



# Asia Pacific Bulletin

EastWestCenter.org/APB

Number 299 | January 27, 2015

## Powering Paradises: Recommendations for the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative

BY AIKO SHIMIZU

The topic of U.S. military forces in Okinawa is once again at the forefront of U.S.-Japan relations. Plans to relocate the Futenma U.S. air base may be thwarted after residents of Okinawa prefecture elected anti-base politician Takeshi Onaga as governor in November 2014. While Okinawa receives benefits such as subsidies from the central Japanese government for hosting U.S. military bases, much greater incentives are needed to convince the majority of Okinawans to accept hosting more bases. One possible solution comes from an unlikely source – a U.S.-Japan joint clean energy initiative known as the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative.

The Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative resulted from a meeting between then Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and U.S. President Barack Obama in November 2009. The meeting focused on ways in which the two countries could conduct joint energy programs to research, develop, and deploy renewable energy technologies to tackle common challenges of global energy security and climate change. Following the meeting, the two heads of state signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on June 17, 2010 that established the Hawai'i-Okinawa Partnership on Clean and Efficient Energy Development and Deployment. The partnership is handled by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI), the State of Hawai'i, and the Prefecture of Okinawa. Hawai'i and Okinawa were selected as the representatives for this partnership due to their leadership and experience with renewable energy technologies including solar, wind, electric vehicles, energy efficiency, and policy planning, as well as the fact that they share similar geography, climate, and power systems. The Initiative has four main areas of collaboration: Energy Efficient Buildings, Smart Grid, Renewables, and People-to-People Exchange.

Economic and energy security issues are integral to the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative. After all, energy trade is a key issue in the economies of both the U.S. and Japan. Sustainability and clean energy have become major global issues from a climate security perspective, spurring new interest and development in the field. The development of clean energy technologies will also stimulate business in both the U.S. and Japan.

Although the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative was intended to be a government-led initiative, it has since become predominantly a private-sector led project in both countries with limited support from the two governments. While it is important for the Initiative to be self-sustainable, it needs to gain stronger backing from the two governments in order to pursue higher profile activities. The Initiative has the potential to benefit the two countries in areas outside of traditional economic and energy security realms such as national security, sustainable development, and international cooperation, but would require greater government leadership.

From a national security perspective, the Initiative will improve U.S.-Japan relations in the context of alleviating anti-base sentiments in Okinawa. Since the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean

**Aiko Shimizu, Visiting Fellow at the East-West Center in Washington, explains that “Effectively utilizing the Hawai'i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative could simultaneously address major economic development and energy security issues in both Japan and the U.S. while improving the two countries' national security cooperation and promoting soft power.”**

The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the US Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options.

**“Lowering energy costs, improving energy supply resiliency in the face of natural disasters, and developing the local economy... will better distribute economic benefits among all Okinawan citizens, potentially improving their outlook on the U.S. military presence.”**

Energy Initiative is a joint Japanese and American initiative that would bring economic development to Okinawa, a greater push from the two governments to highlight the Initiative’s benefits would showcase how U.S. involvement helps Okinawans, thereby lowering anti-base sentiments. Okinawa is the poorest Japanese prefecture and most of its economy depends on money coming from hosting U.S. bases, but the financial benefits from hosting the bases are currently not being felt by all Okinawans. Lowering energy costs, improving energy supply resiliency in the face of natural disasters, and developing the local economy, as will be achieved by the Hawai’i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative, will better distribute economic benefits among all Okinawan citizens, potentially improving their outlook on the U.S. military presence.

For the security of Japan, Okinawans need to accept the fact that U.S. bases enhance Japan and Asia’s regional security. Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are limited according to Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, meaning that its military alliance with the U.S. is critical to its security. Today there are multiple security threats facing the region which Japan cannot handle on its own, such as the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku Islands and a nuclear North Korea. Even though many Okinawans understand this, it is difficult for them to accept U.S. bases when there seems to be very little local benefit. Many Okinawans feel that they bear most of the burden but reap little reward from the U.S.-Japan security arrangement, as the prefecture hosts more American troops than any other Japanese prefecture. If the Initiative can deliver positive outcomes to the citizens of Okinawa, that perception of burden without reward will diminish.

The Initiative will also benefit energy supplies for U.S. military bases in both Hawai’i and Okinawa. The U.S. military is one of the largest energy consumers in the world and it recognizes the value of renewable energy. Key leaders in the U.S. military such as Admiral Samuel J. Locklear, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command based in Hawai’i, has said that climate change poses the greatest problem for the U.S. military. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012, 87 power outages on U.S. military bases lasted over eight hours, a vulnerability that means climate resilience and grid reliability are critical issues. Participating in the development and deployment of renewable energy technologies through the Hawai’i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative will improve the military’s energy security outlook, as well as furthering the objective of positive engagement with the Okinawan community. To facilitate this, the Initiative should be expanded to include the U.S. Department of Defense as a participant.

From a sustainability and international cooperation perspective, the Hawai’i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative could be leveraged to serve as a model for other island nations that are facing challenges similar to those of Hawai’i and Okinawa. As islands, these countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change and face exceptionally high energy prices due to their reliance on imports. If the Hawai’i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative is used as a model for securing energy and promoting economic development, both Japanese and American technology and energy companies will see business stimulated, and both countries will be able to showcase their high-tech industries. The Initiative also brings opportunities for public-private partnerships to provide overseas development assistance, increasing the two countries’ soft power in the developing world.

Effectively utilizing the Hawai’i-Okinawa Clean Energy Initiative could simultaneously address major economic development and energy security issues in both Japan and the U.S. while improving the two countries’ national security cooperation and promoting soft power. The U.S. and Japanese governments will gain more from the Initiative by leveraging it from different angles than by limiting its scope to the economic and energy issues that the Initiative was meant to resolve.

The *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (APB) series is produced by the East-West Center in Washington.

APB Series Editor: Dr. Satu Limaye  
APB Series Coordinator: Alex Forster

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the East-West Center or any organization with which the author is affiliated.

Aiko Shimizu is a Japan Studies Visiting Fellow at the East-West Center in Washington. She holds graduate degrees from Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. She can be contacted at aiko.shimizu@gmail.com.