

February 26, 2010

Some Thoughts on Futenma Station Relocation Issue

By OKAWARA Yoshio

On the year-end and new-year social occasions, I had a chance to make small talk with my friends and acquaintances, and found out that all of them without exception expressed their concerns over the prospects of the Japan-U.S. relation, saying that it could be seriously damaged by the current foreign policy of the Hatoyama administration toward the U.S. Ever since Mr. Hatoyama's article on the Japan-U.S. relation (a reprint from Japanese journal "Voice") appeared on the New York Times in August 2009, which turned out to be quite anti-American, U.S. newspapers have carried articles and editorials that bitterly criticize his inconsistent remarks on the Japan-U.S. relation. On the Futenma relocation issue, for instance, he on the one hand opposes to the Nago relocation plan, he on the other hand alludes to his support for the U.S. adherence to the agreement already made between U.S. and Japan, and thus highly frustrated the U.S. who wishes to resolve the matter expeditiously in line with the agreement.

On December 12, 2009, when most public offices in Washington D.C. were closed due to the heaviest snowfall in years, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton summoned FUJISAKI Ichiro, Japanese Ambassador to U.S., and reiterated the U.S. stance on the relocation issue of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Station that it should be implemented basically in line with a bilateral agreement signed 13 years ago. This truly reflects in concrete the frustration of the U.S. over the indecisive response of the Hatoyama administration. Although an agreement on this issue had been made between then Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and then U.S. President Bill Clinton, no particular advance has been observed since. The Hatoyama administration, in disregard of the agreement with the U.S. made under the previous government led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), demonstrated its willingness to come in line with the Social Democratic Party's (SDP), a ruling coalition partner, that calls for moving the Futenma base outside the prefecture or abroad. If this goes on, the Hatoyama administration should sooner or later be confronted with most tough and undesirable choices of whether to place more emphasis on the contention of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) as a coalition partner, or to accept the demand of the U.S. as an ally.

It is quite clear that, once Japan should get into spat with the U.S., it is invincibly difficult to repair the seriously undermined alliance between Japan and the U.S., which plays a pivotal role in their bilateral relations. Although Prime Minister Hatoyama reportedly said "Trust me" to President Obama at the summit meeting in Tokyo on November 13 last year, it is quite unclear if his words have been born out by any particular concrete measures taken. This situation is quite reminiscent of the Japan-US textile negotiations at the end of 1960's. Amid the negotiation process of the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, then President Nixon, badly in need of votes of the textile industry of the South

for the presidential election in 1968, strongly pressed then Prime Minister Sato Eisaku to encourage the Japanese textile industry to make concessions in concluding negotiation on restrictions of Japan's textile exports to the U.S. And then, Prime Minister Sato reportedly responded "I will do my best." However, he could not take appropriate domestic measures to live up to his words and fell into disfavor with Nixon. One of the reasons why Japan had to suffer the Nixon Shock in 1971 is said to have been Nixon's personal distrust of Prime Minister Sato.

Another concern about the Hatoyama administration is that there is a discrepancy between those remarks on the Futenma relocation issue by Prime Minister Hatoyama and those by Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya and of Defense Minister Kitazawa Toshimi, both in charge of direct negotiation on the issue. The year 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the revisions of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. At this momentous milestone, Japan should exert her every possible effort to address the challenge of deepening Japan-US alliance, the linchpin of Japan's foreign policy, thereby consolidating a relation of trust between the two countries.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Ambassador OKAWARA Yoshio, Chairman of The Global Forum of Japan, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on January 8, 2010.)