

May 6, 2021 East-West Center Indo-Pacific Foreign Policy and Defense Webinar

Reducing the Burden of Military Bases on Okinawa:

Implications of the New Security Environment

Transcript of H.E. Governor Denny Tamaki's Remarks

Haisai, Gusu yo, Chu-Uganabira. That was a greeting in my native Okinawan dialect. Good morning, everyone! Dr. Limaye, Vice President of the East-West Center in Washington, all of the panelists, Mr. Yanagisawa, Professor Nozoe, Professor Mochizuki, Professor Soeya, Professor Yamamoto, and all the attendees to the webinar. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all of you gathered online this morning to discuss the recommendations made by the Bankoku Shinryo Council that was founded by the Okinawa Prefectural Government. My name is Denny Tamaki, the Governor of Okinawa. Historically speaking, the U.S. and Okinawa have deep connections with each other: many people in the United States have their ancestral roots in Okinawa. Especially, American culture has rubbed off on Okinawa since the end of World War II; as a result, Okinawa has developed its unique, unparalleled culture. Born to an ex-US Marine father and a local Okinawan mother, I have absorbed the mindset to value diversity and tolerance by osmosis. When it comes to running the administration as governor, this very mindset of mine is the name of the game. Going forward, I was hoping that we could continue to build favorable relations with the U.S. I understand that the Japan-U.S. relations, including the bilateral security alliance, have long contributed to the peace and stability of Japan and East Asia. The land area of Okinawa accounts for only 0.6% of the entire land area of Japan. However, more than 70% of the military bases and facilities exclusively used by the USFJ are concentrated on Okinawa. This is a huge burden and is too much for us to bear. We have endured numerous problems stemming from hosting many huge US military bases in Okinawa. Namely, noise pollution and accidents caused by US military aircraft; accidents and incidents caused by U.S. service members; and environmental pollution caused by toxic substances such as PFAS. In order to maintain the Japan-US security alliance in a stable manner, it is time Tokyo and Washington began to think in terms of diversifying the burden across the whole of Japan instead of imposing an outsized burden on Okinawa alone. We've been soliciting for the two governments to do justice to this request of ours at every available opportunity. Regarding the construction project of the Replacement Facility for MCAS Futenma, or FRF, arguably the most dangerous military base in the world, the former governor, the late Takeshi Onaga, and I each won the gubernatorial elections, running on a platform of opposing this Futenma deal. Furthermore, in the prefectural referendum on the pros and cons of the reclamation work, an overwhelming majority of 71.7% of the total votes cast, opposed the project, in addition to the fact that the plan was developed 25 years ago and has not reflected the current changes in the security environment at all. In consideration of the circumstances I mentioned, the FRF should not solely be relied on for the relocation to Henoko. Instead, Plan B should be hammered out and implemented to make rapid progress on the elimination of dangers, the swift closure and the return of MCAS Futenma. The water areas around Henoko and Ooura Bay, where the reclamation work is getting

underway, are home to more than 5,300 species of living organisms, including 262 endangered species such as dugongs. It is this crown jewel habitat — known globally for its abundant biodiversity — that is being reclaimed. The water areas in question have been beset by varied, intractable problems such as soft seabed and fault lines. The replacement facility is difficult to complete not only technically but also financially. In my opinion, it is evident that the Futenma project is going nowhere near its principal objective, that is to say, prompt return of MCAS Futenma to Okinawa. Hypothetically speaking, even after spending more than 10 years on the construction of the Henoko's new base, the soft spots in the seabed would most probably result in differential settlement and would hinder the runway operations. Once a huge earthquake happens, it would cause a tremendous disaster taking away lives of U.S. service members and devastating properties of the U.S. Forces, which would result in damaging national interest of the United States. Okinawa Prefectural Government established *the Bankoku Shinryo Council on US military base issue* in order to get proper perspective, Okinawa's outsized burden of hosting U.S. military bases and facilities, and the ongoing sea change in our security environment. In doing so, Okinawa Prefectural Government has striven to foster discussions on the consolidation and reduction of US military bases and facilities in Okinawa. The topic of today's webinar is based on the compilation of the recommendations presented by this council. The council, which is composed of savvy professionals in diplomacy and security fields, has spent untold hours discussing these issues for two years and provided us with insightful recommendations twice. We will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of the reversion of Okinawa in 2022, a watershed moment. On May 15th, 1972, it was reverted to Japan from the US sovereignty that lasted 27 years after World War II. With this upcoming milestone of 50 years after the reversion nearing, we would like to request the United States and Japan to redouble efforts on the consolidation and reduction of the US military bases in order to alleviate the outsized burden on Okinawa. The policy recommendations made by the Bankoku Shinryo Council will play a crucial role in this whole process. Last but not least, my fellow attendees to this webinar, I have a favor to ask. What I wouldn't give for your warm support! I was wondering if you could cherish Okinawa and double down on making further progress on the consolidation and reduction of US military bases and facilities on Okinawa through vigorous discussions. Again, my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Limaye, all the distinguished panelists, and all the other attendees. Ippei Ni-Fee Deebiru. Thank you very much for everything.