second Wind Worries Rivals", *The Japan Times*, 1 July 2010.

³³ Jun Hongo, "Hatoyama Quits as Prime Minister", *The Japan Times*, 3 June 2010.

³⁴ "PM's Dithering Fuels Distrust of Politics", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 6 May 2010.

³⁵ "In with an Approval Rating Bang, out with a Whimpe", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 June 2010.

³⁶ "Approval Rate for Hatoyama Cabinet Hits New Low of 19%", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1 June 2010.

³⁷ "Kan Steps into Raging Tempests", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 June 2010.

³⁸ John Brinsley and Isabel Reynolds, "DPJ Blows Chance to Establish Two Party Rule", *The Japan Times*, 18 December 2012.

agreement in 2006. The U.S. maintained its stand that regardless of whoever is at the helm, the Japanese government must honour the agreement because it was made between governments, not politicians.³⁹ This is crucial in order to maintain the mutual trust between two governments.⁴⁰

The Administration of Naoto Kan (4 June 2010-26 August 2011)

Hatoyama's unfulfilled promise became a thorn in the flesh for his successor, Naoto Kan. Kan who was elected on June 4, 2010, needed to solve the problem of relocation of MCAS Futenma wisely in order to restore the DPJ's credibility. However, Hatoyama's unfulfilled promise left a detrimental impact on the DPJ.⁴¹ An example of this would be when the DPJ decided not to put up candidates in the upper house election in July 2010 in Okinawa due to the lack of support.⁴² In fact, the MCAS Futenma relocation problem had actually worsen under the Hatoyama administration, and continued in similar fashion under Kan's administration.

In his speech as Prime Minister in the Japanese Diet, Kan stressed that the relocation of MCAS Futenma was a major challenge in his cabinet.⁴³ Based on the speech, it can be concluded that Kan was determined to focus on solving the MCAS Futenma problem in his administration while restoring Okinawans' trust for the DPJ.

On the other hand, the selection of Kan as Prime Minister was considered the best opportunity to start over relations between the central government and Okinawa, as well as Japan-U.S. relations. As described above, Japan-U.S. relations was at its worst during the Hatoyama administration owing in large part to his promise to relocate MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. After taking over the administration, Kan's policy tends to restore to the normal Japanese foreign policy, particularly to have good relations with the U.S.

Kan's administration started off with his admission of the Japan-U.S. relationships being the main axis of Japan's foreign policy while at the same time committing to ease the Okinawans' burden in hosting the U.S. military bases.⁴⁴ Kan's strategy was to continue the relocation process of MCAS Futenma to Henoko as he mentioned to Nakaima on June 15, 2010 as well as to transfer 8000 U.S. troops from Okinawa to Guam. In fact, Kan adopted the 2006 agreement by Tokyo and Washington.⁴⁵

Kan's decisions disappointed the Okinawans. Nakaima stressed that the relocation of MCAS Futenma into Okinawa is still very difficult to implement due to the objections by Okinawans and himself.⁴⁶ In the mean time a number of Okinawans who used to support the DPJ cannot decide which party to vote in the upper house election in July 2010 as disclosed by *The Japan Times* in an interview with female voters in the district

³⁹ "Futenma Deal 'will be Respected': Pentagon", *The Japan Times*, 3 June 2010.

⁴⁰ "Delayed Futenma Decision Posing Multiple Crises", 14 December 2009.

⁴¹ "Kan Steps into Raging Tempests", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 June 2010.

⁴² "No Okinawa Candidate", *The Japan Times*, 16 June 2010; Mariko Yasumoto, "Hatoyama Legacy Bedevils DPJ in Okinawa", *The Japan Times*, 8 July 2010.

⁴³ "Kan Hints He Won't be Signing Off on Futenma Plan for Months", *The Japan Times*, 3 August 2010; Itaru Oishi, "Futenma Threatens to Fade Smiles", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 5 July 2010.

⁴⁴ "Mr. Kan States his Approach", *The Japan Times*, 12 June 2010.

⁴⁵ "Japan must be Firm with Russia, China", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 22 November 2010.

⁴⁶ "Futenma Plan Firm, Kan Tells Nakaima", 16 June 2010.

of Naha. An example would be one 63 years old Okinawan woman, who initially put her trust for the DPJ to change the situation in Okinawa but grew frustrated with the party's inability to fulfil its promise, consequently making her undecided on which party to vote for in the election. Meanwhile, an Okinawan man, Masatsugu Kitano in an interview expressed his cynical view of the DPJ by saying the party talked big but cannot deliver its promise.⁴⁷ Similarly, in an interview with the Okinawans during a research field trip, researchers found that the respondents in Okinawa insisted that they were neglected in the decision making process related to the relocation of MCAS Futenma by the DPJ.⁴⁸

Hence, in order to win in the upper house elections in 2010 all opposition candidates stood against the relocation to Henoko. For example Aiko Shimajiri; an incumbent from the LDP, Hiroji Yamashiro; an independent candidate supported by the SDP and Tadayuki Ijyu representing the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) all opined that the MCAS Futenma should be moved out of Okinawa.⁴⁹

On June 23, 2010 in a meeting with Nakaima, Kan stressed that the central government will find ways to reduce the Okinawans over burden for hosting U.S. military bases. However at the same time he was not willing to sever close relations with the U.S. Therefore Kan remained on course for the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa despite protests from the Okinawans. To calm the situation, in his speech in front of 5,500 people at the Peace Memorial Park in Itoman City, Kan apologized to the Okinawans because of over presence of U.S. military bases in the prefecture. He also expressed appreciation for the sacrifices of the Okinawans that has contributed in helping maintain the overall security of Japan and the Asia Pacific region.⁵⁰

On June 27, 2010, in a meeting with Obama at the G20 Summit in Toronto, Canada, both nations' premier leaders agreed that the Japan-U.S. alliance was the foundation for the security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. During the meeting, Kan also agreed to resume the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko as per the 2006 agreement.⁵¹ Similarly, in a meeting between Defence Minister, Yoshimi Kitazawa and his U.S. counterpart, Robert Gates on January 13, 2011, they also emphasized the importance of cooperation for both countries⁵² in facing the threat of North Korea and China.⁵³

In order to strengthen the policy on Okinawa, on September 17, 2010 in a cabinet reshuffle, Kan appointed Foreign Minister, Seiji Maehara to replace Okada. Maehara is known as pro-U.S. and was against China's military modernization and was expected to help solve the problem of relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa. Furthermore, he realized that close ties with the U.S. needs to be improved since China's military modernization must be balanced by U.S. presence. The appointment of Maehara reflected Kan's seriousness to solve the MCAS Futenma relocation problem. On October 13, 2010,

⁴⁷ John Brinsley, Isabel Reynolds, "DPJ Blows Chance to Establish Two Party Rule", *The Japan Times*, 18 Desember 2012.

⁴⁸ Interview with Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

⁴⁹ Mariko Yasumoto, "Hatoyama Legacy Bedevils DPJ in Okinawa", *The Japan Times*, 8 July 2010.

⁵⁰ "Kan Apologizes for U.S. Base Burden", *The Japan Times*, 24 June 2010.

⁵¹ "Mr. Kan Meets Mr. Obama", *The Japan Times*, 30 Jun 2010; Itaru Oishi, "Futenma Threatens to Fade Smiles", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 5 July 2010.

⁵² "Kan, Obama Agree on Futenma", *The Japan Times*, 29 June 2010.

⁵³ "Defense Chiefs talk East Asia", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 17 January 2011.

Nakaima visited Maehara and demanded for the removal of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa since the central government did not have an acceptable proposal. However Maehara insisted that Okinawa continue to host U.S. military bases.⁵⁴

On January 21, 2011 the Chief Secretary of the Cabinet and minister in charge of Okinawa, Yukio Edano visited Okinawa. The visit was also an attempt to resolve the relocation issue as well as to persuade the Okinawans to accept the central government's proposal, particularly with regards to the 2006 Japan-U.S. agreement.⁵⁵ Edano persuaded Okinawans by suggesting economic growth assistance and a new special law related to the development of Okinawa. Edano also mentioned the significance of the U.S. military's presence for the peace and security of Japan and the surrounding region.⁵⁶

In order for the construction of military bases to materialise, the Kan administration agreed to build two runways at the new relocation site in Henoko. In addition, both countries agreed to work together to design the runways and on other technical aspects.⁵⁷ This was evident when in a press statement after a meeting in Washington on June 21, 2011, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defence Secretary, Robert Gates and their counterparts from Japan, Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto and Defence Minister Toshimi Kitazawa insisted that the relocation of MCAS Futenma will be completed after 2014.⁵⁸ An agreement was also reached in which two V-shaped track will be built in the coastal area of Okinawa and the initial agreement which stated 2014 as the final year of the transfer was cancelled, but rather the relocation is to be completed earliest possible after 2014.⁵⁹

On August 26, 2011 Kan resigned as Prime Minister and was replaced by Yoshihiko Noda. MCAS Futenma relocation problems persisted despite the change in the Prime Minister at the helm of the administration happening twice.

The Administration of Yoshihiko Noda (September 2, 2011- December 2012)

As Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda adopted policies which inclined towards the continuation of his predecessor's which aims to restore the close diplomatic relations with the U.S.⁶⁰ In the meantime Noda continued to reduce tensions with Okinawans due to the unresolved issue of the MCAS Futenma relocation. His stand is made clear by his statements in relation to the MCAS Futenma relocation problems in Okinawa.

On the diplomatic front, Noda maintains that strengthening relations with the U.S. was significant in his administration, following Japan's increasingly strained relations with neighbouring countries such as China and North Korea. As described earlier, there was tension in Tokyo- Beijing relations over territorial dispute regarding the islands of Senkaku. For example in 2010, Japanese authorities arrested Chinese fishermen who allegedly intruded into the Senkaku Islands area. China responded by suspending ministerial-level meetings as well as cultural relations between the

⁵⁴ "In a Nutshell, it's Okinawa's Wish vs. National Interest", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 8 November 2010.

⁵⁵ "Edano on Same Kan Futenma Page", *The Japan Times*, 22 January 2011.

⁵⁶ "Hatoyama had no Futenma Relocation Plan", *The Japan Times*, 14 February 2011.

⁵⁷ "Futenma Replacement Runway Plan OK'd", *The Japan Times*, 30 April 2011.

⁵⁸ Japan, U.S. Can't Manage to Shake Futenma Headache", *The Japan Times*, 23 June 2011.

⁵⁹ "Gist of Bilateral Security Statement", *The Japan Times*, 23 June 2011.

⁶⁰ Shuhei Kuromi and Takashi Imai, "Many Hurdles in Rebuilding Alliance", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 7 February 2012.

two countries. China also cancelled deliveries of rare earths to Japan. The Japanese government finally relented and released the fishermen. Researchers argue that events such as these serve as a form of warning to Japan to strengthen the Japan-U.S relations in order to balance China's military strength. Therefore it was significant for Japan to maintain U.S. military presence in Japan.⁶¹ Retention of MCAS Futenma via relocation to Henoko was significant to restore good relationship between the two countries.

In order to improve diplomatic relations with the U.S. as well as to reduce the burden of Okinawans as a result of the U.S. military presence, on September 19, 2011 Noda instructed Foreign Minister, Koichiro Genba to talk to U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Through this discussion both parties agreed to carry on with the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa as per the 2006 agreement. At the same time Genba called on Hillary to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Okinawa. Both countries also agreed to strengthen security relations for the stability of the Asia-Pacific region with perceived threat possibly coming from surrounding countries. To restore U.S. confidence in Japan, Genba underlined the fact that under the Noda administration, relations with the U.S would be the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy.⁶²

While in his visit to New York to attend a meeting at the United Nations (UN), Noda utilized the opportunity to express his pleasure to be able to have good relations with Obama. In a press conference, Noda stressed the importance of relocating MCAS Futenma into Okinawa and solving strong local opposition surrounding the effort. Noda also reiterated the significance of the deterrence strategy adopted by Japan in balancing the military modernization of China and North Korea and also mentioned about easing the burden of Okinawans.⁶³

On October 25, 2011, Noda, Gemba, and Minister of Defence Yasuo Ichikawa in their talks with U.S. Defence Secretary, Leon E. Panetta in Tokyo agreed that MCAS Futenma must promptly be moved to Henoko as has been agreed in 2006. While on February 3, 2012, Gemba reiterated that the relocation to an area of lesser population density was still the best option.⁶⁴ However, in order to implement the agreement, prior approval from the governor was necessary and that is a major obstacle faced by Noda.⁶⁵

To obtain the consent of Okinawans, particularly Nakaima, Noda repeatedly stressed that the relocation to Henoko will ease the burden on Okinawans. This is due to the fact that the agreement will pave the way for the withdrawal of some U.S. troops from the prefecture. The central government will reciprocate the consent given by offering assistance through its economic development plan for Okinawa. Since the return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, the central government had four 10-years economic development plans for Okinawa. The next plan will run up to 2022 and involve funding for multiple public projects. Over the last decade, the central government has extended a total of 2.7 trillion yen to Okinawa in which 940 billion yen was utilised for central government public projects, 1.2 trillion for prefectures and the remainder, small

⁶¹ Hiroyuki Akita, "Security Policy too Vital to Trifle with; Parties must put Aside Partisan Games, Tackle Key Issues like Futenma", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 20 July 2010.

⁶² "Clinton Reaffirm Futenma Base Relocation", *The Japan Times*, 21 September 2011.

⁶³ "Noda Claims Successful Diplomatic Debut", *The Japan Times*, 25 September 2011.

⁶⁴ "Japan Worried over U.S.'s Latest Troop Relocation Plans", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 6 February 2012; "Government Announces Marine Move", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 28 April 2012.

⁶⁵ "Relocation of Futenma Air Station: U.S Defense Secretary Urges Japan to Move as soon as possible on Application Procedures for the Henoko Landfill", *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 26 Oktober 2011; "Leave Futenma Base as is? Not an Option", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 7 November 2011.

public projects in 41 cities, towns and villages. The public projects resulted in various improvements namely the upgrading of the Naha airport runways which enabled the airport to be a major international cargo hub and tourist centre.⁶⁶

In September 2011, immediately after having been entrusted with the premiership, Noda visited Okinawa for the first time and insisted that the central government will remain with the original agreement reached in 2006. He promised however, that the MCAS Futenma will not remain in Ginowan but rather to be relocated to other areas to ease the burden on Okinawans.⁶⁷ During his visit, Noda attempted to address the protest by Okinawans by explaining the detailed plan of the central government, the relocation to Henoko and the transfer of some U.S. troops from Okinawa to Guam.

Noda's visit came within a week after the visit by Defence Minister, Naoki Tanaka to Okinawa to persuade the governor to agree with the relocation plan to Henoko. Nakaima however rejected the notion by Tanaka for the construction of a military base in Okinawa. His argument was that it would be impossible to protect the environment should the military base relocate according to the plan proposed by the central government.⁶⁸

In October 2011 Genba met with Nago's mayor, Susumu Inamine and Nakaima, to obtain their understanding towards the relocation plan of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. However, Inamine opposed Genba's plan and asked the central government to cancel the relocation to Henoko. Nakaima on the other hand stated his insistence for MCAS Futenma to be relocated out of Okinawa and for the affected land in Ginowan to be returned to their owners immediately. During the meeting, Genba also apologized for not being able to find other locations which forced the return to the original plan of relocating to Henoko. Genba also asked Inamine and Nakaima to consider the safety of the East Asian region as important factors to seriously consider accepting the relocation plan. However, Inamine reminded him of the promise made during election of not approving the construction of the military base in Henoko and stressed the importance of sticking with the promise. Inamine instead asked Genba to persuade the U.S. to change the relocation plan to Henoko.⁶⁹

On February 27, 2012 Noda visited Okinawa again and met Nakaima. During the meeting, Noda emphasized the assertion by the U.S. for the MCAS Futenma relocation plan to be agreed upon since it was the only option available.⁷⁰ Noda called for Nakaima to sign an agreement in order for the relocation from Ginowan to Henoko to be implemented immediately. However Nakaima refused by saying that the Okinawans wanted the base as well as the U.S. troops to be moved out of Okinawa.⁷¹ Noda attempted

⁶⁶ Eric Johnson, "Futenma Move May Hinge on Okinawa 10-year Growth Plan", *The Japan Times*, 14 January 2012.

⁶⁷ "Nakaima Tells Noda to Give Up Nago Plan", *The Japan Times*, 28 February 2012; "Noda Flies to Okinawa to Plea Case on Futenma", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 5 March 2012; "Noda must Improve Ties with Okinawa to Solve Futenma", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1 March 2012.

⁶⁸ "Noda makes First Trip to Okinawa for Futenma Talks", *The Japan Times*, 27 February 2012.

⁶⁹ "Nago Mayor Demands the Withdrawal of the Henoko Plan to Foreign Minister, Who is Driving it as the Site for the Futenma Relocation", *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 20 October 2011.

⁷⁰ "Henoko Only Way, Noda says; Premier fails to bring Okinawa Governor around on Futenma Move", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 28 February 2012; "Noda: Okinawa Plan Needs Time; Details of Handover of U.S. Military Facilities will take Months to Finalize", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1 March 2012.

⁷¹ "Henoko Only Way, Noda says; Premier Fails to Bring Okinawa Governor Around on Futenma Move", *The Daily Yomiuri*, 28 February 2012.

further to persuade Nakaima by saying that the central government will help Okinawa by holding a special law which will help especially in stimulating economic growth in the prefecture. After the meeting, Nakaima insisted to remain with his stand to move the military bases entirely out of Okinawa as it was the goal of Okinawans.⁷²

Analysis

The issue surrounding the MCAS Futenma relocation; whether it would be in or out of Okinawa actually stemmed from Hatoyama's promise to move it out of the prefecture. After gaining power in the lower house elections in 2009, Hatoyama failed to deliver on his promise and instead stressed for the MCAS Futenma to remain in Okinawa. Although the DPJ manifesto does not specify the relocation, only to "review the alignment of the bases and the way they should be", but for the Okinawans, they kept waiting for Hatoyama to deliver on his promise.

Hatoyama's promise resulted in the strained relations between the central government and Okinawans as well as Japan-U.S. relations. Therefore, Hatoyama had to face two different parties that oppose each other. First, the Okinawans who demanded the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa or from Japan and second, the U.S. who wishes to stick with the 2006 agreement. For the U.S., abiding with the 2006 agreement served as the best solution to the problem.

Finally Hatoyama adopted the view that the 2006 agreement is to be honoured. The position was taken having considered the Japanese deterrence strategies to balance China's military modernization as well as North Korea's nuclear threat. Additionally, it was agreed that the maintenance of military bases in Japan was a prerequisite to the Japan-U.S. security agreement.⁷³ Should the agreement not be adhered to, it would result in the U.S. not having to commit to protecting Japan in the event of an attack.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the failure to resolve the MCAS Futenma problem will potentially worsen the situation into the country's internal and international problems.

Hatoyama used the word "deterrence" to explain the importance of hosting MCAS Futenma and hence the reason behind him being unable to fulfil his promise. The word and similar sentiment was also used to clarify the decision to relocate the base from Ginowan to Henoko. His indecision on the issue and his subsequent unfulfilled promises was not only frustrating to the majority of Okinawans, but also destroyed their trust in the politics of the country. Okinawans felt isolated and discriminated against by the central government. In fact Hatoyama had no concrete plans on the issue of relocation of MCAS Futenma prior to the promises he made in the election. This was proven in an interview with the Japan Times, in which he claimed he did not think the issue was going to be serious enough to cause him to resign.⁷⁵

Kan's administration on the other hand did not take up interest in the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa or Japan, but rather decided to adhere to the 2006 agreement. Kan merely intended to move MCAS Futenma to a less densely-populated area while easing the burden on the Okinawans. Kan however, faces a tough challenge

⁷² "Nakaima Tells Noda to Give Up Nago Plan", *The Japan Times*, 28 February 2012.

⁷³ "PM must Speak Clearly about Role of U.S. Forces", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

⁷⁴ Interview with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Md Nasrudin Md Akhir in Asia-Europe Institute on 13 November 2013.

⁷⁵ "Hatoyama had no Futenma Relocation Plan", *The Japan Times*, 14 February 2011.

-especially from the majority of Okinawans- to implement the terms of the 2006 agreement following the failure of Hatoyama to deliver on his promise. Kan was a victim of Hatoyama's failure. Not only did Hatoyama complicate matters regarding the relocation of MCAS Futenma, he also made it difficult for the new government to pave new diplomatic ways.

Professor at the George Washington University, Mike Michizuki and Senior Fellow Brookings, Michael O'Hanlon opined that the MCAS Futenma must be relocated out of Okinawa. Their arguments were based on the political climate and social sentiment in Okinawa which is largely unwelcoming towards the presence of U.S. bases. This is apparent for example in the re-election of the Okinawa Governor, where Hirokazu Nakaima in November 2010 adopted a clear stance of opposing the relocation to Henoko as well as refusing to agree to the reclamation project for the construction of runways.⁷⁶ Former Ginowan Mayor, Yoichi Iha who finished second in the elections, also assumed a somewhat similar standpoint which is relocating out of the prefecture immediately.⁷⁷ If the relocation into Okinawa continued, it will go against the will of the majority who refuse to host U.S. military bases. Nakaima also gave a lecture at the George Washington University in September 2011, in which he also reiterated his stand against the relocation plan to Henoko. Nago's mayor, Susumu Inamine also rejected the construction of any U.S. military base in a city of his administration.⁷⁸

Under Noda's administration, Japan-U.S. relations remain an important government policy. Noda supported the close ties with the U.S. due to his background as the son of a former Japanese defence forces (GSDF) and he took a firm stand on the territorial dispute against China. The Senkaku Islands territorial dispute had caused tension in the region and the presence of the U.S. military was significant in protecting Japanese territory. Hence the U.S. military presence in Okinawa not only served as counter-balancing element against China's military modernization, but was also related to security issues in the East Asia region and sea routes. The importance became more apparent when Chinese fishing vessels intruded Japan-controlled Senkaku Islands which prompted action and counter-action from both parties. This conflict triggered an unhealthy relationship between Japan and China. Noda therefore argues on the significance of the Japan-U.S. relations in helping Japan defend her sovereign territory. South Korea which is similarly a close U.S. ally in East Asia also supported the retention of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa, particularly to strengthen the security of the country from the threat of North Korea and the expansion of China's military modernization.

It was clear that Noda supported the 2006 agreement, similar to the policy adopted by the LDP.⁷⁹ Despite the tension with Japan over the relocation of MCAS Futenma, the U.S. maintained the necessity of its presence in Okinawa, especially for the sake of regional security. China showed her true colours in the Japan seas which served as a key necessitating point in U.S. military presence in Japan.

⁷⁶ "Relocation of U.S Marines in Okinawa to the United States is the Logical Option", *Ryukyu Shimpō*, 7 November 2011; "CNN Website Advocates that U.S. Marines in Okinawa be Moved to the United States", *Ryukyu Shimpō*, 6 November 2011.

⁷⁷ "Nakaima Re-elected, Tells Kan to Move Futenma out of Okinawa", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 6 December 2010.

⁷⁸ "Futenma Issue must be Handled with Grit", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 8 April 2013.

⁷⁹ Alex Martin and Eric Johnston, "Noda Pro-U.S. but Past Remarks may Haunt Asia Ties", *The Japan Times*, 30 August 2011.

It is hence apparent the significance of Japan-U.S. relations in the uncertain political environment in East Asia. Former Japanese Ambassador to Thailand, Hisahiko Okazaki opined that the presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa is an asset to Japan and severing ties would be detrimental. For example, an unstable security situation in Southeast Asia ensued post the Philippine Senate's decision to close down U.S. military bases; Camp Clark and Subic Bay in the Philippines. Therefore the MCAS Futenma relocation problem was not only of concern to Japan and the U.S., but also neighbouring countries such as South Korea and the Philippines. For example, Ambassador and former Foreign Minister of the Philippines Domingo Siazon warned that the relocation of U.S. troops out of Japan will affect the stability of Asia. He concluded that the presence of the U.S. military was not only for the benefit of Japan but also neighbouring countries.⁸⁰ Many Southeast Asian countries were involved in territorial disputes with China in the Spratly Islands and the U.S. military presence in Okinawa served as a stabilizer in Southeast Asia. The DPJ administration which recognizes the significance of U.S. military presence should thus maintain the troops in Okinawa.⁸¹

Realistically, Okinawa was of strategic value for the central government in protecting national security. The central government should persuade the Okinawans to understand the significance of U.S. military presence in the prefecture, including the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. However the reluctance of the central government to move MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa was exactly because Japan needs U.S. troops in the country.

In the lower house election in 2012, the DPJ lost 75 per cent of its seats after its landslide victory in 2009. The main reason for the fall was the DPJ's failure to fulfil its manifesto, especially on the issue of Okinawa. In fact the DPJ's ability to resolve the MCAS Futenma issue became more questionable with waning support from the people.

Conclusion

During the DPJ administration, the government focused on national security issues in order to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko. The strategic location of Okinawa was appropriate for the deterrence strategy adopted by Japan in East Asia. Okinawans on the other hand took into account the tremendous burden they had endured thus far in their argument to oppose the relocation of MCAS Futenma inside Okinawa. Because of the difference in view, the MCAS Futenma relocation problem remained unresolved until the end of DPJ administration.

In May 2013 after it badly lost in the 2012 lower house election, DPJ invited 500 people younger than 30 years old to a convention for the purpose of criticizing the party's three years of national administration. It was an initiative by young leaders within the party with the aim of finding out the reason why they were rejected in the last election. The convention was attended by top party leaders such as former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, Former Chief Secretary of the Cabinet Yukio Edano and former Minister of Health, Labour, and Welfare, Akira Nagatsuma. To a question regarding the DPJ administration, the attendees were in agreement in their answer that the party

⁸⁰ "Air Base Issue Fraying Nerves", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 10 May 2010.

⁸¹ Hisahiko Okazaki, "Untold Ties of Friendship Exist between Okinawa and the U.S.", *The Japan Times*, 3 May 2010.

made outrageous promises which were difficult to fulfil. Their credibility suffered the most when Hatoyama failed to relocate MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa.⁸²

After his retirement, Hatoyama sought to find other possible locations as a replacement for Henoko, a goal he considered would be his ultimate achievement. He established the East Asia Peace Centre, a research institute in Tokyo which aim to promote peace and stability in the region. Although Hatoyama was often criticised over his unfulfilled promise, as Prime Minister he was responsible in raising the issue of MCAS Futenma in the mainstream debate.

⁸² Ayako Mie, "To Woo Young Voters, DPJ Tries Self-Reflection", *The Japan Times*, 12 May 2013.

