



Title	Anatomy of a Crash : Local Reactions and Official Responses to the 2004 Futenma Helicopter Accident and its Aftermath (2)
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Anatomy of a Crash:

Local Reactions and Official Responses to the 2004 Futenma Helicopter Accident and its Aftermath (2) *

Robert D. ELDRIDGE**

Abstract

On August 13, 2004, a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53D helicopter crashed next to a building on the campus of Okinawa International University in Ginowan City, Okinawa Prefecture, while on a routine training flight from Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in the same city. While no local residents were injured, the crash raised an outcry locally and nationally and caused many to increase their opposition to the presence of the air station in the prefecture. This article, the second of three installments, examines the crash and its aftermath.

Keywords: Okinawa, U.S. Marine Corps, CH-53D, helicopter crash, Futenma

* As mentioned in the first installment, the draft of this article was written when the author was on sabbatical at U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific headquarters, located at Camp Smith in Hawaii, as a scholar-in-residence from September 2004 to August 2005. He began this study immediately prior to the start of his sabbatical. He is indebted to those interviewed in this study for their assistance.

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4. Local Responses to the Crash and Aftermath

As discussed in the first installment, the crash and perceptions of the subsequent handling of the incident generated a great deal of anger locally. Criticism of the handling of the crash site, as mentioned in Part I, began immediately, and seems to have generated more political friction than the crash itself. This criticism was two-fold: the way in which the crash site was guarded, and the view that the subsequent investigation was handled by the U.S. “unilaterally.”

Regarding this latter point, one local resident is quoted as saying in the *Ryukyu Shimpo's* August 14 edition that “We can not accept the guarding [of the crash site] by the U.S. military alone.”¹⁾ The policing of the site by the U.S. military would come to be seen as a return to the past, an “occupation mentality,”²⁾ and as a “loss of sovereignty” for Okinawa (and Japan).³⁾ These views would set the tone of the public debate on the crash and its aftermath.

Importantly, local response to the crash and subsequent events were initially driven less by the Prefectural Government and more by the local communities affected, namely Ginowan City led by a young, popular anti-base mayor (with higher political aspirations). As the following discussion will show, the OPG appeared to be one political step behind the local mayor and his supporters. Who would take the lead in the criticism of the crash is a question that seems to have fueled some of the dynamics of the subsequent cries of outrage as much as the message itself. Eventually, as is discussed below, while continuing to give support to the Futenma relocation to Henoko, the OPG would also call for the early return of Futenma and a “weakening of its functions” so that it is essentially rendered useless, with Ginowan Mayor Iha Yoichi and his supporters, as well as the local communities and the general population (as reflected in opinion polls) expressing the desire to see Futenma returned immediately and a review of the Henoko plan.

The Responses of Ginowan City and Other Nearby Communities

The first official to criticize the crash and its handling was not Governor Inamine Keiichi, who was in Bolivia at the time visiting the descendants of Okinawan immigrants there, but the mayor of Ginowan City, Iha.⁴⁾ Elected in the spring of 2003 after serving almost seven years in the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly, he was at this time one of Okinawa's most popular politicians. His high-profile, anti-base politics, however, make him unpopular with some in the central government and U.S. military. Likewise, his public popularity was seen as a threat by Inamine and the conservatives, especially with the next gubernatorial election only two years away in November 2006.⁵⁾ Inamine's

1) “Genba Fusa ni Ikari Beigun Chushin no Keibi ni Gimon (Angry at Closing off the [Crash] Site; Questioning Guarding by the U.S. Military Alone),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 14, 2004.

2) “‘Senryo Ishiki Sono Mono’ Shiminra Hihan Beigun Fusa (Citizens Criticize U.S. Military's Closing Off [of Site] as ‘Occupation Mentality’),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 15, 2004.

3) “‘Shuken Kaifuku’ ni Hodo Toku Izen Tsuzuku Beigun Kanri (U.S. Military Control Continues as Before, Still a Long-way for ‘Return of Sovereignty’),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 19, 2004.

4) Inamine subsequently cancelled the remainder of his trip and returned to Okinawa on the 19th after stopping in Tokyo to protest the accident and appeal for central government assistance in dealing with the base problems.

5) Some individuals in Okinawa countered that Iha would probably not run in 2006 (he did not, in the end), as he would still only be in the first part of his term as mayor and has made the return of Futenma, located in his city, as his top policy priority. However, Iha left one office early to run for another in the past, namely his second term as Prefectural Assembly member (*Kengikai Giin*) in 2003. (To be fair, the mayoral by-election was called suddenly due to a scandal af-

absence during the first week of the crisis created a vacuum in which Iha was able to take center stage, literally.

Iha had in the past made Futenma the central issue in his political rise in local Ginowan politics, his years as a Prefectural Assembly member, and subsequently as mayor of Okinawa's fourth largest city, after the cities of Naha, Okinawa, and Urasoe. In July 2004, for example, he visited Hawaii and Washington, D.C. to appeal for the closure of Futenma, and had written directly to the President of the United States on this issue.⁶⁾ He was, ironically, reporting on his trip to the U.S. when word got to him of the helicopter crash. Sending an aide to the site to check the scene of the crash, he was "stunned" to learn that his aide nor, later, he could go into the inner part of the crash site.⁷⁾

Iha viewed the crash site on the morning of the 14th, and upon returning to City Hall, spoke to the press. In the afternoon Internet edition of the August 14 *Shimpo*, Iha explained his criticism of the U.S. being in charge in the following way: "The purpose of the U.S. military investigation is different [from that of the Japanese side]. For them, the most important thing is to preserve the helicopter's body, and has nothing to do with the damage to residents and structures. What should be given priority is different. This recent happening was a U.S. military accident, but it was also a [local] incident. While it happened on duty, it occurred off-base, and it is strange that the U.S. military is proceeding unilaterally."⁸⁾

Members of the city assembly felt the same way. Its military base affairs special committee, led by Tobar Isao, a close ally of Mayor Iha and the head of his support group (*koenkai*), met that day to discuss a draft protest resolution.⁹⁾ It demanded: 1) the early return of Futenma; 2) a fundamental revision of the SOFA; 3) a complete investigation of the damage caused and sincere compensation; 4) complete clarification of the reasons behind the crash; 5) ban on all flights above residential areas; and 6) examination of all military aircraft for any problems. The assembly, called into special session on the 17th, unanimously passed the resolution the next day, which was addressed to the commander of U.S. Forces, Japan, among several others. An attached opinion letter (*ikensho*) was given to Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro and four others.¹⁰⁾

The vote of the Ginowan City Assembly was preceded by an exchange the day before a meeting between Mayor Iha and Deputy Commander of the Marines in Okinawa Brig. Gen. James F. Flock on the morning of the 16th.¹¹⁾ After apologizing for the crash and expressing his relief that no civil-

fecting the then mayor who was subsequently arrested).

6) "Ginowan Mayor Heads to D.C. to Push for Closing of Futenma," *Stars and Stripes*, July 11, 2004. Iha took advantage of President Bush's visit to Japan in October 2003 to call for the closure of Futenma by 2008 and to announce this campaign. See "Mayor Wants Futenma Closed by 2008," *Stars and Stripes*, October 19, 2003. More recently, he took to the editorial pages writing "Futenma Issue Needs Strong Political Backing," for the *Asahi Shimbun's* Point of View (English edition) column on September 11, 2004.

7) "U.S. Chopper Crash."

8) "Genba Fusa ni Ikari."

9) "Kenkei Kensho Naku Kitai."

10) "Ginowan Shigikai ga Kogi Ketsugi." Like the discussion in the Urasoe City Assembly base affairs committee meeting, the committee meeting in the Ginowan City Assembly also saw problems in the wording of the resolution that reflected fundamental policy differences. Namely conservatives expressed concern with reference to Henoko in the demands, as well as calls for the abandonment (*chushi*) of the relocation plans. In the end, the phrase *saiko* (reexamination) was adopted in the resolution. See "'Waga Monogao de Daigaku Senryo' Okikokudai ga Kogi Seimei Heli Tsuiraku Kensho Kyohi (University Occupied as if it Was Owned by U.S. Okinawa International University Protests [U.S.] Rejection of [Request for Joint] Investigation of Helicopter Crash)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

11) "Kenkei Kensho Naku Kitai."

ians were injured, Flock explained that a safety check was being done on military aircraft and that later that day, aircraft would start flying again. Iha reportedly expressed his outrage, both about the crash, and the fact that flights would be resumed. These exchanges no doubt got back to the committee members and added to the momentum for the passage of the resolution.

With the resolution in hand and having completed his own initial look at the site, discussions with affected residents, and meetings with central government and U.S. military officials on Okinawa, Iha took the protest to Tokyo on the 18th, meeting with officials from the Foreign Ministry, Defense Agency, Cabinet Office, and U.S. Embassy.¹²⁾ Iha demanded that: 1) discussions be begun on the closure of Futenma and that its complete return be realized; 2) flights of all U.S. military aircraft over residential areas should be stopped and the operation [of Futenma] as a helicopter base should be ended immediately; 3) the reasons for the crash should be investigated as quickly as possible and the results released; 4) an apology and proper compensation should be made to those affected by the crash; and 5) [assistance should be given to help] Okinawa International University function again the lifestyles of the local residents returned to normal. Subsequently, at the end of the day, Iha met with Inamine, who had just returned from South America to Tokyo, and gave the governor a briefing on the situation.¹³⁾ At this point, he reportedly avoided showing any differences of opinion on the issue of Futenma with the governor for the sake of unity.

In the meantime, while Iha was away, his supporters in Ginowan were working with other local community assemblies to coordinate their efforts and protest the crash and subsequent handling of it. Urasoe City, located in between Ginowan and Naha cities, had actually taken the lead in the protests.¹⁴⁾ After debating an emergency draft resolution over the weekend in its Base Affairs Committee, the assembly held a special session on the afternoon of the 16th where it unanimously passed a resolution calling for the closure and early return of Futenma Air Station, the early return of administrative rights over the crash site to the Japanese government, and the full payment of compensation to those affected by the crash, among other items.¹⁵⁾ A related opinion letter, which included the demand that Futenma be closed, was also sent to the prime minister, foreign minister, the defense minister.

Other communities in the area such as Okinawa City and Chatan Town, both bordering Kadena Air Base to the north, were quick to follow suit. Eventually, two weeks after the crash, as many as 31 of 52 communities had passed resolutions calling for the reexamination of SACO and/or the decision to relocate the functions of Futenma to Henoko, as well as calls for Futenma's early return or

12) "Futenma Kichi no Heisa Yokyu Ginowan Shicho, Seifu ni Kogi (Ginowan Mayor Protests to Government, Demanding Closure of Futenma)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 18, 2004.

13) Much speculation appeared in the press as it became unclear whether the governor could or would meet with Iha, a critic over the years of the Inamine administration. Inamine likely wanted to avoid being trapped into committing to something until he was able to see the situation himself and speak with his advisors waiting in Okinawa. At the same time, there was a great deal of pressure on him to meet with Iha and for Okinawa to speak with one voice. See "Kyokusetsu de Mendan Jitsugen Chiji to Shicho, Ichimaiwa ni Nareruka (Meeting Realized after Twists and Turns, Governor and Mayor Will they be able to Speak with One Voice?)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 19, 2004.

14) "Kitai Kaishu Sosa ni Shisho Kenkei, Bei Taio ni Fuman Hyomei (Taking Away the Body of the Helicopter, Problems in Investigation, Prefectural Police Express Dissatisfaction with U.S. Handling)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

15) The vote was unanimous, but this does not mean that there were not any problems in its passage. Namely, conservatives vetoed the inclusion of phrases such as "mujoken henkan (unconditional return)" and "Henoko isetsu no dannen (abandon the relocation [to] Henoko)" by the leftists in an early draft by Tokuyama Tomokazu, a member of the committee.

outright closure.¹⁶⁾

It should be pointed out, however, that the votes were not always easy ones, as they inherently reflected competing ideological concerns, policy concerns, and vital political and economic interests. This tension was seen in the discussion above and in the discussion on the OPG's stance, taken up below. It was also most apparent in the debate in Nago City, whose Henoko village on the eastern shore, is the site of the planned relocation. The assembly held a special session of their base affairs committee to discuss a resolution on the 16th. Much debate went into its crafting, including over references to Henoko and to reexamining the SACO decision. Eventually after members of the assembly became deadlocked 14-14, the acting speaker of the assembly cast his vote against even a watered down the resolution.¹⁷⁾ Notably, despite the concern that that the resolution would likely have a negative effect on the government's economic development policies for the city, six members of the conservative ruling party voted in support of the resolution. One city assembly member from the ruling party stated that this move "was significant, signaling the beginning of the end of the Henoko relocation."¹⁸⁾

Response of the OPG

If not the first of the local governments in Okinawa to raise a furor, the OPG nevertheless became the focus of attention as the representative of Okinawa's 1.3 million people. With its head, Governor Inamine, abroad on a trip, it fell to the remaining leadership of the OPG—vice governors Makino Hirotaka and Higa Shigemasa, and Treasurer Kakazu Noriaki—to deal with the crisis until the governor returned. After cutting short his visit to Argentina, the second stop on his trip to South America, and stopping over in Tokyo to meet with government officials, Inamine arrived back in Okinawa almost a week later.

News of the crash reached the OPG leadership at 2:25 p.m., approximately five minutes after the it when a resident of Ginowan called in and reported the accident.¹⁹⁾ Official word from the Naha DFAB came at 2:46 p.m., after the Marine Corps Community Relations Office (G-5) had contacted the DFAB informing them of the crash. Just prior to that at 2:40, officials from the OPG's Military Base Affairs Office departed for the scene. Upon confirmation of the crash, Vice Governor Makino called Inamine in Bolivia at 3:40 in the afternoon (2:40 a.m. local time) to inform him of the accident. Shortly after this, Vice Governor Higa departed to see the crash site and to meet with Mayor Iha. In the meantime, Makino held a press conference on the crash shortly before 5:00 that evening.²⁰⁾

16) "31 Gikai ga Kogi Ketsugi Heri Tsuiraku de Kennai Shichoson Gikai (31 Local Assemblies Pass Protest Resolutions against the Helicopter Crash)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 29, 2004.

17) "Gekishin 'Futenma' Beigun Heri Tsuiraku Nagoshigikai no Henka (U.S. Military Helicopter Crash The Futenma 'Earthquake' Change in the Nago City Assembly)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 21, 2004.

18) *Ibid.*

19) Military Base Affairs Office, "Ken no Taio (The Prefecture's Response)," available at <http://www3.pref.okinawa.jp/site/view/contview.jsp?cateid=14&id=6978&page=1>.

20) His comments at the press conference, namely that the prefecture might review its stance on the SACO agreement, would get him into trouble, forcing him to announce clearly the next day that there was no change in the OPG's policies. This in turn would invite criticism that the OPG was out of touch with the changed situation that the crash represented. See, for example, "17 Nichi ni Kogi Ketsugi e Kengikai (Prefectural Assembly to Pass Resolution of Protest on 17th)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 15, 2004. When the OPG announced that it was in fact reviewing its stance, as is discussed below, to reexamine the SACO decision and call for the return of Futenma prior to the completion of a relocation facility, the editors of the Shimpo "welcomed the change in the prefecture's policy." See "Shasetsu Futenma Iset-

(Makino's press conference would be followed by one by Inamine from Bolivia, reported in the Okinawan press the next day, in which he described the situation as "extremely serious" and one that was "particularly regrettable."²¹⁾ Still later that evening at 9:00 p.m., Makino received Lt. Gen. Blackman and Consul General Thomas G. Reich for the purpose of allowing them to apologize for the crash and to hand them a list of demands.²²⁾ This was followed by meetings with officials from the central government, such as by that of Kakazu Chiken, parliamentary secretary of the Defense Agency (a Diet member from Okinawa who is related to the treasurer), and Ishii Michio, Deputy Director of the Defense Facilities Administration Agency, who expressed their regrets and were handed a set of demands to their respective bosses, Defense Agency Director General Ishiba Shigeru and Yamanaka Akiyo. Later that hour, Numata Sadaaki, Ambassador in Charge of Okinawan Affairs, and Nishikata Noriyuki, the new director of the SOFA Division at the Foreign Ministry (having just assumed his position less than two weeks earlier), called on the OPG, where they also received a list of demands for their minister, Kawaguchi Yoriko.

The next day, the three leaders of the OPG received a visit by parliamentary secretary for Foreign Affairs Arai Shogo, who in turn later met with Mayor Iha and Lt. Gen. Blackman. When these meetings were over, the leadership of the OPG met with that of the ruling parties at the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly building next door. Their purpose was to discuss the response to the crash and whether to call the OPA into a special session.²³⁾ A decision was reached to do so, and two days later, as the first step in this process, the Prefectural Assembly's Special Committee on U.S. Base Affairs (*Beigun Kichi Kankei Tokubetsu Inkaï*), headed by Iha Tsunehiro, met to discuss drafts of a resolution criticizing the crash and opinion letter.²⁴⁾ The resolution included calls for: 1) the early return of Futenma Air Station; 2) the full investigation of the reasons for the crash and its early public release; and 3) full grounding of all flights until measures have been taken to prevent a reoccurrence. The debate and subsequent vote did not go smoothly, however, due to a related issue discussed in more detail below, namely the Futenma relocation. Opposition parties in Okinawa, critical of the Inamine administration's willingness to accept the relocation within the prefecture as called for the 1996 recommendations of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa, to the community of Henoko in northern Okinawa, called for an additional demand to "review the SACO agreement and planned relocation to Henoko." Eventually, the committee voted in favor of the draft as prepared by the ruling parties and the assembly passed the resolution on the 17th by a vote of 19 to 17 (with several members abstaining or absent due to the summer holidays).²⁵⁾

The close vote illustrates the difficulty the OPG, under Inamine, was having with maintaining its policy of conditionally supporting the relocation of Futenma to Henoko.²⁶⁾ Opposition had grown

sumae Henkan Jumin no Anzen Saiyusen Se Yo (Editorial Return of Futenma Prior to Relocation Give Priority to Safety of Residents!)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

21) "Inamine Chiji Shuccho Nitei Kiriage Kikoku e (Governor Inamine Cuts Trip Short to Return Home)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 14, 2004.

22) "Ken no Taio."

23) "17 Nichi ni Kogi Ketsugi."

24) "Kitai Kaishu Sosa ni Shisho Kenkei, Bei Taio ni Fuman Hyomei (Taking Away the Body of the Helicopter, Problems in Investigation, Prefectural Police Express Dissatisfaction with U.S. Handling)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

25) "Isetsumae Henkan Shusho Yosei e, Inamine Chiji (Toward Demanding the Return of Futenma Prior to Relocation, Governor Inamine)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 18, 2004.

26) As is well known, some of the conditions on the relocation that Inamine has applied over the years is the introduction

over the years to the construction of the facility in the waters off Henoko, particularly out of concern of the potential environmental impact and in light of various reports that U.S. forces might be relocated to other parts of Japan and/or the region in any case as part of the Global Posture Review that was being conducted by the U.S. The crash only added to the voices of opposition, essentially drowning out those who urged that it is *precisely* because of the potential for accidents that the facility should be moved out of crowded Ginowan. A poll taken by the center-left *Asahi Shimbun* and *Okinawa Times* one month after the crash, for example, suggested that some 81 percent of residents of the prefecture were now opposed to the move. A poll released one week after crash by the *Shimpo*, similarly, showed that an amazing 93% called for the reexamination of the SACO agreement.²⁷⁾ Moreover, as of late August, as discussed above, a majority of local assemblies have passed resolutions calling for a “reexamination of the decision to relocate to Henoko.” Most dramatically, this call was seen in the Ginowan City Assembly vote. Just five years before, in August 1999, the assembly had passed a resolution calling for the quick decision on the site to relocate Futenma, approving the relocation within the prefecture. The assembly essentially reversed itself with the unanimous vote. While this does not necessarily mean outright opposition by local political leaders to relocating to Henoko, it made implementing the decision (made in late 1999) all the more difficult, and perhaps impossible.

A similar debate was seen in the OPA. The four opposition parties and the *Ishin no Kai* (Restoration Group) proposed the inclusion of a similar phrase “SACO Goi o Minaoshi Henokooki e no Isetsu o Saiko Suru Koto (Reexamine the Relocation to the Waters Off Henoko and the SACO Agreement),” but in the end the military base affairs committee supported the draft of the ruling parties, which did not include such a demand—one that would have meant a repudiation of the work and policies carefully crafted over the six years of the Inamine administration.²⁸⁾

This action does not mean, however, that there was no internal discussion on the impact of the crash on the Henoko move. Indeed, the statements attributed to members of the OPG leadership suggested that a great debate had been emerging. On the afternoon of August 13 at his press conference, for example, Vice Governor Makino stated along these lines that the administration “would consider reviewing the relocation [decision],” but the next day he altered his statement to say that in fact there were “no changes in the policy of the prefecture [regarding the relocation].”²⁹⁾ Continuing, Makino argued that expediting the return of Futenma was one way to avoid the danger Futenma represents.

This issue, the danger that Futenma represented—“an accident waiting to happen,” was not a recent one, but a concern that has been around for a while. As the timeline of the implementation of

of massive economic aid to the prefecture and other special measures, as well as the establishment of a 15-year time limit on the use by the U.S. of any relocated facility in the prefecture.

27) “SACO Minaoshi 93% Beigun Heri Tsuiraku de Kinkyu Kenmin Ankeeto (93% [Call for] Review of SACO Emergency Poll of Prefectural People on U.S. Military Helicopter Crash),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 20, 2004.

28) The version passed did however share similarities with the version not accepted. Namely, both called for: 1) the early return of Futenma; 2) the complete inquiry into the accident and the early release of its quick release of the contents; and 3) the suspension of flights of all aircraft until measures to prevent a reoccurrence have been put into place. See “Kitai Kaishu.”

29) “17 Nichi ni Kogi Ketsugi.” For concerns held in the ruling parties by the comments of Makino, see “Makino Hatsugen Yotonai ni Hamon Soki Henkan de ‘Kyoki’ Unagasu (Makino’s Comments have an Impact within the Ruling Party Urged to Remain ‘Strong’ by Early Return of Futenma),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 16, 2004.

the SACO decision to return Futenma (initially expected to take 5-7 years) began to look like a further 10 to 15 years out, many in the OPG (and U.S. and Japanese governments) worried about when the accident waiting to happen would in fact become one that did occur. Now that it has happened, it is no longer a hypothetical question, and hence the realization among some in the OPG that it is no longer possible to ignore the danger of flights in and out of Futenma. (It is unclear how the crash will impact the thinking of the U.S. and Japanese governments, but it has certainly placed them in a reactive mode.)

The OPG initially continued to point out to critics that if the relocation plans are scratched, then the realization of the relocation itself would be pushed off all the more further in the future. But according to local reporters, while the OPG maintained this façade, a strong recognition began to set in following the crash and public outcry that simply calling for the realization of the early return based on relocation alone has its limits.³⁰⁾

It was with this dilemma in the background that Inamine faced reporters upon his return to Japan in the evening of August 18. Inamine's answers to questions skirted around a clear definition of what the post-crash policy of the OPG is, sometimes suggesting that they would continue to push the Henoko move as "the realistic option" and at other times that he would "use all his strength to work toward...realizing the earliest possible elimination of the danger of Futenma Air Station and its earliest possible return."³¹⁾ Moreover, Inamine explained that the OPG was, in order to eliminate the level of danger, "demanding that flights be cancelled, and a total approach in which the function of Futenma would be weakened through the reduction of forces and the relocation of training." After this meeting, as mentioned above, Inamine then met with Iha, who was also in Tokyo that day to protest the crash to the central government.

The next morning, Inamine visited the U.S. Embassy and the Cabinet Office to protest the crash and call for the earliest return possible for Futenma, followed by a meeting in the late afternoon with Chief Cabinet Secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki, formerly the minister in charge of Okinawa affairs. Inamine had wanted to meet Prime Minister Koizumi directly but a meeting could not be arranged as the latter was on vacation (something that exposed Koizumi to intense criticism in Okinawa for being unsympathetic to Okinawa's situation and giving priority to the Japan-U.S. alliance over Okinawa).³²⁾

After arriving back in Okinawa late on the 19th, Inamine held meetings on the morning of the 20th with the OPG leadership where they confirmed Inamine's intention to push for the reduction of forces, the relocation of training outside the prefecture, and the early return of Futenma prior to the relocation as a way to eliminate the danger of Futenma. In addition, the OPG leadership decided to not recognize the resumption of the operation of Futenma on the same scale as before the crash and to call on the U.S. and Japanese governments to discuss ways to eliminate the dangers prefec-

30) "Saiaiku Jitai Nijimu Kikankan Ken, Kiken Kaihi ni Kyukeisha (Worst Case Situation, Festering Fear Prefecture Turns Sharply toward Avoiding Danger)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 16, 2004.

31) "'Ichinichi mo Hayai Henkan o' Inamine Chiji 'Futenma' de Kaiken (Inamine Calls for 'Return [of Futenma] as Soon as Possible' at Press Conference)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 19, 2004.

32) "'Shirotomo Shinai' Shusho Shisatsu o Nozomu Kennai kara Kibishii Hihan ('No Attempts at Even Trying to Learn [about the Situation] Desire for Prime Minister to Visit Site Strong Criticism from within Prefecture)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 18, 2004.

tural residents faced.³³⁾

The following morning, Inamine went to Okinawa International University to view the crash scene and speak with university president Toguchi Kazuaki. Upon seeing it, Inamine reportedly said that it was “even worse than he had imagined.” That afternoon Lt. Gen. Blackman, who had returned from an exercise in Korea to meet the governor, and Consul General Reich, met with Inamine and the OPG leadership at 1:00 p.m. Blackman expressed his regrets for the crash and explained that a full investigation was underway. The governor in turn demanded a complete suspension of flights, the release of the results of the inquiry, and the implementation of measures to prevent a reoccurrence. In addition, Inamine called for the cancellation of the planned construction of the Army urban warfare training facility within Camp Hansen. Finally, as had sadly become his trademark, Inamine refused to shake hands with the U.S. representatives at the conclusion of the meeting.

The following day, a new issue would emerge to make this already difficult relationship more complex—the limited resumption of flights of the CH-53Ds.

5. The Decision to Resume Flights and the Ensuing Criticism

Immediately after the crash, military authorities grounded all aircraft out of concern for political sensitivities in Okinawa as well as a precaution until the reason behind the crash was better understood.³⁴⁾ As it became clear that the crash was related to the specific helicopter involved, and with the necessity for other flights both for training and operational concerns to proceed, the ban was lifted in three different stages, namely: 1) “minimum essential flights” of helicopters with the exception of the CH-53D-type (on the 17th); 2) flights of a limited number of Sea Stallions to deploy off Okinawa (22nd); and 3) flights for the remaining CH-53Ds on Okinawa.

As the respective suspensions were lifted, the decisions were increasingly criticized at both the local and national levels, bringing a new level of publicly visible friction. This section looks at the decisions and the criticism that emerged.

The decision, two days after the crash, on the 17th to lift the ban on flights for all aircraft with the exception of the Sea Stallion was met “with a resounding chorus of protests from the prefectural and local governments,” according to the *Stars and Stripes*.³⁵⁾ Residents in the area complained of stress, fearing that another aircraft would crash, particularly “when safety concerns had not been fully met.”³⁶⁾ Another resident condemned it, saying “the U.S. military has not been repentant at all. It is clear that they give priority to military matters even at the expense of injuring the local population. There is no choice but to get rid of the bases.”³⁷⁾ One after the other, local assemblies joined

33) “Chiji Isetsumae.”

34) Operations of fixed wing aircraft technically were not suspended but were limited to “fulfilling operational requirements...[and would] return to normal in conjunction with the resumption of helicopter operations,” according to an unnumbered and untitled August 17, 2004 US Forces Japan press release.

35) “6 Futenma CH-53ds Set Off for Iraq,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 24, 2004.

36) “Heri no Oto ‘Mo Iya Da’ Jumin Kanjo Mushishi Hiko Kunren Saikai (The Sound of Helicopters is ‘Enough!’ Resumption of Flight Training Ignores Feelings of Local Residents),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

37) *Ibid.*

in the criticism, passing resolutions calling for a ban on flights.³⁸⁾

The concern that the resumption of flights created was not limited to local residents and politicians, however. On August 17, Defense Minister Ishiba decided to request the U.S. military to halt the flight of all helicopters assigned to Futenma Air Station for the time being.³⁹⁾ His decision reportedly was based on a special meeting held that morning with senior officials in the Defense Agency, who discussed the following four points: 1) the need to request the U.S. military to cancel flights for the time being; 2) the need to study safety measures until Futenma is relocated; 3) the need to pay compensation to residents [affected by the crash]; and 4) the need to maintain the decision to pursue relocation of Futenma to Henoko. That same day, Vice Director of the Defense Facility Administration Agency Ishii, speaking with Brig. Gen. Timothy R. Larsen, Deputy Commander, U.S. Forces, Japan, and Nishi Masanori, Director of the Naha Bureau of the DFAA, with Lt. Gen. Blackman in Okinawa, both relayed the request of Ishiba to cancel flights. On the 20th, however, the first of the helicopter flights to and from Futenma began for 20 helicopters (4 UH1Ns, 12 CH46Es, and 4 AH1Ws). No CH-53Ds flew, however. Having already given warning through the lifting of the ban, the media coverage was small.

This relative lack of media focus would change over the weekend when frictions between the Japanese government and the U.S. government would come to a head. The resumption of “minimum necessary flights” of aircraft other than the one that crashed were one thing, apparently, but for the flight, if even one time, of the same type of CH-53 that had crashed, was another. Early on the 22nd, according to newspaper accounts, the U.S. Embassy contacted Ebihara Shin, Director of the North American Division of the Foreign Ministry, to explain that it was necessary to allow the Sea Stallions to fly in order to deploy for operations in Iraq.⁴⁰⁾ In addition to the operational need, apparently some on the U.S. side calculated that the central government and Prefectural Government would not oppose it since it meant that the aircraft would be leaving Okinawa, and thus lightening the burden.

Surprised at the request, however, Ebihara immediately responded that they could not allow it. Feeling that most of the people of the country would be against the flights and sensing the need for there to be a political decision, the Foreign Ministry reportedly contacted Koizumi's private secretary (Iijima Isao) and Cabinet Secretary Hosoda later that morning. Koizumi, according to the same story, expressed his opposition to the flight. Having been directed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to deploy the 31st MEU to Iraq, the U.S. went ahead with the flights at around noon that day after informing the Foreign Ministry that the six Sea Stallions (the remaining CH-53Ds of the original seven assigned to Okinawa) would leave Futenma for the USS *Essex* at White Beach Naval Facility 30 minutes before (and releasing a press statement just 12 minutes before), for duty with

38) “Ginowan Shigikai ga Kogi Ketsugi SACO Minaoshi Yokyu (Ginowan City Assembly Passes Resolution of Protest, Demands SACO Review),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 17, 2004.

39) “Ishiba Boei Chokan Heri Hiko no Chushi Yosei Jumin Sodansho Kaisetsu (Defense Agency Director Ishiba Requests Cancellation of Helicopter Flights, Establishes Office to Handle Complaints of Residents),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 18, 2004.

40) “Futenma ‘Seigo Funo’ ni Gunji Yusen ni Gaimusho Konwaku (Foreign Ministry Confused about the Military-First Approach and Inability to Control Futenma),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 23, 2004.

the 31st MEU.⁴¹⁾ The press release explained that a preliminary investigation had determined the cause of the crash as specific to the downed helicopter, every CH-53D helicopter had since been “thoroughly inspected for safety and cleared to resume mission essential flights” for deployment of the 31st MEU.⁴²⁾ The short notice, and the move itself, generated greater criticism, and at a much higher level.

Inamine, according to media reports, “felt betrayed,” having just met with Lt. Gen. Blackman and urging the U.S. not to go ahead with the flights. The media likewise described the move as one that was “rushed”. The Foreign Ministry, at all levels, including that of Amb. Numata to Lt. Gen. Blackman, protested it as well. “We could not approve it, especially when the reasons for the crash were not clear. It is extremely regrettable (*kiwamete ikan*),” Ebihara stated to reporters in Tokyo, “that the operations were restarted even though the Japanese government had been opposed.”⁴³⁾ Newspapers likewise commented that it “was a moment when the desires of the prime minister were trampled on.”⁴⁴⁾ Finally, the mayor of Ginowan described it as “just like living under a military occupation.”⁴⁵⁾

Unhappy with the restart of flights and the crash itself, Governor Inamine decided to go to Tokyo again to call for the full ban on flying and to protest to the central government and to the representative of U.S. forces. After meeting with Waskow, commander U.S. Forces Japan, Inamine said that he “could not say it was a good conversation...although I felt a great deal of sincerity from the general. I want a complete ban on flights until a workable solution is realized, but he did not answer.”⁴⁶⁾ He subsequently met with Prime Minister Koizumi on August 25 to seek assurances that proper safety measures were being put into effect before the resumption of normal air operations.⁴⁷⁾ Inamine also urged the prime minister to visit Okinawa again “as soon as possible and see the present state of the bases.”

41) The USS *Essex* had arrived on the afternoon of the 14th from Sasebo Naval Base. Public affairs officials of the Marines initially denied on the 13th that the 265 Helicopter Squadron was on its way to Iraq or other theatres of conflict, but this turns out to have been true.

42) “6 Futenma CH-53ds Set Off for Iraq.”

43) “Mokusatsu Sareta Shusho Handan Jiko Genin Setsumeishi Nashi (Prime Minister’s Decision Ignored No Explanation of Reasons for Crash),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 23, 2004. The next evening, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi telephoned Secretary of State Colin Powell to protest the crash and resumption of flights, and to call for the cancellation of flights of similar aircraft. See “Beigun Heri Tsuiraku Kawaguchi Gaisho ga Paueru Beikokumu Chokan to Denwa Kaidan (The U.S. Military Helicopter Crash Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Speaks with Secretary of State Powell),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 24, 2004.

44) “Futenma ‘Seigo Funo’ ni.”

45) “Kenmin no Inochi Naiga Shiro ‘Maru de Gunseika’ Ginowan Shicho (Ginowan City Mayor Describes [situation] Like ‘Living Under a Military Occupation’ Lives of Prefectural People Not Important),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 23, 2004.

46) “Hiko Teishi Jijitsujo no Kyohi Chiji, Zainichi Beigun Shireikan ni Kogi (De Facto Refusal to Stop Flights Governor Protests to Commander U.S. Forces Japan),” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 25, 2004.

47) “Kitai Kaishu.”