

**Look at Tense Iranian Situation**

Tadae Takubo

The most important news for citizens may be those about themselves and their respective countries. News may be less important for citizens if news event locations are more distant from them. But Japanese media coverage seemingly focuses too much on China and the Korean Peninsula, developing tunnel vision. Americans and Europeans are paying no less -- or probably more -- attention to the Middle East than to Asia. Particularly, they are paying attention to when Israel could launch attacks on Iran that has desperately continued nuclear development and how long the U.S. Obama administration would be able to keep Israel from attacking Iran. In this respect, a sense of urgency is growing.

**Israel could launch attack next spring**

Japanese may not be able to estimate how tense Israel's sense of crisis is.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has publicly and repeatedly threatened to "eliminate Israel." How would Israel react to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons? For its survival, Israel may have no choice but to launch preemptive strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

In his general debate speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu specified a "red line" Iran cannot cross without risking a military response. Dividing uranium enrichment into three stages, Netanyahu said Iran entered the second stage where uranium enrichment is up to 90% completed after the first stage where enrichment is up to 70 percent completed. He threatened to attack Iran before it enters the third stage where it will secure sufficient enriched uranium for nuclear bombs in several weeks. If Iran is expected to enter the final stage next summer, Israel may implement attacks on Iran next spring.

Ahead of the U.S. presidential election where his reelection is at stake, President Barack Obama has tried to persuade Netanyahu that diplomacy and economic sanctions can check Iran's nuclear development. But Israel has been driven to the brink of making a decision for its survival. As the international community waits and sees, Iran's nuclear facilities may be moved deeper underground. Any attack may end up delaying the nuclear program only for two to three years. Prime Minister

Netanyahu may be growing frustrated.

**War may shock Japan's economy**

Iran will naturally react to any Israeli attack. What will happen to the Persian Gulf if Iran attacks U.S. military facilities on the gulf? Commercial tankers could become targets for Iran's attacks. In anticipation of Iran's short-to long-range missile attacks on Israel, U.S. and Israeli forces have launched their largest ever missile interception drill planned to last for some three weeks.

Any emergency in the Persian Gulf will likely shock the Japanese economy. The viewpoint of Washington rather than Tokyo may be required to interpret the international situation.

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