

Background

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Top 10 Reasons Why the U.S. Marines on Okinawa Are Essential to Peace and Security in the Pacific

Bruce Klingner

Abstract: *Two factors have driven the debate over the planned U.S. military realignment in Japan: campaign pledges made by the Democratic Party of Japan and complaints from Okinawans about the presence of the U.S. military. These factors have had a particularly strong impact on efforts to preserve the Marine Corps Air Station on Okinawa. However, other critical factors—national interests, regional threats, and the U.S.–Japan alliance’s military requirements—are absent from the discussion over the station’s scheduled relocation from Futenma to a more remote locale. The Obama Administration should continue to press Japan for implementation of the military realignment agreement. It is past time for Tokyo to jettison its passive consensus-building approach and take more assertive steps.*

Two factors have driven the debate over the planned U.S. military realignment in Japan: campaign pledges made by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and complaints from Okinawans about the presence of the U.S. military. These factors have had a particularly strong impact on efforts to preserve the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) on Okinawa.

However, other critical factors—national interests, regional threats, and the U.S.–Japan alliance’s military requirements—are absent from the discussion over the station’s scheduled relocation from Futenma to a more remote locale. As a result of this lopsided debate, a number of military fallacies have taken hold in both the Japanese and the American publics.

Talking Points

- Debate over the planned U.S. military realignment in Japan has neglected such critical factors as national interests, regional threats, and the U.S.–Japan alliance’s military requirements.
- Neither Washington nor Tokyo has explained the geostrategic necessities of a U.S. forward-deployed military presence in Asia effectively. Nor have officials articulated the significant role of the U.S. Marines in a broad spectrum of alliance missions.
- The United States Marines stationed on Okinawa are an indispensable element of an integrated, comprehensive U.S. security strategy that uses individual service capabilities based on a specific contingency or operation. Removing Marine Corps assets from Okinawa would leave the United States with insufficient capabilities to deter, defend, or defeat growing security threats in Asia.
- The Obama Administration should continue to press Japan for implementation of the military realignment agreement. It is past time for Tokyo to jettison its passive consensus-building approach and take more assertive steps.

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One measure of the importance of the Marine presence on Okinawa was the depth of concern expressed by governments throughout Asia over the DPJ's initial security policies. Nations as diverse as South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia expressed alarm at the impact that the DPJ policies risked having on their own national security.

Although the DPJ eventually abandoned many of its misguided security concepts, the party's campaign vow to undo the military realignment agreement strained bilateral relations and continues to cast a pall over the U.S.–Japan alliance. Okinawans who are critical of the U.S. military presence were emboldened by the DPJ's pledge to remove the Marine Corps air base from the island. Despite the party's subsequent policy reversal, Okinawan activists are still clinging to its campaign promise, demanding that it take precedence over the Guam Agreement to realign U.S. forces in Japan.

Neither Washington nor Tokyo has explained the geostrategic necessities of a U.S. forward-deployed military presence in Asia effectively. Nor have officials articulated the significant role of the U.S. Marines in a broad spectrum of alliance missions.

The Obama Administration should continue to press Japan for implementation of the accord. It is past time for Tokyo to jettison its passive consensus-building approach and take more assertive steps, such as clarifying to Okinawa that future Japanese expenditures for the island's development—contained in the Special Measures Law, which expires in 2012—are conditional on relocating the air base as agreed.

There is also a need for both the United States and Japan to increase public diplomacy efforts. Neither Washington nor Tokyo has explained the geostra-

tegic necessities of a U.S. forward-deployed military presence in Asia effectively. Nor have officials articulated the significant role of the U.S. Marines in a broad spectrum of alliance missions—an issue that is complicated by political sensitivities and U.S. officials' excessive fear of revealing military contingency plans.

The DPJ's Security Policy Flip-Flops

The DPJ took office advocating a dramatic shift in Japan's security posture. Such a shift, the DPJ proclaimed, would require reducing Japan's "over-reliance" on the United States, demanding an "equal alliance" with Washington, and initiating a closer embrace of Asian nations, particularly China.

But Beijing and Pyongyang did not follow the DPJ script, choosing instead to pursue increasingly assertive policies. This miscalculation cost the DPJ in the eyes of the Japanese public; even after the party abandoned the feckless Yukio Hatoyama as prime minister, its approval ratings continued to plummet. By November 2010, 91 percent of survey respondents were worried about the DPJ's foreign and national security policies overall, and 82 percent disapproved of its handling of the Senkakus incident with China.¹

Beijing's aggressive behavior and Pyongyang's attacks on South Korea eventually led to a belated DPJ epiphany about geostrategic realities, with the party's misguided idealism giving way to greater pragmatism; DPJ rhetoric demanding an equal alliance with the United States or recalibration of Japan's foreign policy has evaporated. As a Japanese official commented, "Re-balancing is not on anyone's agenda now. It's been tried and it failed. The crisis over the Senkaku Islands has beefed up Japan's relations with America again."²

After months of advocating the eviction of a Marine Corps air base from Okinawa, several senior DPJ politicians reversed course and publicly admitted that the Marines are an indispensable and irre-

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1. Yuka Hayashi, "Shaky Diplomacy Scuttles Kan Ratings," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2011, at <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2010/11/08/shaky-diplomacy-scuttles-kan-ratings> (June 6, 2011).
 2. Peter Ford, "Japan Abandons Bid to Make China a Key Pillar of Its Foreign Policy," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 17, 2010, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2010/11/17/Japan-abandons-bid-to-make-China-a-key-pillar-of-its-foreign-policy> (June 6, 2011).

placeable element of any U.S. response to a crisis in Asia. For example:

- Although Prime Minister Hatoyama campaigned on a promise to remove the Marine air unit from Okinawa, he later admitted that, “As I learned more about the [security situation in Asia], I’ve come to realize that [the Marines] are all linked up as a package to maintain deterrence.”³ He added that the U.S. Marines on Okinawa “have a major role to play, and it’ll be inappropriate to relocate the Marines too far away from Okinawa.”⁴
- Foreign Minister Okada reversed his earlier opposition to the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) by declaring that “the presence of U.S. Marines on Okinawa is necessary for Japan’s national security [since they] are a powerful deterrent against possible enemy attacks and should be stationed in Japan.”⁵
- U.S. diplomatic cables reveal that then-Land Minister and State Minister for Okinawa Seiji Maehara told U.S. diplomats in December 2009 that “if the U.S. does not agree to an alternative to the existing FRF plan, the DPJ would be prepared to go ahead with the current plan.”
- In January 2011, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoriyoshi Matsuno told the U.S. embassy that the DPJ would “consider for ‘form’s sake’ Futenma options outside of Okinawa, but the only realistic options are to move Futenma to Camp Schwab or another existing facility.”⁶

It is important to acknowledge that the DPJ has made the right—albeit belated—decision with regard to U.S. Marines in Okinawa, but the real issue—one that is perhaps not well understood in either America or Japan—is why U.S. Marines must remain in Okinawa.

Top 10 Reasons for Keeping U.S. Marines on Okinawa

The United States Marines stationed on Okinawa operate as one element of an integrated, comprehensive U.S. security strategy that uses individual service capabilities based on a specific contingency or operation. Removing Marine Corps assets from Okinawa would leave the United States with a two-legged security stool in a region where steadiness and support are essential.

It is therefore essential that all parties recognize the following 10 reasons for maintaining the U.S. Marine presence on Okinawa.

Reason #1: The U.S. Marine presence is a tangible sign of America’s commitment to defend Asia.

U.S. forward-deployed forces in Asia are indisputable signals of Washington’s commitment to the obligations of its 1960 security treaty with Japan to defend its allies and maintain peace and stability in Asia. The U.S. Marines on Okinawa are an indispensable component of any U.S. response to an Asian crisis.

After months of advocating the eviction of a Marine Corps air base from Okinawa, several senior DPJ politicians reversed course and publicly admitted that the Marines are an indispensable and irreplaceable element of any U.S. response to a crisis in Asia.

The Marine presence is also a clear rebuttal to perceptions of waning United States resolve in the face of a rising and assertive China. Withdrawing the U.S. Marines from Okinawa would only affirm that perception and lead Asian nations to accommodate

3. “Hatoyama Visit Lost on Okinawa,” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 5, 2010, at <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201005040241.html> (June 6, 2011).
4. “Hatoyama Shusho, Okinawa Kinrin o Mosaku, Seiji Sekinin ni Hatsu Genkyu,” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, April 22, 2010, as quoted in Gavan McCormack, “Ampo’s Troubled 50th: Hatoyama’s Abortive Rebellion, Okinawa’s Mounting Resistance and the U.S.–Japan Relationship,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, at <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Gavan-McCormack/3367> (June 8, 2011).
5. “Okada: Japan Needs US Marines in Okinawa,” *NHK*, May 14, 2010.
6. “The Truth Behind Japan–U.S. Ties (1): DPJ Government Never Committed to Futenma Alternatives,” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 4, 2011, at <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201105040063.html> (June 6, 2011).

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themselves to Chinese pressure. As a senior U.S. military officer commented, “U.S. dominance is not a given. You have to be on the court to be in the game.”

Finally, an important question remains: What impact would the removal of U.S. ground forces have on President Obama’s much-hyped claim that “the U.S. is now back in Asia”?

Reason #2: The U.S. Marine presence deters aggression.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos has explained that the fundamental role of U.S. military forces in Japan is to “make those who would consider the use of force in this region understand that option is off the table. The forward deployment of U.S. forces puts us in a position to react immediately to emerging threats.”⁷

The December 2010 Japanese National Defense Program Guidelines underscored Roos’s comments by noting that the presence of U.S. armed forces in Japan gives countries in the Asia–Pacific region a strong sense of security by “functioning as deterrence against and response to contingencies in this region.”⁸ Foreign Minister Okada affirmed that “the presence of U.S. Marines on Okinawa is necessary for Japan’s national security [since they] are a powerful deterrent against possible enemy attacks and should be stationed in Japan.”⁹

History has repeatedly shown that ground troops are necessary to influence an opponent. Removing combat elements of the only rapidly deployable U.S. ground force between Hawaii and India would degrade U.S. deterrence capacity and limit response options.

Reason #3: The U.S. Marine presence enables the conduct of full-spectrum combat operations.

The Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) on Okinawa is a flexible, scalable, tailored, self-contained, rapidly deployable, powerful military force that can fulfill any contingency that might arise throughout the region. A combined arms force that operates under the Marine Corps doctrine of Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF), the III MEF is comprised of organic ground, air, and logistics components under a single commander.

A MAGTF requires collocation of its ground, air, and logistics components to enable coordinated training of integrated units. Ambassador Roos explained that the Marine helicopters on Okinawa enable the U.S. to:

Rapidly move our ground combat and support units on Okinawa across the island chain that links Northeast and Southeast Asia to wherever they would be required. For heavier and longer-range operations, the Marines would be supported by our naval fleet in Sasebo, just a few days sailing time away, which could project both Marine ground and air power anywhere in the region.

The Marines on Okinawa would “arrive first on the scene to secure critical facilities, conduct civilian evacuations, and provide forward land and air strike power.”¹⁰

Lieutenant General Keith Stalder, former commander, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, echoed Roos’s comments, noting that Okinawa Marines are trained to respond to dozens of different emergencies and contingencies: “When the 31st MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] is aboard ship in Okinawa, there is a 100 percent chance they are about a day’s transit time to either a U.S. defense treaty ally, a threat to regional stability, or a perennial disaster relief location.”¹¹

7. Ambassador John Roos, “The Enduring Importance of Our Security Alliance,” speech at Waseda University, January 29, 2010.

8. “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond,” Japan Ministry of Defense, approved December 17, 2010, at http://www.mod.go.jp/eng/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf (June 6, 2011).

9. “Okada: Japan Needs US Marines in Okinawa.”

10. Roos, “The Enduring Importance of Our Security Alliance.”

Reason #4: The U.S. Marine presence helps America meet its commitment to defend Japan, including the Senkaku Islands.

The United States has pledged the lives of its sons and daughters to defend Japan. As Lieutenant General Stalder succinctly explained, “all of my Marines on Okinawa are willing to die if it is necessary for the security of Japan.”¹²

Indeed, as Prime Minister Kan commented, “Including the Marines in Okinawa, all U.S. troops stationed in Japan play a major role in contributing to our nation’s safety and the region’s stability.”¹³ Kan stated:

[W]e must never forget that in the context of the Japan–U.S. alliance, members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. Marines, perhaps youth not even twenty years of age, have a mission to be prepared to shed their own blood [for the defense of Japan] should a contingency arise.

In response to Chinese provocations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reassured Foreign Minister Maehara in November 2010 that the United States considered the Senkaku Islands to be Japanese territory under the bilateral security treaty. The U.S. statement was a stronger affirmation than previous vague diplomatic comments on the sovereignty of the islands.

In addition to the Senkaku Islands, U.S. Marines are also critical to securing Japanese interests in Okinawa. For example, Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa opposed moving U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam because, as he noted, these troops have “a very important role in deterring against Chinese adventurism near Okinawa—if all the Marines in Okinawa were transferred to Guam, we cannot defend those islands.”¹⁴

Further highlighting the Marines’ role in the Pacific, in February 2011, Admiral Robert Willard, commander of Pacific Command, announced that the Marine Corps had been integrated into the new U.S. AirSeaBattle Concept battle plan, commenting that “their capabilities will be an enhancement to our joint force.” A U.S. defense official added that the revised strategy could use the Marines to retake islands in the East China or South China seas after a Chinese attack. The official commented that “the Japanese and South China Sea states don’t have Marine Corps-type capabilities to stop a Chinese occupation of islands.”¹⁵

In addition to the Senkaku Islands, U.S. Marines are also critical to securing Japanese interests in Okinawa.

Reason #5: The U.S. Marine presence would help to defeat a North Korean invasion of South Korea.

The U.S. Marines on Okinawa play a critical role in Operations Plan 5027, the joint U.S.–South Korean war plan for responding to a North Korean invasion. Marine forces are capable of conducting a full range of combat operations in Korea. Even the threat of an amphibious invasion would force North Korea to divert ground forces from the front line. General Burwell Bell, former commander of U.S. Forces Korea, affirmed that:

[The Marines on Okinawa] have a critical role in any Korean contingency. They were my deep operational ground maneuver unit. Without them, it would be WWI all over again. When the North Koreans consider the

11. Lieutenant General Keith J. Stalder, speech at the Tokyo American Center, February 17, 2010, at <http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20100217-71.html> (June 6, 2011).

12. *Ibid.*

13. Editorial, “Hatoyama’s Betrayal,” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 17, 2011, at <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201102160285.html> (June 6, 2011).

14. “Okinawa Marine Transfer Idea Nixed,” *Japan Times*, February 23, 2010, at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/n20100223a3.html> (June 6, 2011).

15. Bill Gertz, “Military to Bolster Its Forces in Pacific,” *The Washington Times*, February 17, 2011, at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/feb/17/military-to-bolster-its-forces-in-pacific/> (June 6, 2011).

potential for the United States Marines to interdict their logistics sites and fragile supply lines deep in their rear areas, the likelihood of the North seriously considering a sustained ground offensive drops drastically.¹⁶

Representative Park Jin, then chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the South Korean National Assembly, declared that:

[T]he U.S. military bases located in Okinawa play a significant role in keeping the Korean peninsula peaceful and safe. The U.S. Marines in Okinawa are obliged to defend Korea.... Thus, the relocation of U.S. military bases in Japan would affect not only the U.S.–Japan relations but also security on the Korean peninsula.¹⁷

In seeking to justify removing U.S. Marine forces from Okinawa, some analysts have asserted that a Korean War would be over quickly and that South Korean forces would be sufficient to handle the North Korean forces. Both premises are dangerously wrong. U.S. war simulations reveal that, even a week after a North Korean invasion, the situation would remain precarious. Moreover, an invasion would result in horrific casualties in the hundreds of thousands as well as trillions of dollars worth of damage.¹⁸ A U.S. defense official commented:

[E]ven if South Korea could do it without U.S. Marines, it would be with far greater casualties and destruction. Why would you do that? Why would you send the military into a dangerous situation with fewer capabilities than necessary? Besides, you need those [South Korean] troops for the post-war collapse of North Korea.¹⁹

Indeed, the North Korean attack on Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010 illustrated the critical role Marines would play in rebuffing an attack by Pyongyang. As a result, Seoul augmented its own 27,000-member Marine Corps by 2,000, thereby bolstering its ability to defend the five islands in the West Sea.²⁰

Reason #6: The U.S. Marine presence helps the U.S. respond to Korea crisis contingencies other than war.

The U.S. and South Korea have also developed Concept Plan 5029 to respond to crisis contingencies short of war. MAGTF forces can conduct several military operations in support of those plans, including limited amphibious raids and full-scale amphibious assaults, airfield and port seizure operations, maritime interdiction operations, amphibious advanced force operations, stability operations, and tactical air support.²¹

Moving U.S. Marines away from Okinawa would hinder protection and evacuation operations, directly increasing the threat to U.S. lives, as well as the lives of America's allies.

Major General Mark Brilakis, commanding general of the 3rd Marine Division on Okinawa, affirmed that in *all* U.S. contingency plans for Korea, the 3rd MEF plays a major role. In case of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula, Brilakis stated, “overnight, I go from being the smallest division in the Marine Corps to being the largest.”²²

According to Japanese media reports, Lieutenant General Stalder commented during a private meet-

16. General Burwell B. Bell, personal interview with the author, March 1, 2011.

17. Hon. Park Jin, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee, National Assembly, Republic of Korea, Keynote Speech, The 4th Seoul–Washington Forum, May 3, 2010, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

18. U.S. Department of Defense official, interview with the author, February 2011.

19. U.S. defense official, interview with the author, February 8, 2011.

20. Lee Tae-hoon, “Marines to Have a Greater Role,” *Korea Times*, February 8, 2011, at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2011/02/116_81027.html (June 6, 2011).

21. “31st Marine Expeditionary Unit Mission.” United States Marine Corps, at <http://usmc.mil/unit/31stmeu/Pages/mission.aspx> (June 6, 2011).

22. Major General Mark Brilakis, interview with the author, April 11, 2011.

ing with Japanese officials that during a Korean crisis, the Marines in Okinawa would be charged with seizing North Korean nuclear weapons.²³ Such an operation would be consistent with the responsibilities of Military Expeditionary Unit—Special Operations Capable (MEU–SOC) units that conduct operations behind enemy lines, such as special reconnaissance and direct action against designated strategic targets.

Reason #7: The U.S. Marine presence enables non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs).

Marines, through NEOs, can provide physical protection and evacuate U.S. citizens from Taiwan or other Asian nations during a deteriorating security situation or natural disaster. NEOs usually involve “swift insertions of a force, temporary occupation of an objective, and a planned withdrawal upon completion of the mission.”²⁴

NEOs have typically been a specialty of Marine Expeditionary Units, which have participated in several NEOs worldwide. Implementing an NEO may require forming a joint task force. However, the organic combat, combat support, and combat service support forces of a Marine Corps forward-deployed amphibious expeditionary strike group (special operations capable) are trained and certified to conduct NEOs.²⁵ The 31st MEU on Okinawa routinely trains for NEOs.

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Reason #8: The U.S. Marine presence helps the U.S. to conduct humanitarian operations.

The Okinawa Marines have routinely been the primary responders to major natural disasters in Asia, such as the 2004 Asian tsunami, mudslides in the Philippines, and the typhoon in Tai-

U.S. disaster relief operations generated considerable goodwill in Japan, including on Okinawa.

wan. The Marines have led or participated in 12 significant humanitarian assistance–disaster relief (HADR) missions during the past five years alone, helping to save hundreds of thousands of lives in the region.²⁶

For example, in response to the March 2011 natural disasters in Japan, U.S. military forces in Asia responded quickly and worked seamlessly with the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Operation Tomodachi (“friendship”) highlighted the versatility of U.S. forces deployed on Okinawa. During Operation Tomodachi, the proximity of Futenma MCAS to Marine ground and logistics units was critical to the rapid deployment of supplies and personnel. Marine assets on Okinawa began flying to Japan within four hours of being tasked. Helicopter and fixed-wing C-130 aircraft from Futenma were involved in humanitarian operations, as were members of the 31st MEU, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, and 1st Marine Air Wing, all based in Okinawa.

U.S. disaster relief operations generated considerable goodwill in Japan, including on Okinawa. Okinawans now realize what the Marines were training for when conducting HADR operations elsewhere in Asia. Yet Okinawan media refused to publish articles or photos of U.S. Marines from Okinawa conducting humanitarian assistance operations in Japan.

In fact, some Japanese media outlets went so far as to criticize the Marines’ relief work. For example, the *Ryukyu Shinpo* criticized the U.S. Marine humanitarian assistance as a “tool for political manipulation [and an attempt] to gain the support of the

23. “U.S. Commander Reveals True Purpose of Troops in Okinawa Is to Remove N. Korea’s Nukes,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, April 1, 2010.

24. U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, Joint Publication 3-68, January 22, 2007, p. I-1, at <http://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/NEO/JP3-68NEO1.pdf> (June 8, 2011).

25. *Ibid.*

26. Roos, “The Enduring Importance of Our Security Alliance.”

Japanese people to keep the FRF within Okinawa.” The *Shinpo* editorialized that the U.S. statements highlighting the benefits of having the Marines available to assist Japan was “very discomfoting” and “tricks.” The *Okinawan Times* chimed in as well, posturing that the U.S. was using the disaster as a “political tool [to] manipulate our political decision-making.... [I]t is something we cannot allow.”²⁷

Reason #9: The U.S. Marine presence is vital to the Theater Security Cooperation program.

The Marines influence the regional security environment on a daily basis through the Theater Security Cooperation program, which, with 70 joint exercises per year, enables partners and reassures allies.

Reason #10: Japan lacks the necessary defensive capacity.

Japan lacks any Marine forces of its own, has ground forces that are less capable than their U.S. counterparts, and has poor combined arms operation capabilities. Nor is there any existing Asian architecture that guarantees the rights or interests of Asian nations. The continued presence of U.S. Marines ensures that Japan’s security limitations do not become liabilities.

The Japanese Ministry of Defense responded to growing concerns over China’s increasingly assertive foreign policy by advocating the creation of Japanese ground forces “modeled after the U.S. Marine Corps to strengthen the defense of remote islands in southwestern Japan.” The ministry recommended doubling the 2,000 Grand Self-Defense Force troops on Okinawa and developing ground forces capable of conducting amphibious operations to retake islands held by hostile forces. Yet Japanese forces’ amphibious operations capabilities remain in their infancy, and Tokyo does not intend to assume the regional responsibilities of the U.S. Marines on Okinawa.

Guam Agreement Does Address Okinawan Concerns

The Guam Agreement addresses the concerns raised by the Okinawans, including the need to reduce U.S. flight operations in a congested area, decrease the U.S. military presence on Okinawa, and return land to local authorities.²⁸ Yet, despite meeting each of these issues, the Guam Agreement faces continued opposition from Okinawa.

For example, the Guam Agreement does exactly what the Okinawans have demanded: It reduces the U.S. military presence on the island. The FRF would be one-third the size of the Futenma air base. The planned redeployment of 8,000 Marines and 9,000 dependents from Okinawa to Guam would constitute a nearly 50 percent reduction of the Marine Corps forward presence in Japan. That redeployment would enable the return of 70 percent of the U.S. bases south of the Kadena Air Base.

The Guam Agreement does exactly what the Okinawans have demanded: It reduces the U.S. military presence on the island.

Tokyo hoped to allay Okinawan concerns by altering the construction method at the planned relocation site to address environmental concerns. Protesters have complained that the replacement facility would harm the habitat of the dugong (manatee) and that building on coral would destroy a pristine bay. These complaints are groundless. Local Okinawans say they have not seen a dugong—which is a migratory animal—in Henoko Bay for three generations. Nor is the bay as unique or irreplaceable as depicted; Okinawan civilian construction firms continue to build extensively on offshore coral locations throughout Okinawa.²⁹ Unsurprisingly, these proposed alterations have done little to allay Okinawan objections, however, as the pur-

27. Masashi Miyamoto, “Okinawans Feel Empathetic Toward U.S. Forces,” *Sankei Shimbun*, April 7, 2011.

28. The U.S.–Japanese Roadmap for Realignment (“Guam Agreement”) is a comprehensive, interconnected package of 19 separate initiatives to realign U.S. forces on Okinawa and the Japanese main islands.

29. Author tour of Henoko Bay, April 2010, and interviews with U.S. officials and Okinawan residents, April 2010 and April 2011.

ported environmental issues are simply another means of combating the U.S. redeployment plan.

Japan has also sought to decrease Okinawan resistance to the Guam Agreement by reducing the “burden” of the U.S. military presence. Washington and Tokyo agreed that F-15 fighter training flights would move from Okinawa’s Kadena base to Guam. Up to 20 days of training by two F-15 squadrons stationed at Kadena would be relocated, with a maximum of 20 out of a total of 50 fighters participating each day.³⁰ Japan subsequently announced that U.S. flights out of Misawa Air Base in Aomori Prefecture and the MCAS Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture would also be moved to Guam.

For Okinawan politicians, the preferred option has always been to defer making a decision, both to avoid having to implement an unpopular option and to garner additional benefits from Tokyo and Washington.

The Kan administration emphasized that the training agreement constituted a tangible reduction of the U.S. military burden on Okinawa and hoped it would facilitate implementation of the long-stalled FRF agreement. However, the agreement has had no impact on Okinawan demands. Indeed, Governor Nakaima continues to downplay the significance of the flight training movement, arguing, “That’s the only part of the military presence that has been reduced, and often those flights moved out are just replaced with new aircraft coming in. I won’t know the true outcome until the move has been completed.”³¹

Neither reductions in flight operations nor mitigation of the environmental impact of relocation will satisfy those who are seeking the withdrawal

of USMC flight operations, let alone the entire U.S. military presence. Short of turning over bases to Okinawan control, attempts at reducing the burden that the Marines place on the island are unlikely to appease opponents of the relocation plan. The Okinawan priority is not alliance requirements and geo-strategic factors but localized concerns of reduced military footprint, land givebacks, and removal of noisy military units.

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An Agreement, Not a Buffet Line

The Guam Agreement is a fragile compromise of interlocking steps. The accord stipulates that the U.S. force realignment on Okinawa cannot be implemented piecemeal. Consequently, Okinawa and Japan cannot decide to abide by some components and ignore others; it is an all-or-nothing deal, and a failure to implement any component nullifies the entire agreement.

The relocation of 8,000 Marines to Guam, consolidation of Marine forces on Okinawa, and return of U.S. bases south of Kadena depend on “(1) tangible progress [by Japan] toward completion of the Futenma Replacement Facility, and (2) Japan’s financial contributions to fund development of required facilities and infrastructure on Guam.”³² Okinawan resistance to the FRF would undermine the agreement’s intent to reduce the burden on the Okinawan people. If the deal falls through, then the Marine air unit stays at Futenma. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates affirmed in February 2011, if Japan does not implement the FRF, “troops don’t leave Okinawa; lands don’t get returned to the Okinawans.”³³

30. “U.S. to Transfer Some F-15 Jet Drills from Okinawa to Guam,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 20, 2011, at <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110120005604.htm> (June 6, 2011).

31. “Gov’t Announces Japan–U.S. Working Group on Expanding Okinawa Base-Sharing,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, January 26, 2011.

32. Agreement Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the United States of America Concerning the Implementation of the Relocation of III Marine Expeditionary Force Personnel and Their Dependents from Okinawa to Guam, p. 2 and Arts. 3 and 9.

33. Travis Tritten, “Gates Hopes to Have Futenma Plans Set in Spring,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 17, 2011, at <http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/okinawa/gates-hopes-to-have-futenma-plans-set-in-spring-1.135082> (June 6, 2011).

The U.S. forward-deployed presence is a burden on the United States as well. There is a monetary cost to maintaining U.S. forces overseas, and—more important—the United States has pledged the lives of its sons and daughters to defend Japan.

An alliance is about achieving objectives, not reducing burdens. Removing the Marine air base on Okinawa does not eliminate the alliance mission that necessitated the initial construction of the base. There are, however, two ways to remove the underlying need for the U.S. Marines on Okinawa:

1. Reduce the threats from North Korea and China or
2. Have Japan assume all of the local, regional, and global responsibilities of the Marines.

Neither is likely. Repeated diplomatic entreaties have failed to curb Pyongyang's and Beijing's growing capabilities and increasingly assertive policies. For the latter option to happen, Japan would have to amend its constitution, alter its interpretation of collective self-defense, significantly increase its defense budget, develop military capabilities it does not now have, and gain domestic and foreign support for a dramatic shift in Japanese military policy. Tokyo has shown no inclination to push forward on any of these issues and, indeed, has been strongly resistant to any such change.

Kan's Unenviable Dilemma

As a result of his predecessor's repeatedly making conflicting pledges to different audiences, Prime Minister Kan is stuck between Scylla and Charybdis. His choices are:

- Discover a miraculous compromise that has eluded U.S. and Japan negotiators for the past 15 years;
- Announce that compromise is impossible, that the 2006 agreement has collapsed, that the Marine air unit at Futenma will remain in place indefinitely, that there will be no U.S. force rede-

ployments to Guam, and that there will be no return of U.S. bases to Okinawan control;

- Realize that compromise is impossible and decide to support Okinawa's desire to remove the Marines (which also means realizing that such a decision would have tremendous consequences); or
- Fully implement the Guam Agreement.

The Kan administration has continued Tokyo's trend of promising everything to everyone. Upon becoming prime minister, Kan affirmed the previous administration's May 2010 agreement to abide by the Guam accord. The Guam Agreement includes provisions regarding the 2006 Roadmap for Realignment Implementation, which stated that the FRF would be located in an area combining Henoko Point and the "adjacent water areas as Oura and Heonoko Bays, including two runways in a V-shape, each runway having a length of 1,600 meters plus two 100-meter overruns."³⁴

An alliance is about achieving objectives, not reducing burdens.

Yet in January 2011, Defense Minister Kitazawa denied media reports that the base relocation was proceeding under a plan similar to that drawn up by the previous administration. Kitazawa stated that the government had no such policy and had yet to decide on a relocation site since Okinawa continues to demand that the facility be moved off the island.³⁵

What the United States Should Do

Although challenging, the current security situation facing Japan can—and must—be addressed. The following recommendations will ensure that the issues surrounding the U.S. Marines' continued presence in Okinawa are resolved in a manner that

34. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Aso, and Minister of State for Defense Fukushima Nukaga, "United States–Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation," United States–Japan Security Consultative Committee, May 1, 2006, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/doc0605.html> (June 6, 2011).

35. "Defense Chief Denies LDP Plan for V-shaped Runway," *NHK World*, January 18, 2011.

strengthens Japan, the U.S., and the bilateral relationship between the two nations:

- **Increase public diplomacy.** The Obama Administration should increase its public diplomacy efforts to convince the Japanese and Okinawan legislators, media, and public that the U.S. military presence is critical to the security of Japan, as well as to regional stability. Washington should explain that U.S. military capabilities depend on coordinated, integrated strategies, including that of the Marine Air Ground Task Force. As such, the U.S. Marines on Okinawa are an indispensable and irreplaceable component of any U.S. response to an Asian crisis.
- **Emphasize that the Guam Agreement addresses Okinawan concerns.** The Obama Administration should stress that the existing agreement does remedy Okinawan concerns by moving the Marine air unit to a less populated area, reducing the U.S. military footprint on Okinawa, and returning land to local authorities.
- **Do not get caught in the middle.** The U.S. should continue to have Tokyo lead discussions with Okinawa. Washington should resist any Japanese attempts to put the U.S. in the middle or to use the U.S. as a buffer to deflect criticism of the DPJ.
- **Urge Japan to do its part.** Japan depends on the U.S. for its security but chafes at hosting the men and women responsible for providing that security. The DPJ should publicly articulate its security vision for Japan as well as the roles, missions, and capabilities it is prepared to assume. Rather than bemoaning and apologizing for the “burdens” such a relationship entails, the DPJ should emphasize the need for its alliance with the United States. Prime Minister Kan should publicly rule out any “off-Okinawa” scenario to enable Okinawa Governor Nakaima to advocate the Henoko Bay site as being superior to the status quo.
- **Press Tokyo to fully implement the Guam Agreement.** The U.S. should reiterate that redeployment of Marine forces on Okinawa depends

on Japan fully implementing the Guam Agreement without qualifications.

- **Emphasize that Okinawa is not a country.** The Guam Agreement is between two sovereign nations, Japan and the United States. Tokyo should work with Okinawa to address local concerns, but it must also make clear that Japanese national security and Asian peace and stability trump local Okinawan convenience: Seeking understanding and consensus has its limits. As then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano said in March 2010, “There are cases in which the central government has to take certain actions, even if those actions go against a resolution of a local assembly.”³⁶
- **Remember that the budget sword cuts both ways.** Tokyo should make it clear to Okinawa that Japanese expenditures for Okinawan development (contained in the Special Measures Law, which expires in 2012) are conditional on FRF relocation. Non-compliance by Okinawa could result in reductions in Japanese subsidies, particularly given increased Japanese budgetary constraints after the recent natural disasters. Similarly, U.S. budgetary constraints make it more likely that the Marine air unit would stay at Futenma unless progress is made soon.

Conclusion

It is important that both the United States and Japan realize that maintaining—and, indeed, strengthening—their alliance best serves their respective national interests. The U.S. military in Asia provides both a shield behind which nations can develop and prosper and a sword whose threat deters those nations that would otherwise try to influence weaker nations through coercive diplomacy or the threat of force.

It was unfortunate that Prime Minister Hatoyama’s comments regarding the presence of U.S. Marines triggered a year of unnecessary turmoil in the U.S.–Japanese alliance. Yet even during the tumultuousness of the Futenma debate, most aspects of the alliance continued to function well because of the exemplary coordination between U.S. and Japanese forces.

36. “Okinawa Leaders, Locals Rap Plan to Move Futenma to Land Area,” *Daily Yomiuri*, March 10, 2010.

Now that the DPJ has reversed its security policies, the strains in the relationship are dissipating. Even as Washington and Tokyo strive to redeploy U.S. forces in Japan, the allies should focus on expanding the two nations' military relationship to address growing regional and security challenges.

The U.S. and Japan, along with South Korea, share basic values of freedom, democracy, and the free market. The allies also share a common objec-

tive: defending these principles against potential threats from China and North Korea. Washington should therefore work closely with Tokyo and Seoul to identify ways to transform these military alliances, as well as the broader relationships, to meet common challenges.

—Bruce Klingner is Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.