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Kyodo News

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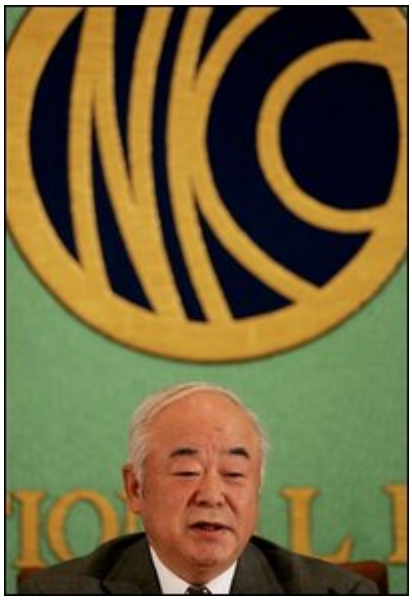
By Kyodo News

The U.S. government has filed a protest over Defense Minister Kyuma Fumio's remarks last week criticizing President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq, diplomatic sources said Saturday.

But on Saturday, Kyuma criticized Washington again, this time for failing to understand the need to consult with Okinawa over plans to relocate the Futenma air base.



Kyuma at the Japan National Press Club on January 24, 2007.

James Zumwalt, director of the Office of Japanese Affairs at the State Department, made the protest to the Japanese Embassy in Washington, saying the United States takes the remarks seriously as they came shortly after Bush's State of the Union speech, the sources said. He also said the remarks could have a negative impact on the bilateral alliance.

In the annual speech to Congress on Tuesday, Bush urged the legislative branch to throw its support behind his plan to increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq at a time when his approval ratings are at their lowest point.

Kyuma told the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo on Wednesday he believes Bush's decision to go ahead with the war in Iraq in March 2003 was a mistake because it was based on the erroneous assumption that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

Zumwalt also said it may be difficult to arrange the schedule for the next Japan-U.S. ministerial security talks involving the foreign affairs and defense chiefs of the two countries if there are any more remarks critical of Bush, the sources said.

Japan has been hoping to hold the so-called two-plus-two security meeting at an early time. The two countries last held the talks in May in Washington, where they compiled a final report on the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan.

The next two-plus-two talks would be attended by Foreign Minister Aso Taro and Kyuma as well

as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

On Saturday, Kyuma said during a speech in Isahaya, Nagasaki Prefecture, "The United States says (the Futenma plan) should be implemented now that the two governments have made a decision between themselves, but we can't do it unless the Okinawa governor says yes."

Kyuma noted the need for Okinawa Gov. Nakaima Hirokazu to issue a permit to reclaim land necessary for the relocation of the functions of the U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Ginowan to an area in Nago around Camp Schwab.

"When we have to go about this by taking the governor's opinions into account, the United States doesn't understand matters around it," Kyuma said. "The United States doesn't understand (the importance of) spadework."

[Two days after criticizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Kyuma backtracked:
"I did not say it was a mistake, but I thought at the time (the U.S.) should have been more cautious," Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma said Friday in response to a reporter's question after a Cabinet meeting, blaming English translation in part for any misunderstanding. According to the Associated Press, the revised comments followed meetings with Foreign Minister Aso and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Japan Focus]

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