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A Government Can be Collapsed by “Such a Thing”

By SUGIURA Masaaki

Though an attempt to clean up the image of “a mad king” is understandable, we cannot buy the sleight-of-hand tricks over the top priority issue of the administration. Hirofumi Hirano, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, has of late been committed to obnubilate the definition of “settlement” on the Futenma relocation issue. Whereas Hatoyama himself means by “settlement” coming to a unanimous agreement among the U.S., Okinawa and the Japanese people, Hirano tries to mean merely initiating negotiations with prospective relocation sites. It is quite obvious and unseemly that Hirano tries to prevent Hatoyama from being exposed to his political liability. He should realize that the issue is intrinsically above himself in his capacity as Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Hatoyama, who always lacks consistency in his policies on both domestic and foreign affairs, has somehow come to take a firm position on the Futenma relocation issue. He has adhered to his policy of settling the issue by the end of May since the end of last year and has made avowals of this policy at various occasions including the meeting between party heads and the Japan-U.S. summit meeting. At the meeting between party heads, Hatoyama clearly stated that a new relocation site will be fixed by the end of May based on agreement with both the U.S. and the Japanese people, and also pledged that he stakes his political life on the conclusion of the negotiations. He also promised President Obama that he would settle the issue by the end of May. On another occasion, he made clear that he has prepared himself for settling the issue to the satisfaction of all the three parties of the US, Okinawa and the Japanese people.

What is the true intention of such statements of him that block his own escape routes? It seems there are two possibilities. One is that he does not even understand that he has blocked his own escape route at all. The other is that he is actually prepared to leave office. The former possibility is more likely than the latter, as he has been shooting blanks since he took office and he may indulge himself in making ad-hoc lush statements. In this case, he will encounter enormous criticism by making excuses right before the deadline in May and be forced to resign wretchedly. Usually, one will not use such big words as ‘staking one’s political life’ or ‘to prepare oneself’ unless resignation is seriously considered. But when it comes to Hatoyama, who is eccentric enough to be called “an alien,” words come out of nowhere. His words are too light. Though it is still hard to tell which of the two possibilities will turn out to be correct, it is likely that he may alternate between the two for the time being.

Although some sympathies may be stirred for Hirano who has to work for such a prime minister as a close aide, we should not forget that Hirano himself is a politician who has obtained a

public mandate. He is now supposed to choose whether to be motivated by personal concern for Hatoyama or to decide to take the helm of the State. He is too spotlighted to play tricks. Mass media correctly recognize that Hirano's series of evasive remarks are a precaution against the pursuit of political liability of Hatoyama. Somebody in the nerve center of government should not make such remarks considered to be evasive. Futenma relocation issue epitomizes the inability of the Hatoyama Administration to hold the reins of government. The inadequacy should be frankly admitted. According to Asahi Shimbun, a high government official has reportedly confessed that it was sad to see that the government is to be collapsed by "such a thing." This truly is an in-depth coverage by the Asahi Shimbun worth being credited. It is quite clear that to recognize the issue as 'such a thing' truly epitomizes the weakness of the Hatoyama Administration.

(This is the English translation of an article written by SUGIURA Masaaki, Political Commentator, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on April 16, 2010.)