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ABE Won the OKADA Proposed Debate about the Risk of Sending Japanese Troops Overseas

By SUGIURA Masaaki

As I heard the debate among party leaders in the Diet, it has become apparent that the opposition still clings to the idea of “one-country pacifism”, which has been their “raison d’etre” throughout the postwar era. They dare to dismiss the fact that international circumstances, particularly security situations surrounding Japan, has changed dramatically in the postwar 70 years, as they challenge Prime Minister Shinzo ABE in the debate. This is a tactic to agitate anxieties among the public. There is no wonder why their debates do not fit well, and both leaders fail to reach an agreement. Regarding the transition of international circumstances, Abe mentioned North Korean nuclear missile and Chinese intrusion to the Japanese airspace, and said, “North Korea deploys hundreds of ballistic missiles, and their nuclear program is making further progress. The scramble of the Self Defense Forces increased seven times in these 10 years. In view of these realities, we have to think of the responsibility of the legislative body, and it is important to take a stance that we make a decision that we have to do and make a law that is required.”

Katsuya OKADA’s question as the leader of the Democratic Party utterly lacks understanding of critical points as ABE commented, and basically he focuses on the danger of “being embroiled in the war led by the United States”. The fear of getting caught in the US-led war was agitated by the Socialist Party (currently, Social Democratic Party) and the Communist Party when the US-Japanese Security Treaty was revised, but he has no sober understanding of the fact that Japan has not involved in any war for half a century since then. What is even worse, OKADA stressed the “risk to the Self Defense Forces”. However, the Self Defense Forces take risks, because they must defend people from risks that would arise from changes of international circumstances. The Japanese troops tackle the risk when there is “a clear threat to the Japanese people that could fundamentally threaten constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, and that is the core concept of the three conditions for the use of force as collective self defense, in view of North Korea’s nuclear missile program, and China’s hegemonic behavior in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

It seems that OKADA does not care about the risk to the people, while he cares about the risk to the Self Defense Forces so much. I believe that he has inherited the Socialist Party's idea that peace comes from the heaven. Regarding the reason for Japan's 70 year peace after World War II, OKADA attributes this to the deterrence of the US-Japanese alliance and the ban of the use of force abroad by Article 9 of the constitution, while ABE does to the US-Japanese alliance and the presence of the Self Defense Forces. There is no doubt that the pacifist clause of the constitution works for self deterrence, but seen from the global standard, it is too naïve to believe that only this keeps the country safe. Deterrence is effective only when it is associated with military power, and therefore, ABE's view is more persuasive, as he mentioned the presence of the Self Defense Forces.

Needless to say, SDF personnel swear to fight in case of emergency to save the state, as they go into the service. OKADA argues "Obviously, the SDF's sphere of operation will grow dramatically. The risk of getting involved in combats will increase, accordingly", but in an extreme situation such as an invasion or a nuclear missile attack by the enemy, who else assumes responsibility for national defense, unless the Self Defense Forces take risks? The Diet debate should go further into this compelling point. As Admiral Isoroku YAMAMOTO noted "Keep soldiers for a hundred years to keep peace", the basic principle to manage the crisis of national survival has not changed, whether in the prewar era or the postwar era. The difference is whether to use forces for imperial militarism, or for "a resort to power to fulfill minimum requirements" for national defense as ABE says, and this depends on the choice of people in a democracy. It is utterly an issue whether people select militarist or not. ABE told that the risk would be avoided by on-site judgement of the commander, and the government would send troops to the region where the danger of getting involved in the battle is as unlikely as possible. The issue is about the response to the crisis of national survival, ABE's opinions are more appropriate.

From this point of view, OKADA's logic of "being embroiled in the war led by the United States" is nothing but a negative labeling and anti-LDP propaganda. ABE makes it clear that Japan shall not send troops overseas, and also, reiterated that the government shall not send the SDF to the war like the Gulf War and the Iraq War, therefore, we should trust his words. Startlingly, OKADA insists that we state not to wage war in foreign territories in our law. From the very beginning, the new security bill places emphasis on "deterrence", but there is no denying that the SDF may have to enter foreign territorial land, air, and water, for logistic support to the coalition to deter the enemy. ABE shows willing attitude to mine sweeping in the Hormuz Strait as an exceptional case, because this Iranian territorial water is a life line for oil supply. ABE told that the three conditions for the use of self defense would be applied strictly, and this is quite a restrained change in the global standard. Among major powers, Japan is the last country to move for a modest step toward collective self

defense, on presumption that there is a danger of being attacked by others. The basic idea of new security bill is “passive”, not “aggressive”. Generally speaking, opposition arguments are armchair theories, and I am bewildered by such a start of the debate on new security bill. Nagatacho should realize that only “foreign enemies” will be pleased to hear their hypothetical arguments based on such armchair theories.

(This is an English translation of the article written by Mr. SUGIURA Masaaki, Political Commentator, which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on May 21, 2015.)