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## A bluff is the best way to approach Japanese

By FUJINAGA Takeshi

Recently, I have often recalled what Professor Donald Zagoria of Columbia University told me about twenty years ago. Ivan Kovalenko, who happened to visit the United States at that time, said at a meeting attended by many Americans, "Japanese people are servile to power. If you bluff them, they will certainly give way." His remark surprised all the people present. Mr. Kovalenko is widely-known for having directed brainwashing operations for Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia immediately after WWII in his capacity as Chief of the Japanese Section in the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union(CPSU). He is also notorious for having "ordered" the then Hokkaido Governor Dogakinai to remove a signboard saying, "Return the Russian-occupied Northern Islands!" in Sapporo and having been rejected when he came to Japan in 1976.

The above story is an excerpt from what Japan Forum on International Relations President Kenichi Ito wrote in the "Seiron" column of the last February 28 edition of the Sankei. I introduced this story here because I think it is worth remembering as a Japanese. Kovalenko acted as the chief editor for Japanese Newspaper for Japanese detainees in Siberia after World War II. He conducted special operations to make Japanese prisoners of war friendly to the Soviet. Subsequently, he played a central role in policy formulation for Japan as the deputy chief of the international department of the Soviet Union's Communist Party and he is known as a devotee of intimidating diplomacy for Japan. Behind his remark was his viewpoint of Japan that had been formed through his long-year direct contacts with Japanese people.

Now, our neighboring countries are becoming increasingly aggressive toward Japan. However, it is clear that the Democratic party of Japan's diplomacy is a series of blunders. The Democratic party of Japan deteriorated Japan's relationship with the United States. The DPJ allowed Russian prime minister to visit one of Russian-occupied northern islands and also allowed China to repeatedly intervene in the Senkaku islands. In addition, the DPJ also could not prevent South Korean president from landing on Takeshima. With regard to the abduction issue as well, Japan has been given continuous brush-offs by North Korea. These neighboring countries are following Kovalenko's remark that a bluff is the best way to approach Japanese. More helplessly, public criticism of neighboring countries' aggression against Japan and the government's weak-kneed response is not shaping a major tied among the Japanese. A

considerable number of Japanese just call for the slogan of constitutional “pacifism,” “determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world.” The primary focus of Japanese diplomacy seems to be to “beat around the bush” and “not rock the boat” instead of protecting national interests to the extent that Japan will not be exposed to complaints.

Philosopher Michitaro Tanaka argues in one of his books, *Contemporary Political Interest*, that if peace can be guaranteed only by the so-called pacifist constitution, it may have been wise to prohibit the arrival of typhoons as well by the constitution. This is a sharp irony to postwar unrealistic pacifism.

From now onward, it is extremely unlikely that major countries will start wars by directly exerting their military powers and it can be said that such cases will be almost zero. However, if Japan does not have the strong grit to fight when they really need to and has just a weak military capability, which is a physical representation of the will to fight, the country is likely to be forced to give in without fighting. Before the collapse of the bubble economy and the fall of the Cold War structure, Japan overwhelmed China in military capability and could say, “If you want to beat me, do it.” However, neither the Japanese government nor the Japanese public now have the will to “mobilize the Self-Defense Forces.” Neighboring countries see through such Japanese mentality and the Self-Defense Forces cannot exert their power even as “deterrence.” Kovalenko’s past remark that if you bluff Japanese they will certainly give way is looming large vividly in our mind.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by FUJINAGA Takeshi, the Reservists' Blue-Ribbon Association Secretary, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron - Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on September 22, 2012.)**