

The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Newsletter

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Greetings!

The Obama tour of Asia has placed Japan and the Asia-Pacific briefly in the spotlight, and this week we examine some of the most critical issues in the US-Japan and US-Japan-Okinawa relationship that assume new significance in light of the DPJ victory and installation of a new Japanese government.

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Gavan McCormack, The Battle of Okinawa 2009: Obama vs Hatoyama

Elections at the end of August gave Japan a new government, headed by Hatoyama Yukio. In electing him and his Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Japanese people, like the American people less than a year earlier, were opting for change - a new relationship with both Asia and the US, including a much more equal one with the latter. Remarkably, however, what followed on the part of the Obama administration has been a campaign of unrelenting pressure to block any such change.

The Obama administration has targeted in particular the Hatoyama desire to re-negotiate the relationship with the United States so as to make it equal instead of dependent. Go back, it seems to be saying, to the golden days of "Sergeant-Major Koizumi" (as George W. Bush reportedly referred to the Japanese Prime Minister) when compliance was assured and annual US policy prescriptions ("yobosho") were received in Tokyo as holy writ; forget absurd pretensions of independent policies.

The core issue has been the disposition of American military presence in Okinawa and the US insistence that Hatoyama honour an agreement known as the Guam Treaty. This article provides a comprehensive critical overview of the six decades' US-Okinawa conflict over bases and the local movements contesting current proposals for a new base at Henoko and transfer of a substantial component of the Marines to Guam.

Gavan McCormack is emeritus professor at Australian National University, coordinator of The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, author, most recently, of Client State: Japan in the American Embrace (in English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean), and contributes a monthly column to the Korean daily Kyunghyang shinmun.

Recommended citation: Gavan McCormack, "The Battle of Okinawa 2009: Obama vs Hatoyama," The Asia-Pacific Journal, 46-1-09, November 16, 2009.

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Study Group on Okinawan External Affairs, Okinawan Message to President Obama: Withdraw the Marines

On Friday 13 November, US President Obama flew in to Tokyo. The unresolved issue of "replacing" Futenma US Marine Air Station has been removed from the talks agenda, because the two sides cannot agree on how to resolve it. Festering for more than 13 years, the issue has risen gradually to a head since the Hatoyama Government took office at the beginning of September calling for a redefinition of US-Japan relations.

The one proposal that nobody in either Tokyo or Washington has considered is the one advanced below, by a representative group of prominent Okinawans: that the US simply close and withdraw from all its Okinawan bases. For 65 years, US forces have dominated Okinawa, beginning with the 1945 and continuing through protracted military occupation to the present. Until Okinawan views are taken into serious consideration, the problem cannot be settled. Text available in English and Japanese.

Recommended citation: Study Group on Okinawan External Affairs, "Okinawan Message to President Obama: Withdraw the Marines," The Asia-Pacific Journal, 46-3-09, November 16, 2009.

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R Taggart Murphy, Before Sunrise: Will Obama seize a rare opportunity for change in U.S.-Japan relations?

This is an article that appeared at The New Republic (online edition), and is given a new introduction here. Its premise is that the kind of relationship Japan and the U.S. have had is over. That relationship was rooted in postwar arrangements that have been destroyed -- and this is the significance of the DPJ victory. That victory gives Obama a window in which to construct a genuine alliance that would be of great help to both sides. It would be the greatest mistake to slam shut the window of opportunity opened by electoral changes in both the US and Japan because of the Pentagon's narrow, parochial concerns with its logistics.

Like many Americans who voted for him, I have been disappointed that Obama has failed to capitalize on the windows of opportunity that his electoral mandate and the financial crisis seemed to provide him. The conditions that precipitated the crisis are still very much there; there has been no real reform or recognition of the need to bridle Wall Street. We are still spilling blood and treasure in military adventures that should never have been started in the first place. The assaults on the rule of law and civil liberties that occurred under the George W. Bush administration -- assaults that strike at the very essence of the American experiment -- have not been redressed.

Here is one window -- forging a good, working relationship with the DPJ leaders. It is a tantalizing opportunity -- I hope that Obama understands it and seizes it.

R. Taggart Murphy is Professor and Vice Chair, MBA Program in International Business, Tsukuba University(Tokyo Campus) and a coordinator of The Asia-Pacific Journal. He is the author of The Weight of the Yen and, with Akio Mikuni, of Japan's Policy Trap. He wrote this article for The Asia-Pacific Journal.

Recommended citation: "Before Sunrise: Will Obama seize a rare opportunity for change in U.S.-Japan relations?" The Asia-Pacific Journal, 46-2-09, November 16, 2009.

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R Taggart Murphy, Is Japan Headed for a Fiscal Doomsday?

Many people in the financial world - not all of them kooks - have managed to convince themselves that Japan is hurtling towards some kind of fiscal doomsday. And that no matter what the Hatoyama government does or doesn't do, it's already too late. That Japan will be defaulting on its pension obligations. Or defaulting on its debt. Or will find itself unable to halt a string of bank failures that will bring the financial system to its knees. Or some combination thereof.

Taggart Murphy critically examines this emerging consensus.

R. Taggart Murphy is Professor and Vice Chair, MBA Program in International Business, Tsukuba University (Tokyo Campus) and a coordinator of The Asia-Pacific Journal. He is the author of The Weight of the Yen and, with Akio Mikuni, of Japan's Policy Trap. He wrote this article for The Asia-Pacific Journal.

Recommended citation: R. Taggart Murphy, "Is Japan Headed for a Fiscal Doomsday?" The Asia-Pacific Journal, 46-4-09, November 16, 2009.

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