

How We Should Respond to Terrorism

by HOSONO Goshi

There was a massive terrorist attack in Mumbai, which claimed many victims including Japanese citizens. Countless such tragedies have been reported since September 11 terrorist attacks. When the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was discussing within the party whether or not to support Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, we fiercely debated over what should be done to wipe out terrorism. Some said that we could not drive out terrorists without using force, while others said that eye-for-eye use of force does not end terrorism so we must focus on civilian aid. Not yielding a point, the two sides were at a deadlock. But a senior member of the party, who was in youth a radical student activist, broke the ice by saying "In my own experience in the past as a terrorist manque, we must call to arms, at least temporarily, to sweep terrorists away." I was really shocked at the remark of this fellow, who is an ex-member of former Socialist Party of Japan. Eventually, this gave a momentum in the party for the support of the air strikes against terrorists' bases in Afghanistan.

Indeed, in a world which experienced such horrible incident as September 11, counterattacks against terrorists were urgently called for. And, I was among those who backed that policy at that time. I still believed in that decisive remark of the senior member. But, it should have been "temporary." I suspect that those subsequent force-dependent policies such as the war on Iraq and counter-terrorist sweep operations in Afghanistan outlasted their validity. We have opposed the war on Iraq and emphasized the need to provide civilian aid to Afghanistan. But we could not stop those policies pursued by the Bush Administration and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan. President Obama says that the war on Iraq was a mistake. His willingness to talk with dictators and terrorists could risk compromise with them. But still he has a chance to break a deadlock.

The Iraq war and Afghan War have often been referred to as "War on Terror." But I must say that this notion is fatally misleading. Although it is necessary in some cases to call to arms to wipe out terrorists, they could not be the enemy against which to wage a frontal war, because hotbeds of terrorism are, regretfully enough, deeply embedded in each society. The point is that we must stamp out 'terrorism.' Now is the time for us, Japanese, to determine how our own counter-terrorist strategy should be, instead of merely following that of the United States.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. HOSONO Goshi, Member of the House of Representatives (DPJ), which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on December 2, 2008.)