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Is the US Really Returning to East Asia?

By SAKAI Nobuhiko

The United States is said to have again committed herself to the security of East Asia. President Obama recently visited Australia and announced that the US will permanently station the US Marine Corps in Darwin, Australia. The stationing will start with 250 personnel and the number will eventually be increased ten times to count 2500. It is generally explained that this is intended to counter the moves of China who, in recent years, has rapidly extended her military reach into the sea, and claimed her "core interests" in the South China Sea. Then, is the US really returning to East Asia? I can hardly believe so. Taking a longer perspective of history without being captivated by immediate events, I cannot assume otherwise. The so-called "Cold War system" collapsed about twenty years ago. In terms of world history, it was a biggest turning point of the post-war world system. At that time, democratization of East European countries was realized, and national independence was also realized with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. National independence led even to the separation into Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the breakup of Yugoslavia. Since the extent of democratization and national independence is the test of progress, it can be said that progress in history was promoted in Europe. And with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US became the world's only remaining superpower. It was at that time that a dubious work entitled "The End of History and the Last Man" was published.

As a matter of natural course of history, when the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" had collapsed, China as another evil empire was there to be overthrown next. This is because China is a straitjacketed communist state as was the Soviet Union and is an aggressive state which rules over other races by force. However, the US did not set out to overthrow China. Then President Bush fought the Gulf War in 1991 and gained an overwhelming victory over Iraq. This war might have been meant to bring relief for the bitter memory of their defeat in the Vietnam War. Ten years later, President Bush, Jr. plunged into war with Afghanistan and then with Iraq in retaliation for the September 11 terrorist attacks. This means that the US has always been concentrated chiefly on West Asia while her response to East Asia has almost been neglected. In the meantime, China achieved rapid economic growth, having surpassed Japan to be the second largest economy in the world. Besides, China devoted the fruits of her economic growth to arms buildup, which has rendered her the second largest military power in the world. China has literally adopted a hard-line policy of enriching the country and strengthening the military. The

accelerated expansion of China not only covers maritime and air domains but space and cyber-space domains.

The US did not prevent this hard-line policy of China toward militarism at all. It could only be said, in the first place, that that the rapid economic growth of China as the major premise was a fruit of the collaborative work with the US. A quite cunning system was formed in which the cheap labor force of a straitjacketed communist state is combined with the capital and technology of the West to enable mass-production, whose inexpensive products are to be massively consumed by the Western countries. It is a manifestation of the ugliest sort of adhesion between communism and capitalism. As this sort of adhesion burgeoned progressively, criticism against China's human rights record by the West including the US has rapidly lost momentum. The reason why the US turns a blind eye to China's drive towards military expansion is because the US herself is in weakening tendency. The US reached her apogee when she became the only superpower and has clearly been in steady decline henceforth. Therefore, it is quite unlikely that the US should ever wage a war with China. For, China not only accelerates arms buildup but owns a huge amount of US government bonds, thereby possessing a powerful economic arsenal.

Judging from the flow of history as stated above, it is quite unimaginable that the US should ever severely confront China. Therefore, even if the US did return to East Asia this time, it is a kind of pretense and is never to last indefinitely. Eventually, the US will, for sure, decline further and recede into the east of the Pacific. Then, it is Japan that is in question. The Japanese people, who have neglected an effort to consider seriously the issue of national defense, pinning it entirely on the US, are still lacking in security awareness. As proof of this, they totally lack a sense of vigilance against the latest torrential military expansion of China. It must be said that their national spirit is completely eviscerated. If the US walks away under such circumstances, Chinese army will come instead. It is a ridiculously simple and plain story, isn't it ?

(This is the English translation of an article written by SAKAI Nobuhiko, Director of Japan Institute of Nationalism Studies and former Professor of the University of Tokyo, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on November 24, 2011.)