



Jane's Defence Weekly

First Ospreys arrive at Futenma

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Publication:

Jane's Defence Weekly 2012

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Section:

ASIA PACIFIC

Countries:

Japan

United States

Last posted:

2012-Oct-01

The US Marine Corps (USMC) deployed six Bell-Boeing MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft at its Futenma air station in Okinawa Prefecture on 1 October, despite protests by hundreds of residents at the base's front gate and the opposition from the prefectural government.



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An MV-22 Osprey arrives at the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma as children play in a nearby playground in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture on 1 October 2012.(PA Photos)

"Forcibly conducting the plan while the anxieties of the people of the prefecture remain unaddressed is beyond my comprehension," Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima told reporters. "It is disappointing and extremely regrettable."

"The safety of the aircraft has been fully ascertained," Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said in a nationally televised news conference. In terms of operations of the aircraft, the government "will take utmost care of local residents' daily lives", he added.

The MV-22 deployment is part of the ongoing replacement of the USMC's ageing CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter fleet. The USMC plans to begin full Osprey operations at Futenma during October 2012 after completing the transfer of the remaining six Ospreys, which are temporarily stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture, in western Japan.

The US and Japanese governments have agreed safety measures that include avoiding flights over densely populated areas close to Futenma, requiring Ospreys to stay above 500 ft (150 m) during low-altitude training, and reducing the amount of time it takes to transit from aircraft to helicopter mode.

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