

# *Thousands Protest U.S. Base in Japan's Okinawa*

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Tokyo, May 18 (RHC)-- Thousands of protesters have held a massive rally in Okinawa in southern Japan in protest against the presence of a controversial US airbase on the island. Organizers estimated that about 35,000 people took to the streets in Okinawa's capital, Naha, on Sunday.

The protesters also gathered at a baseball stadium in the region to oppose the presence of U.S. Futenma airbase. The angry demonstrators also chanted slogans against the establishment of a controversial U.S. Marine airbase in the southern Japanese island.

The massive demonstrations on Sunday aimed to pressure Japanese government to halt building work for the military base. The protesters also strongly criticized the Tokyo government that is apparently ignoring local residents.

Meanwhile, latest reports say a large number of people have also gathered outside Camp Schwab, the United States Marine Corps camp located in northeastern Okinawa. Several protesters were arrested while they were trying to block the traffic into the American base.

The United States announced plans to move the Futenma airbase in 1996, hoping to ease tensions with the host community. The decision to move Futenma to the less-populated coastal area of Henoko in Nago City was also raised during Abe's recent week-long visit to Washington where he and U.S. President

Barack Obama agreed to initiate the construction of a new base in Okinawa.

The deep-rooted resentment against the U.S. in Okinawa boiled over in 1995 when U.S. servicemen brutally raped an elementary schoolgirl, triggering mass rallies and violence across Japan. U.S. troops have been involved in other cases of violent conduct in the area, making people more and more sensitive about Abe's pro-Washington policies.

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