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Kyuma Fumio

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by Kyuma Fumio

This brief interview with a ranking Japanese politician offers surprising insight into the U.S.-Japan relationship. In it, Kyuma Fumio, acting chairman of the governing Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council, admits that the Bush regime's arguments for invading Iraq are unconvincing. But in the same breath, he insists that Japan must at least "show understanding" because of the extent of US-Japanese economic ties and the depth of Japanese dependence on the American military. To bolster his argument, he insists that the North Korea problem cannot be solved without American help and that "Japan is helpless" without the US. He adds that "after all, Japan is like an American state," but his description rather resembles that of an American colony. Finally, we learn that Kyuma heads an association of Diet members who are seeking better relations with Iraq.

One couldn't ask for a better statement of the cynicism of the ruling LDP. Recent opinion polls have shown that 70 to 80 percent of Japanese citizens, like their counterparts almost everywhere else, oppose the war. But the Koizumi administration has its UN ambassador tell the world that Japan supports the use of force while in Tokyo the Prime Minister - ordinarily a very articulate man - mumbles about working with the international community to disarm Iraq. For the old boys who run Japan, it's clear that the only "international community" that matters is inside the White House and the Pentagon.

INTERVIEW / Kyuma Fumio: Show understanding not support for the U.S.
The Asahi Shimbun February 19, 2002

As the United States continues to seek international backing for its plans to attack Iraq, Tokyo has no choice but to show understanding, rather than support, says Fumio Kyuma, acting chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council. To win international support, the United States needs to show more clearly how Iraq poses a serious threat, Kyuma said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun. Excerpts follow:

Q: How do you view the current situation?

A: I understand why the United States has adopted a tough stance. Unless it shows aggression, Iraq will not cooperate to abolish weapons of mass destruction. Be that as it may, I think there are other things the United States should do before resorting to military action. It is understandable for Washington to call Iraq a dangerous country, but it needs to present details of the Iraqi threat more clearly. I doubt the United States has sufficient data to convince other countries.

Q: Tokyo appears willing to cooperate with the United States. What do you think about that?

A: Considering Japan-U.S. relations up to now, the government cannot flatly refuse but at the same time, it is difficult to show strong support. I think the most Japan can do is show understanding. But the United States seems to interpret Japan's understanding as support and says so. Japan does not bother to deny this, either. I think that is the situation.

Q: What is your personal view?

A: I would say it is not appropriate to use the word "support." The word "understanding" is enough.

Q: The prevalent mood within the Foreign Ministry would seem to be summed up this way: "There is no other option than to support" the United States. What is your view?

A: Japan cannot settle the problem with North Korea without the United States. Also in terms of economic relations, Japan is inseparable from the United States. Without the United States, Japan is helpless.

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Q: What conditions are necessary to justify a U.S. attack on Iraq?

A: Because Iraq did not follow a U.N. resolution, it returned to the way it was when it invaded Kuwait (during the Persian Gulf crisis) and the war continues. Logically, such an argument may be possible. But it is preposterous to say the United States can attack Iraq on the grounds a war that actually ended is still continuing. The United States also thinks that argument is unreasonable. That is why it wants a new U.N. resolution.

Q: If there is no new U.N. resolution, will Japan still show "understanding"?

A: I think it has no choice. After all, Japan is like an American state.

Q: Do you think the Japanese government has offered a sufficient explanation?

A: What else can the government say as things stand in Japan? Even I would give the same explanation if I were the prime minister. No matter what, I would never say Japan would follow the United States blindly.

Q: Would it be difficult for Japan to support U.S. forces in the event of war?

A: I think it would be difficult if the United States goes to war without a U.N. resolution.

Q: What if there is a U.N. resolution?

A: I think voices calling for Japan to do the least expected of a U.N. member would become stronger. (The United States) would probably demand financial contributions. Perhaps Japan can transport supplies or provide other forms of logistic support.

Q: Do you think it is possible to support the United States with new legislation?

A: I do not think it would actually happen. The Diet would fall into turmoil if we tried to pass such legislation.

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