

## JAPAN CHAIR PLATFORM

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**Time to Acknowledge the Realignment Impasse**

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Japanese foreign minister Koichiro Gemba and U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton recently reaffirmed their countries' commitment to an agreement to build a Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) in northern Okinawa and relocate over 8,000 Marines to Guam. Despite this high-level reaffirmation, the agreement is no longer workable. Although the allies are no closer to implementing it than they were the day negotiations began, developments over the past few months have pushed them further from their goal. Tokyo and Washington need to acknowledge that the conditions that were once conducive to implementation no longer exist. Because of the impasse, it is time to temper political rhetoric with reality.

**Current Realignment Plan**

The current agreement framing Futenma's relocation was crafted in May 2006. Called the U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation (hereafter "Roadmap"), the plan clarified that a FRF would be built at Camp Schwab and two runways on reclaimed land in Oura Bay (both in the Henoko district of Nago in northern Okinawa) by 2014. Only *after* the FRF's completion would Futenma's air units relocate to Camp Schwab, 8,000 Marines move to Guam (and 9,000 dependents), a host of U.S. facilities south of Kadena—including Futenma—close, and 2,600 acres of land be returned. Although Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama promised to reexamine the Roadmap when his party came to power in 2009, he reneged and renewed Tokyo's backing in May 2010. His successors, Naoto Kan and current premier Yoshihiko Noda, have maintained this support.

There are many critics who have long questioned or opposed the details and/or necessity of the FRF and Guam relocation. Although the Roadmap is far from perfect, I believed there was a possibility for completion if two interlocking efforts succeeded. First, if the central government built trust with Okinawan residents through genuine dialogue over why the Marines are needed in Okinawa, I believed it would improve the prefecture's political environment and reduce opposition. Second, because Governor Hirokazu Nakaima's primary focus has been Okinawa's economic development, I believed if Tokyo crafted measures to promote development while working with the United States to quickly reduce some level of the Marine presence, then Nakaima could accept the plan without looking like he was capitulating. Understanding these were both difficult tasks, I believed strong political leadership was required. I implicitly assumed continued funding and advancing infrastructure developments on Guam.

Yet, over the past few months, multiple problems have arisen. There is a widening chasm of trust between Naha (capital of Okinawa Prefecture) and Tokyo, mounting delays on Guam, and significant funding cuts in Tokyo and Washington. The convergence of these trends dooms the Roadmap. It is because of this that I now join the chorus of others who believe it is time to acknowledge the difficulty with the current plan and begin anew to consider alternatives.

**Widening Chasm between Naha and Tokyo**

Building trust with local Okinawan officials and residents is necessary for long-term support of U.S. troop presence, but that support is dwindling. Ever since Futenma's relocation was first announced, opposition has existed. Every government has attempted to minimize it through dialogue in an attempt to build trust, without much success. Worse, there has been a rapid deterioration of trust between Naha and Tokyo since the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came to power in 2009. Although trust was lacking before, events over the past few months have accelerated this trend to the point that there is now irreparable damage in their relationship that makes it difficult to proceed.

Hatoyama's promise to reexamine the Roadmap and relocate U.S. forces out of Okinawa raised expectations among Okinawans that the DPJ would address their concerns of noise, hazards, and ecological damage. It also raised their expectations that the DPJ would reduce the U.S. military presence. His promise also emboldened officials, such as Governor Nakaima and Mayor Susumu Inamine of Nago. Unfortunately, after politicizing such a highly charged issue, Hatoyama's renegeing shattered trust in the DPJ. While Kan and Noda have tried to repair this relationship by sending officials to Okinawa to engage local officials and residents, irreparable damage has been caused by insensitive gaffes that make convincing Okinawans now a Herculean task that no leader in Tokyo can achieve.

The first gaffe came in November when Satoshi Tanaka, chief of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, likened the Futenma relocation issue to rape. According to Japanese media, Tanaka was asked during a casual drinking session why Tokyo has never given a clear timetable for submitting an environmental assessment report to Okinawa. In response, Tanaka asked whether you declare you are going to rape (*okasu*) someone prior to raping them. The comment, inappropriate in any context, was particularly insensitive given that three U.S. servicemen raped a 12-year-old Okinawan girl in 1995. Outrage over the comment was compounded by a subsequent gaffe by Defense Minister Yasuo Ichikawa that he had no knowledge of the horrendous rape.

Both gaffes were extremely damaging. Tanaka's comment reinforces an image of Tokyo trying to cajole Okinawa with money and rhetoric while hiding its real intentions to ignore Okinawan concerns and forcibly carry out policies. Ichikawa's ignorance reinforces the notion of an out-of-touch central government that has little sympathy for Okinawans. After all, it was the rape that led to protests and eventually the December 1996 Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) agreement outlining realignment plans. Although both officials were lightly punished, the combined consequence of their remarks is the destruction of any possibility for the central government to build a relationship of trust with Okinawa. As such, it is now exponentially more difficult to obtain the understanding of both Nakaima and the local communities regarding relocation.

Obtaining this consent is crucial. Without consent by local communities, the Marine Corps transfer to Camp Schwab would be wrought with constant friction. If local communities increase their opposition to the U.S. presence throughout Okinawa, it could lead to opposition at other bases that would have broader consequences. For example, if opposition grew to Kadena Air Base, it would threaten the U.S. forward presence as it is United States' largest air base in Asia. Political fights with host communities are not the types of battles in which the U.S. military wishes to engage.

Likewise, obtaining Nakaima's consent is critical because he needs to approve two necessary items for the FRF to move forward. Tokyo needs to submit an environmental impact assessment report to Naha examining how the proposed runway built on reclaimed land will affect coral reefs and the endangered dugong. The report, recently submitted to Naha, will be the basis for Nakaima to approve or reject the relocation project. Similarly, because the governor is required by law to approve land reclamation during construction projects, Tokyo needs Nakaima's approval for the plan to proceed. Because Nakaima is opposed to both the relocation and land reclamation, Tokyo has been sending officials to meet him with the hope that dialogue and economic packages will build some level of trust to obtain his consent. The recent gaffes destroyed this possibility. Although Tokyo could force the land reclamation project through eminent domain or the courts, this carries significant political risks as it usurps the governor's power and thus reinforces an image of Tokyo forcing its will on an unwilling Okinawa. Worse, it would freeze FRF movement because it would be stuck in litigation for years.

Despite years of Tokyo engaging Naha to build trust and convince local officials and residents on the necessity of retaining the Marine presence in Okinawa, the recent gaffes destroyed whatever trust may have existed. As such, the possibility of Tokyo obtaining consent for the relocation is lost. Short of Tokyo overriding all opposition and riding out years of litigation, there is little prospect for the current FRF plan to succeed.

### **Mounting Delays on Guam**

Unlike Okinawa, many on Guam embraced the idea of an expanded U.S. presence. This was because of the prospect of a rapid influx of money to help rebuild the poor infrastructure and struggling economy. Yet, while most media and scholarly attention has focused on the FRF, problems have been increasing on Guam as well.

The U.S. Navy was not able to release up to \$1.2 billion in military construction task orders for the Guam buildup until the March 2011 signing of a Programmatic Agreement. This enabled contractors to complete the final phases of their design work for proposals. The existing buildup is already plagued by infrastructure concerns and cost overruns. Worse, key construction projects are hampered by lawsuits, environmental concerns, and as I discuss below, funding

cuts. With the navy promising this past autumn to conduct new studies on proposed construction sites, the commencement of crucial parts of the Guam buildup is now pushed back by several years, at least.

Consider first the navy's plans for live-fire rifle and grenade ranges for the marines. The navy deferred its decision on a location because of an ongoing lawsuit. In November 2010, three private groups filed a lawsuit against the Department of Defense (DOD) in an effort to prevent the ranges on about 1,090 acres of ancestral Chamorro lands that are host to ancient graves and medicinal plants. The area, known as Pagat, is the preferred site but is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Opponents encourage the navy to locate the ranges on the island of Tinian, an option the navy has ruled out. Although navy officials have pledged to protect Pagat Village and argued that the ranges could be built with minimal damage to Pagat, that Guamanians can access the land when the ranges are not in use and that some areas would be accessible at all times, Guamanians remain unconvinced. And while the government of Guam approved the plan in March 2011, the plan has not moved forward due to continuing public outcry and the lawsuit. Forward movement completely stopped when, in November, the navy announced it would conduct a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) to evaluate alternatives. The SEIS will take a minimum of two years to complete and is not expected to begin until early 2012. Once completed, the navy will select a location, pushing construction years away.

The navy has also delayed a decision on where to locate a wharf for transient aircraft carriers. As part of the Guam buildup, the navy plans to build a new wharf somewhere in Guam's main harbor, Apra Harbor. Although the navy never officially chose a site, after a one-year study its initial plans were narrowed to two locations (Polaris Point or the former Ship Repair Facility) that required dredging of about 71 acres of coral. However, several U.S. federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service requested that the navy conduct a new environmental impact study to focus not just on coral, but also fishes, sponges, and protected sea turtles at 72 sites in Apra. There was also opposition from local residents and lawmakers who pressured the navy to use the San Luis area instead, an area west of the proposed locations that would require less dredging. Although the initial fieldwork showed little high-quality coral would be removed, the navy agreed this past autumn to conduct another full study and consider an alternative site. Because this study could take several years and may require artificial reefs or other forms of protection, the final decision on location (let alone completion) is now several years delayed.

As delays mount, and give rise to new requirements, costs continue to rise. With the final number of personnel, dependents, and civilians yet to be determined, costs are expected to rise further still. Worse, it is uncertain how Guam will be able to handle the expected population increase. There are about 183,000 people living on Guam. According to the navy's July 2010 Final Environmental Impact Statement, Guam's permanent population is expected to increase by about 30,000 (troops, dependents, civilian workers). In addition, the island will see an estimated short-term increase of 79,000 workers. Both expansions will take a terrible toll on the island's infrastructure, including utilities, roads, and water supplies, as well as services, such as dentists, doctors, clinics, and schools. Until these problems are resolved, which is still many years away, it is uncertain how quickly the Guam buildup can proceed.

It is clear that the Guam buildup is beset by problems. The decisions by the navy this past autumn to conduct new studies means that work cannot begin on key portions of the Guam buildup for at least the next few years. Continuing infrastructure problems may push this back even further. With key aspects of Guam's buildup now uncertain, the likelihood of the Roadmap's success diminishes further still.

### **Evaporating Financial Support from Tokyo and Washington**

More than anything else, money is needed for the Roadmap to succeed. In 2006, costs for facility and infrastructure development on Guam were calculated at \$10.27 billion. Japan would provide \$6.09 billion and the United States \$4.18 billion. Yet, in December, Tokyo and Washington announced cuts and freezes in their funding. With funds drying up, the death bell for the realignment plan has rung.

In the United States, key members of the Senate have been critical of DOD's realignment plans. In May 2011, Senators John McCain, Carl Levin, and Jim Webb criticized the plans as "unrealistic, unworkable and unaffordable." Acting out of a need to address ballooning costs and rising opposition, they proposed an alternative to sync with current fiscal and political realities, although it was bereft of many specifics. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) study the same month supported their thinking, showing that the military did not develop an accurate cost estimate or appropriately consider alternatives. Instead of the expected \$10.27 billion, the GAO study stated that the cost of the Okinawa and Guam relocations could be closer to \$29.1 billion.

As such, it was not surprising that senators cut funding during discussions on the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Last month, they slashed the entire \$150 million allocated for the planned relocation of marines from Okinawa to Guam. Additionally, despite the House of Representatives approving \$303 million for military construction projects on Guam, the Senate reduced it to \$83.6 million but froze it until certain conditions are met. Furthermore, they cut the entire \$33 million approved by the House to fund socioeconomic projects directly related to the Guam transfer and the influx of people (although it was revived in the Consolidated Appropriations Act).

In the past, funding cuts have later been restored. Yet, because DOD faces automatic cuts of \$600 billion during a financial recession, it is unlikely the NDAA cuts will be restored until DOD presents a more rigorous analysis of the need and costs of its realignment plan to convince the Senate.

Worse, Tokyo followed Washington by cutting its funding by about 80 percent. In its initial budget for FY2011, Tokyo dedicated \$667 million (¥52 billion) for the planned relocation. Yet, following the NDAA cuts, Tokyo decided it had no choice but to reduce its amount to less than \$128 million (¥10 billion) in FY2012. It also is examining whether it should withhold disbursements for related spending included in the FY2011 budget.

Thus, fiscal realities in Washington and Tokyo have now significantly altered the entire realignment plan. These developments are the most damaging because they bring the realignment process to a halt. With little possibility that these cuts will be restored, forward progress on the Roadmap is now unlikely.

### **Time to Move On**

Despite 16 years having passed since the SACO, the United States and Japan have nothing to show for their years of effort. Nevertheless, top officials in Washington and Tokyo continue to pledge their commitment to the Roadmap. Yet, it is opposed by local officials and residents in Okinawa, hampered by delayed projects and insufficient infrastructure on Guam, and facing funding shortfalls. Taken as a whole, it is clear the Roadmap is no longer capable of being implemented. The sooner Washington and Tokyo recognize this, the sooner they can begin the process of finding an alternative. Although both Washington and Tokyo need to contribute ideas, it is unlikely Tokyo will initiate the process given that Hatoyama's attempt ended so disastrously. The United States therefore needs to begin the process. This would send a strong message that the United States is open to hearing new ideas.

What the alternative is remains open for discussion, although closing Futenma and integrating its current assets and operations elsewhere needs to be included. Understanding that building large military bases is unaffordable today, a joint basing option on Japanese military bases for the marines may prove beneficial, something Sheila Smith of the Council of Foreign Relations has advocated. Not only does it save money by utilizing existing infrastructure, it also improves interoperability between the allies. Another option, advocated for years by Mike Mochizuki of George Washington University and Michael O' Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, could be the pre-positioning of U.S. equipment and supplies. This could be at Japanese military bases (with access agreed ahead of time), on amphibious ships at Japanese military ports, or on maritime vessels pre-positioned in Japanese waters. Pre-positioning equipment would allow marines to be flown in from bases abroad (or a smaller number that remain in Okinawa) to quickly access their equipment in a crisis. Another option is looking to other states. When U.S. realignment plans were first negotiated, one of the reasons Guam was chosen was because no other countries offered to host U.S. forces. Yet, this past November, Washington and Canberra agreed for the port of Darwin to host a full marine task force of up to 2,500 personnel. The implications of having this many marines based in Australia could take some pressure off the U.S. focus on Okinawa. Likewise, in December, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, chief of naval operations, wrote in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings* that the United States will station several of its newest littoral combat ships in Singapore and may step up periodic aircraft deployments to the Philippines and Thailand. While not marines, this strengthens the U.S. presence in the region and could therefore further alleviate pressure to have a heavy military presence on Okinawa or Guam.

Though none of these alternatives are perfect substitutes for the Roadmap, they represent innovative approaches to maintaining U.S. forward presence in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure rapid, flexible responses during times of crisis.

Because the problems of realignment have been plaguing the allies for years, it behooves them to find a solution. This is not because trust in the alliance is deteriorating or because it prevents them from working together. After all, there are multiple arenas where the two closely cooperate. One need only remember that the United States responded quickly to help Japan in the aftermath of the March 2011 disasters and that the two worked closely together in Operation Tomodachi. Any similar regional contingency that could erupt would elicit the same cooperation.

A resolution is required because as the United States pivots to the Asia-Pacific region, it is imperative to know what the U.S. force posture is going to look like and how Japan fits in this strategy, and then work to implement it. Excess focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. Marine presence in Okinawa diverts attention away from the sizable role to be played by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force at Yokosuka and Kadena in the event of a regional contingency. The region is rapidly changing, and the quicker the problems of realignment are settled, the quicker the United States and Japan can adapt to meet those changes.

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