

Unfinished Tasks of the Futenma Issue

By YUSHITA Hiroyuki

In order to turn the recent agreement between Japan and the U.S. over the Futenma issue to be an opportunity to strike a balance between the two tasks of reducing the burden of Okinawa and of maintaining Japan's national security, which emerged in the course of "twists and turns" over the issue, it is essential for us to address the following three tasks and yield results.

The first task is to swiftly embody the agreement between Japan and the U.S. on the relocation of the Futenma base. The Japanese government should make every effort to attain the cooperation of the people of Okinawa to implement the agreement on the return of the Futenma base and also the development of Okinawa. Since the relocation of Futenma base was agreed between the previous regime of Japan and the United States, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Komeito Party which were the ruling parties at that time should assist in realizing this relocation plan.

The second task is to engage in the reduction of the burden and promotion of regional development of Okinawa, which go beyond the Futenma problem. The current government policy clearly states that there is a need "to reduce Okinawa's burden caused by the concentration of the U.S. bases there." It is perhaps the first time that this issue is seriously taken up on national level. We must, though belatedly, make the most of this opportunity to correct the unjust and consider how best to share, on the national level, the burden of the national security.

The third task is to promote discussion at the national level on Japan-U.S. alliance which encompasses but is not limited to the issue of U.S. bases in Japan, so that the knowledge and thoughts on security issues as a whole should be enhanced. The Hatoyama administration clearly lacked awareness of the deterrent effect of U.S. forces in Japan. His later shift in policy revealed that Japan has been stupefied by provided peace. With this provided peace, Japan did not have to consider the issue of security seriously during and even after the Cold War, and was able to devote itself in economic development. However, it has to change as the situation has changed. Otherwise, Japan will be in a difficult position to keep its security under the current circumstances of the multipolarization of the international community, the expansion of Chinese military power, and North Korea becoming a nuclear-armed state.

If a positive outcome regarding these three tasks is obtained, a valuable lesson will have been learnt from the Futenma issue, in which the calamity turns into a blessing.

(This is the English translation of an article written by YUSHITA Hiroyuki, former Ambassador to the Philippines, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on June 2, 2010.)