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Okinawans to Be Sacrificed Again on the Altars of US and Japanese Militarism

Friday, 03 January 2014 11:20 *By Dr Joseph Gerson, Truthout | Opinion*

After years of threats, veiled political bribery and arm twisting, the US and Japanese governments finally extracted an agreement from Okinawa's governor to build a massive new Marine air base in Okinawa. Its implications are devastating for the Okinawan people and the prospects for peace in East Asia. The Okinawan people again are being sacrificed on the altar of militarism: the Obama Administration's military "pivot" to Asia and the Pacific and the US-Japan military alliance - the "keystone" of US Asia-Pacific power.

In late December 2013, Japan's militarist prime minister, Shinzo Abe, circumvented 16 years of deeply committed popular opposition to the construction of a massive new US Marine air base at Henoko, in northern Okinawa. With the lure of \$3 billion a year through 2021 for economic development - an economic bonanza for local construction contractors and their workers - and the fact of escalated tensions with China, Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima succumbed to pressures from Tokyo and Washington to build the advanced air base adjacent to the Marines' Camp Schwab. Other elements of the deal include transferring 5,000 Marines to Guam and 2,500 to Australia, while leaving roughly 12,000 Marines, as well as massive US Air Force, Navy and Army bases that occupy 18 percent of Okinawa Island.

Plans to build the base at Henoko have been on the drawing boards since 1966. The plan was revitalized 30 years later to silence popular Okinawan demands for the withdrawal of US military bases following the abduction and rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan school girl by three Marines. US and Japanese military planners hoped that by closing the Futenma Marine Air Base in the middle of Ginowan City and by moving its functions and more to less densely populated Henoko, Okinawan public opinion could be pacified.

With the deafening noise of aircraft taking off and landing day and night next to elementary schools and over nearby homes, with the night landing and low-altitude exercises, accidents, sexual assaults and other Marine crimes, Futenma has long been at the center of Okinawan opposition to US bases and a fault line in the US-Japan alliance.

The agreement extends the exploitation and suffering of the Okinawan people. First conquered in 1609 and annexed by Japan in 1879, Okinawa was militarized in 1944 to resist advancing US forces and thus to buy time for the Emperor System. The ensuing Battle of Okinawa claimed the lives of one-quarter of the Okinawan people. And in the battle's immediate aftermath, most Okinawans were confined to concentration camps, with more of their land seized by the United States to expand what had been Japanese military bases. In the negotiations to end the formal military occupation of Japan, Washington and Tokyo agreed to the concentration of US bases in Okinawa and to the prefecture's continued formal military occupation. The goal was to minimize opposition to the military alliance by limiting the impact of US forces on the people of Japan's main islands.

When, after years of protest, formal military occupation finally came to an end in 1972 with Okinawa's "reversion" to Japan, Okinawan hopes were shattered as US military bases - including nuclear weapons - remained. In the past four decades, US forces in Okinawa have inflicted modern versions of what the US Declaration described as the inevitable "abuses and usurpations" that accompany the hosting foreign "standing armies."

The Abe-Nakaima agreement was achieved to reinforce the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia and the Pacific and Abe's campaign to shed the last remnants of post-war Japanese pacifism. Building on the Bush-Cheney plan to "diversify" the forward locations of hundreds of US military bases and installations to better encircle China, the US has committed to deploy 60 percent of US war planes and 60 percent of the Navy to Asia and the Pacific to press China's military containment. The more than 100 US bases and military installations in

Japan - with the greatest concentration in Okinawa - and the military alliance with Japan are "keystones" of the pivot.

Contrary to article nine of its Constitution - which renounces war as a sovereign right and pledges not to possess land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential - during the past half century with US encouragement, Japan has become the world's fifth-greatest military spender, with an advanced Navy, the ability to send rockets to Beijing as well as to Mars. And as a near-nuclear power, it possesses massive reserves of weapons-grade plutonium.

Having won power with his pledge to revitalize Japan's long-stagnant economy, Abe is committed not only to reinforcing the alliance with the United States but to fulfilling his lifelong goal of restoring much of Japan's pre-war order. He "steam rolled" parliamentary passage of a new state secrets law deemed the worst in any industrial democracy. He is increasing Japan's military spending and has prepared the way to revise and eviscerate the official interpretation of article nine to the point of being meaningless. He brought Japan to the brink of war in its territorial dispute with China, inflamed tensions with Beijing and Seoul by refusing to acknowledge Japan's wartime aggression and the government's role in wartime sexual slavery, as well as with his recent pilgrimage to the Yasakuni Shrine, where the spirits of Japan's Class A war criminals are honored.

Securing the agreement to build Henoko airbase marks one more notch in Abe's and the Pentagon's militarist agendas.

The Abe-Nakaima deal's implications for the people of Guam also must be borne in mind. Conquered from Spain in 1898 to serve US military operations in the Western Pacific and Asia, more than a century later it remains a US military colony with more than a quarter of the small island nation occupied by massive US naval and air bases. The plans to expand Andersen Air Base and Navy Base Guam and to move an additional 5,000 Marines and their dependents from Okinawa to Guam will result in:

- One-third of the island being occupied by US bases, a 40 percent increase in the island's population.
- The further marginalization of the indigenous Chamorro people, in the tradition of cowboys and Indians.
- The creation of a shortfall of 6.1 million gallons of water per day.
- The destruction of 70 acres of vital coral reef.
- The transformation of neighboring Pagan Island, pristine and environmentally rich, into a live fire range for the Navy, Air Force and Army.
- The expansion of the Mariana Island Range Complex, now 500,000 square miles, to 984,000 square miles - larger than Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, Montana and New Mexico combined.

China's rise, its aggressive territorial claims and its military build-up to offset Washington's pivot are indeed sources of concern. But the answer is not a new arms race that increases the dangers of war and further sacrifices the Okinawan people. Instead, US, Japanese and Chinese diplomacy must be based on the pursuit of common, shared and human security.

Not unlike 20th century US civil rights struggle, Okinawans have pressed nonviolently for the end to their military colonization. They have peacefully and symbolically encircled US bases. They have blocked roads to prevent live-fire military exercises that threaten their homes and families. And as many as 100,000 of the small prefecture's people have turned out for massive demonstrations. Octogenarians initiated the campaign to prevent the construction of the Henoko base with a sit-in that lasted for years. Opposing the destruction of reefs that serve as important feeding grounds for dugongs, a type of manatee, they adopted the friendly dugong as their mascot and won the support of environmentalists around the world. Okinawans have prevented the passage of documents from Tokyo related to construction equipment and base construction. They elected a mayor opposed to the base construction, won resolutions from the prefectural legislature and for years led Nakaima to oppose the base construction.

These gentle and determined people will not give up their nonviolent struggle for freedom, security, peace and environmental sustainability. They remain a source of inspiration and a model for people across the world. They more than deserve our support.

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