

Clear Principles Required for Japan-U.S. Partnership

Yoichi Shimada

I visited Washington, D.C. from May 6 through 13 as a member of a delegation from parliamentary and private organizations supporting Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea. As suspicions emerged about North Korea's possible abduction of an American citizen, I felt that Japanese and U.S. conservatives could enhance cooperation in dealing with North Korea and China. In response to requests from parliamentary participants in the delegation, the Japanese embassy there arranged meetings with such key persons as Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chairwoman of the House International Relations Committee, allowing the delegation to make more achievements than earlier expected. At the same time, however, I found some problems.

Ros-Lehtinen declined to meet with Japanese lawmakers

Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen's response to the request for the meeting was surprising. She said she would meet with delegation members excluding lawmakers. The Republican from Florida and fellow congressmen were to tour Taiwan and South Korea from May 18 and return home without visiting Japan. The exclusion of Japanese lawmakers from the meeting and Japan from the East Asian tour might have stemmed from her discontent with Japanese politicians' failure to make decisions or implement commitments about such key issues as the pending relocation of the Futenma air station in Okinawa.

I heard about Ros-Lehtinen's East Asian tour plan during my earlier U.S. trip in March and conveyed it to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. A ministry official, in a carefree manner, told me that the U.S. lawmakers apparently planned to visit only Taiwan. Japanese politicians and bureaucrats may be refraining from facing the severe U.S. attitude toward Japan.

Japan should adopt value-oriented diplomacy

Leading the Japanese delegation to Washington, D.C., this time was a member of House of Representatives Keiji Furuya, an opposition Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker serving as secretary general of the

parliamentary league for the repatriation of Japanese abductees. As leader of the Japanese Uyghur parliamentary group, Furuya made great efforts to hold the recent meeting of the World Uyghur Congress in Tokyo. He is remarkable as a value-oriented diplomacy player. Nevertheless, Ros-Lehtinen declined to meet with Furuya in particular. Her reason was Furuya also chairs the Japan-Cuba Parliamentary Friendship League.

Ros-Lehtinen is from a Cuban refugee family and has taken a hard-line attitude against Fidel Castro's totalitarian regime. Also hailing from a Cuban refugee family is Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio, a young candidate for the Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney's running mate. U.S. conservatives do not discriminate North Korea from Cuba.

Furuya in his blog says: "North Korea and Cuba are now the only pure communist countries in the world. Different from North Korea that refuses information disclosure, is Cuba (which has freedom of information) where Premier Castro has remained head of state for decades, gaining support from many citizens."

Furuya's idea may be difficult for Ros-Lehtinen to understand. A poster at the entrance of her office describes Cuba as "the world's largest prison for journalists." That Furuya, who can be said as an ace of Japanese conservative politicians, is unable to meet with leading American conservatives of today and tomorrow is unfortunate. This situation must be resolved promptly.

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