

Time to consider a nuclear strategy for Japan (2)

By OKAZAKI Hisahiko

< Japan's N-deterrent marginal >

Let us assume that Japan possessed a nuclear deterrent similar to that of France. In this scenario, even if China launched an attack on the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, it would be inconceivable for the United States to retaliate with nuclear arms. However, Beijing may find it more difficult to gauge Japan's reaction to such an attack, because the Japanese government might be coerced into nuclear retaliation against China.

It should be noted, however, that even France relies on the United States for the main part of its nuclear deterrence. In other words, France's own nuclear deterrent is merely marginal--though sufficient to concern a potential enemy. Even if Japan opted for nuclear armament, China may think Tokyo would not resort to a nuclear response if the Senkakus were attacked. In this case, Japan's nuclear deterrent would be even more marginal than France's.

Regardless of its independent nuclear deterrent, France has been an ally of the United Nations within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. During the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, then French President Charles de Gaulle solidly supported the United States. In contrast, Japan was a half-hearted ally to the United States throughout the Cold War, with no collective self-defense. We have to acknowledge that the level of trust between Japan and the United States is different from that between France and the United States during the Cold War.

< Use U.S.-U.K. alliance as model >

In conclusion, I think an ideal approach for Japan's nuclear armament--if this is the choice of the nation--would be to pursue the British example. In this connection, I believe Japan should lift the prohibition on collective self-defense to upgrade the Japan-U.S. alliance in line with the Anglo-American alliance, as clearly proposed by the Armitage report of October 2000, titled "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership."

Even if the upgrading of the bilateral alliance is realized, the strategic importance of Japan's nuclear armament will be a marginal issue. Considering the current situation--in which Washington says it would consider an attack on Japan as being an attack on the United States--Japan's own nuclear deterrent would become a more marginal issue.

Rather, it may be meaningful for Tokyo to discuss Japan's nuclearization as a way of indirectly pressing the United States to continue its nuclear commitment to protect Japan, although such a diplomatic tactic is of a different nature from its nuclear strategy.

In addition, if Japan reviews its three nonnuclear principles and allows the United States to bring nuclear weapons into the country, the U.S. nuclear commitment is likely to be enhanced,

as in the case of the introduction into Europe of Pershing medium-range ballistic missiles in 1983.

Finally, we should consider the sentiments of the Japanese people. If the Japan-U.S. alliance was to be upgraded to the level of the Anglo-American alliance, and the Japanese public overwhelmingly favored going nuclear, the United States would have to choose between ending the bilateral alliance with Japan and tolerating Japan's nuclear armament. In such a case, the United States might let Japan arm itself with nuclear weapons--as in the case of the Anglo-American relationship. As Japanese society remains strongly allergic to nuclear weapons, the chances of the Japanese public making such an about-face may be slim. (End)

(This is the text of an article by Ambassador OKAZAKI Hisahiko, the director of the Okazaki Institute, which was originally posted in "Daily Yomiuri" on April 8, 2007.)