

Japan needs far-reaching Eurasian strategy (2)

By YAMAUCHI Masayuki

The United States' dubious justification for launching the war in Iraq brings to mind Lady Anne's curse at the Duke of Gloucester in Shakespeare's "Richard III":

Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble us not;

For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,

Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.

<U.S. should change Mideast policy>

Having said that, however, what is urgently needed now is a realistic plan to stem the crisis in the Middle East.

The diplomatic engagement of Iran and Syria to bring about peace in Iraq should therefore be a top priority. While the Iraq Study Group, which included former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, called for a bold change in Washington's diplomacy by involving Tehran, Bush chose to adopt the opposite strategy by pledging to send an additional 20,000 U.S. troops to Iraq and deploying a second aircraft carrier and Patriot missiles to the region in anticipation.

But it should also be noted that the relentless terror in Iraq is being fueled by personnel, weaponry and ammunition smuggled across the borders with Iran and Syria, with these areas reportedly serving as a sanctuary for insurgents. During the Sino-Japanese War, Japan was defeated after it extended the battle lines to deal with the routes through China's neighboring territories supplying Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang troops. Likewise, the United States lost the Vietnam War largely because of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

A U.S. attack on Iran might cause Tehran's program to produce highly enriched uranium to be delayed for several years, but it would be a bad move for Japan as the already tense situation in the Middle East would descend into chaos, disrupting the steady supply of crude oil.

Now that Britain has decided to withdraw its troops from Iraq, it is necessary for the United States to seek a broad political solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, among others, if it wants to improve the Iraq situation. In order to quell terrorism in Iraq, the U.S. government should adopt a new diplomatic approach, such as a policy of befriending distant states and Iraq's neighbors so that the insurgents' supply bases in Iran and Syria would be weakened.

<Concessions or breakup>

At present, there are about 2 million Iraqi refugees in the surrounding countries, while Iraq's internally displaced are believed to total about 1.8 million. Iraq is thus encountering the difficult challenge of keeping itself united--a situation similar to that once faced by the former Yugoslavia. The Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish populations in Iraq should be willing to make all the concessions necessary and consent to a flexible federal structure for a republic that can integrate coalitions of local governments, while providing them with greater autonomy.

If this is not done, Iraq will be destined to an era of factions constantly seeking secession. To avert this, the Kurdish people should not cling to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, while the Sunnis should forsake their past glory and instead agree to share oil revenues with Kurdish and Shiite groups.

What is actually happening in Iraq is increasingly similar to the ethnic strife seen in the closing years of the Soviet Union and the tragedy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. No matter how loudly the Iraqi regime, safe in the heavily protected Green Zone of Baghdad, emphasizes national integration as its ideal, it is hardly in a position to save Iraqi citizens from tragedy and bloodshed.

In any case, the United States cannot expect to both stabilize the internal situation in Iraq while leaving the relationship with Iran and Syria fragile. As the bloodshed in Bosnia could not be halted without the engagement of Serbia and Croatia, Iraq will not be able to achieve peace, and end rampant terrorism, without the participation of Iran and Syria. (Continued)

(This is the text of an article by Mr. YAMAUCHI Masayuki, Professor of Tokyo University, which was originally posted in "Daily Yomiuri" on March 4, 2007.)