

“There Will Be No Stopping the Okinawan Resistance,” an Interview with Yamashiro Hiroji

Asia-Pacific Journal Report, Gavan McCormack

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The erosion of civil liberties proceeds apace in Okinawa, the most conspicuous case being the imprisonment for five months (17 October 2016 to 19 March 2017) of Yamashiro Hiroji, head of the Okinawa Peace Movement Center and a prominent activist opposing base activist. In most developed democratic countries, a suspect may be held in police custody for up to four days before she or he is either indicted or released, but in Japan the limit is 23 days,¹ and in Yamashiro’s case it was arbitrarily extended by serial arrests on unrelated charges.



Yamishiro after being released

Two more months were to follow, however, before that happened. Even then, the court imposed strict conditions: setting bail at seven million yen (roughly \$65,000), and forbidding Yamashiro from resuming his role in the protest movement or communicating with its members. As it became clear that the rules were being twisted to enable his prolonged

detention, a national and international movement began to develop around his case. In December 2016, a number of members of the editorial group of this journal (this author included) joined an international call for release of Yamashiro and his colleagues.² On 4 January, a well-known American specialist on Japanese law, Lawrence Repeta, wrote in similar vein in the *Japan Times*, pointing out that the government of Japan was in breach of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its treatment of Yamashiro constituted a “shocking display of raw government power.”³ In January 2017, a group of 41 Japanese criminal law specialists issued a statement of protest and demand for Yamashiro’s release, which was translated and posted on this site together with my analysis.⁴ Amnesty International also took up the case, issuing an “urgent call” for Yamashiro’s release.⁵

Yamashiro gave the most detailed account of the conditions of his detention to the Japanese monthly journal, *Sekai*, where it was published in July 2017. We here present our English translation. For five months (exactly 152 days) Yamashiro was held in solitary confinement and denied any human contact including that of his family, in semi-darkness and without sense of time (deprived of any timepiece), often cold, ill (he had been hospitalized in 2016 for malignant lymphoma), subjected twice daily to a humiliating “body search,” and interrogated under immense pressure designed to extract a “confession.” The state, with all its resources, was intent on compelling submission of this

citizen. Systematic intense pressure was combined with random brutality. For much of that time, as we wrote in January, though suffering from the cold, he was forbidden even to accept the gift of a pair of socks.

Yamashiro remains innocent of any crime, unless and until the present court decides otherwise, but has already been severely punished and he remains henceforth forbidden to return to the site of struggle with which he is identified and which he led so brilliantly. He has not been completely silenced, however. On 15 June 2017 he addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on his treatment at the hands of the state,⁶ and he has spoken at rallies and meetings in various parts of Japan. Yet he remains on parole and whatever judgment is eventually issued in his case is almost certain to include a continuing ban on return to his role in the Henoko and Takae struggles. Anyone who had observed Yamashiro “in action” as “choreographer of the resistance” on the front-lines of struggle up until 17 October 2016 would understand that the state naturally feared and wanted to get rid of him. By now, even without a court verdict against him, the state has accomplished its goal of removing him from the movement. It presumably reasons that, deprived of its leaders, the movement, fatally weakened, will collapse.

In May 2017, the United Nations Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, expressed concern that “this government action could chill expression and particularly public protest and dissent.”⁷ It was if anything too mild a comment on a detention and interrogation that was closer in spirit to the infamous *Kempeitai* of pre-war Japan than the police procedures of a modern democratic state. Multiple human rights provisions in the Japanese constitution would appear to have been breached in the way Yamashiro (and others) has been handled, and a serious question arises as to whether the conduct of the state might even qualify as

“torture”, which is “absolutely forbidden” under Article 36.

Though Yamashiro is undoubtedly the best-known figure of the Okinawan movement against construction of the new base at Henoko or of “helipads” (strictly speaking Osprey-pads) at Takae to have been singled out for punishment by the Abe government, he has not been alone. Two others are on trial now (late July 2017) alongside him. Another, a pastor, was arrested and charged with causing injury to an employee of the Okinawa Defense Bureau at the Henoko protest site and obstructing the employee’s performance of official duties in an incident on 25 August 2016. He was found guilty on 27 July 2017 and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, suspended for 3 years. Since his charges are very similar to those that Yamashiro and his two co-defendants face, the outcomes may well be similar.

Furthermore, the arrests, detentions, and sentences in the case of Yamashiro (and others) pre-date the coming into effect of new legislation criminalizing engagement in a “conspiracy” to commit a crime (11 July). The arrests and charges in question all concern actual acts. Under the new law, irrespective of the outcome of ongoing or just-completed trials, it has become potentially a criminal act for them to communicate with each other or with others in the movement, even within a chat group or online.

These cases are plainly intended to serve as warning to the movement as a whole. “As we dealt with Yamashiro (and other Okinawa activists),” the state is saying, “so we will deal with others until you Okinawans submit and surrender.” Whether the movement will in fact bow in submission remains to be seen.

Gavan McCormack, 30 July 2017

Yamashiro Hiroji, Interview, “There will be no stopping the Okinawan resistance,” *Sekai*, July 2017, pp. 44-53.



Sekai, July 2017 issue

Prolonged police detention and interrogation

Yamashiro Hiroji, head of the Okinawa Peace Research Center and long involved in the movement against construction of a new military base at Henoko in Nago City, Okinawa, was arrested on 17 October last year [2016] and held in detention for 152 days. His requests for bail were denied and he was periodically re-arrested. The injustice of his prolonged detention on suspicion of trivial offenses was taken up by this journal (*Sekai*, March 2017) among others. The Abe administration's repression of the anti-base movement attracted attention both in Japan and abroad and a significant public demand grew for Mr Yamashiro to be released on bail or freed.

—First, let me ask you about the circumstances of your detention and investigation.

Yamashiro: For the two halves of my 152-day detention, exactly 76 days each, I was held first in the cells attached to Nago Police Station and then in Naha Detention Center. I was detained for this long period, charged with property damage for snipping a strand of barbed wire with pliers during the protest against construction of the helipads at Takae, and my requests for bail were dismissed in order “to prevent flight or concealment or destruction of evidence.”

During my time in the cells, the interrogation was conducted on an almost daily basis. It was conducted in an interrogation room separated just by a door and a passageway from my cell, but each time I was moved the few meters from my cell to the interrogation room I was handcuffed and a cord fastened around my waist, supposedly because the staff in charge of the cells were different from those in charge of the interrogation room. Each time I was moved from one to the other I was subject to body search. This was conducted by having me spread out on all fours, hands up against the wall, simply to humiliate me. This went on day after day, morning and afternoon.

In the bleakness of the cramped cell, it was impossible to see outside, and with curtains blocking the view from the corridor, it was impossible to know anything of what was going on around me. For one week, I was put into a dark cell with a covered window through which scarcely any light at all penetrated. The humiliating interrogation continued while thus confined to a cupboard-like room, contact with family and friends completely cut off. Their goal by putting me into this environment was to break my spirit so that I would say whatever they wanted.

The first count on which I was arrested was that of property damage mentioned above. I

will go into detail on this in the coming trial but since I myself admitted the actual act in question from the beginning I thought saying “Yes, I did it” would be enough to be released the next day. In fact the summary court rejected the police request for my detention on the third day (October 20). Although the Naha prosecutors immediately launched a provisional appeal to the Naha District Court, which allowed continuing detention, I still thought that my release would not be long in coming. However, on that very day – probably to block my release at all costs – the police issued a new arrest warrant. The cause for the subsequent arrest was “obstruction of the performance of public duties” and “causing injury” to an employee of the Okinawa Defense Bureau at Takae. This was something I could not admit to. As a civic activist I had some knowledge of procedure in such cases of repression and so assumed that if I denied the charges, I would be freed within twenty-three days (the limit for police detention).

With the detention term limit approaching, on November 11 I was indicted and assumed that most likely I would be transferred to a detention center. More than anything I wanted an end to the daily humiliation of the police interrogations. However, the police began arresting “accomplices,” one after the other. Then, they refused to release me from the cells because the interrogation of those “accomplices” was still going on. It was a really dirty trick. So long as they could find and arrest “accomplices” and put time between their arrests, they could keep on investigating me in the cells as long as they wanted. In other words, so long as the police do not want to release someone they can do what they like.

Then on 29 November they produced a third arrest warrant, this time charging me not over Takae but over “forceful disruption of business” by the placing of [concrete] blocks in the course of protest activities against construction of the base at Henoko. Since I had not

anticipated this third arrest, it was a severe psychological blow. On top of that, they produced an arraignment that included matters such as poking at American soldiers or “inflicting violence” on rightists who had stormed the protest tents. I felt there would be no end to it. So far as the references to rightists was concerned, all we had done was beat off a late night attack on our tents by rightists who were in a majority. In the event, however, this particular matter did not go beyond voluntary questioning.

After this situation continued with no end in sight, on December 26 I was finally transferred to the [Naha] Detention Center.

The shouts of encouragement helped me endure

—Your story makes me realize what a problem “hostage justice” (*hitojichi shiho*) is, and how inferior the protection of human rights is in Japan.⁸ Did your life change after you were transferred to the Naha Detention Center?

Yamashiro: When I went to the detention center I was a bit relieved, thinking that perhaps the police investigation would end, but jail is jail, and it too was a hard life. The interrogation was stressful, my dental cavity got worse, and when I told them I wanted to receive treatment for the pain that was coming on, they said, “We don’t give medical treatment for teeth here. If you can’t handle the pain, all we can do is remove the tooth.” Concerning this point, the guards at the detention center ignored my human rights, in a sense, to an equal or even greater extent than the police. Winter was cold this year even in Okinawa, and I was permitted to receive socks from outside the jail, something that the police did not allow at the holding station, but even the guards at the detention center would not allow me to receive disposable heat packs (*kairo*) from outside.

The room was dirty. There was so much dust

that my finger became black when I touched it, and they handed me a rag and a bucket as if to say, “do the cleaning yourself.” The holding cell at the police station was similar, but the detention center was worse. In the detention center, they made me change rooms three times, and the second and third rooms were so dirty that the water in the bucket became black right away.

What was different after I moved to the detention center was that I was allowed to buy things with my own money through a “self-payment” (*jiko bensai*) system. I could buy things at a store inside the detention center. Meals are provided early: breakfast is at 8 AM, lunch is at 11:40, and the evening meal comes at 4 PM. Since you get hungry at night, you are allowed to buy bread and things like that with your own money. This is probably less for the convenience of the people detained there than for the people who work there and go home at 5 PM, leaving us on our own for the rest of the night.

One problem for me was that at the police holding cell as well as at the detention center, there was no clock. Even if I woke up in the middle of the night, I didn’t even know if dawn was close or not. I didn’t realize that not being able to confirm what time of day it is makes a person feel really anxious. What this does, I thought, was induce you to be painfully aware that you have been placed in conditions different from those of the lives of ordinary citizens.

One thing that was hard for me at the police holding cell was being cut off from information about the outside world. I was able to read the newspaper, but articles related to me had been cut out of the paper. I knew nothing about how my arrest and my being taken into custody were being reported. But what a human being senses is strange. Gradually I came to be able to guess what was going on by looking at what section of what page had been cut out, and how

large that section was. Wow, *Ryukyu Shimpō* has written a big editorial about me, or *Okinawa Times* has published a special report relating to my case. When there were a lot of sections that had been cut out and that I could not read, I felt happy that a campaign was underway for my sake (smile). After, my lawyers later handed me a whole stack of the articles that had been kept from me and I realized, “ah, that’s what those articles were about”—I learned that as soon as I was arrested, friends, prominent people of culture, and many organizations started raising their voices on my behalf and I saw that even the mass media had reported my case as one of “unlawful arrest.”

After being transferred to the detention center, I was able to subscribe to and read newspapers and magazines without anything being cut out of them, except that since I could only read one newspaper, I alternated between two local Okinawa newspapers. At the time I was subscribed to the *Okinawa Times*, I read an editorial that was published in the form of a letter to me, entitled “From Henoko to Hiroji,” and I read many other articles, including a piece by Yamaguchi Izumi that was published in *Ryukyu Shimpō*. These editorials and articles really encouraged me and gave me confidence.

I was able to hear the voices of encouragement from my friends who were outside the police station and detention center. And since the police station was on a small lot, I was even able to recognize who was speaking and what they were saying. The detention center was on a large lot, and since I was put in one of the innermost cells, I was not able to understand what they were saying, but even so, whenever their voices reached me, it gave me courage. This is what enabled me to endure.

Denial of medical treatment

—Mr. Yamashiro, there were reports that you were suffering from malignant lymphoma, and we worried about you. Were you able to receive

treatment without any trouble?

Yamashiro: When I was in the police holding cell, on days designated by my physician at the prefectural hospital, I was escorted to the hospital by a police officer. But at the detention center, they would not take me to see my physician. That was one way for them to intimidate me. They would say, “You have cancer, don’t you? If you want to get out of jail soon, don’t you think it makes sense to cooperate with the investigation and admit that you are guilty?”

Right now my cancer is in remission and once a month I get a checkup to see if I am having a relapse.

—You were denied visitors and even people close to you were not allowed to see you. How did that affect you?

Yamashiro: I had heard that I would probably be able to see my family and friends once I had been transferred to the detention center, so I was looking forward to that, but the prohibition on visitors was not removed.

What still makes me feel intense anger even now is that even though letters and post cards full of massive encouragement had been sent to the detention center, I was not allowed to see even one of them. On the morning of the very day I was released from jail, they brought to me a huge pile of letters and postcards. Just like the prohibition on visitors, being cut off from information, and not having a clock, their real aim was to break the spirit of the person in custody and put them in a state of emotional exhaustion.

What made me the most anxious was, as you’d expect, not knowing what was going to happen next—when I would be released.

On March 28th of this year, I was suddenly told that I would be released, and they released me wearing the same rubber boots I had on when I

was arrested in Takae.

Injustice of prolonged detention: which is the real crime?

—Why do you think your detention continued for so long?

Yamashiro: One reason is that they didn’t want me to go back to the protest site; another is that the police and prosecutors were looking for “accomplices”.

My first arrest was on the charge of property damage, and that was just me. But as I was being interrogated regarding subsequent arrests, I came to realize that the interrogation was being aimed more and more at those around me, and I knew that I couldn’t let myself give in to that kind of interrogation. The police would show me video footage from the protest site and ask me, “who is this?” “what kind of person is he?” They asked me who the people were who helped me pile up the blocks and what organizations they belonged to, who the people standing next to me were when I was conversing in the woods in Takae, and other such questions.

Those people never did anything to put themselves under suspicion of committing a crime. Yet nonetheless, the police insisted there was a conspiracy, and that they were accomplices. If I tell someone to sit in a certain place at a sit-in and they comply, that constitutes a conspiracy. If someone applauds a speech I give or if I even just make eye contact with someone, that constitutes a conspiracy. If they operate on that premise, they can interrogate and arrest hundreds of people. I couldn’t tell how far they planned to expand the target of their repression. It was frightening. Several people other than myself had also already been arrested, and I felt terrible for them; in order to prevent the repression from extending any further, I exercised my right to remain silent.

Regarding the accusation that I had caused injury, the prosecutors tried to get me to confess by asking if I felt remorse for having caused injury to a person. They pressed me, saying, “causing injury to a person, whatever the reason, would cause anyone emotional distress. You have no humanity if you refuse to apologize.” When I said, “I did not cause injury. I did nothing to injure anyone,” they said, “fine, if you still refuse to admit what you did, we’ll just see you here again next week.” In other words, they implied that as long as I refused to confess, they would continue the interrogation.

But even their harassment and threatening interrogation couldn’t erase all the years I spent struggling together with friends and allies. There was no way I could forget the pride of Okinawa’s struggle, which embodies the majority will of the Okinawan people, and say “I was in the wrong.” I remained silent with the conviction that if they were intent on turning my actions into a spectacle, I would speak in public, before the court.

Even so, the detectives and the prosecutors kept trying to push me over the edge with their interrogation. I would tell them that I had been informed of my right to remain silent and I intended to exercise that right, but they refused to listen. When I sat there silently, not answering their questions, they would come down on me, saying, “why aren’t you saying anything!” Even though it was obvious that I was merely exercising my right to remain silent. They would say, “When you’re out protesting you can’t keep your mouth shut, yapping into your microphone, but here you shut up and won’t even open your eyes?” They were pushing so hard, I finally said, “Mr. Detective, you told me yourself that I have the right to remain silent, but you get angry when I choose to exercise that right. In the end you lose it and call me names. I won’t speak.”

Not only did they threaten me violently, they also tried to win me over psychologically. “Mr.

Yamashiro,” they would say, “From where I stand, what you did wasn’t such a terrible offense. But if you won’t talk to us, we’ll never know the truth of what took place. Even if your offense was minor, if you keep silent, it could spiral into something bigger. If you don’t tell us your side of the story, what you did and didn’t do, we’ll never be able to determine what really happened. This is for your own sake as well.” But giving in to their cajoling would still mean confessing to a crime. If I succumbed to their threats and cajoling and confessed that I had committed a “crime,” all my friends and fellow protesters would become accomplices, which could exacerbate the repression even further. Or my testimony could be used as a tool to convince the public that crimes are being committed as part of the Henoko protest movement.

It’s ridiculous if you really think about it. Hundreds of thousands of Okinawans, a majority of the population, desiring peace, opposing the burden of bases being hoisted off on Okinawa and opposing environmental destruction that will harm the exquisite coral reefs, elected candidates opposed to the new Henoko base to governor and to mayor of Nago, brought opponents of the base to be a majority in the prefectural assembly, and put opponents of the base in every seat representing Okinawa in the national Diet. For years, public opinion has been clear and political achievements have been many. Isn’t the real crime to ignore that reality, crush it, and forcefully press forward with the construction of a military base?

When Okinawans feel compelled to protest these actions of the government, huge numbers of riot police are mobilized from outside Okinawa and crack down on us with reckless violence. When we stand in the face of this state-sanctioned malice, the government calls our actions “obstruction of the performance of public duties” and “forcible obstruction of business” and detains us for long periods of

time. They even perform irrelevant searches of our homes. What should really be on trial is the tyranny of the current government, which is trampling on the will of Okinawans, destroying Okinawa's precious natural environment, and trying to use Okinawa's land for military purposes, despite the fact that Japan's constitution ostensibly prohibits the use of military force. When I go to court, I intend to fight for the sake of these sentiments held by Okinawans, and for our honor.

As long as the current administration is in power, there is a good chance that the repression of our activities will continue. I think of this world where I live as something temporary, and I live with the sense that I could eventually spend many years in prison. My five months in detention were not short. It was an agonizing experience. But I have learned how to survive repression and detention. I don't just think of it as an awful experience that I never want to repeat—I tell myself that next time, I will be able to endure and handle the situation with even greater strength.

Dangers of the Anti-Conspiracy Bill



Passage of Anti-Conspiracy Bill in House of Councillors, June 15, early morning

—Following the State Secrecy Act and new security legislation, the Abe administration is aiming to force through the anti-conspiracy bill. What dangers do you think that presents?

Yamashiro: If the anti-conspiracy bill passes, I fear that the scope of suppression of civilian resistance as in my own case will become even greater and stronger.

I mentioned that, while I was being interrogated, they asked me about “accomplices.” That was really only about acts that had already been performed, like piling up concrete blocks on the road. Even before the anti-conspiracy bill becomes law, the police have been claiming that people who applauded my speeches or with whom I made eye contact were part of a “conspiracy,” though they weren't actually conspiring or conferring with me at all. That's a problem in itself.

What is more, if the anti-conspiracy bill is passed, the police will be able to conduct an investigation arbitrarily any time they like, even when no crime has been committed. At present, an investigation or arrest is made in response to some sort of action, even if it is a false accusation. But once that premise is removed, a mere conversation inside a tent in front of the gate can be made the subject of investigation. The government may claim that this bill has “nothing to do with the general public,” but just two people having a conversation could be viewed as a conspiracy. I'd like people who don't oppose the anti-conspiracy bill to take a good look at what is happening in Okinawa. The police are targeting not organized crime but citizens' resistance.

To get the bill passed, the government says things like “the courts will provide a check” on enforcement of the new law, but my own experience shows that the court cannot perform this function in reality. Judicial proceedings are led by the prosecution, not the courts. I filed for bail a dozen times, but it only went to the Supreme Court twice, and on each occasion bail was refused due to concerns about “destruction of evidence or fleeing.” But how could I possibly destroy evidence or flee? These were spurious reasons concocted so that

they could keep me in detention for several months. The courts did nothing to curb these excesses of the investigating authorities. If the courts don't protect human rights but just do whatever the prosecutors say, the "separation of the three powers of government" and "independence of the judiciary" are mere castles in the air.

Whether it's the anti-conspiracy bill, state secrecy act or security laws, legislation that clearly violates the Constitution ought to be invalidated by filing a lawsuit and having it judged unconstitutional, but that never happens. Because the government views the courts as a puppet of the administration, they are able to promote this kind of unjust legislation. While holding the courts by the scruff of the neck, they tell the public not to worry because they are there to protect them. People must not let themselves be fooled by this.

Broadening solidarity with citizens' movements nationwide

—How are you approaching your own trial?

Yamashiro: Rather than charges against me as an individual, this is suppression of the protest movement against the construction of a new base in Henoko. You could go further and say that it's oppression of all the citizens of Okinawa who have clearly repeated their opposition to construction of the base.

To crush the anti-Henoko movement and force through construction of the base, they are throwing us in prison and taking us to court, but we will take our stand in the courts and show how this oppression violates public opinion in Okinawa and is contrary to the spirit of the Constitution. I also think it's important for us to once more arouse public opinion both inside and outside Okinawa, and this will be important not only for the coming trial, but also to prevent the Henoko base from being constructed in the first place.

Thanks to the efforts of people involved, it seems I will get the chance to address the UN Commission on Human Rights in June. I will only have a very short time to speak, but I hope to make an appeal about the sacrifices the government is forcing on the Okinawa region in the name of national policy and about the local people who are putting their lives on the line to protest against this. The central government is relentlessly strengthening the military and rushing towards war, through the construction not only of US bases at Henoko and Takae but also of SDF bases in Miyako and Yaeyama. As always, it is the people of Okinawa who are suffering as a result of this policy, and citizens who understand this are bravely resisting the government's aims. The central government has been using the Japan Coast Guard and riot police to suppress this resistance, arresting those who continue to protest. These are the sorts of things I want to appeal about to international public opinion.

From our viewpoint in Okinawa, it seems that the media in mainland Japan have considerably toned down their reports on these issues. I would like to see them not only report more on Okinawa issues, but also wage a campaign to report on the dangers of the anti-conspiracy bill. I want the media to probe more deeply into the violence being committed by the authorities in Okinawa. I think that's the duty of journalists.

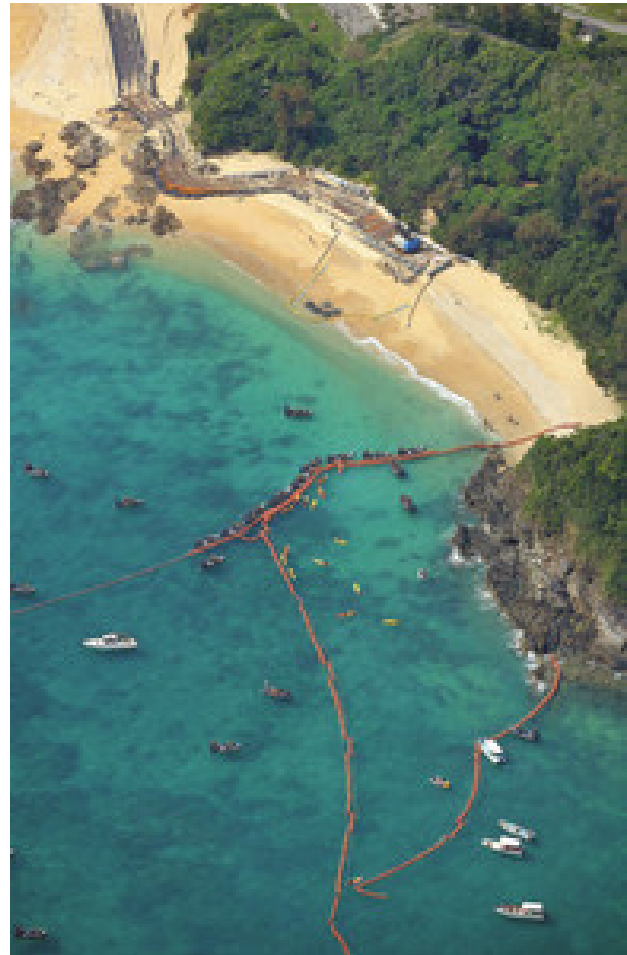
The internet is full of hate speech against the popular movement in Okinawa and against Governor Onaga. I think the spread of such hate speech is to some extent a result of the silence of journalism and the major media organizations. If the history of Okinawa and feelings of its people were covered accurately on a regular basis and properly investigated and reported, vilification of Okinawan protesters that they are "spies for China," "getting paid to do it" or "terrorists" would not have spread as widely as it has.

Many people in Okinawa have come to feel that they can no longer expect anything from the Japanese government or the mainland media. For my part, I still pin my hopes on a popular movement. One of the conditions for my release was that I would no longer have any contact with people involved in the movement, so it is difficult for me to go to Henoko at present. I am taking advantage of this hiatus to travel around Japan to broaden solidarity with citizens nationwide. I still have great hopes for a citizens' movement.

First, we must stop construction at the site



Henoko, April 3



April 25

—I'd like to ask about the situation in Henoko and the Okinawa prefectural government. Last month the Japanese government began forcibly dumping landfill in Oura Bay. What direction do you think the struggle should take now against base construction?

Yamashiro: More important than anything else is enlarging the movement at the site. There are calls for Governor Onaga to hurry and cancel the landfill permit. And, under the circumstances, I understand why impatience is growing. But what will most spur Governor Onaga into action is a healthy protest movement at the site to which the prefectural government must respond. If 300 people join the Henoko protests on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, construction would

stop on those days. As for the courts, if the governor cancels the landfill permit now, it would likely just put things off for a while. But if construction is stopped at the site, delayed even for one day at a time, Governor Onaga will act when the time is right.

The government's claim that "landfill and main construction are already underway" is only propaganda meant to discourage Okinawans opposing the base and make them give up. In reality, filling in the coral reef of Oura Bay would be a huge undertaking and technically very difficult, and necessitate rerouting of the Bija River waterway. This would require the permission of Nago Mayor Inamine, so it is impossible as long as he is in office. Even if, as an alternative, the Japanese government applies for a change in the construction plan, Governor Onaga would never approve it.

Speaking of approvals, the central government should have explicitly applied for a permit to crush coral in the bay. Instead, it deceived the fishermen, paying them money and claiming they had "abandoned their fishing rights," then forcibly went ahead with construction. In fact, fishing rights come with the authority over local public waterways, which are under Governor Onaga's jurisdiction. Ignoring his authority, the construction companies claimed that "fishing rights no longer exist," and are forcibly dumping landfill. This blatant evasion of legal jurisdiction has no place in a nation of laws.

Such unconscionable actions cannot be allowed to stand. Time after time we file lawsuits, appealing cases up to the supreme court. But each time the courts go along with the central government. It is no wonder people have lost faith in Japan's judiciary.

The truth is that, as long as the people of Okinawa support Governor Onaga and Mayor Inamine, the base in Henoko will not be built. The Abe administration cannot continue for

another ten or twenty years. Things are bound to change. To my fellow Okinawans I say that we must believe this and never lose hope as we steadfastly hold our course ahead.

Let's make Okinawa a hub of peace

—You mention the importance of support for the administrations of Governor Onaga and Mayor Inamine. Both are facing elections next year. The All Okinawa candidates have suffered defeats in municipal elections. What kind of struggle should be waged now?

Yamashiro: The Japanese government clearly it cannot continue construction of the base at Henoko without replacing Onaga and Inamine. That's why the Nago mayoral election next January and the gubernatorial election at the end of this year are of utmost importance.

In the meantime, the negative campaigns against Governor Onaga on social media and by right-wing magazines are sure to become more cunning and large-scale. It is essential to confront them directly, not only with rebuttals, but with Governor Onaga positively asserting his principles.

On the one hand, the Abe administration wants to use Okinawa as a base for war while others seek Okinawa's development as a hub for peaceful exchange among Asian countries. In Okinawa, with its long history, propaganda about "the China threat" has far less resonance than on the mainland. The driving force behind the millions of tourist visitors to Okinawa is China and other Asian countries. Okinawa can develop as the hub of East Asia. Not as a military hub, but as a hub of mutual prosperity and friendship. There resides Okinawa's hope for the future, and no one should want to destroy that future. This should be our appeal.

What we call "peace" is not just avoiding a repetition of the war seventy-two years ago, but joining with other Asian nations in learning from the bitter lessons of the past and

committing to a future of peaceful development.

The Abe administration is brandishing the “North Korean threat” to revise Japan’s security framework and increase military spending. The resulting victim will not be Tokyo, but Korea and Okinawa. Even a nuclear attack on Kadena Air Base becomes a possibility. The newly elected president of South Korea advocates negotiations with the North. Surely most people in Okinawa also favor this.

The Abe administration talks about “strengthening defense of the Southwestern Islands,” and pushes ahead with construction of SDF bases on Miyako and Yaeyama. But bases that target Chinese ships for missile attacks do not “defend” the Southern Islands, rather they have the potential to secure their involvement in a war that would obliterate them. The claim that the SDF will “revitalize” these islands is a fallacy. Bases can only bring the menace and victimization of war. This is the lesson Okinawa

learned seventy-two years ago. From the movement to stop construction of the base at Henoko—from that very site—Okinawa can build on the principle of peace for future generations.

Interviewed by Kumagai Shin’ichirō of the *Sekai* editorial staff

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Notes

¹ Silvia Croydon, *The Politics of Police Detention in Japan: Consensus of Convenience*, Oxford, Clarendon Studies in Criminology, 2016.

² “Heiwa senta Yamashiro-shi shakuho o,” *Ryukyu shimpo*, 17 December 2016, and “Yamashiro-shi no soki shakuho yokyu,” *Okinawa Taimusu*, 17 December 2016

³ [“The silencing of an anti-base protester in Okinawa”](#)

⁴ Gavan McCormack and Sandi Aritza, [“The Japanese State versus the People of Okinawa: Rolling Arrests and Prolonged and Punitive Detention,”](#) *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 15 January 2017

⁵ Amnesty International, UA: 23/17 Index: ASA 22/5552/2017 Japan.

⁶ Jon Mitchell, "Okinawa's 'prisoner of conscience' to address UN about human rights abuses," *Japan Times*, 10 June 2017

⁷ See [here](#).

⁸ The term *hitojichi shiho* ("hostage justice") is used to describe the impossible situation faced by many people arrested in Japan, that has little to do with the law. You can resist police demands for a false confession, deny the charges, and be in jail for an extended period of time; or you can confess, get out right away, and get on with your life.