

‘Okinawa Without US Bases’: Mass Protest Against U.S Military Presence in Japan

By [RT](#)

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Thousands have been marching in Okinawa and across Japan in protest against the planned relocation of a US military base in Okinawa. The protesters criticized the Japanese government, who appear to be turning a deaf ear to the locals.

The protests began on Friday with about 1,200 people in Okinawa, as the island marked the 43rd anniversary of its reversion to Japanese sovereignty, and continued into Sunday gathering thousands of people.

“Even after our reversion, the problems of the bases remain unchanged,” Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga said at the protest, adding reversion of sovereignty had failed to bring Okinawans what they wanted.

The activists said the island had seen decades of injustice from US and Japan.

Hyogo Okinawa association of people origination from the same prefecture!
pic.twitter.com/8PB9d8wzqu

— mamimoe1 (@mamimoe1) [May 17, 2015](#)

“We’ve long suffered from the bases, and I’m angered by the outrageousness of both the US and Japanese governments in insisting a new base be built in Henoko,” Fujiko Matsuda, who heads a local citizens’ group, told the Japan Times.

“It is wrong to proceed with the Henoko relocation without listening to the voices of the Okinawans,” said another Okinawa resident, Atsuko Ikeda. *“If we don’t prevent it, there is no future for Japan as a democratic nation.”*

On Saturday, protestors marched around the US Futenma airbase in Ginowan city in Okinawa. About 2,600 people across Japan from Hokkaido to Nagasaki also took to the streets to voice their disapproval.

The activists shouted slogans, such as: *“Oppose enhanced Japan-US defense ties”, “Bring back an Okinawa without US bases”, “The United States has to respect Okinawa people’s will”.*

Hyogo Okinawa association of people originating from the same prefecture!
pic.twitter.com/41lZR33NPI

— moejunko (@moejunko) [May 17, 2015](#)

In the northeastern town of Henoko, hundreds of protesters scuffled with police outside new 'Camp Schwab'. Several demonstrators were detained following the clashes.

On Sunday, about 35,000 people turned out to protest in the prefecture.

"No matter how long it might take, we will never give up our fight until the government gives it up," said Keiichi Takara, director of the Confederation of Trade Unions Okinawa. *"Through the rally, we will reaffirm our resolved commitment."*

30000人参加の抗議集会 #saveokina #saveokina #savethedugongs
<http://t.co/bAyPMysEEY> pic.twitter.com/A2rJmYu4Ij

— Greenpeace Japan (@gpjTweet) [May 17, 2015](#)

According to mayor of Nago, Susumu Inamine, who opposes US military bases in Okinawa, *"the government is thrusting their responsibility on us."*

"The government says we are to blame that the issue has stalled for 19 years and they tell us to find an alternative place (for the base). That's outrageous," he shouted into the crowd of protesters.

#saveokina #saveokina #saveokina #Okinawa ①<http://t.co/Cn8V884TAb> ⇒
pic.twitter.com/FczPeuSbWk

— mikiya itou (@mickey228) [May 17, 2015](#)

Marine biologist Katherine Musik said the rally *"is absolutely tremendous."* *"Tens of thousands of voices, right now, shouting together, 'NO', in perfect harmony! 'NO' to the US military presence, how powerful! Let's all shout, 'Yes' to the blue corals, red sea fans, orange clownfish, 'Yes' to the endangered dugongs in the sea, the endangered birds in the forest!"*

PRAY for JAPAN from OKINAWA is out! <http://t.co/qH4mg52uT7> Stories via
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The US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in heavily populated Ginowan city has been a cause of tension between American troops and local residents for years. Okinawa, home to about 1 percent of Japan's population, hosts nearly half of the 47,000 US troops based in Japan. Tokyo authorities want to shut the base down and open a new one in the more remote town of Henoko, in the center of the southern Japanese island. But the majority of the locals, as well as Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga, want the construction of the

replacement base to be scrapped.

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In March, Onaga demanded the underwater survey needed to build an offshore airstrip for the new base be stopped, citing environmental damage.

He met Defense Minister General Nakatani in May for the first time to discuss the relocation plan. They failed, however, to resolve their differences.

all okinawa!! no more base, n i just hope the world peace
[pic.twitter.com/33Y9EvDIR5](#)

— chikichiki (@kochikichiki) [May 17, 2015](#)

There is a long history of incidents and alleged crimes committed by US soldiers in Okinawa. The current wave of anti-base sentiment on the island was sparked by a 1995 case, when three US marines were reported to have kidnapped and brutally raped a 12-year-old schoolgirl.

There were also less-publicized sex crime cases involving underage victims reported in 2001 and 2005, the fatal running over of a female high school student by a drunken US marine in 1998, and other crimes.

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