

Deep Contempt for Hatoyama Politics

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For about 10 days in late March, I visited Washington for an exchange of opinions with experts on North Korea and China as well as foreign policy advisers to leading lawmakers. The biggest target for their laughing and contempt was not North Korea's Kim Jong-un or Iranian theocrats but former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. Unless Japan breaks with Hatoyama politics featuring extreme inconsistency, irresponsibility and frivolity, all Japanese people could be subject to laughing and contempt.

Present U.S. policy is similar to Rice-Hill approach

In September 2005, the Bush administration invoked financial sanctions or strategic law enforcement against Banco Delta Asia, a Macao bank involved deeply in laundering of North Korean crime money, and made a media leak that enhanced the sanctions' warning by indicating that the next sanction target could be the Bank of China, one of China's four major commercial banks. In some one year, however, the sanctions were lifted under the leadership of then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Assistance Secretary Christopher Hill who had optimistic expectations on a conciliatory approach. This was the Bush administration's biggest miss.

The problem is that many foreign policy experts view the present U.S. policy as similar to the Rice-Hill approach. According to a key person involved in the strategic law enforcement, then Vice President Dick Cheney and some others in the administration were opposed to lifting the sanctions. But then national security adviser Stephen Hadley joined the Rice-Hill team, concerned that the United States would have no room to address any emergency in North Korea at a time when the Iraqi situation was in disarray. This led to the decision to lift the sanctions.

A growing view in the present Obama administration may be that Washington should maintain a conciliatory approach on North Korea as tensions are rising in the Middle East over Iran's nuclear development.

Americans' Japan passing

Israel, which is the most seriously exposed to Iran's nuclear threat, has growingly been bracing for preemptive attacks on Iran. Meanwhile,

Japan is the most seriously exposed to North Korea's nuclear threat. But its government has remained complacent with its exclusively defensive policy, without developing capabilities to attack enemy bases even though the government has interpreted such an attack for defensive purposes is constitutional. It may not be strange for the United States to believe that Washington now should focus on the Middle East while putting off North Korea.

Republican Senator James Inhofe, who is a leading member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and known for his hard-line policy against North Korea, is angered that the Hatoyama administration "renewed" on an agreement that took 13 years to be reached on the reorganization of U.S. bases in Japan, said an aide to the senator. The aide quoted the senator as saying he would not have any in-depth discussion about the future with Japanese lawmakers until the Futenma issue is resolved. A foreign policy expert questioned why Japan did nothing when South Korea had implemented the relocation of U.S. bases and the construction of a new naval base while excluding opponents.

Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who chairs the House International Relations Committee, strongly criticized the Rice-Hill approach and has deep understanding about the North Korean abduction issue, will skip Japan while visiting Taiwan and South Korea during her East Asian tour in May, an aide to the lawmaker said. The aid cited no specific reason while explaining there was no invitation from Japan. But the Japanese government sent an official invitation in the name of the minister for the abduction issue to the U.S. lawmaker last year. Her plan to skip Japan during the tour may indicate her dissatisfaction with Japan or her belief that she does not have to give priority to Japan. As far as Japan demonstrates no leadership while failing to overcome the Hatoyama politics, the nation will be growingly disregarded.

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