

# Meltdown of Japan

By HAKAMADA Shigeki

Meltdown is the most serious accident in nuclear power plants. If metaphorically applied to a nation-state, meltdown would mean the worst case imaginable concerning its sovereign integrity. The recent boat collision incident off Senkaku is the prime example of it. The sovereignty of Japan melted down.

After the Chinese fishing-boat collided with Japanese patrol vessels, the Japanese government, which has administered and claimed the Senkaku islands, arrested the Chinese captain and pronounced its intention to deal with this issue in accordance with Japan's domestic law. This move of Japan should be regarded as quite natural as the Senkaku islands are inherently territories of Japan. However, in view of the fact that China started to claim unwarrantedly these islands from the 1970s on, this Japan's move carries weight because it means to the world that Japan will compete against China over the sovereignty issue. Then, suddenly, it occurred to me that while an intense game of chicken began, it is quite doubtful whether the Japanese government has the guts and elaborated strategy to deal with it. Although Japan has absolute legitimacy in this case and therefore the situation is of great advantage to Japan, as far as this is a sovereignty issue, China was expected to cope with it as a national "core" issue.

As it turned out, the Japanese government posed challenge to China without due recognition of the gravity of the issue and without any solutions in sight. On top of that, the Japanese government did not even realize that it was involved in a chicken game. The Japanese government unbelievably underestimated the situation. Namely, unless Japan had made fuss of it, this incident could have been mechanically handled as simple charges of obstructing officials on duty. In the end, however, Japan succumbed to China's threat, gave up prosecution, and released the captain by extralegal measure. The Prime Minister and the Chief Cabinet Secretary announced, "This decision was made after considering Japan-China relations" by the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office. The fact that the most important political decision concerning national sovereignty was left to the decision of a prosecutor should not be permissible, even if it was a made-up story. If the Japanese government wanted to make excuses about this issue, then "the extralegal measure by the Prime Minister" would have been preferable logic, although this also denies the law. These alone show how ignorant and irresponsible the head of government in Japan is about the sovereignty issue, i.e., serious disputes between nations. The Japanese government fatally lacked the recognition that the sovereignty issue concerning territory and territorial waters is a core problem upon which a country's existence is staked, and it therefore is a deadly poison.

The Chinese government demanded immediate, unconditional release of the captain in the pretext that the islands are part of the Chinese territory. Since then, China has fully employed its economic resources on this political issue. Japan was shaken by a series of China's hard-hearted assaults and surrendered. Furthermore, China demanded an apology and compensation from Japan, upon the release of the captain. Japan proposed to hold a summit-level meeting to solve the problem but it was refused by China. In sum, the tail is wagging the dog. Needless to say, demand for an apology and compensation should have been made by Japan in the first place.

Japan naively assumed that the chain of China's excessive over-reaction reflected its loss of composure. This also reveals ignorance of the Japanese government about sovereignty issues at large and about the nature of China. While admitting that China took an even tougher stance than what the Japanese government had expected, China's reaction was logical and well-calculated, and they took into account the lack of understanding of the sovereignty issue on the part of the Democratic Party of Japan, the weakening of the Japan-U.S. relations, and China's own domestic political situations. Of course, China's domestic situations have a lot to do with it. Namely, the Hu Jintao administration is seen to be weak against the hard-liners of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and also weak-kneed in its foreign policy toward Japan. Therefore, it is true that the Chinese administration purposely resorted to a tough stance in order to bottle the frustrations of PLA and the Chinese people.

However, from the standpoint of relations between nations in general, it should be noted that China took a very natural action to deal with the sovereignty issue. In order to deal with the issue of the Senkaku islands, China brought up the issue of gas fields in the East China Sea and put its economic pressures against Japan. On the other hand, the Japanese government expressed its displeasure, saying those issues are irrelevant. This by itself shows Japan's low sense of responsibility and ignorance of the sovereignty issue. As far as it is a serious match over sovereignty, China takes it for granted that it should resort to all measures just as in a case of a serious war. Not to mention Clausewitz or Mao Zedong, politics and war are treated on the same level.

Then, how should Japan have responded to this incident? Japan should have anticipated China's tough reaction at the time of arrest, and have carefully crafted plans to manage and resolve it. The effectiveness of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty should have been studied and the possibility of deployment of the Chinese naval force's invasion should have been simulated with the U.S. Had the Japanese government not been prepared to take the above-mentioned measures, the next best option would have been to evict the Chinese fishing boat before launching judicial proceedings based on Japan's domestic law, just as in the past the Japanese government did to invaders of the Senkaku islands. Nonetheless, this is also an extralegal measure based on political consideration, which is exactly the same case as the one in which the Japanese government handled Kim Jong-nam's (the first son of

Kim Jong-il) illegal entry, and which is essentially impermissible. Due to the lack of political sense related to the sovereignty issue as well as the illusionary views toward China, the current administration is now faced with serious political debt of its neglectful treatment on security issues and Japan-U.S. relations.

Any countries draw a line in terms of the sovereignty issue. When the Japanese government pronounced its intention to deal with this issue in accordance with Japan's domestic law, all other countries in the world must have taken this pronouncement as a serious determination of the Japanese government. Nevertheless, Japan succumbed and unconditionally released the captain following China's demand. This is almost equal to acknowledging that the Senkaku islands are China's territory. It is natural that the New York Times reported of Japan's response as "Japan's humiliating retreat" and the Yonhap News Agency in South Korea as "Japan Surrendered to China's Pressure" (September 24). China, which demanded an apology and compensation from Japan, never showed the slightest compunction, and China's action has been consistent all the way according to China's logic.

Some people may think that Japan-China relations could avoid the worst case scenario, because Japan released the captain in an extralegal manner, with a connotation that Japan acted as a grown-up. This is totally off the point. As a matter of fact, Japan had no firm conviction regarding its national strategy or defense of its sovereignty. The world simply saw that Japan is not a full-fledged country at all. Japan has lost its dignity not just in the context of Japan-China relations, but also in that of multilateral negotiations, which, I am afraid, will not be restored in the next 20-30 years. China, which took an arrogant attitude, will temporarily face criticism from the international community, but China will continue to treat Japan and other Asian countries in the same arrogant manner. After this incident, a certain expert on China reportedly said that the Japanese government leaders deserve to die 10,000 times. The biggest tragedy for Japan is that Japanese leaders themselves do not possess any realistic visions about sovereignty, and they still do not realize that our nation is starting to melt down.

In the midst of this event, Russian President Medvedev visited China and issued a joint communiqué with China to the effect that the two countries would not tolerate history to be distorted. Russia came into line with China in terms of historical perception and territorial issues. President Medvedev announced that he would visit the Northern Territories, and in response to this announcement Foreign Minister Maehara warned to Russian Ambassador that this would cast a serious problem on Japan-Russia relations. Japan's diplomacy is now being tested.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by Prof. HAKAMADA Shigeki, Professor of Aoyama Gakuin University, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on September 29, 2010.)**