

## **The Okinawa Perspective by Keiichi Inamine, Governor of Okinawa**

March 15, 2005

Center for Strategic and International Studies

*The Office of the Japan Chair hosted a forum on Okinawa's perspective on U.S. military bases in Japan on March 15, 2005. The speaker, Keiichi Inamine, is the current governor of Okinawa.*

Governor Inamine began by stating that the purpose of his trip to the United States is to appeal to U.S. audiences to lift the burden on Okinawa during the current global realignment of U.S. military personnel and facilities.

Inamine described the peculiarity of Okinawa in comparison to the rest of Japan. First, Okinawa was placed under U.S. control for the first 27 years of the postwar period. While the rest of Japan was enjoying rapid economic growth, the people of Okinawa felt that they were being left behind. U.S. military bases were built during the period of U.S. control and as a result, an island with a mere 0.6 percent of Japan's landmass has the burden of sustaining 75 percent of U.S. military bases in Japan today. Second, most of the military bases in Okinawa are built on privately owned land, whereas the bases in other prefectures are built on publicly owned land.

He also spoke to Okinawa's unique political situation. With the demise of the Cold War, pro-Soviet reformist parties, mainly the Communist party and the Socialist party, have reduced their significance in the Japanese political arena, and the DPJ has stepped in between the reformists and the pro-American conservatives. However, in the Okinawa Assembly, almost 40 percent of the members are reformists or leftists and there are no DPJ members. As a result, Okinawa is clearly divided between the two confrontational groups: the conservatives who support the U.S.-Japan security alliance and claim the reduction of bases in Okinawa would hurt this alliance, and the reformists who oppose the alliance and demand the complete removal of U.S. bases from Okinawa.

Inamine stated that the Okinawan government recognizes and realizes the importance of the security treaty with the United States and the pivotal role the bases play in Okinawa. With 75 percent of U.S. bases on its land, Okinawa plays a key role in the U.S.-Japan security treaty. But Inamine warned that it was vital to lift this burden off the Okinawan people. U.S. bases bring with them daily noise problems, accidents (including a recent helicopter crash on a school yard), and environmental destruction.

The U.S. government is currently working on realigning its military forces and facilities around the world. With regard to this, Governor Inamine lobbied the U.S. government for: 1) the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps out of Okinawa, 2) operational improvements to the Kadena Air Base, 3) halting construction of the U.S. Army's live-fire training complex at Camp Hansen, and 4) fundamental revision of the SOFA. He stated that he already submitted these demands to the Japanese government.

Inamine closed his argument by asking the United States to consider Okinawa's unique reality, and he asked for a reduction in the excessive base burden the Okinawan people have shouldered for more than 50 years.

## **Q&A session**

Q. What was the reaction of the U.S. government, especially the Department of Defense?

Inamine: The Department of Defense expressed their willingness to speed up resolution of this problem. In the recent Two-Plus-Two conferences, both the United States and Japan agreed to lift the burden on the Okinawan people while retaining the deterrent power.

Q. What is the difference between Governor Inamine's view, who is affiliated with the conservative group, and that of his predecessor Mr. Ohta, who is a reformist?

Inamine: Regardless of their political affiliation, all governors of Okinawa confront the same challenges and difficulties. Governors of Okinawa pursue what the people of Okinawa demand, which is the reduction of U.S. military bases in Okinawa. However, this is a difficult task to accomplish. Mr. Ohta was a reformist himself but as a governor, he acted according to the demands of the Okinawan people.

Q. It is hard for the American people to understand the sentiment of the Okinawan people since there are no foreign troops stationed in the United States. How would you address the problem with President Bush, who advocates for liberty and freedom around the world?

Inamine: I agree that it is hard for the American people to understand the anxiety and fear the Okinawan people have. However, I would take every opportunity to address the issue of bases in Okinawa from the American side. I met President Bush briefly and asked him to visit Okinawa. We will continue addressing the issue to the United States.

Q. In addition to accidents such as the helicopter crash, there are crimes committed by U.S. service members. How would you solve the problem?

Inamine: The U.S. military is fully aware of the seriousness of the problem and have strengthened the educational training of service members. It is almost impossible to achieve complete eradication of crimes. However, the Okinawan government will continue addressing the problem. It is vital to keep putting the issue on the table.