Japan Should Not Follow U.S. Logic of Force

Jitsuro Terashima

Japan Should Not Follow U.S. Logic of Force

by Terashima Jitsuro

Terashima Jitsuro was born in Hokkaido in 1947. Upon completing a graduate program at Waseda University, Terashima joined Mitsui & Co. He currently wears several hats, including chairman of the Japan Research Institute, president of the Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute, and professor at Waseda University's graduate school.

A government-sponsored bill to send the Self-Defense Forces to Iraq to take part in postwar reconstruction cleared the Lower House last week. There is little doubt this legislation is a demonstration by Japan of its willing cooperation with the U.S. global strategy.

The following is an in-depth commentary contributed recently to The Asahi Shimbun by Jitsuro Terashima, chairman of the Japan Research Institute. Terashima has studied and analyzed Japan's relations with the United States and the Middle East for many years.

Having witnessed the United States force its way into Iraq, we may be inclined to imagine the post-Iraq war world as a place ruled by brute force, where the weak can only accept what the strong have done as a fait accompli.

We may be tempted to conclude the old adage ``might is right' was true after all. The United Nations failed to function, we may have to acknowledge, which means the days of collective security through the United Nations are over. The only realistic choice left is to side with powerful allies.

But we would be quite wrong to think so. I say this because the world is already moving, steadily and surely, away from what the might-is-right mentality would have us do.

Japan is going to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces to Iraq. I am convinced this is not so much for the sake of the people of Iraq as for the U.S. government. I cannot stress enough how crucial it is for the Japanese people to seriously ponder the danger of carelessly subscribing to the logic of force.

Some people maintain the U.S. victory over Iraq represents progress in the war on terrorism, the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the democratization of Iraq-the reasons used to justify the war in Iraq.

Too naive and optimistic

Such people, however, are being extraordinarily naive and optimistic. They need to get real. In Iraq and other parts of the world, that war has only stoked people's hatred and outrage against injustice. And around the world, whatever world order there used to be is slowly eroding. Such is the stark reality we must scrutinize rationally and objectively.

Had the threat of weapons of mass destruction been used as a convenient excuse for legitimizing that pre-ordained war, I could not think of a more despicable, vicious sacrilege against the people who were killed in the conflict.

And whatever became of the ``intelligence report' that claimed Iraq had more than 30,000 chemical weapon warheads and enough materials to make

500 tons of chemical weapons? All we know for certain is that Iraq never used those weapons, and that they are still nowhere to be found.

For a long time to come, this reality must surely weigh heavily on the conscience of those who supported the war merely on the strength of information fed by the United States.

And let us not forget the other excuse-that Iraq had to be assaulted to liberate the Iraqi people-nor the insistence that we were wrong to consider this an oil war.

But the victor nations are now swooping down on the oil interests like vultures. We were betrayed. With the lifting of the economic sanctions against Iraq, the U.N.-led oil-for-food program has been discontinued, and the United States has been acknowledged as the primary custodian of Iraqi oil. American oil firms and related businesses are rushing to Iraq in droves.

Ironically, the more transparent America's greed for oil has become, the more difficult it has become for America to have its way.

Turning away from the dollar

The oil-producing Gulf nations, which share anti-American sentiments, have begun to turn away from the dollar in favor of the euro as their currency of oil settlement. The move has also to do with the empathy these Gulf nations have toward Europe for refusing to support the Iraq war. A more pragmatic reason, however, is that these nations are turning to the euro as a hedge against falling oil prices, which could happen when the Americans start raising Iraq's oil output.

After the Persian Gulf War, the dollar soared against the then-deutsche mark. After the Iraq war, the dollar began its plunge against the euro. This is not just a sign of the euro's emergence today as the world's No. 2 currency; it rather spells the start of a trend to withhold oil money from the United States.

During the Group of Eight summit at Evian, France, in early June, President George W. Bush abruptly gave his blessing to a strong-dollar policy. He also stressed his firm commitment to the Mideast peace process, going so far as to discuss the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state. Bush's behavior indicated he was finally becoming aware of the consequences of being estranged from the Arab world.

Militarily, there is no question America dominates the world. Economically, however, the world is transforming into a multipolar structure that will never permit monopoly by a single nation.

The International Criminal Court is one concept that proves the American way is not the only thing making the world tick. The ICC was set up at The Hague in March as a separate entity from the International Court of Justice.

Ratified by more than 60 nations in June last year, the ICC can now try to punish war crimes and other crimes against humanity according to a criminal justice system sanctioned by the international community. Nations that have ratified the ICC total 90.

The United States under the Clinton administration supported the ICC concept. But the Bush administration did a shocking about-face. The reason-which came across to me as self-serving unilateralism par excellence-was that America could not let any of its citizens suffer the ``injustice' of being arrested as a criminal suspect in a third country and tried unfairly.

War on terrorism can never be won by hitting potential terrorist nations one by one. A more effective approach-albeit roundabout-is to establish an international criminal justice system to punish international criminal organizations.

The ICC, in fact, could come in handy for Japan in resolving the abduction issue with North Korea. The abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents should definitely qualify as a crime against humanity under international law. Whether North Korea is an ICC signatory or not is irrelevant. As the nation where the crime was committed, Japan could transfer jurisdiction to the ICC and strategically force the issue on the international community.

South Korea is an ICC signatory. So is Britain, which fought with the United States in Iraq.

But Japan's attitude defies comprehension. When the ICC concept was on the drawing board, Japan was eager to go along. But now the government appears to have lost all interest in ratifying the court.

U.S., Japan are aberrant

As I see it, the ICC is a harbinger of a world ruled by international law. It is also a mirror that reveals the United States and Japan for what they are-aberrant nations.

History will one day prove that Japan is straying onto a mistaken path by believing being incorporated into the U.S. global strategy is in its national interest.

Should Japan lose sight of its self-determination, the national emergency legislation could well force Japan to automatically participate in an American-induced war. The post-World War II Japan was founded on the twin imperatives of renouncing the use of armed force as a means for conflict resolution and maintaining the world order through multinational cooperation. But now that Japan is falling in step with the Bush administration, which believes in forcing its own values throughout the world, the spirit of these imperatives is fast fading.

In participating in Iraq's postwar reconstruction, Japan must practice self-discipline and limit its work to what will truly help the Iraqi people. I am much pained by the plight of young SDF troops who are being shipped to the conflict zone with little idea of what duties they are supposed to perform. I believe Japan must first reflect on exactly what sort of work it is cut out for, then let the international community know. One suggestion I would make is that Japan establish something like an international ``relief corps'-a non-military entity devoted to medical services and humanitarian aid.

Come to think of it, Iraq is a man-made state whose borders were drawn in 1921 by the British Empire, which had defeated the Ottoman Empire. Iraq has a history as a pawn of the great powers. Today, there are developments that even make me think of the word ``re-colonization.'

What is expected from the Japanese people is their deep, empathetic insight into the history of Asian and Middle Eastern nations that have been at the mercy of the world's great powers. One choice Japan must never make is to ride on someone's coattails.

Misreading global current

More than any other nation, it is Japan that must stand absolutely firm by its own principles to make sure the occupying administration will prove fair and just to the people of Iraq. Nations of the Middle East and other Asian nations are quietly watching Japan to see if it will act with the conscience of a true leader, or simply ape the great powers by joining in their power game and be satisfied with being considered ``an honorary white.'

At the start of the 20th century, Japan misread the current of world history. It failed to see the typically 20th century concepts of ``self-determination' and ``nation-state' already budding in such parts of Asia as China and India. Having missed these incipient developments,

Japan became a great-power wannabe, entered the game of colonization-and fell on its face miserably as a result.

At the start of the 21st century, I believe Japan is again misreading the global current in the false belief that the world has entered a U.S.-dominated era dictated by the logic of force.

But the world, albeit slowly, is moving in the direction of a global order ruled by international law and cooperation, an order that presupposes participation by all nations.

America's resilience is now being tested. So is Japan's sanity.