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## OPINION

### Another battle of Okinawa

Despite protests, the U.S. insists on going ahead with plans for a new military base on the island.

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By Chalmers Johnson

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The United States is on the verge of permanently damaging its alliance with Japan in a dispute over a military base in Okinawa. This island prefecture hosts three-quarters of all U.S. military facilities in Japan. Washington wants to build one more base there, in an ecologically sensitive area. The Okinawans vehemently oppose it, and tens of thousands gathered last month to protest the base. Tokyo is caught in the middle, and it looks as if Japan's prime minister has just caved in to the U.S. demands.

In the globe-girdling array of overseas military bases that the United States has acquired since World War II — more than 700 in 130 countries — few have a sadder history than those we planted in Okinawa.

In 1945, Japan was of course a defeated enemy and therefore given no say in where and how these bases would be distributed. On the main islands of Japan, we simply took over their military bases. But Okinawa was an independent kingdom until Japan annexed it in 1879, and the Japanese continue to regard it somewhat as the U.S. does Puerto Rico. The island was devastated in the last major battle in the Pacific, and the U.S. simply bulldozed the land it wanted, expropriated villagers or forcibly relocated them to Bolivia.

From 1950 to 1953, the American bases in Okinawa were used to fight

the Korean War, and from the 1960s until 1973, they were used during the Vietnam War. Not only did they serve as supply depots and airfields, but the bases were where soldiers went for rest and recreation, creating a subculture of bars, prostitutes and racism. Around several bases fights between black and white American soldiers were so frequent and deadly that separate areas were developed to cater to the two groups.

The U.S. occupation of Japan ended with the peace treaty of 1952, but Okinawa remained a U.S. military colony until 1972. For 20 years, Okinawans were essentially stateless people, not entitled to either Japanese or U.S. passports or civil rights. Even after Japan regained sovereignty over Okinawa, the American military retained control over what occurs on its numerous bases and over Okinawan airspace.

Since 1972, the Japanese government and the American military have colluded in denying Okinawans much say over their future, but this has been slowly changing. In 1995, for example, there were huge demonstrations against the bases after two Marines and a sailor were charged with abducting and raping a 12-year-old girl. In 1996, the U.S. agreed that it would be willing to give back Futenma, which is entirely surrounded by the town of Ginowan, but only if the Japanese would build another base to replace it elsewhere on the island.

So was born the Nago option in 1996

(not formalized until 2006, in a U.S.-Japan agreement). Nago is a small fishing village in the northeastern part of Okinawa's main island and the site of a coral reef that is home to the dugong, an endangered marine mammal similar to Florida's manatee. In order to build a large U.S. Marine base there, a runway would have to be constructed on either pilings or landfill, killing the coral reef. Environmentalists have been protesting ever since, and in early 2010, Nago elected a mayor who ran on a platform of resisting any American base in his town.

Yukio Hatoyama, the Japanese prime minister who came to power in 2009, won partly on a platform that he would ask the United States to relinquish the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station and move its Marines entirely off the island. But on Tuesday, he visited Okinawa, bowed deeply and essentially asked its residents to suck it up.

I find Hatoyama's behavior craven and despicable, but I deplore even more the U.S. government's arrogance in forcing the Japanese to this deeply humiliating impasse. The U.S. has become obsessed with maintaining our empire of military bases, which we cannot afford and which an increasing number of so-called host countries no longer want. I would strongly suggest that the United States climb off its high horse, move the Futenma Marines back to a base in the United States (such as Camp Pendleton, near where I live) and thank the Okinawans for their 65 years of forbearance.

