



## **ALL-OKINAWA COUNCIL'S TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORK STRATEGY IN RESPONSE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES' MILITARY BASE CONSTRUCTION IN OKINAWA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research seeks to describe All-Okinawa Council's transnational advocacy network strategy in response towards the United States' military base construction in Henoko, Okinawa. This research utilizes descriptive qualitative method, with documentation data collection technique. The results of this research found that there are four strategies conducted by All-Okinawa Council, as a non-governmental organization in opposing the United States' military base construction in Okinawa. Firstly, information politics by strengthening communication networks with mass media, government, and international non-governmental organizations. Secondly, symbolic politics by forming alliances with other advocacy groups with similar goals. Thirdly, leverage politics by organizing direct action campaigns and demonstrations to gain public attention and increase political pressure. Finally, accountability politics by holding meetings and discussions with political leaders and diplomatic representatives from the involved countries. This research concludes that All-Okinawa Council's transnational advocacy network strategy has successfully influenced public opinion, obtained international support, and increased political pressure on the Japanese and American governments.

**Keywords:** All-Okinawa Council, Transnational Advocacy Network, United States' Military Base, Non-Governmental Organization, Okinawa

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research seeks to describe All-Okinawa Council's transnational advocacy network strategy in response towards the United States' military base construction in Henoko, Okinawa. The United States (US) has several military bases in other countries, utilized to support operations, training, and security. One of the US' most strategic

military bases is located in Okinawa, the southernmost territory of Japan. Previously during the World War II in 1945, the US positioned its army in Okinawa as a strategy to invade Japan's territory. In the process, the US cleared some land to construct a military base in Okinawa, which ended in 1952, but resumed in 1960 based on the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (Alexandra, 2015).

The presence of United States' military bases in Okinawa has long been a source of tension between the Japanese government, the United States, and the local population. The relocation of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to Henoko has triggered large-scale protests involving both local and international actors (Hassan, Paidi & Tan, 2014). In response, the All-Okinawa Council has served as a coordinating umbrella for the opposition movement, integrating various civil society organizations and NGOs. This article examines the strategies employed by the All-Okinawa Council in building a transnational advocacy network to oppose the construction of the military base.

The issue of the United States (US) military base construction in Henoko, Okinawa, represents a complex intersection of national security policy, local identity, and transnational activism. For decades, the presence of the US' military base in Okinawa has been a persistent source of tension among the Japanese government, the United States, and the Okinawan people. Although the official justification emphasizes the maintenance of regional stability and the US–Japan security alliance, the reality in Okinawa reflects prolonged social, economic, and environmental grievances. The contradiction between these normative claims and factual conditions constitutes a significant research gap that this paper seeks to address.

Normatively, both the United States and the Japanese government argue that the Henoko base relocation from MCAS Futenma aims to ensure regional security and reduce risks for Okinawan residents. However, in practice, this relocation project has exacerbated public discontent, ecological damage, and political inequality. The Island of Okinawa is only 0.6% of Japan's territory, yet hosting approximately 75% of all US military facilities in the country, which continues to bear disproportionate military and environmental burdens (Letman, 2015). Additionally, the construction of the new base in Oura Bay directly threatens the habitat of endangered species such as the dugong, coral reefs, and sea turtles, while also deepening historical resentment over crimes committed by the US military personnel and economic dependency on base-related employment. These factual conditions expose a structural disparity between Japan's national interests and Okinawa's local welfare.

This contradiction underscores the urgency of examining an Okinawan civil society organization, particularly the All-Okinawa Council, which mobilizes resistance by linking local movements with transnational advocacy networks. While prior researches have discussed the socio-political history of Okinawa's opposition movements, few have analyzed how the All-Okinawa Council strategically utilizes transnational advocacy mechanisms, such as information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics to

internationalize their struggle. This study fills that research gap by analyzing the Council's strategic practices in building transnational alliances to influence both domestic and global public opinion.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that Okinawa's resistance transcends local protest. It illustrates a broader transformation in global activism, where local communities employ transnational advocacy to challenge the dominance of state-centered security frameworks. Understanding this movement is crucial for the study of International Relations, as it reflects how subnational actors utilize global civil society networks to assert political agency against hegemonic state interests.

Moreover, learning from Okinawa's experience is essential to understand how local communities facing structural inequality can effectively transform local grievances into global advocacy. The All-Okinawa Council demonstrates how persistence, collective organization, and transnational collaboration can amplify local voices to influence international discourse. Their approach not only represents a model of bottom-up political engagement but also provides valuable insight into how marginalized regions can negotiate power asymmetries through nonviolent, globally connected strategies. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding how transnational advocacy networks serve as both a form of resistance and a means of empowerment for communities confronting globalized security structures.

## **METHOD**

This research utilizes descriptive qualitative method, with documentation data collection technique. The researchers act as a key instrument in data collection from documents such as eBooks, journal articles, and websites. Subsequently, the authors analyze the collected data to obtain understandings through interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Transnational advocacy networks are organizations and social movements that aim to influence the government or decision makers' decision, in order to support issues which are faced by the society. Transnational advocacy networks include domestic and international non-governmental organizations, social movements, foundations, the media, civil unions, and parts of the executive or legislative branch of the governments. Transnational advocacy networks need to collaborate to strengthen their influence in voicing out social issues to be heard by the government or decision makers,

Transnational advocacy networks implement four strategies in expressing their movement, in order to influence decision-making (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Firstly, information politics – generating information which would impact political decision-making. Activists usually frame information as right or wrong in support of their social cause, hoping to gain support from the society who believe in the same principles. Secondly, symbolic politics – producing symbols useful to identify the movement, easy

to attract society's attention to support the social cause. Thirdly, leverage politics – selecting influential members of the transnational advocacy network, capable of voicing out the issues, when less influential parts of the network are incapable of doing so. Pressuring or persuading influential actors would effectively generate change in policies through material leverage such as money or goods, or moral leverage, such as aspirations heard by the government when spoken by influential people. Finally, accountability politics – influencing politicians or decision makers to support the social cause in their policies. When the government has decided to uphold certain principles, such as democracy or human rights, activists pressure the government by highlighting inconsistencies between their upheld principles and political practice, in order to change the government's policies.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this research found that there are four strategies conducted by All-Okinawa Council, as a non-governmental organization in opposing the United States' military base construction in Okinawa, which are information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics and accountability politics. These strategies not only function to mobilize support but also to pressure the Japanese and US governments to take responsibility for the social and environmental consequences of their policies.

### **All-Okinawa Council's Information Politics by Strengthening Communication Networks**

Firstly, All-Okinawa Council used online media, such as news and social media to spread information regarding Okinawa society's condition impacted by the US military base. All-Okinawa Council utilized websites, social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter, as well as other online media channels. The All-Okinawa movement has actively sought to influence the international community, operating under the belief that the greater the global awareness of the situation in Henoko, the more likely it is to generate international pressure on the Japanese government that would be difficult to ignore.

By creating new opportunities for engagement, activists and participants of the All-Okinawa movement have consistently worked to mobilize transnational support, anticipating that heightened international attention would strengthen external pressure on Tokyo. To date, numerous international visitors have traveled to Henoko to express cross-border solidarity with the Okinawan people's struggle. Similarly, Governor Onaga, representing the All-Okinawa Council, undertook a visit to the United States to call for a review of the relocation plan for the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma and the construction of its replacement facility in Henoko, while simultaneously seeking to build public support among the American populace (McCormack, 2015).

Secondly, sending delegates to San Francisco and Washington D. C. to represent Okinawa society's aspiration in opposing the US' new military base construction in Okinawa. All-Okinawa Council sent their delegations to the US in November 2015 (Hideki, 2015). During their visit, activists representing the All-Okinawa Council delivered a clear message. The message, conveyed to two dozen members of Congress and officials at the Pentagon, urged President Obama to annul the agreement with the conservative government of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō regarding the construction of a new military base on reclaimed land in the coral-rich bay along Okinawa's northern coast. According to recent public opinion surveys, more than 80 percent of Okinawa's residents oppose the new Henoko base, and they now enjoy the backing of all elected officials on the island (Shorrock & Rabson, 2015).

Several activists have also sought to raise awareness regarding the presence of United States military bases in Okinawa by initiating a tour across Europe. Among these activists were Aihara Sarasa and Kamoshita Yuichi, who disseminated information about the struggle of the Okinawan people in resisting the construction of the new base in Henoko (Kimura, 2016).

### **All-Okinawa Council's Symbolic Politics by Forming Alliances**

Firstly, the All-Okinawa Council became the symbol of Okinawa society's movement in opposing the new US military base's construction in Henoko. The All-Okinawa Council used the term "All-Okinawa" as a slogan for their movement in opposing the new US military base. The term 'All-Okinawa' originated during the 2014 gubernatorial election campaign, when Governor Onaga Takashi pledged to the people of Okinawa to halt the construction of the military base in Henoko. The campaign message of 'All-Okinawa' subsequently became a symbolic rallying cry for the anti-military base movement in Okinawa. To this day, the term continues to be employed by the All-Okinawa Council, with its origin rooted in this campaign message.

Secondly, organizing a campaign with other organizations, including the Veterans for Peace and Greenpeace to oppose the new US military base's construction. All-Okinawa Council and Veterans for Peace held a campaign in front of the Camp Schwab's gate (Ryukyu Shimpo, 2015). Besides that, Greenpeace also protested by holding banners which mentioned "Save the Dugongs".

Greenpeace launched the 'Save the Dugong' campaign in response to the fact that the proposed construction site for the new military base overlaps with the natural habitat of the dugong, a legally protected species. Conservationists have emphasized that this marine mammal depends on the seagrass meadows flourishing in Oura Bay, yet the planned airbase would further imperil its survival. By reclaiming the bay with massive landfilling—depositing rocks to construct two runways and a one-mile seawall—the project would effectively bury the seagrass beds, thereby destroying a critical ecosystem

that sustains not only the dugong but also numerous other rare and endangered species (Zangas, 2019).

They joined the All-Okinawa Council in organizing a sustained sit-in protest at the gates of Camp Schwab. At the site, members of Veterans for Peace (VFP) demonstrated transnational solidarity by raising their fists in unison with local protesters and carrying banners in English stating, 'No New U.S. Military Base on Henoko,' 'Close Futenma Air Station,' and 'No Helipads at Takae.' Tarak Kauff, a VFP board member, publicly articulated strong support for the movement, drawing on his prior experiences of solidarity activism in the United Kingdom and South Korea. Kauff emphasized that the opposition movement in Henoko holds international significance and is connected to broader struggles against militarization worldwide. His statement further underscored a commitment to sustained collective resistance, affirming that he would continue to stand alongside the Okinawan community in their mobilization efforts (Ryukyu Shimpo, 2015).

Peace activists have also called on the United States to cancel its large-scale military construction plans on Okinawa, Japan. In addition to organizing demonstrations, they submitted a petition with 190,000 signatures to the White House. The petition demanded a halt to the construction of the U.S. airbase in Oura Bay until a referendum could be held on 24 February. The initiative was led by Robert Kajiwara, a fourth-generation Okinawan-American, who organized the online petition that garnered 190,000 signatures. As both a musician and a human rights activist, Kajiwara sought to mobilize international support to prevent the establishment of the Henoko base, thereby situating local opposition within a broader framework of global civil society advocacy (Zangas, 2019).

### **All-Okinawa Council's Leverage Politics by Organizing Campaigns and Demonstrations**

Initially, All-Okinawa Council gained moral leverage by gaining support from international non-governmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Nature Conservation Society of Japan, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the Veterans for Peace. All-Okinawa Council and Veterans for Peace had organized a sit-in protest together (DemocracyNow, 2016). Meanwhile, Greenpeace also protested and spread information. IMADR assisted by conveying their aspirations to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (Teh, 2015).

APALA stated full support through their official website to spread the issues faced by Okinawa society affected by the US' new military base construction. Following its meeting with the Okinawan delegation, the National Executive Board of APALA adopted a resolution expressing solidarity with the people of Okinawa in their opposition to the construction of the Henoko base. APALA National President Johanna Puno Hester

likewise voiced her opposition to the establishment of a new United States military installation (APALA, 2015).

On its official website, APALA articulated its sustained commitment to advancing movements for peace and environmental sustainability, while explicitly opposing the expansion of United States military bases in Okinawa. Beyond issuing formal statements, APALA has engaged in educational initiatives aimed at U.S. union leaders, Asian American community leaders, and selected elected officials, disseminating information about the Okinawan situation and the broader socio-environmental consequences for local communities. Such efforts illustrate APALA's role within transnational advocacy networks, contributing to the diffusion of norms related to environmental justice, demilitarization, and human rights, thereby situating Okinawa's struggle within a wider framework of global solidarity and collective resistance.

In September 2015, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), in collaboration with the All-Okinawa Council and Franciscans International, organized an event entitled 'Militarization and Human Rights Violations in Okinawa, Japan.' During this event, Governor Onaga underscored the fact that the people of Okinawa had never voluntarily ceded their land for the construction of United States military bases. He further criticized the Japanese government for disregarding the collective will of Okinawans who opposed the establishment of a new base in Henoko.

Subsequently, on 22 September 2015, Onaga delivered a two-minute speech before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), in which he once again condemned the construction of the U.S. military base in Henoko and demanded the relocation of MCAS Futenma out of Okinawa. These interventions not only highlighted the structural marginalization of Okinawans within national decision-making but also represented an attempt to internationalize the issue through appeals to human rights discourse and global institutions (Shimin Gaikou Centre & IMADR, 2016).

Secondly, All-Okinawa Council also attained material leverage by receiving support and funding from activists to continue protests. All-Okinawa Council relies on donations from its members to fund the organization's activities. Additionally, businesses in Okinawa also donated some funds to support the All-Okinawa Council's movement. All-Okinawa Council received material support from several prominent business figures in Okinawa, including Morimasa Goya of Kanehide Holdings, Choei Taira of the Kariyushi Group, and Tokumatsu Nagahama of Okinawa Ham (Japan Press, 2015).

Former Kadena mayor Miyagi Tokujitsu, along with local-level politicians, also contributed to the movement. The funds were utilized for a variety of activities, such as publishing advertisements articulating their position in newspapers across Japan and the United States, as well as financing activists' visits to Henoko to witness firsthand the site of the planned military base construction. This financial and political backing illustrates the extent to which the All-Okinawa Council was able to mobilize cross-sectoral

resources, thereby strengthening its capacity for sustained advocacy and enhancing its visibility within both national and transnational arenas (Japan Press, 2015).

### **All-Okinawa Council's Accountability Politics by Meeting Political Leaders and Diplomatic Representatives.**

All-Okinawa members became involved in politics to seek political support for Okinawa society's protest against the US' new military base construction in Henoko, Okinawa. For instance, All-Okinawa Council seeks support from Denny Tamaki, the Governor of Okinawa, his predecessor, Takashi Onaga, and other politicians to support the organization's opposition towards the US' new military base in Okinawa. Governor Tamaki has also traveled to the United States to appeal for a reduction of the burdens borne by Okinawa (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2019). In particular, he directly raised concerns with the U.S. government regarding the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to Henoko, Nago City, highlighting issues such as the noise pollution caused by jet aircraft and the detection of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which are chemicals proven to be hazardous, in the vicinity of the base.

Governor Tamaki had previously undertaken visits to the United States, during which he delivered a public lecture at New York University attended by Okinawan diaspora, military veterans, and members of the media. In his address, Tamaki outlined the situation in Okinawa and expressed his aspiration for audiences to share awareness of Okinawan issues and expand solidarity-based action for Okinawa beyond the Pacific region. These diplomatic efforts demonstrate not only a continuation of transnational advocacy strategies pursued by his predecessor but also an attempt to reframe Okinawa's local grievances as matters of global environmental justice, human security, and international solidarity (NHK, 2023).

In the House of Councilors election, the candidate endorsed by the All-Okinawa Council, Yoichi Iha, secured victory over Aiko Shimajiri, who had been backed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). This outcome was largely attributable to the 100,000 votes cast in Iha's favor, reflecting the strong support of Okinawan residents opposed to the presence of U.S. military bases. Nevertheless, in the near term, it remains highly unlikely that the anti-base movement will substantially reduce the United States' military presence in Okinawa. This is due to the LDP's longstanding commitment to maintaining the bases, as well as the financial incentives that some Okinawans derive from their continued presence. Although 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's formal reversion from U.S. administration to Japanese sovereignty, the island continues, in practice, to function as a joint U.S.–Japan colony (Ryukyu Shimpo, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that All-Okinawa Council had conducted four transnational advocacy network strategies in opposing the US' new military base construction in Henoko, Okinawa. Firstly, information politics by strengthening communication networks through mass media, websites and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and sending representatives to San Francisco and Washington D. C. to voice their aspirations to the US Government. Secondly, symbolic politics by using the "All-Okinawa" slogan for the movement in opposing the US military base, and forming alliances with other advocacy groups with similar goals, such as the Veterans for Peace, and Greenpeace. Thirdly, leverage politics, including moral leverage from the support of international non-governmental organizations, such as APALA, Greenpeace, IMADR, Nature Conservation Society of Japan, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the Veterans for Peace; as well as material leverage by receiving funding from activists to continue campaigns and demonstrations to gain public attention and increase political pressure. Finally, accountability politics by holding meetings and discussions with political leaders, such as the Governor of Okinawa, and diplomatic representatives from the involved countries. As a result, All-Okinawa Council's transnational advocacy network strategy has successfully influenced public opinion, obtained international support, and increased political pressure on the Japanese and American governments.

The four strategies collectively demonstrate that the All-Okinawa Council effectively operationalized the framework of *Transnational Advocacy Networks*. Their actions represent the *boomerang pattern* described by Keck and Sikkink (1998): when local actors are ignored by their own government, they reach out to international allies to create external pressure that rebounds back onto domestic policymakers. This case exemplifies the evolution of global activism, showing that civil society can serve as an alternative channel of diplomacy and accountability in the global political arena. It also underscores the democratization of international relations, where non-state actors can challenge traditional hierarchies of power through information, legitimacy, and solidarity.

The Okinawa case offers valuable insights into how marginalized communities can transform structural inequality into transnational advocacy power. The All-Okinawa Council's strategies reveal that collective organization, moral framing, and global networking can enable local actors to exert influence even in asymmetric power relations. For scholars and policymakers, the case highlights the importance of integrating human security and environmental justice into national security policies. For global social movements, Okinawa serves as an inspiring model of peaceful, sustained resistance that bridges local realities with global consciousness. Ultimately, the All-Okinawa Council symbolizes not only local defiance against militarization but also the transformative potential of global civil society in advancing democracy, environmental stewardship, and human rights amid the complexities of modern geopolitics.

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