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Black joke in terrorism in Russia

By OOTOMI Akira

The Russian government was indeed quick. Soon after Moscow Domodedovo Airport was bombed on January 29, footage of the incident has been broadcast worldwide on TV. Needless to say, the footage was possible thanks to the video camera set at the site accidentally. On the following day, the profiles of the criminal were described as "three males from Chechen."

In contrast to the case of the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya which has been left unresolved for more than four years and whose suspect has not yet been pinpointed by the Russian government, we cannot help but sigh at the remarkable performance of investigative sources of the Russian government this time. Even the case of bombing of an apartment in Moscow 12 years ago still shows no signs of being unresolved. One should not, however, be overconfident of the Russian government which should be accused of a series of false announcement in the past.

In Japan on the other hand, an editorial entitled "Terror in Russian Airport: Struggles should be Made to Eliminate Hatred" which appeared in the January 26 issue of the Yomiuri Shimbun quite correctly pointed out "the dissatisfaction among Chechen people towards unfair treatment from Russian government as the proper background for these terrorists attacks."

In relation to the bombing, most Japanese newspapers including the January 25 issue of Tokyo Shimbun introduced a chart of "major cases of terrorism in Russia in recent years." The chart, however, has a defect in that it is the one that indicates "the number of Russian people killed by Chechen terrorists" and not vice versa. The number of Russians that have been killed by Chechens does not exceed 1,000, whereas that of Chechen people dying from military attacks by Russian army exceeds 200,000, which is a whopping number. This chart, therefore, does not give a true picture of the situation.

It is not meant that to blame is the Russians on the ground that the simple comparison of the number of victims shows that more Chechens have been killed than Russians. The question is that the inability to grasp the nature of each incident against the background of larger historical context is of grave concern.

It is not only in the case of Chechen issues that most Japanese mass media tend to cover stories from the standpoint of the Russians government and authorities concerned. In Japan, mass media has been closely associated with the Japanese

government through such mechanisms as press clubs. As a consequence, even the fact that most of the hostages were killed by toxic substances released by Russia army in Moscow Theatre hostage crisis has been distorted in Japanese mass media. In an chronology in an newspaper described that Russian forces successfully released hostages with 129 casualties. Is it suggesting that hostages were “released to heaven?” This is nothing but black humor.

The casualties of 330 people in the Beslan school hostage crisis was the result of the storm of the ground forces into the school under the direction of the Russian government who refused to negotiate with the hostage takers. However, it is usually reported that the blame is on the Chechen side, which apparently lacks fairness is coverage.

Though the above is only the case typical of Japan, from the global perspective also the Chechen issues are far from being comprehended properly. Sometimes, unfounded reports that Chechen militants are associated with Al-Qaeda have been seen.

During more than 15 years of military attacks by Russians, some of the Chechen people have become the puppets of the Russian government and infringed human rights of their fellow Chechens, which has made the whole picture rather complicated. But the problem is that this series of conflicts has in the first place started with Russia’s attempts to conquer the Caucasus with violence. To be more precise, in the context of international politics with Russia as a primary actor, this war has persisted because of the unjust violation of human rights of Chechen people and their autonomy. I sincerely hope that the people all over the world would pay attention to this fact.

(This is the English translation of an article written by OOTOMI Akira, Editor in Chief, Chechen News, which originally appeared on the BBS “Giron-Hyakushutsu” of GFJ on June 26, 2011.)