

Iwakuni Residents Fight Back Against US Military Presence in Japan

By [Peoples Dispatch](#)

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Residents of Iwakuni, which hosts one of the largest US foreign bases, recently announced that they will file a lawsuit that could have wider implications for foreign military bases in Japan

A group of residents of the city of Iwakuni, in the Yamaguchi Prefecture, announced plans to use a lawsuit to demand a ban on military aircraft flights in the city on May 2. Residents have long complained of noise pollution from both Japanese and US aircrafts in the city’s military base, and have sought a ban on their activities as well as damages. The group is expected to file the lawsuit at the Yamaguchi District Court later in the month.

Once filed, the lawsuit will be the second of its kind to emerge from Iwakuni. According to reports, the same group of residents were plaintiffs or supporters of an earlier lawsuit in 2009 that won JPY 735 million (USD 5.66 million) in damages for the noise pollution. The earlier lawsuit failed to win the ban on military aircrafts that the petitioner had also demanded.

This comes just days after the Japanese government made promises to redistribute US military infrastructure in Japan away from the island of Okinawa. On April 28, on the 70th anniversary of the San Francisco Treaty taking effect, Japan’s House of Representatives passed a resolution to reduce Okinawa’s burden of hosting US military bases.

The resolution, which also comes ahead of the 50th anniversary of Okinawa’s accession to Japan in 1972 on May 15, was shortly followed by promises by prime minister Fumio Kishida to “make tangible progress in reducing [Okinawa’s] base-hosting burden”.

Despite the promises, the proposed lawsuit by Iwakuni residents has the potential of highlighting the pitfalls of moving US bases to other parts of Japan. Iwakuni currently houses one of the largest US foreign air bases in East Asia in terms of number of aircrafts.

In 2018, the air base had doubled the number of aircrafts after 60 planes were relocated from Naval Air Facility Atsugi in the Kanagawa prefecture. The military bases around the city are seen as one of the facilities with potential for expansion if the Japanese government implements the proposed base redistribution plans.

The lawsuit highlights the wider discontent against the continued US military presence in Japan. A recent survey conducted by *Kyodo News* found that while most of the respondents—79%—believe that Okinawa’s disproportionately large burden of hosting the US military was unfair and 58% supported calls to redistribute the bases, over 69% were opposed to moving the bases near their place of residence.

From 1945 to 1972, Okinawa was under military occupation by the United States, when the US held the Ryukyu Islands. Despite Okinawa being back under Japanese sovereignty, the US continues to maintain its extensive military presence in the islands. Left-wing parties like the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), as well as peace advocates and movements based in the island have for long demanded complete withdrawal of the US military.

Over the past decade the movement against US bases has grown in Japan, with Okinawa at the epicenter. Earlier this year, the bases came under further scrutiny after disproportionately large COVID-19 outbreaks were reported in Okinawa, which reported over a [fifth of new cases](#) despite contributing less than one percent of the national population, along with other locations hosting large US bases.

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Featured image: Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa is one of the largest US foreign air bases. The island of Okinawa hosts a bulk of US military stationed in Japan and has witnessed popular unrest over this issue in recent times. (Source: Peoples Dispatch)

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