

The Question is Afghanistan

By IRIYAMA Akira

Setting aside the question of Iraq, the U.S. President-elect Barack Obama and the incumbent President George W. Bush seem to have agreed on the need to send more troops to Afghanistan. Obviously, they aim at subduing al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden as the direct perpetrators of September 11 terrorist attacks.

Originally, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was carried out on the grounds that Iraq would have possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and been closely linked with al-Qaeda. It was also rumored that al-Qaeda was responsible for the existence of WMD in Iraq. However, those grounds turned out to be baseless. Some say the U.S. were manipulated by disinformation fed by al-Qaeda, while others say that U.S. knowingly carried out the invasion. Although the U.S. backed up the establishment of a new administration led by Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq, it was not surprising that a new administration soon sank into a morass of corruption. Besides, the security is far from being restored, thus diluting the administration's political commitment. Now that things have come to this pass, the best way for the U.S. to escape from this quagmire is to retreat from Iraq sooner or later, leaving the entire affairs to the Iraqi government. Then, the question is Afghanistan.

How could the U.S. possibly alleviate its own wrath without wiping out its archenemy, al-Qaeda, and above all, Osama bin Laden? After the U.S. overthrew the Taliban regime on the account of its cooperative ties with al-Qaeda, both Taliban and al-Qaeda turned to guerrilla tactics. It is probably true for the U.S. that nothing can be done especially for al-Qaeda, who hid in the mountains near the border with Pakistan. For the time being, it is realistically the only viable option for the U.S. to close a bargain with Taliban remnants, and patiently take the time to contain al-Qaeda. Mr. General David H. Petraeus, Commander of U.S. Military Central Command, is said to have taken this option. Mr. Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, also strongly advocates this option together with Mr. Barnett R. Rubin, in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine (November/December 2008).

I am not sure if the Bush administration makes a move in this direction during little time left in its tenure. It is the same old game played by the U.S. to narrow down the to-do list of the administration when it is too complicated. Recent policy of the U.S. towards North Korea without due concern for Japan might be one of its by-products.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. IRIYAMA Akira, Guest

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