

Make Political Decision to Toughen Archipelago Up to Secure Japan's Survival

Satoshi Fujii

Any country may prosper or go to ruin. In world history, many superpowers became small or poor countries.

One of them is Portugal. In the 18th century, Portugal boasted of its strong power to "dominate" the world. But the 1755 Great Lisbon Earthquake suddenly reduced its strength.

The huge earthquake killed 60,000 people. The capital city of Lisbon was devastated by fires and great tsunami waves. As a result, the Portuguese economy was hit hard. The earthquake triggered Portugal's fall from the superpower status.

A Great Heisei Kanto Earthquake coming within 10 years

The Portuguese history indicates that a huge earthquake hitting a country's capital has potential to drive the country down from a superpower status. As 200 years have passed since then, a superpower is exposed to such a crisis. That is Japan.

Historically, a massive earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 to 8.0 has hit the Kanto Plain (Tokyo area) every 30 to 50 years. In the past nearly 90 years, no huge earthquake hit the plain. This unusual situation indicates that earthquake energy has continued to be accumulated in the underground of the Kanto Plain.

The March Great East Japan Earthquake came amid the situation. History indicates that four huge earthquakes occurred in Pacific waters off Japan in the past 20 centuries and that a massive earthquake hit the Tokyo metropolitan region within 10 years after each of the four quakes. Given the historical facts, a Great Heisei Kanto Earthquake is very likely to come within 10 years.

Japan exposed to the greatest crisis in history

The situation alone represents a national crisis for Japan. Moreover, however, Japan is exposed to a risk of a huge Tokai Nankai Tonankai earthquake hitting western Japan including Osaka and Nagoya. Such quake has a 70-80% chance to occur within 20 years.

Japan thus faces the greatest crisis in history where the three largest metropolitan regions could be devastated suddenly after having expanded fast since the end of World War II. The crisis amounts to the war.

But Japan as a technology-oriented economic power surely has potential to implement thorough disaster prevention measures and build resiliency to overcome such crisis under a 200 trillion yen archipelago-toughening program(“Japan Resiliency Program”).

Nevertheless, Japan lacks an important thing. That is a political decision to implement the Program. Now we must make utmost efforts to make the political decision to secure Japan’s survival. Japan’s future fate depends on the decision by our Japanese people in the present Heisei Age.

Satoshi Fujii is Professor, Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University