

# *Japanese Hold Protests in Okinawa to Obstruct Construction of U.S. Base*

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Tokyo, January 26 (RHC)-- Japanese protesters have staged a sit-in, trying to obstruct the construction of a new U.S. military base on the southern island of Okinawa, which has been rife with anti-U.S. sentiment for years.

Protesters tried to block 80 trucks carrying building materials on an access road, prompting police to intervene and break up the demonstration. One protest organizer said: "Under the democratic fundamental principle which is an "election," the people of Okinawa said we don't need the base. Unfortunately the Japanese government doesn't think of Japanese people as the priority."

Local residents are concerned about potential noise pollution, and safety and environmental hazards. The Japanese and U.S. governments have pursued the relocation of the Futenma Air Base to the less populated Henoko coastal area in the Okinawa city of Nago, saying the plan is "the only solution" to address noise problems and accident risks. Many Okinawans, however, want the base to be relocated outside the prefecture.

According to the relocation plan, the state-of-the-art airbase will be built in the waters off the island over the next five years to replace the Futenma base. According to U.S. Forces Japan, nearly half of 100,000 U.S. troops in Japan reside on Okinawa.

Multiple cases of misconduct by U.S. forces, with several rape cases and the rape and murder of a 20-year-old woman in 2016, has raised anti-American sentiment among the pacifist islanders.

Japan has criticized the U.S. military for breaking a pledge to avoid flying helicopters over a school next to the Futenma base. The school has become a focal point for discontent over the U.S. presence on the island since a window fell from a U.S. Marines helicopter onto its playground last month.

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