



OKINAWA PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT
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OKINAWA 900-8570 JAPAN

March 9, 2020

The Honorable Mark Thomas Esper
Secretary of Defense
United States Department of Defense
Washington D.C.
U.S.A. 20301-3010

Admiral Philip Scott Davidson
Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command
Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, U.S.

Lieutenant General Kevin B. Schneider
Commander, United States Forces Japan and 5th Air Force
Yokota Air Base, Kanagawa, Japan

Lieutenant General Herman Stacy Clardy III
Okinawa Area Coordinator, Okinawa Area Field Office United States Forces Japan
Commanding General, III Marine Expeditionary Force
Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan

Dear Secretary Esper, Admiral Davidson, Lieutenant General Schneider,
Lieutenant General Clardy:

As I appreciate the U.S. Government's commitment to the promotion of peace
and democracy in the world and the U.S. Department of Defense's endeavors in

that commitment, I have repeatedly conveyed to both the U.S. and the Japanese governments the democratic voice of the people of Okinawa against the construction of a new base in Henoko-Oura Bay in northern Okinawa as a replacement facility (the Henoko Plan) for the United States Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Ginowan City, Okinawa.

Today, I write to direct your attention to two urgent situations related to construction work and to request that the U.S. Department of Defense take the initiative to cancel the Henoko plan and seek alternatives to the Henoko plan for removing the dangers of the Futenma Air Station imposed upon the people of Okinawa. To this end, I also request that the U.S. Department of Defense visit Okinawa as representatives of the U.S. Government and conduct on-site research on the soft seabed and others problems.

Dugongs

I am concerned that base construction has seriously impacted the Dugong, Okinawa' cultural icon, an endangered marine mammal, and a Japanese Natural Monument" and their precious habitat of Henoko-Oura Bay in possible violation of laws and regulations.

As the Bald Eagle is important to the U.S., so is the Dugong to Okinawa. In 1955, it was designated as one of its first Natural Monuments by the Government of the Ryukyu Islands during the U.S. military's occupation of Okinawa. At present, it is protected as an endangered species by Japanese laws and international conventions. It is designated and protected as a national Natural Monument by the Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. Because of its designation as Japan's Natural Monument, the U.S. Federal District Court ruled in March 2005 in the "Dugong Case" that the dugong in Okinawa is protected by the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

The waters of Okinawa Island is the only confirmed habitat for the dugong in Japan, making Okinawa the northernmost habitat for the world's dugong population. Henoko-Oura Bay, one of the most biodiversity-rich marine areas in Japan, is critical for the survival of the world's northernmost dugong population.

However, the Okinawa Defense Bureau of Japan and the U.S. Department of

Defense concluded that base construction and operation would have no adverse impacts on the dugong. With that conclusion, the Bureau set up floats in the water and began the landfill work in Henoko-Oura Bay in August 2014. Since then, we have seen alarming changes in the behavior of dugongs. According to survey reports by the Okinawa Defense Bureau, no dugong has been sighted since January 2015 at Oura Bay, where dugongs had been sighted in the past. The individual dugong known as Dugong C, which in the past had been frequently sighted along the coastal areas of northern Okinawa Island, including Oura Bay, has not been sighted anywhere since June 2015. Dugong A, which had been regularly sighted in Kayo, just north of Oura Bay, has also not been sighted since September 2018. This situation is counter to the conclusion drawn by the Okinawa Defense Bureau and the U.S. Department of Defense.

Now with the death of Dugong B, a female dugong, in the northwestern part of Okinawa Island in March 2019, the future of the dugong in Okinawa is in grave doubt. Responding to this alarming situation, in December 2019, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) designated the dugong in waters off Okinawa and Nansei Islands as a "Subpopulation" and declared it "Critically Endangered" in its Red List of Threatened Species. IUCN pointed out that the construction of the new base at Henoko-Oura Bay is, among others, a threat to the dugong.

Regrettably, the Japanese Government has disregarded the Okinawa Prefectural Government's repeated calls for the protection of the dugong from base construction. Also regrettably, the late governor Takeshi Onaga's request for a consultation with the U.S. Department of Defense regarding the impact of base construction on the dugong under Section 402 of the U.S. NHPA has never been materialized. Immediate measures are needed to rectify this situation.

Fragile Seabed and Delay of Base Construction

I am also concerned that as the presence of extremely fragile seabed at the construction site makes the Henoko plan nonviable, the U.S. and Japanese governments' insistence on the Henoko plan would irresponsibly delay the removal of the dangers the Futenma Air Station imposes upon the people of Okinawa.

In January 2019, the Japanese Government admitted that the Oura Bay side of the seabed at the base construction site is extremely fragile, requiring changes in construction design and major reinforcement work.

Regarding the construction, a number of problems could occur even if the reinforcement work was to be done, including; subsidence over a long period of time, the impact of the murky water from the construction site has on the environmental, and as an independent team of specialists pointed out, the possibility of a collapse of the revetment. According to the Japanese Government's estimate, 71,000 sand piles need to be driven into the seabed as deep as 300 feet below the water surface. That would certainly bring about irreversible damages to the biodiversity-rich environment of Henoko-Oura Bay.

Recently in December 2019, the Japanese Government acknowledged that land reclamation work would take 9.3 years from the time of obtaining approval from the Governor of Okinawa for design changes, and the entire transition from the Futenma to the new facility would take at least 12 years to complete. The Japanese Government now sets its completion date in the 2030s, although I have no intention to approve changes in construction design.

It is incomprehensible that the Okinawa Defense Bureau's Environmental Impact Assessment completed in 2012 did not address the issues of fragile seabed at all. It is troubling that the Bureau did not inform the prefectural government of the problematic conditions of the seabed until January 2019, 4 years after the start of construction. It is disturbing that the U.S. Department of Defense approved the construction plan and conducted its assessment of the impacts of base construction on the dugong and the environment without information on the fragile seabed. It is also disturbing that the Japanese Government is still reluctant to release full details on the fragile seabed. With all the technical difficulties and uncertainties associated with the fragile seabed, base construction will undoubtedly face more delays. Even if land reclamation and base construction were completed, according to experts, subsidence will occur, and the base might not properly function. The Henoko plan appears in conflict with the common understanding that the world situation and the U.S. military's strategies are likely to change in the next 12 years. The U.S. and Japanese governments' claim that "Henoko is the only solution" to remove the dangers of the Futenma Air Station is becoming less and less convincing.

I have raised doubts about those issues for quite a while. When I visited Washington D.C., I raised such issues to the members of the U.S. Congress and their assistants and requested that they confirm them with the Japanese Government. I must point out that concerns and questions over the Henoko Relocation Plan have been growing among the residents of Okinawa. This is due to the problems the Okinawa Prefectural Government has been advocating such as the impact on the dugongs and the prolonged construction schedule because of the soft seabed.

Requests

Henoko-Oura Bay is far from an ideal site for a military base; it is a site for international environmental conservation efforts. Please be reminded that over 5300 marine species, including 262 endangered species, inhabit the mere 13 square miles of Henoko-Oura Bay - an environmental miracle. The value and wonder of the biodiversity in Henoko-Oura Bay are comparable to those of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Hawaii. It is the world's second-largest marine protected area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Cultural and Natural), where some 7,000 marine species thrive in its 583,000 square miles.

In fact, in October 2019, an environmental NGO Mission Blue of the U.S., led by the renowned biologist Dr. Sylvia Earle, designated Oura-Bay and its surrounding waters as a Hope Spot for its marine environmental significance and uniqueness. Henoko-Oura Bay has now joined Florida Gulf Coast and Monterey Bay as Hope Spots.

As Governor of Okinawa Prefecture, I have the responsibility, together with the people of Okinawa, to protect and conserve the dugong and the environment of Henoko-Oura Bay for its biological and cultural significance for future generations. I believe that the U.S. Department of Defense also has the responsibility under the NHPA, other U.S. laws, and agreements with the Japanese government, to protect the dugong and the environment from the construction and operation of the base.

I respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Defense take the initiative, in consultation with the Japanese government, to cancel the Henoko plan and that the U.S. Department of Defense take the initiative, in consultation with

the Japanese Government and the Okinawa Prefectural Government, to seek alternatives to the Henoko plan. To this end, I also request that the U.S. Department of Defense visit Okinawa as representatives of the U.S. Government and conduct on-site research on the soft seabed and others problems.

Respectfully yours,

Denny Tamaki
Governor of Okinawa Prefecture
Japan

cc:

Mr. John M. Fowler, Executive Director
The U.S. Advisory Council on Historical Preservation

Dr. Peter O. Thomas, Executive Director
The U.S. Marine Mammal Commission

Congressman David Adam Smith
Chair of the House Armed Services Committee

Senator James Mountain Inhofe
Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services

Mr. Eugene Louis Dodaro
Comptroller General of the U.S. Government Accountability Office