

U.S. Military Colonization: Mayor From Okinawa to Bring Surprising Message to Washington

By [David Swanson](#)

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Imagine if China were stationing large numbers of troops in the United States. Imagine that most of them were based in a small rural county in Mississippi. Imagine — this shouldn't be hard — that their presence was problematic, that nations they threatened in Latin America resented the United States' hospitality, and that the communities around the bases resented the noise and pollution and drinking and raping of local girls.

Now imagine a proposal by the Chinese government, with support from the federal government in Washington, to build another big new base in that same corner of Mississippi. Imagine the governor of Mississippi supported the base, but just before his reelection pretended to oppose it, and after being reelected went back to supporting it. Imagine that the mayor of the town where the base would be built made opposition to it the entire focus of his reelection campaign and won, with exit polls showing that voters overwhelmingly agreed with him. And imagine that the mayor meant it.

Where would your sympathies lie? Would you want anyone in China to hear what that mayor had to say?

Sometimes in the United States we forget that there are heavily armed employees of our government permanently stationed in most nations on earth. Sometimes when we remember, we imagine that the other nations [must appreciate it](#). We turn away from the public uproar in the Philippines as the U.S. military tries to return troops to those islands from which they were driven by public pressure. We avoid knowing what anti-U.S. terrorists say motivates them, as if by merely knowing what they say we would be approving of their violence. We manage not to know of the heroic nonviolent struggle underway on Jeju Island, South Korea, as residents try to stop the construction of a new base for the U.S. Navy. We live on oblivious to the massive nonviolent resistance of the people of Vicenza, Italy, who for years voted and demonstrated and lobbied and protested a huge new U.S. Army base that has gone right ahead regardless.

Mayor Susumu Inamine of Nago City, Okinawa, (population 61,000) is headed to the United States, where he may have to do a bit of afflicting the comfortable as he tries to comfort the afflicted back home. Okinawa Prefecture has hosted major U.S. military bases for 68 years. Over 73% of the U.S. troop presence in Japan is concentrated in Okinawa, which makes up a mere 0.6% of the Japanese land area. As a result of public protest, one base is being closed — the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The U.S. government wants a new Marine base in Nago City. The people of Nago City do not.

Inamine was first elected as mayor of Nago City in January 2010 promising to block the new

base. He was reelected this past January 19th still promising to block the base. The Japanese government had worked hard to defeat him, but exit polls showed 68% of voters opposing the base, and 27% in favor of it. In February U.S. Ambassador Caroline Kennedy visited Okinawa, where she met with the Governor but declined to meet with the mayor.

That's all right. The Mayor can meet with the State Department, the White House, the Pentagon, and the Congress. He'll be in Washington, D.C. in mid-May, where he hopes to appeal directly to the U.S. government and the U.S. public. He'll speak at an open, public event at Busboys and Poets restaurant at 14th and V Streets at 6:00 p.m. on May 20th.

A great summary of the situation in Okinawa can be found in this statement: ["International Scholars, Peace Advocates and Artists Condemn Agreement To Build New U.S. Marine Base in Okinawa."](#) An excerpt:

"Not unlike the 20th century U.S. Civil Rights struggle, Okinawans have non-violently pressed for the end to their military colonization. They tried to stop live-fire military drills that threatened their lives by entering the exercise zone in protest; they formed human chains around military bases to express their opposition; and about a hundred thousand people, one tenth of the population have turned out periodically for massive demonstrations. Octogenarians initiated the campaign to prevent the construction of the Henoko base with a sit-in that has been continuing for years. The prefectural assembly passed resolutions to oppose the Henoko base plan. In January 2013, leaders of all the 41 municipalities of Okinawa signed the petition to the government to remove the newly deployed MV-22 Osprey from Futenma base and to give up the plan to build a replacement base in Okinawa."

Here's [background on the Governor of Okinawa](#).

Here's [an organization](#) working to support the will of the public of Okinawa on this issue.

And here's a video worth watching:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzAw-jOQwME#t=0>

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