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counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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Obama and the Empire

The Latest Happy Face of the Ruling Class

By ALLEN MENDENHALL

For decades Japanese leaders denied the existence of U.S.-Japanese agreements to shift the financial burden of U.S. military facilities in Japan from United States taxpayers to Japanese taxpayers. Yet Japan's Foreign Ministry, pursuant to regulations it implemented in May of this year, has declassified several documents relating to the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japanese rule. Although the Foreign Ministry established an expert panel to clarify portions of the clandestine U.S.-Japanese pacts over the reversion, the panel failed to, or refused to, explain many of the declassified documents.

Nevertheless, a former Foreign Ministry official, speaking to Japanese media about the documents, confirmed that the U.S. forced Japan to pay an additional \$65 million costs to complete the Okinawa transfer. These costs came on top of \$320 million Japan was to pay to cover other costs—mostly for goods and services—pertaining to the reversion. As if this weren't shocking enough, the documents also reveal that more files regarding the reversion were incinerated or dumped. The discarded documents most likely addressed the controversial arrest of reporter Takichi Nishiyama, who exposed the furtive U.S.-Japan collusion as early as 1972.

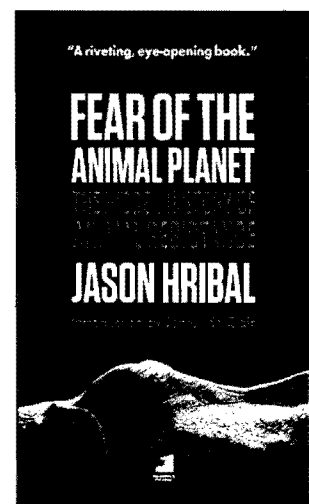
The declassified documents also address conspiracies between the U.S. and Japanese governments, including a secret plot to rig a 1968 gubernatorial

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election in favor of the pro-Washington Junji Nishime, a leader of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The plot was an inside effort to subvert the then-just-passed bilateral accord granting Okinawans the right to vote in Japanese elections. The U.S. had hoped to use Okinawan suffrage as a tool for implementing U.S. plans in the region when she urged LDP leaders to pledge more money for Nishime. The plot apparently failed when Chobyu Yara, a politician who opposed many U.S. demands regarding the reversion, triumphed in the election, albeit just barely.

As news of these declassified documents spread through Japanese media last week, Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara announced his hope that some U.S. military facilities could be returned to Japan earlier than planned. This announcement flew in the face of recent declarations that the Futenma base dispute was resolved when Obama virtually unseated Yuko Hatoyama, the most recent former prime minister of Japan. Hatoyama had staked his career on the Futenma base issue, and his refusal to toe the Washington policy line resulted in his political demise.

As if to give the appearance of entertaining Okinawan interests, Maehara met with Governor Hirokazu Nakaima and American military leader Terry Robling on December 21. During these meetings, Nakaima, who pledged to defy Washington-Tokyo efforts to carry out Futenma base policies, informed Maehara that, in effect, the Futenma plan, as stated, made little sense because relocating to a site outside of Okinawa would be "faster." Maehara apologized to Nakaima for the LDP's failure to live up to its promises to resist American coercion during the Futenma base dispute, but the apology was not enough to please Nakaima.

Declassifying these important government documents, although intended to strengthen the trust of Japanese citizens in their government, could go great lengths toward undermining that public trust. The Japanese government is at least confirming that for decades it lied to its people, whereas in America, the public, much of it anyway, complacently accepts whatever outrageous narratives the government and ruling classes pass down. Obama is simply the latest happy face of the moment on oligarchy. It's just ironic that this commander in chief has managed to gather the Nobel Peace Prize, among other accolades, while serving the interests of military occupation and threatening the sovereignty of a supposed ally.

Allen Mendenhall has lived, taught, and studied in Japan. He is an attorney, a LL.M. candidate in transnational law at Temple University, and a Ph.D. student in English at Auburn University. Visit his website at AllenMendenhall.Com.

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