



Written by on May 21, 2010

Controversy Over U.S. Base in Okinawa

The British Guardian newspaper on May 21 quoted from a statement made by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to reporters in Tokyo that a dispute between the United States and Japan over the future of a U.S. airbase in Okinawa would not affect the countries' "rock solid" 50-year-old alliance.

"We both seek an arrangement that is operationally viable and politically sustainable," said Clinton, at the start of a three-nation tour of Asia that will include visits to China and South Korea. "The goal of our governments remains unchanged: we want to maintain the security of Japan and the stability of the region."



After meeting Japan's Foreign Minister, Katsuya Okada, Clinton said the two countries would continue to seek an agreement, stating: "We have committed to redoubling our efforts to meet the [May 31] deadline that has been announced by the Japanese government."

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Reuters news quoted Clinton's statement further: "This partnership is essential for meeting the challenges not only of today but also of tomorrow," she told a joint news conference with Okada. "It is good to be reminded, as we recently were with the unprovoked [North Korean] attack on the [South] Korean vessel, that there are still dangers and challenges that confront us together."

During the news conference, Clinton strongly condemned Pyongyang's action in the sinking of the South Korean ship *Cheonan* on March 26 and called for an international response.

Both Clinton and Okada used the *Cheonan* incident to bolster support for the U.S. military presence in Japan. "We need to be aware this could happen to us. There is no guarantee it won't happen to Japan," Okada told a news conference after a joint appearance with Clinton.

"I want to explain frankly to the Japanese people that the presence of U.S. troops in Japan is indispensable to Japan's security and to the peace and stability of the region in the current security environment," Okada said.

The base provoking the controversy with Japan, Futenma airbase on Okinawa, has been the U.S. military headquarters in Japan since 1945, the year Japan surrendered to the United States, ending World War II. Futenma is home to nearly half of the 50,000 U.S. military personnel in Japan. Following a 1995 rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen, local opposition to the base's presence grew, and the United States and Japan began negotiating new arrangements, including a 2006 plan to move 8,000 Marines and their dependents off Okinawa to Guam. Another part of that agreement called for moving the base from its current site in the city of Ginowan to Camp Schwab, an existing Marine base in northern Okinawa.

However, Yukio Hatoyama, Japan's Prime Minister, drew criticism from the Obama White House by



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suggesting he would renege on an agreement to build a replacement for the base off Okinawa's north coast. Since then, reports the *New York Times*, Hatoyama "has decided to reverse himself and accept nearly all of Washington's demands that he honor an existing agreement to relocate an American air base on Okinawa, in an attempt to end a damaging dispute that had sown confusion and mistrust between the longtime allies."

According to a Reuters report, Japan's domestic media are reporting that the two governments will announce on May 28 an agreement to stick to the 2006 plan with minor changes, and that this decision will likely to be greeted with anger when Prime Minister Hatoyama visits Okinawa on May 23. Opposition to the base in Okinawa extends beyond the 1995 rape incident, and is also based on objections to the noise produced by aircraft landing at and taking off from the base.

AFP reported on May 16 that thousands of people had formed a human chain surrounding Futenma airbase in a protest to demand its closure.

After the human chain — with organizers estimating the number of participants at 17,000 — was formed, Ginowan city Mayor Yoichi Iha told reporters that Hatoyama had to stand by his original promise. "We have publicly demonstrated the local public's opposition to the central government, which is trying to change its position to the relocation within the prefecture," he said. "I want the government to negotiate with the United States by maintaining their original position of getting [the base] removed, at least outside Okinawa," he said.

A comment in the *Guardian* revealed an important reason behind the U.S. desires to maintain a large military presence in Japan: "While many Okinawans oppose the military presence, Washington insists that the island is ideally located *should the U.S. need to intervene* in conflicts on the Korean peninsula or between China and Taiwan." (Emphasis added.)

The statement literally describes the *interventionist* U.S. foreign policy that has been conducted (with congressional declarations of war) during both world wars, and without such declarations ever since. It is a policy used to justify sending U.S. troops to into combat in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The power vacuum in Asia is especially relevant to the alleged need for a U.S. troop presence in Japan, since that vacuum was largely created when the United States (while occupying Japan following its surrender in 1945) forced Japan to adopt what is termed the "Postwar Constitution" or the "Peace Constitution."

Article 9 of the postwar Japanese Constitution reads:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. (2) To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Article 9, in effect, makes Japan incapable of defending itself, and therefore, dependent upon the United States to protect it from possible hostile powers such as China or North Korea. Furthermore, if Japan had maintained a viable military force since gaining control of its own government following World War II, it might have formed defense alliances with Asia's other free nations, such as South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and (when it still existed) South Vietnam. Such an alliance may well have successfully repelled the communist advance of North Korea and North Vietnam, eliminating even the pretext of any reason for the United States to have sacrificed 36,516 military killed in Korea and 58,236 in Vietnam.



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It is time to encourage the Japanese to amend their constitution and become responsible for their own self-defense, since there is nothing in the U.S. Constitution authorizing U.S. troops to defend Japan or an other nation, except our own.

Photo: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton shakes hands with Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada (out of picture) during their joint press conference in Tokyo on May 21, 2010: AP Images



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