

**Denny Tamaki**  
**Governor of Okinawa**

**Defense Writers Group**  
**Project for Media and National Security**  
**George Washington School of Media and Public Affairs**

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**Moderator:** Welcome to this Defense Writers Group with Governor of Okinawa Denny Tamaki. Sir, we are very honored to have you here.

As always, our ground rules, this is on the record, but there is no reposting of audio or video. Still photographs for your web sites are absolutely fine.

I'll ask the first question as always. Seven or eight of you emailed in advance to get on the questioners list. When we go through those we'll take questions from the floor.

Governor, welcome sir.

You're in Washington at a very dynamic time as the United States is reaching out to Japan, Australia, the Philippines to help bolster America's defense against China. There's much discussion about more or new troop deployments to Okinawa, a place that many of us have visited and feel very fond about.

Sir, I'd like to ask you, what is your message to Washington at this time?

**Governor Tamaki:** It's going to be a little long answer.

**Moderator:** The floor is yours.

**Governor Tamaki:** Good morning. How are you? I came from Okinawa, Japan. I am Denny Tamaki, Governor of Okinawa Prefecture. It is my pleasure to be here. Thank you for hosting me this morning. It's a great pleasure to meet you all. I will do my very best to make today's session beneficial to all of you.

I have two major messages that I want to convey to US government and US citizens. My first topic is about the US military bases in Okinawa. There are 31 military facilities and areas exclusively used by US military in Okinawa, and that is home to

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about 50,000 US service members, civilians and their families altogether. So I will talk about the current situation in Okinawa and friction with the local community.

Currently the exclusive US military facilities take 45,675 acres of land which account for about 8.1 percent of Okinawa's land area, and the area taken by the US military facilities is as large as the Washington, DC area including wider area.

Even though Okinawa takes up only 0.6 percent of Japan's land area, 70.3 percent of the exclusive military facilities in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa.

Just for your information Aomori Prefecture which hosts Misawa Air Base, hosts 9 percent of the US military facilities in Japan. And the Kanagawa Prefecture which hosts Yokosuka Navy base hosts 5 percent of the US military bases in Japan.

So due to the heavy concentration of the US military bases in Okinawa, Okinawa repeatedly sees crime committed by service members or civilians as well as aircraft accidents and range fires stemming from the military training.

So murder, robbery, rape and other heinous crimes have been happening in Okinawa, and also recently an Osprey crash in 2016. In 2017 a helicopter made an emergency landing and then burst into flames. Also a window frame of a heavy helicopter fell to an elementary school while students are engaged in PE class.

The US military bases seriously impact the environment as well. So recently a high level of peat moss has been detected in rivers and water sources around the US bases. Of course that water is purified before being provided to the local citizens. And this water is provided to the US service members and their families on base.

In order to identify the source of the contamination we've been asking access on base to US forces, however, we haven't been granted access so far.

Now Futenma Air Station of Marine Corps and Kadena Air Base, airport, sits right in the middle of urban areas and it's been causing issues, noise pollution from aircraft training as well as accidents. This Futenma Air Station is planned to be relocated to an area called Henoko in Okinawa. However, the

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government of Japan and the US agreed on this relocation without considering the desire of the local residents.

I am opposed to this relocation to Henoko because of three reasons. The first reason I am against this relocation plan is that the will or opinion of Okinawans is against the Futenma Air Station relocation to Henoko. This local citizens' opinion has been clearly demonstrated in the gubernatorial elections, two gubernatorial elections that elected myself, and also one gubernatorial election for my predecessor, Governor Onaga. The main point of the election campaign was this relocation. So my election and former governor election clearly presents the will of the Okinawans.

Also in 2019, February, referendum was held among the local citizens, all Okinawans. The question asked was do you support the relocation to Henoko or not? And 73 percent of those who answered said no.

The second reason why I oppose is that Oura Bay in Henoko has extremely high biodiversity. In this area more than 5,300 species have been identified including 262 endangered species such as dugongs which is designated as nationally protected animal.

My third reason is related to laws and regulations. At this Oura Bay in Henoko the seabed that is as soft as mayonnaise has been identified spreading 163 acres. So the feasibility of the successful construction is very much in doubt.

And let me tell you the last point I want to tell you. Okinawa is the closest to Taiwan among all prefectures in Japan. Okinawa has a population of 1.5 million. In December of last year the lawmakers of Japan agreed on the three key defense documents and the Japanese government announced a major shift of its defense policy which drastically changed from the conventional policy that is in line with the national constitution of Japan.

When we think about the relations between the US, China and Japan we have to think about the high dependency among each other -- Japan/China, and China/US. These countries are highly dependent on each other economically. Japanese government and US government have announced or it has been said that they are committed to enhance deterrence. However, there is a concern

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that hiking the deterrence may cause the loss of the balance of economy.

So for me in order to maintain this economic balance, peace-building is the priority. So if we focus too much on the deterrence by military that this balance may be lost. That is why the I as Governor of Okinawa I have decided to come to have this opportunity to ask the citizens of the US what is important and what should be sought after.

**Moderator:** Thank you so very much.

The first question is Irene Loewenson of Marine Corps Times.

**DWG:** Thank you, sir, for coming here.

What is your stance on the transition of the [inaudible] Marine regiments on Okinawa into a littoral regiment?

**Governor Tamaki:** According to the agreement made in 2012, 9,000 Marines out of 19,000 Marines in Okinawa were set to be relocated from Okinawa to Guam, Hawaii or mainland US. So my view is that if the US military, US Marine Corps realigns its units it would be done within this remaining Marines, the Marines that are going to stay in Okinawa.

**Moderator:** Demetri Sevastopulo, Financial Times.

**DWG:** Good morning. Two questions.

It's been reported in Japanese media that the government wants to put counterstrike missiles in Okinawa. And there's also discussion about moving ammunition dumps from Hokkaido to Okinawa to have more diversity and to be closer to Taiwan.

So the first question, have you had discussions with the Japanese government about the two of those?

**Interpreter:** I'm sorry, can you repeat the questions? I missed the details.

**DWG:** There's been discussion about moving ammunition dumps from Hokkaido and creating them in Okinawa to be closer to Taiwan.

And then also talk about putting counterstrike missiles in

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Okinawa over the next few years.

**Governor Tamaki:** Actually regarding the relocation of ammunition we have asked Okinawa Defense Bureau which is part of the Ministry of Defense, about this if it is true or not. They said they haven't received any information or explanation by the US side.

And also Japan Self Defense Force hasn't yet announced their plan to relocate some forces to Southeast islands which includes Amami Islands and Okinawa. However, there hasn't been a clear explanation about how much asset including ammunition will be relocated.

**DWG:** Sorry, my broad question is as tensions mount between the US and China over Taiwan and Japan becomes more focused towards Taiwan, how do the people of Okinawa feel about being right in the center of a potential conflict?

**Governor Tamaki:** People of Okinawa still remember the last [inaudible]. 200,000 lives were lost during the Battle of Okinawa. This number includes civilians and military personnel. Also people think that Okinawa has lots of commonality with China and Taiwan because of the history and culture of Okinawa. Some Okinawans have understanding towards the deployment of Japan Self Defense Force in Okinawa by the Japanese government. However now because of this tension over Taiwan, many Okinawans think that we should never let Okinawa be battlefield again.

**Moderator:** Meghann Myers, Military Times.

**DWG:** Some American members of Congress are calling for first, the release of a Navy lieutenant who's been imprisoned in Japan over his role in a car accident. And also a renegotiation of the agreement that allows Japan to prosecute American service members who are stationed in Japan.

Do you have any concerns about a change in that agreement or the precedent it would set releasing this lieutenant and your ability to enforce laws on Okinawa when it comes to American service members?

**Governor Tamaki:** Are you asking about the issues regarding the Status of Forces Agreement?

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**DWG:** Yes, and whether you're concerned about a renegotiation and how that would affect your ability to govern.

**Governor Tamaki:** Yes, regarding accidents or incidents happened during the duty hours of the US service members, for a long time Japanese jurisdictions cannot reach because the first, the right to do the investigation was, the primary right to do the investigation was on the US side.

However, there has been some cases that the right to do the investigation was given to the Japanese side out of the favorable consideration because of some considering the impact on the society of Japan.

However, we have been asking or requesting to amend the Status of Forces Agreement to give the primary right to investigate to the Japanese side when an accident takes place in Okinawa or in Japan by amending the Status of Forces Agreement rather than just giving the favorable consideration by the US side to Japan. However, as you may know, that this Status of Forces Agreement hasn't been amended or revised for six years.

**DWG:** Do you have any concerns that releasing this lieutenant would send a message that American service members are above Japanese law?

**Governor Tamaki:** According to this current Status of Forces Agreement, when the US claims the right to investigate, Japanese government has to agree with them.

**Moderator:** Kyoto News, [Toshida Kochi].

**DWG:** Thank you very much.

In the US there is a growing threat argument against China which is increasing its military pressure on Taiwan. US forces stationed on Okinawa are becoming increasingly important to deter China. As the Governor of Okinawa Prefecture relative to China and Taiwan, how do you think about the military threat from China?

**Governor Tamaki:** It is usually said that military power increases as economic power increases. I believe China has been strengthening the pressure to other countries in this region by increasing its military power as its economic power also has

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increased. However by looking at the increase of the military power by China, if we think that China is going toward invading other countries I don't think that idea is not really well balanced. Let me give you three reasons.

First reason is that [Inaudible] think tank conducted an opinion poll or survey in Taiwan asking the question do you think China will invade Taiwan. And 52.7 percent of the respondents in Taiwan said no.

The second reason is that Mr. [Yuyi Myamoto] who served as Japanese Ambassador to China and also Ambassador to Okinawa said that the possibility of China's aggression to Taiwan is close to zero. However, there are two elements that can increase the possibility. One is that Taiwan declares independence with specific date and time. Another is that if US denies the One China Policy. He said if those happened then there is a possibility that China will exert military power.

The last reason, the third reason, is that according to the report issued by the Department of Commerce of US, the trading between China and the US last year amounted for \$690.5 billion.

So considering that, the tension between China and the US over Taiwan if anything happens that is going to give negative impact to all the players.

So I believe it is very important to give any reason to those countries to do that and engaging in the peaceful diplomacy is the way to maintain this status quo or this balance.

**Moderator:** Associated Press, Tara Copp.

**DWG:** Thank you for doing this.

I was wondering who else you're meeting with during this US visit and what is the main issue that you'll be pressing and trying to accomplish while you're here?

**Governor Tamaki:** Yesterday I met the Directors in charge of Japan Affairs at Department of Defense and Department of State. And also I met with the Director of Japanese Affairs at CSIS which just announced the wargame report. And also I met with five experts on national security, [inaudible] issues and economy including Dr. Mike [Inaudible].

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**DWG:** What main issue do you want to press during this visit?

**Governor Tamaki:** What I want to press during this visit is that how from the perspective of Okinawa, how do we see the relations between Japan, China, Taiwan and the US. So I want to send a message about the current situation we see in Okinawa. And also my mission is to convey the message to the US citizens, American people, that we should not allow the situation to happen where the contingency actually happens.

I believe my success depends on how well you can send this message to your readers and how you analyze my message. I have high expectations.

**Moderator:** Steve Trimbball, Aviation Week.

**DWG:** Acknowledging your point on the Chinese military threat, what have you observed with Chinese aerial surveillance over Okinawa Prefecture?

**Governor Tamaki:** Actually in the sea area around Okinawa Japan Self Defense Force had to do the scramble aircraft to warn the incoming aircraft that is coming into the territory, those aircraft used to be mainly from Russia but at one point the Chinese aircraft started coming more. So it has become more frequent that Chinese aircraft are coming into the area, territorial area of Japan.

**DWG:** I'm curious as Governor of Okinawa Prefecture what you think the right response to that should be. Especially when we're talking about these balloons and shootdowns, if that is -- how you think about that response.

**Governor Tamaki:** I believe that coming into the territorial area is, should not happen and we should not allow aircraft from other countries to do that. However, we should avoid the situation escalating. So we need to maintain calm and collected response and also we need to keep the communication lines.

**Moderator:** Kimberly Underwood, Signal Magazine.

**DWG:** Good morning. Thank you for your time today.

I wanted to ask, given your position regarding deterrence and



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your call for peaceful diplomacy, what can be done about China's increased actions that violate international laws?

**Governor Tamaki:** I believe international law is very important standard that all countries should abide by. The Japanese Air Force shifted its defense policy to allow itself, allow Japan to actually have the long-range standoff missile as part of the counter-attack capability. Before it was just a possibility, but now the government actually is ready to have it.

However, there is a concern among Japanese people that it means Japan is going to have a capability that can be used as preemptive strike. So of course all countries should abide by the international law. So any country including Japan or China should make sure, should present to the global community that it is going to abide by international law.

**Moderator:** That's the end of the advanced questions. We have a few minutes left.

**DWG:** Thank you, Governor, for being here. It's good to see you again.

Recognizing that a war over Taiwan would be existential to Okinawa, can you talk a little bit about the status of contingency planning to protect Okinawan civilians in the event of war, whether that's the Japanese government building bomb shelters, whether that's organizing civilian evacuations using a combination of military or civilian planes and ships. What are contingency preparations like right now?

**Governor Tamaki:** Japan has so-called national basic protection law which is designed to protect the citizens of Japan in case of large-scale disaster or contingency or terrorist attacks. So the division of responsibility has been determined among national government, professional government, and cities and towns.

There is a scheme in place for the municipalities, cities and towns, to create basic plans to protect its citizens. There are 41 municipalities in Okinawa. And of course Okinawa is one of the prefectures in Japan and it's comprised of small islands. So there are 36 inhabited islands within Okinawa Prefecture.

In case there is any contingency or war, then Japanese

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government says okay, this is a contingency or war. Then the prefecture government or municipal governments have to have the plans for evacuation of its citizens by using private transportation as well including ships, buses, tracks or aircraft. So there has to be agreement with those private entities about evacuation of the local citizens.

However, the discussions haven't been done yet about how much budget is going to be allocated for evacuation and how much would be given to prefectural government or municipal Air Force for the evacuation. So we believe that the national government has to first make it clear what their roles and responsibilities are.

**Moderator:** Tara had a quick follow-up, and then a last question.

**DWG:** There's been some discussion in the US with Japan, in the Asia Pacific, about forming a new NATO. I was wondering what your thoughts were and what Okinawans' thoughts were on doing a new sort of alliance.

**Governor Tamaki:** Actually in Japan or in Okinawa there hasn't been much discussions about creating something like NATO in Asia Pacific region. But considering what happened between Russia and Ukraine, we need to study and analyze how NATO played in this contingency involving Ukraine. In order to avoid contingency to happen I believe there has to be somewhere that can play as a buffer.

**Moderator:** The last question to wrap up.

**DWG:** Thank you, Governor.

I wanted to ask you, in your ideal world would all the American bases be moved out of Japan? Is that ultimately what you'd like to see? Not just Okinawa, but the rest of the country?

**Governor Tamaki:** Actually some people misunderstand my stance. Just because I am against the relocation of Futenma Air Station to Henoko, some people think that I am against all the stationing of US military in [Japan]. But actually I do understand the importance of Japan-US alliance.

The people of Okinawa have been wanting or have had a desire

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that the anxiety coming from the overburden of hosting US military bases should be removed. So I believe it is very important that the Japanese government and US government implement measures to reduce the burden of Okinawa in a visible manner. For example, reducing the incidents or accidents or the water source contamination.

Regarding removing all the bases from Japan, I believe we need to look at the situation really closely including the international situation or the stability of the region to determine if it's really possible or not.

**DWG:** One quick question. I apologize for this question. I was told to ask you.

**Moderator:** Told by whom? [Laughter].

**DWG:** What do you say to your critics who say that your opinions about the American bases in Okinawa is colored by your own personal story, having an American GI father who abandoned your mother and left the state, that it's still been an issue for you, which is why -- some critics, it's not just from the US, from Japan as well I've seen that. And I apologize for that.

**Moderator:** Thank you for laughing, Governor.

**Governor Tamaki:** My mother never told me how my father looked, where he is from, or what kind of food he likes. However my mother never talked bad about my father, and also I know that my father brought me to this world so I don't have any negative thoughts about that.

Of course it's true that when I was growing up I received some negative comments or hate attitude just because I am a mix between my father's country, US, and my mother's country, Japan. But as I have grown up I see myself in a positive manner and I have accepted myself and I have established my own identity.

I am actually not anti-US or anti-US bases. I just want to create an environment where Okinawans, Japanese and US service members can respect each other. So I want to create such an environment as people can enjoy paradise and exist there. That is my personal desire. I always tell my grandchildren that I want to create, I want to make this world without any worries under blue sky.

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**Moderator:** I'm going to use the power of the chair for a personal observation. We've never met before, Governor, but what you just said gave me great insight into you. It's very personal, forgive me. My father passed away this past October, 98 years old. Greatest man I ever met. Was raised in an orphanage, never knew his father. I once asked my dad, aren't you angry? Don't you hate your father? He said just what you said. Every blessing in my life is possible only because this man. He gave me life. I have nothing but love. And to hear you say that was very, very touching.

So thank you for your time today. It was a very interesting discussion. We wish you the best of luck, sir.

**Governor Tamaki:** Thank you very much.

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