

# THE ISSUE OF JAPAN'S MARINE CORPS AIR FORCE STATION FUTENMA'S RELOCATION AND THE FALL OF HATOYAMA<sup>1</sup>

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*In 2009, the opposition party, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won a landslide victory in Japan's lower house elections, winning 308 seats out of the 480 seats. Through the elections, the Japanese people hoped to see a change in the old bureaucratic-centered politics and the beginning of a two-party system. The reform materialized after more than 50 years of a one-party rule under LDP. The Okinawans, in particular, were strong supporters of the DPJ where the party received 70 percent of votes from the prefecture. One of the key factors behind this support was the promise by the DPJ to relocate the Marine Corps Air Force Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma) to Henoko. However, relocation of the military base out of Okinawa was almost impossible because it required the consent of the United States and various parties such as the Okinawans and the coalition government. This paper aims to analyze how the issue of relocating Futenma during Hatoyama's administration led to the eventual fall of Hatoyama. The opposition is not obligated to fulfill all its promises but when in power, they face difficulties in fulfilling promises. Because of the relocation failure, DPJ was seen as an unreliable political party, and Hatoyama was forced to step down, after less than nine months in office despite winning a historical landslide victory in the 2009 elections.*

Keywords: Democratic Party of Japan, Hatoyama, MCAS Futenma, Okinawa

## Introduction

Although the US occupation of Japan ended in 1952, Japan's dependence on the US continues, particularly in the area of security, as seen through the Japan-US Security Treaty. One of the treaties stipulates that several US military bases would be stationed in Japan, including in Okinawa. Although Japan attained her independence after the treaty, Okinawa remained as a US colony until 1972. However, after Okinawa was officially returned to Japan, the US military bases were not relocated. Since then the Okinawans have continuously demanded that the military bases be removed from their prefecture, including Marine Corps Air Force Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma).

The MCAS Futenma relocation issue had been negotiated since the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administration (1955 to 2009) and was resolved with the signing of agreement in 2006 titled United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation.<sup>2</sup> Both countries agreed to transfer some troops from Okinawa to Guam; MCAS Futenma, located in the densely populated Ginowan City would be relocated to a less densely populated city of Henoko, in Nago City, northern Okinawa. The plan involves the construction of two runways on a plot of reclaimed land adjacent to Camp

<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by a Japan Foundation Research Grant under Grant [number: 25 RC-A2003].

<sup>2</sup> Tomohito Shinoda, *Contemporary Japanese Politics: Institutional Changes and Power Shift*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p 168.

Scwab.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the agreement also states that by 2014, a total of 8,000 US soldiers and their families will be moved to Guam. Japan will bear a total cost of USD 6.09 billion, the cost of transfer to Guam. In essence, the 2006's agreement was considered the best solution to address the problems faced by both countries. However, the relocation to Henoko was opposed by the majority of Okinawans since the plan did not meet their needs, which was to get rid of MCAS Futenma from the prefecture.

The situation changed when the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) promised, during the lower house election campaign in August 2009, to move the military base out of Okinawa, to another prefecture or out of Japan, should they win the election.<sup>4</sup> However, when the DPJ won the elections and formed a government, they failed to fulfil this promise, which caused the Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama to resign in June 2010, after less than nine months of being in power.

This paper analyzes how the relocation issue of MCAS Futenma led to the fall of the Hatoyama administration. The researchers argue that the relocation of military bases is not simple, as it requires the consent of many parties such as the United State (US), the Okinawans as well as the coalition government parties. Failure to obtain the consent of these parties was the key factor responsible for the failure of the DPJ's relocation plan. Ironically, the opposition parties can promise something that is almost impossible to fulfill because they are not obligated to make it happen. However, when they manage to form a government, they face difficulties in fulfilling promises, and the failure to do so eventually undermines the trust of the people.

## MCAS Futenma Relocation Issue under Yukio Hatoyama's Administration

The MCAS Futenma relocation issue was raised by the DPJ before they won the lower house elections in August 2009. During Hatoyama's visit to Okinawa in 2008, he promised that if the DPJ won the elections and he was elected as Prime Minister, he would relocate MCAS Futenma in Ginowan out of Japan. In the autumn of 2008, Seiji Maehara, the then Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism under the DPJ administration and the minister responsible for Okinawa and Northern Territories, made a prediction; he convinced his supporters that the US presidential candidate, Barrack Obama would revise the entire agreement of 2006 should he win the US presidential election. During the August 2009 election, the DPJ candidate in Okinawa also promised not to allow the construction of new military base in the prefecture.

Statements by Hatoyama and other DPJ leaders proved to be well received as 70 percent of Okinawans supported the party as shown in poll results, conducted by *Mainichi Shimbun*.<sup>5</sup> The DPJ also opposed the huge financial burden imposed on the Japanese government for the transfer of US troops to Guam. Promises by DPJ politicians during the elections gave hope to the Okinawans who objected the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko.<sup>6</sup> The efficient election campaign, particularly on the relocation of

<sup>3</sup> Camp Scwab situated in Nago City, northern Okinawa, is also a station of the fourth US marine regiment.

<sup>4</sup> *Saitei demo kengai, dekiru koto nara kokugai he*, Refer to Jinbo Ken, "Gaikou.Anpo: Rinen Tsuikyū Kara Genjitsu Rousen He" in Nihon Saiken Inshiatibu (cho), *Minshuto Seiken Shippai no Kensho*, Tokyo: Chukou Shinsho, 2012, p 131.

<sup>5</sup> 'Thousands of Japanese Protest US Base Plan,' *Reuters*, 8 November 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Johnson, 'Opposition to MCAS Futenma Move Won't Go Away,' *The Japan Times*, 19 October 2009.

MCAS Futenma in Okinawa enabled the DPJ to win a large number of seats, securing 308 out of 480 seats. Voters rejected LDP in 2009 because they believed that the transition would end the problems faced. Winning the election allowed the DPJ to govern Japan for the first time since it was established in 1998.

After winning the elections, the relocation of MCAS Futenma became a major issue to be resolved by Hatoyama. If the issue were unresolved, it could potentially threaten the relationship between Japan and the US as well as result in a loss of trust from his supporters. Clearly, Hatoyama's action of issuing various statements showed he did not have a plan. For example, in September 2009, Hatoyama stressed that the DPJ would review the Japan-US agreement on the relocation of MCAS Futenma to another part of Japan or out of the country.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the *Japan Times* report on October 10, 2009 highlighted that Hatoyama's coalition government would stick to the plan to re-evaluate the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. However, the day before, Hatoyama agreed to relocate MCAS to another city as per the agreement in 2006. In November 2009, Hatoyama insisted that Tokyo would take time to consider the issue of relocation despite his promise to implement relocation upon winning the election.<sup>8</sup> The *Japan Times* reported on December 5, 2009 that Hatoyama agreed to relocate MCAS Futenma to Guam.<sup>9</sup>

Various statements by Hatoyama also showed his inconsistent stance on the issue of relocating MCAS Futenma. In addition, Hatoyama was caught between maintaining interests of three parties: promises made to the Okinawans during the election campaign in 2009; the need to preserve good relationship with one party in the coalition government, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which called for the moving of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa; and the US stance that the 2006 agreement should be adopted in order to resolve the issue. Finally, on May 4, 2010, Hatoyama admitted that he was unable to fulfil the promises given to the Okinawans and decided to designate Henoko as the most suitable location for MCAS Futenma.<sup>10</sup> The Japanese government then issued a joint statement with the US in May 2010 relating to the transfer of MCAS Futenma to Henoko as agreed in 2006.

## Coalition Parties

Long before the coalition government was formed between the SDP, the New People's Party (*Kokumin Shinto*, PNP) and the DPJ on September 16, 2009, diplomatic and security issues were anticipated to be a thorn in the flesh of their coalition.<sup>11</sup> This became a reality when they could not reach an agreement, especially concerning the relocation of MCAS Futenma. The three parties' coalition government was characterised by political analyst, Hideaki Kase as "water mixed with oil", which means it is hard to

<sup>7</sup> 'MCAS Futenma Stance the Same: Hatoyama,' *The Japan Times*, 26 September 2009.

<sup>8</sup> 'Demo of 21,000 People Demand Closure of MCAS Futenma Air Base,' *The Japan Times*, 9 November 2009.

<sup>9</sup> 'Hatoyama Cabinet Confirms US Base Relocation Accord must be Reviewed,' *The Japan Times*, 10 October, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> 'Full MCAS Futenma Move Impossible: Hatoyama,' *The Japan Times*, 5 May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Jun Hongo, Alex Martin, 'DPJ, Two Allies Agree to Form Coalition,' *The Japan Times*, 10 September 2009.

find a point of agreement among them.<sup>12</sup> The SDP is a pacifist ideological party and the party president, Mizuho Fukushima was of the view that MCAS Futenma must be moved out of Japan.<sup>13</sup>

In response to Hatoyama's statement to move MCAS Futenma to Henoko, the SDP threatened to leave the coalition government. This is because the SDP's stance on the issue is that MCAS Futenma must be moved out of Japan.<sup>14</sup> Should SDP withdraw from the coalition government, it would affect the majority in the upper house where the SDP's five seats enabled the coalition government to dominate both chambers of the Diet in Japan. Without the SDP, the ruling coalition had only 120 out of 242 seats, short of three seats to gain a majority. Although the DPJ controlled 308 seats out of 480 seats in the lower house, Hatoyama relied on other parties in the upper house to form a coalition government. Therefore, Hatoyama had to be very careful with the views expressed by the parties in the coalition government in order to sustain his administration. In terms of the MCAS Futenma relocation issue, following objections by the SDP, Hatoyama decided to postpone the plan until he could find a suitable location.

*"As I have mentioned before, I do take the Japan-U.S. agreement seriously, but I am wondering if Henoko is our only choice," Hatoyama said. "I would like to resolve the issue as soon as possible, but with the new SDP problem, I have asked (the foreign and defense ministers) to actively look into a new location."<sup>15</sup>*

In April 2010, the SDP Policy Chief, Tomoko Abe and Diet Affairs Chief of the PNP, Mikiyo Shimoji demanded the government cancel the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the two parties in the coalition government opposed the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa. Abe and Shimoji also opposed an alternative proposal to relocate MCAS Futenma to White Beach, which is located in Uruma at Katsuren Peninsular, east of Okinawa; their reasoning was the relocation would not ease the burden borne by the Okinawans.<sup>17</sup> The SDP instead proposed the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Guam, Tinian or Saipan in the Mariana Islands.<sup>18</sup> However, Hatoyama assumed that the relocation to Guam was unrealistic in terms of deterrence strategies in order to counterbalance China's military strength and North Korea's nuclear threat in East Asia.<sup>19</sup>

Negotiation related to the relocation of MCAS Futenma were been postponed until May 2010 due to opposition from the SDP.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, a new location for

<sup>12</sup> Jun Hongo, Alex Martin, *Japan Times*, 10 September 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Jun Hongo, 'Fukushima Strives to Carve a Pacifist Path for the SDP,' *The Japan Times*, 31 December, 2009. Refer also to 'Fukushima Firm on Base Opposition,' *The Japan Times*, 24 January 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Jun Hongo, *Japan Times*, 31 December 2009. Refer also to Jun Hongo, 'Fukushima Returned, Repeats SDP Threat,' *The Japan Times*, 5 December 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Masami Ito, 'Hatoyama: Move MCAS Futenma to Guam?' *The Japan Times*, 5 December 2009.

<sup>16</sup> 'DPJ's Allies Oppose White Beach Option,' *The Japan Times*, 1 April 2010.

<sup>17</sup> *Japan Times*, 1 April 2010.

<sup>18</sup> 'DPJ Eyes Changing Constitution,' *The Japan Times*, 27 December 2009. Refer also to 'SDP to Push Overseas Relocation for MCAS Futenma,' *The Japan Times*, 28 February 2010.

<sup>19</sup> *Japan Times*, 27 December 2009

<sup>20</sup> 'Defense Chief Backs May Deadline for MCAS Futenma,' *The Japan Times*, 23 December 2009.

MCAS Futenma was sought in order to solve the problem. Finally, on May 28, 2010, an extraordinary cabinet meeting was held to decide on the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. However, Fukushima refused to sign the agreement, and as a result, she was dismissed from the Hatoyama cabinet. Fukushima's dismissal is a reflection of her continued opposition to the agreement between Japan and the US on the relocation of MCAS Futenma in Okinawa.<sup>21</sup>

Following Fukushima's dismissal, the coalition government between the DPJ, the SDP and the PNP dissipate; the SDP left the coalition in May 2010. However, the SDP was ready to back the coalition should the DPJ agree to withdraw the plan to move MCAS Futenma to Henoko.<sup>22</sup> Ever since Fukushima's dismissal, Hatoyama's support dropped to 19.1 percent compared with 72 percent when he first formed his cabinet.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, without a majority in the upper house, the DPJ faced difficulties in passing any law that required the support of the majority in the upper house.

## The Okinawans

In fact, the Okinawans have long been calling for the moving of MCAS Futenma out of their prefecture. Several series of demonstrations had taken place and one of the largest rallies was in 1995 when 85,000 residents turned out to protest. Following the demonstration, a Special Action Committee Okinawa (SACO) was established in order to plan for the reduction of the burden of the Okinawans, especially to cut down on the number of US military bases. Since then, several series of negotiations were held in February 1996, which resulted in an agreement between Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and US President Bill Clinton to return MCAS Futenma's land to its owner within five to seven years.<sup>24</sup> In November 1996, the Japan Defence Agency Director, Fumio Kyuma proposed the construction of a runway on the reclaimed land in Henoko, the place where four US military bases, including Schwab base are located. However, the proposal was opposed by the Okinawans in December 1996, when 22,000 demonstrators protested against the decision to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko.<sup>25</sup> Despite continued protests from the Okinawans, in 2006 an agreement was signed to permanently relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko.

The agreement again sparked off opposition from the Okinawans who aimed to move MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa or Japan. The Okinawans were not satisfied with the decision to relocate the base to a less densely populated area without their prior consent. On August 13, 2009, about 200 people gathered at Okinawa International University campus to protest against the relocation of MCAS Futenma, the place location adjacent to the location where a MCAS Futenma Marine helicopter crashed on August 13, 2004. The accident destroyed the university building and in order to prevent such an event from recurring, pressure was exerted to close the marine air force base and move it out of Okinawa. The tragedy was not the first incident involving the US military in Okinawa; there had been other untoward happenings, which triggered public outrage

<sup>21</sup> 'Fukushima Fired from Cabinet over MCAS Futenma,' *The Japan Times*, 29 May 2010.

<sup>22</sup> 'Masami Ito, No Regrets about Exit: Fukushima,' *The Japan Times*, 29 June 2010

<sup>23</sup> 'Heavy Blow to Mr. Hatoyama,' *The Japan Times*, 2 June 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Masamichi Sebastian Inoue, John Purves and Mark Selden, "Okinawa Citizens, US Bases, and the Security of Asia," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 6, p 264.

<sup>25</sup> Masamichi Sebastian Inoue, John Purves and Mark Selden, p 264.



in Okinawa. The most notable event was on September 4, 1995 when a 12-year-old girl was kidnapped and raped by three US military officers.<sup>26</sup> Although the military had apologised for the incident, safety concerns persists. Similarly, land acquisition for the construction of military bases had raised the grievances among farmers who lost fertile agricultural land for farming. In addition, the landscape was also destroyed to give way for the construction of US military bases.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of Hatoyama's inconsistent stance on the MCAS Futenma relocation issue since the beginning of his administration, the Okinawans began to lose confidence in him. They continued to hold demonstrations against the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. The ongoing protests and the increased number of participants reflected the frustration among the locals on the vague stance of the new government in addressing the MCAS Futenma relocation issue. For example, on November 8, 2009, a few days before Obama's visit to Japan, 21,000 people marched on the streets in Haneko.<sup>28</sup>

The demonstrators demanded the immediate closure of MCAS Futenma in the densely populated area in Ginowan City and urged Hatoyama to move the base out to other prefectures or out of Japan. The demonstration also attracted municipal as well as local leaders.<sup>29</sup> Naha Mayor, Takeshi Onaga who took part in the demonstration appealed to the Ministry of Defence and the Japanese Foreign Ministry as well as the US Embassy in Tokyo to resolve the MCAS Futenma issue before Obama arrived in Japan. Meanwhile Ginowan Mayor, Yoichi Iha stressed that MCAS Futenma military base was the most dangerous place in the world because it is located in the most densely populated area.

The MCAS Futenma base has long been labelled as a disaster in waiting for errant landings or takeoffs, where 45 thousand aircraft takeoffs and landings take place every year in an area surrounded by houses and shops.<sup>30</sup> Errors in landings and takeoffs could result in horrifying incidents. In addition, the Okinawans are also exposed to the noise pollution of weapons during military exercises.<sup>31</sup> A High Court order was obtained so that the government had to pay compensation of 369 million yen in total, to the 390 residents who live around MCAS Futenma.<sup>32</sup> Because the presence of the military base has severely affected the Okinawans, Iha demanded that the US military bases in Okinawa should never be re-constructed.

Okinawan Prefectural Assembly's Chairman, Zenshin Takamine stressed that the Okinawans are forced to bear the burden which exceeds acceptable levels. The prefecture provides 75 percent of the total land of US military bases in Japan as well as residence for half of the 50,000 troops. At the same time, the area of Okinawa accounts for only 0.6 percent of the total area of Japan. However, the total area of the US military bases covers nearly 20 percent of the land in Okinawa. Takamine also slammed the US for pressuring Japan to accept the 2006 agreement and for assuming that Okinawa is a colonial land of the US. In fact, most of the mayors in Okinawa opposed the relocation of MCAS

<sup>26</sup> George Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2000, p 36.

<sup>27</sup> George Feifer, p 36.

<sup>28</sup> 'Thousands of Japanese Protest US Base Plan,' *Reuters*, 8 November 2009.

<sup>29</sup> 'Demo of 21,000 People Demand Closure of MCAS Futenma Air Base,' *The Japan Times*.

<sup>30</sup> George Feifer, page 39.

<sup>31</sup> Interviewed Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

<sup>32</sup> 'MCAS Futenma Noise Compensation Unchallenged,' *The Japan Times*, 14 August 2010.

Futenma to Okinawa, including Nago's Mayor, Susumu Inamine.<sup>33</sup> The objection to the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Haneko led to difficulties for the central government to obtain approvals from the local government.

Demonstrations against the MCAS Futenma relocation to Henoko continued on April 25, 2010 when about 90,000 people, included Okinawa governor, Hirokazu Nakaima and the majority of the 41 mayors in the municipal.<sup>34</sup> The Okinawa assembly also showed a tendency of the people to protest against the MCAS Futenma relocation to other areas in the prefecture. On July 2008, the majority of the assembly members rejected the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. Similarly, the assembly urged the government to relocate MCAS Futenma to other parts of Japan or out of the country for the safety of Okinawans.<sup>35</sup>

Poll results also showed that a high percentage of Okinawans objected the relocation of MCAS Futenma within Okinawa. In June 2009, a poll conducted by the *Okinawa Times* and *Asahi Shimbun* showed that 68 percent of residents opposed the transfer of MCAS Futenma to Henoko compared with only 18 percent who agreed. Respondents who raised objections asserted that the transfer to Henoko would not ease the burden of the Okinawans, but would rather damage rich marine life in the islands. Those who supported the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko believed the noise and other related problems could be solved over the years. In addition, the relocation to a new area in Okinawa would pay off when the Okinawans receive subsidies injected by the central government.

Meanwhile, the poll in October 2009 by *Shimpo Shimbun / Mainichi Shimbun* in the prefecture also showed the same public opinion. Polls showed that 70 percent of Okinawans objected to the relocation of MCAS Futenma within the prefecture. Public protests against the relocation of Futenma to Henoko were also in line with Article 95 of the Japanese Constitution. The Article states that any special law will be void without the consent of the majority of residents. Without consent of residents, the new military base construction will be deemed illegal. Therefore, the central government must obtain approval from the governor of Okinawa prior to building a runway in Haneko. Okinawa governor, Hirokazu Nakaima who gained the trust of the people to address the problem, pointed out that should the government of Japan and the US insist on relocating to Haneko, chaos will break out among the residents.

Environmental consideration is also an important factor for the Okinawans' opposition to the relocation of MCAS to Henoko. In fact, since 2003, activists have been campaigning to stop the selection of the Henoko as a US new military base. For example, groups from the US and Okinawa had filed a lawsuit in San Francisco district court against the US Department of Defence; they insist that the land reclamation in Henoko would destroy habitats of species protected under the Japanese Register of Cultural Properties such as dugong.<sup>36</sup> However, the lawsuit in 2003 failed to include the interests of sustainability in order to stop the construction in Henoko. From 2003 to 2008, several clashes occurred among local activists who used kayaks to prevent the central government from conducting geological research. Local activists received

<sup>33</sup> 'Nago Mayor Presses Hatoyama to put MCAS Futenma Somewhere Else,' *The Japan Times*, 19 February 2010.

<sup>34</sup> 'Okinawans Rally against Keeping Base,' *The Japan Times*, 26 April 2010.

<sup>35</sup> 'Naha Assembly: Move MCAS Futenma Away,' *The Japan Times*, 3 November 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Interviewed Okinawans on 16-20 December 2013 in Naha, Okinawa.

support from Greenpeace, Union for the Conservation of Nature and World Wildlife Fund to oppose the construction of the military base in Henoko. Opponents assert that their responsibility was to ensure the survival of dugongs in Heneko for the next generation.<sup>37</sup>

It is obvious that the residents, the Okinawa assemblymen as well as the mayors objected and wanted the US military base to be built elsewhere in Japan or out of Japan.<sup>38</sup> Due to objections from various quarters in Okinawa, Hatoyama could not make a coherent stance on the issue of the relocation without the consent of the Okinawans.

## The United States

Before being elected as the prime minister, it was already expected that the most difficult problem to be solved by Hatoyama was the issue of relocation of MCAS Futenma. This is because out of all the campaign promises, this issue seemed to be the most difficult to implement after winning the election. At the same time, Hatoyama needed to maintain good relations with the US for the sake of Japan's security. Hatoyama himself even pointed out that the Japan-US alliance was significant in his administration.<sup>39</sup> Relocation of MCAS Futenma became a test for his administration.

In a meeting between Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and the US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton on December 21, 2009, the latter stressed that Washington would stick to the agreement signed in 2006 as a basis for further discussion on the relocation issue.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile in a meeting of the Ambassador of Japan in the US, Ichiro Fujisaki with Hillary Rodham Clinton, it was also stressed there was no change in the US stance on the issue of relocation of MCAS Futenma.<sup>41</sup>

On 18 November 2009, the US Deputy Secretary of Defence for Asia and the Pacific, Wallace Gregson stressed that executing the agreement signed in 2006 was the best way to resolve the issue of the relocation.<sup>42</sup> These statements from the US high official indicated that the US firmly refused to compromise with Japan on the transfer of military bases elsewhere.

The US continued to insist Japan stick to the agreement in 2006 although several sites had been proposed to replace MCAS Futenma in Okinawa such as Iwoto (known also Iwojima), Guam,<sup>43</sup> Hawaii, Kadena Air Base, Tokunoshima Island in Kagoshima and other islands. There was also a suggestion to build an artificial island near Okinawa.<sup>44</sup> However, no consensus was reached on the proposal. The main obstacles to the settlement of the issue were suitability of site and readiness of residents to accept military bases. For example, Hatoyama proposed a relocation of MCAS Futenma to

<sup>37</sup> 'Eric Johnson, Opposition to MCAS Futenma Move Won't Go Away,' *The Japan Times*, 19 October 2009.

<sup>38</sup> 'Yet another 'Battle of Okinawa' *The Japan Times*, 11 November 2009.

<sup>39</sup> 'Hatoyama Reiterates MCAS Futenma Vow while Dining with Obama,' *The Japan Times*, 14 April 2010.

<sup>40</sup> 'Hatoyama Gives Obama Assurances on US Ties,' *The Japan Times*, 24 September 2009.

<sup>41</sup> 'Defense Chief Backs May Deadline for MCAS Futenma,' *The Japan Times*, 23 December 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Masami Ito, 'US official presses implementation of 2006 base deal,' 18 November 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Masami Ito, 'Hatoyama: Move MCAS Futenma to Guam?' *The Japan Times*, 5 December 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Alex Martin, Jun Hongo, 'Hatoyama's Grip Weakens but DPJ Short of Alternatives,' *The Japan Times*, 24 April 2010.



Tokunoshima Island, but this was opposed by the residents of the island.<sup>45</sup> The municipal leaders even refused to discuss the proposal concerned.

The presence of military bases in Okinawa is significant to the US, particularly for operations and military training. In addition, the location is strategic since it is near to its amphibious unit in Sasebo, Nagasaki. Besides, its position close to China and North Korea allows prompt military action to be taken if Japan and South Korea are attacked. Okinawa's strategic position was evident in the Korean and Indochina War where the military bases were utilised to mobilise US troops to these countries.<sup>46</sup> Former Japanese Ambassador to Thailand, Hisahiko Okazaki who supported the presence of the US military in Okinawa insisted the military bases were crucial to East Asian regional security. He attributed security imbalance in Southeast Asia due to the moving out of the US military base at Camp Clark and Subic Bay in the Philippines.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the US position is clear on the relocation issue of MCAS Futenma. The US holds firm to its stance to stick to the 2006 agreement; this caused difficulties for Hatoyama to obtain their consent to move the military base to another place. Because of this setback, Hatoyama eventually decided to proceed with the plan of relocation of MCAS Futenma from Ginowan to Henoko.

## Security Strategy and Economic Development vs Sovereign States

The MCAS Futenma relocation issue remains unsolved due to objection from the majority of Okinawans concerning the relocation to Henoko; their ultimate aim is to move the military base out of the prefecture or Japan.

However, it is undeniable that the existence of the bases greatly contributes to the development of the local economy in terms of job opportunities, revenue from military bases lease, building tenant, military personal expenses and contracts with local businesses.<sup>48</sup> The central government also injected more than 10 trillion yen since 1972, which was channelled to public projects such as road building and other facilities. All incomes derived from public spending are a reward for the Okinawans; these financial gains are a trade off for their willingness to host the US military bases.<sup>49</sup> Should the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of the prefecture be implemented, it is expected that Japan's poorest prefecture will become even poorer.<sup>50</sup> According to prefecture sources, the US military bases in Okinawa contribute at least USD 2 billion per year to the economy.<sup>51</sup> This is the second largest source of income after tourism industry in Okinawa. Therefore, there are groups of people who support the move to Henoko, especially the business community. For example, Yukikazu Kokuba, the president of the largest construction company in Okinawa, Kokuba-gumi Co., believes

<sup>45</sup> 'Hatoyama's Plan to Move Marines to Tokunoshima Gets Icy Reception,' *The Japan Times*, 29 April 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Masamichi Sebastian Inoue, John Purves and Mark Selden, p 264.

<sup>47</sup> 'Hisahiko Okazaki, Untold Ties of Friendship Exist Between Okinawa and the US,' *The Japan Times*, 3 May 2010.

<sup>48</sup> George Feifer, p 37.

<sup>49</sup> 'Philip Brasor, Anniversary of Okinawa's Reversion Highlights Opposing Press Views,' *The Japan Times*, 27 May 2012.

<sup>50</sup> 'No Change: Nago Mayor,' *The Japan Times*, 13 Mei 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Johnson, 'Opposition to MCAS Futenma move won't go away,' *The Japan Times*, 19 October 2009.

that the relocation of MCAS Futenma to a new location in Okinawa is the best solution to solve the problem.<sup>52</sup>

Although the government had been looking for various alternative locations, Henoko remained the most suitable location. Therefore, the Okinawans had no choice but to accept the decision. In fact, since 1996 when Japan and the US agreed to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko, the central government had brought various mega projects to Nago City, in the north of Okinawa, especially to win over the residents. Construction projects such as the facilities for Group of Eight Summit were implemented in Nago in the year 2000. Similarly, under the ten year-projects of the Northern Okinawa Promotion Special Measures, a fund valued at 100 billion yen was invested in the year 2000 into public works such as the construction of infrastructure and other facilities.<sup>53</sup>

The relocation-related projects such as building of a runway and land reclamation work have substantially benefited the business community. Should the project fail, many parties, including contractors and real estate firms would be badly affected. Besides, Tokyo also promised financial incentives to residents if they support the plan to relocate MCAS Futenma to Henoko. Because of the huge potential economic gain that could be generated by the base, Osaka's Mayor, Toru Hashimoto suggested relocating the MCAS Futenma operations to a less popular airport away from Osaka International Airport. Hashimoto assumed that the relocation would help Osaka to generate economic growth. However, his suggestion was objected by his adjacent prefecture, Hyogo governor, Toshizo Ido. Ido asserted that it would be an extreme action for the central government to consider Hashimoto's proposal.<sup>54</sup>

Looking at the relocation issue from a broader perspective, without US troops in Okinawa, the security of the East Asian region, including Japan will be threatened. China's military capabilities in the region must be counterbalanced by a dominant power such as the US. Hence, the Japan-US security relationship is significant for the DPJ and maintaining the US military in Okinawa is important. This is also the reason why Hatoyama dismissed Fukushima from his cabinet in May 2010, due to her objection to the relocation of MCAS within Okinawa.<sup>55</sup>

The benefits of the US military presence in Okinawa have been highlighted, such as economic contributions and security provision for the East Asian region, Okinawans continue to protest. They demand sovereignty but after nearly four decades since Okinawa was returned to Japan, the US military bases still occupy one-fifth of the prefecture. Okinawans also perceive US seized their land and farms after the Second World War by using the "bayonets and bulldozers" formula. Their voices were ignored when military bases remained even after Okinawa was returned to Japan. Okinawans also were forced to bear heavy burden in terms of defence compared with residents in other prefectures in Japan. In addition, should MCAS Futenma remain as the US marine's base in Ginowan or Henoko, there will be high risks of accidents, crime, noise pollution, and injury or death of residents living near the military bases. Moreover,

<sup>52</sup> 'Mizuho Aoki, MCAS Futenma Question Decisive factor for Prefecture's Voters,' *The Japan Times*, 11 July 2013.

<sup>53</sup> 'Reiji Yoshida, MCAS Futenma Relocation has Certain Bidders Salivating,' *The Japan Times*, 7 July 2010.

<sup>54</sup> 'Will the US Marines Charge Ashore at Kansai Airport?' *Japan Today*, 16 December 2009.

<sup>55</sup> 'Fukushima fired from Cabinet over MCAS Futenma,' *The Japan Times*, 29 May 2010.

Okinawans also refuse to have their prefecture used as a military base, arguing that the US military presence is no longer relevant since the Cold War ended in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

Hatoyama promised in his 2009 election campaign to move MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa, but failed to do so. Hatoyama was stuck between fulfilling his promises made in the election campaign and the obligation to maintain security of Japan. The main reason leading to his downfall was his failure to resolve the relocation issue, which he promised. His failure drew much criticism, forcing him to resign. Since the Hatoyama administration in 2009, the failure to keep the promise of moving MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa has affected DPJ's relationship with the Okinawans, local government, parties in the coalition government, as well as its most important ally, the US.

During the general election on December 16, 2012, the DPJ lost a large number of seats, from 230 down to 57. The MCAS Futenma relocation issue persisted and it became a thorn in the flesh of the DPJ administration. Hatoyama's inconsistent stance caused Okinawans to lose hope and trust given to the DPJ administration. Okinawans feel discriminated and isolated compared with the residents in other prefectures. However, in an interview with the *Japan Times* on January 1, 2013, Hatoyama who had retired from politics promised to find a suitable location to replace Henoko.<sup>56</sup> He established the East Asian Peace Centre, a research institute in Tokyo that aims to promote peace and stability, especially in dealing with MCAS Futenma. Although the relocation of MCAS Futenma was not successful during the Hatoyama administration, credit should be given to Hatoyama for his efforts in trying to resolve the issue.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Masami Ito, Retired Hatoyama still on MCAS Futenma Quest,' *The Japan Times*, 1 January 2013.

