

Fragile civilian control in China

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Let me write precisely. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates arrived in Beijing on January 11. A Chinese website then carried information about a flight test of a prototype of China's next-generation stealth fighter aircraft, the J-20. When Secretary Gates took up the flight test at his meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao on the same day, the president seemed unaware of the information. A senior U.S. government official said so to reporters accompanying Secretary Gates.

Was Hu left unaware of test flights?

On his way home from China, Secretary Gates stopped in Tokyo and made a speech at Keio University on January 14. After the speech, a student of the university's law faculty asked a question: "If truly the civilian leaders, including President Hu, had no prior intel on the test flights of the stealth fighters, then doesn't that represent the opaqueness and the prominence of China's military, even within its own country, as it is to the world?" The student's news sense is even more excellent than that of a professional journalist in terms of timing and amplitude.

Secretary Gates answered: "This is an area where over the last several years we have seen some signs of -- I guess I would call it a disconnect between the military and the civilian leadership. We think that the civilian leadership was not aware of the aggressive approach by Chinese ships to the U.S.'s Navy ship Impeccable two or three years ago. We think that -- our information is that the civilian leadership may not have known about the anti-satellite test that was conducted about three years ago. And as I indicated yesterday, there were pretty clear indications that they were unaware of the flight test of the F-35 -- of the J-20, rather."

(<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2011/01/mil-110114-dod02.htm>)

Signs have been since three years ago

The remark indicated that U.S. doubts about the civilian control on the Chinese military are based not only on the J-20 case but also on some other cases seen since three years ago. Secretary Gates made the remark at Keio University apparently for the reason that the Pentagon's doubts were backed up by his meeting with President Hu. You can assume the Chinese leader may have been informed about the J-20 flight test

but pretended to be unaware. But this assumption may prove groundless.

If the Communist Party or the Chinese government lost control on the military, the situation could be grave. We may have to question the credibility of military figures including those of the budget available for external observation. We have seen the Chinese Navy's activities advancing from the so-called First Island Chain (linking Kyushu, Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines and Borneo Island) to the Second Island Chain (linking the Izu Islands, the Ogasawara Islands, Guam, the Palau Islands and northwestern New Guinea), and Chinese military activities on the border with North Korea, the opposite shore of Taiwan and the border with India. Are we in transition to or have we entered an age when nobody knows to what extent the Chinese military operations are based on the will of the government? If so, the preconditions for Japan's defense policy will lose ground.

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