

## **"The Japan That Can't Decide"**

Hironobu Ishikawa

On August 19, a book titled "The Japan That Can't Decide" was released in Japan. The author is Kevin K. Maher, a former director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Japanese Affairs. Observations by Maher, who has been engaged in diplomacy with Japan for three decades, are persuasive. He concludes that the problem for the modern Japanese politics and society is that "Japan can make no decision with none willing to take responsibility, leaving key problems pending."

Right after the earthquake which struck eastern Japan on March 11, Maher served as coordinator for a U.S. task force for consultations with Japan on how to deal with the disaster. In his book, he unveils an episode that the U.S. had a deep sense of distrust in the Japanese government's response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident and once mulled a proposal to evacuate 90,000 Americans out of Tokyo. In an event that amazed Maher, the Japanese made no direct response to a list of U.S. support offers including the provision of unmanned helicopters while sending back carefree questions about performances of such helicopters and compensations for possible chopper accidents. He wasted two weeks on dealing with Japanese officials who had no sense of crisis.

### **Malicious interpretation of Operation Tomodachi**

Maher promoted U.S. forces' Operation Tomodachi as a natural action for an ally. He was angered by an editorial on an anti-American and anti-base newspaper in Okinawa that interpreted the operation as designed to demonstrate the significance of U.S. forces' presence in Okinawa. While Okinawa is the cornerstone of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, the U.S. has promoted plans to reorganize the Futenma Marine Air Station and other U.S. military facilities in Okinawa to reduce the burden on Okinawan people. But when the plans were close to completion, the government of Democratic Party of Japan not only stopped but reversed them, he writes.

China demonstrated its territorial ambition through its response last year to a Chinese fishing boat's collision with Japan Coast Guard patrol ships near the Senkaku Islands that have been controlled by Japan and claimed by China. Meanwhile Chinese Ministry of Commerce has bought up properties in Okinawa through its affiliates, seeing Okinawa as a buyout target, he warns. He emphasizes that Japan and the United States should keep their security arrangements tough to cope with Chinese

threats.

### **Serving as a villain**

Japanese politicians have always maintained vague attitudes to voters to defend themselves, failing to clearly explain the necessity of the U.S. military bases since the days of the Liberal Democratic Party government. Since Maher became U.S. consul-general in Okinawa, he clearly said it would be naive to believe that conflicts could be deterred without military forces and that the Futenma Air Station could not be shut down. The then Okinawa governor labeled Maher as a provocative diplomat and local media made him their target of criticism. Maher claims that the United States has played a role that Japan should play, serving as a villain in place of Japan.

Maher was dismissed from his State Department post in early March over a Kyodo News report quoting him as describing the people of Okinawa as “masters of manipulation and extortion.” With his dismissal Maher has become free to speak out as a private citizen and he has been fighting to correct the distorted Kyodo News report and clear his own name. His dismissal is not only his problem but also ours. When will we stop depending on others for serving as villains?

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