

Japan-U.S. Alliance Should Not be Turned Adrift

By YANO Yoshiaki

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came into office with overwhelming support of the Japanese people. The DPJ administration has so far been making such statements and included them in their political manifesto as would undermine a number of agreements between Japan and the U.S. which have formed the foundation of the Japan-U.S. alliance. The U.S. is for sure keeping a close eye on how the DPJ administration would direct its foreign and security policy. The Japan-U.S. alliance is now standing at a critical crossroads.

The Obama administration is planning to spend a huge amount of public funds on countermeasures to the financial crisis as well as to push through major reforms in domestic affairs including the health care system. These policies would lead to the mid- and long-term aggravation of the governmental fiscal condition and also to future tax hikes. Considering such severe fiscal conditions, the Obama administration has decided to reduce U.S. national defense spending. As it intends to allocate its defense budget mainly to the development of military capability to counter the immediate threats as in the war on terrorism, while reducing high-tech weapons to prepare for mid-and-long term threats, the global power projection capabilities of the U.S. forces will be impaired and the U.S. military transformation will also be accelerated. Also, as for the war on terrorism now in progress, it is increasingly likely that the U.S. forces will not only withdraw from Iraq as already planned, but also withdraw from Afghanistan.

Under such circumstances, the U.S. might welcome proposals made by DPJ that it will end Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and instead provides financial assistance in reconstruction of Afghanistan and strengthen civilian support in reconstruction assistance of Iraq. Also, the relocation issue of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma could possibly be settled by an agreement between Japan and the U.S. over such a drastic measure as an immediate and complete pullout of the Station to their home country. Even the Japan-U.S. Status-of-Forces Agreement could be subject to a major review in the international context, just as the U.S. forces stationed in

Germany and South Korea were substantially reduced after the end of the Cold War.

From this standpoint, part of the DPJ policies might be accepted by the Obama administration, and then the Japan-U.S. relations would be directed to a new path. However, if this new path leads to the hollowing-out of the Japan-U.S. alliance, there is something quite gloomy in the future.

If the U.S. forces should gradually withdraw from Japan's soil to the Continental U.S. and adopt above policies, the Japan-U.S. relations would be increasingly estranged especially on the security and diplomatic front. The U.S. forces in Japan, especially its ground forces, i.e. the Marine Corps in Okinawa, are essential to secure a guarantee of provision of contingency support in the event of military attacks from outside Japan. Therefore, if they would accelerate withdrawal from Japan, the credibility of the contingency support of the U.S. will accordingly decline. Moreover, such policies advocated by Foreign Minister OKADA Katsuya as realization of "North-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone" and investigation into Japan's secret agreement with the U.S. on moving U.S. nuclear weapons through Japanese territory would risk undermining unilaterally the efficacy of extended nuclear deterrence provided by the U.S., unless denuclearization of North Korea has been realized.

As, in recent years, there has been discord between the U.S. and China as exemplified in the naval standoff in the South China Sea, the U.S. is on high alert for China's military buildup, saying that it has already exceeded the scope of "liberating" Taiwan, and reached such an extent as to be able to seek regional hegemony. DPJ, on the other hand, intends to build closer relations with other Asian countries including China and Korea, and aims to create an "East Asian community". However, the fact remains that China assumes one-party dictatorship, a regime totally different from ours, and has bilateral concerns with Japan such as issues of territorial rights over the Senkaku Islands or gas field development in the East China Sea. Thus, there is a limit to intimacy between the two countries.

If those DPJ policies should be misdirected, there is a risk of the Japan-U.S. alliance being hollowed out both in terms of provision of extended nuclear deterrence, in terms of provision of contingency support by means of conventional weapons in the event of military attacks from outside Japan. Besides, if Japan should adopt pro-China policy while making light of the U.S., the U.S. would for sure deepen a sense of mistrust

toward Japan. The Obama administration must be realistic enough to press Japan to pay its fair share of the cost if Japan wishes to be an ally of the U.S. on an equal footing. Otherwise, it would not hesitate to attenuate its bilateral ties with Japan as allies. DPJ administration, however, fails to show its willingness to take steps further beyond provision of civilian and financial assistance and to increase its own share of the defense responsibilities by way of dispatching the Self Defense Forces of Japan or increasing its defense spending. Rather, DPJ is likely to curtail further its defense spending for the cause of cutting waste, thereby generating financial resources to implement the party's feature policies including "Child Care Allowance."

Should it be the case, the Japan-U.S. relations would soon fall into an alliance of a nominal and insubstantial nature, and the peace and stability of East Asia would even be impaired. The hollowing-out of the Japan-U.S. alliance should pose a fundamental question to Japan on how to secure its national security for the foreseeable future, thereby turning adrift the national fundamentals of Japan. So long as it is in power, the DPJ administration should bear in mind the grave nature of this fact.

(This is the English Translation of an article written by Mr. YANO Yoshiaki, retired Senior Officer of Self Defense Forces of Japan, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Seiho" of JFIR on September 25, 2009.)