

**Fight Intimidation by the Weak with Sanctions**

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Iran and North Korea are weak countries that intimidate the world. After the International Atomic Energy Agency gave specific evidence of Iran's nuclear weapon development in its report, the U.S. Obama administration in December singled out the Central Bank of Iran as a target of sanctions and threatened to bar any foreign banks which deal with the CBI from the U.S. market. On January 23, the European Union decided not to import Iranian crude oil. Any ordinary country may give up in the face of such actions. Nevertheless, senior Iranian officials threatened to block the Straits of Hormuz, saying that blocking the straits would be easier than drinking water and that no crude oil would be allowed to pass through the straits.

**Tensions growing in the Gulf**

The United States and the EU have failed to laugh such warning off as bravado, indicating the subtleties of international political and military issues. While preparing for economic sanctions, the Obama administration has sent three aircraft carriers -- the John C. Stennis, Carl Vinson and Abraham Lincoln -- to the Persian Gulf.

Apart from the U.S. military power, Israel could launch preemptive strikes on Iran. As indicated by Israeli attacks on a nuclear facility in Iraq in 1981 and in Syria in 2007, Israel would not hesitate to take any action for its survival. These attacks have prevented Iraq and Syria from trying to develop nuclear weapons again.

But Iran's nuclear facilities are not limited to a single site. Iran has strengthened its Persian Gulf coast bases, targeting missiles with a range of 200 kilometers at the Straits of Hormuz where 20% of global crude oil supply passes. Of Japan's crude oil imports, 80% passes through the straits. If even only one missile is launched, oil prices may shoot up, plunging the world economy, including the recession-plagued EU, into panic. As a matter of course, concerted counterattacks by U.S. and Israeli forces may easily collapse Iran.

A failure to block Iran's nuclear development could drive Iran's archrival Saudi Arabia to developing nuclear weapons and triggering global nuclear proliferation. The mankind could face the most serious age of terror since the birth of the Earth.

**Iran's artful diplomacy**

Iran has artfully taken advantage of such psychological effect of its intimidation for its diplomacy. The present Persian Gulf crisis may be resolved. Iran has conducted a behind-the-scene diplomacy, agreeing to resume negotiations with the

United States, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany through Turkey's mediation. Even if their negotiations are resumed, however, Iran's access to nuclear weapons may not be stopped. Iran is similar to North Korea that has obtained money, goods and energy by demonstrating its readiness at some time and its reluctance at other time to accept the so-called six-party talks on its nuclear development.

The Obama administration might have realized that tightening economic sanctions could be effective. If so, it should exert greater pressure on financial institutions dealing with North Korea, as it did in regard to Banco Delta Asia in Macao in the past.

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