Japanese Countermeasures Against International Terrorism

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1 Global Threat of Terrorism

Two years have passed since the terrorist attacks of September 11 in the U.S., and global efforts against terrorism have made certain progress. However, many terrorist incidents are still taking place.

The great concern of the international community at the moment is the situation in Iraq. Last weekend, an American helicopter crashed in Iraq, killing 13 U.S. soldiers. It is suspected that the helicopter was shot down by a portable air-defense missile. The incident was right after the series of bomb attacks, which took place in Baghdad, targeting the Al Rasheed Hotel, the Red Cross center (ICRC), and several Iraqi police stations. It is said that Islamic extremists and terrorists are gathering in Iraq to launch terrorist attacks on people who are dedicated to the reconstruction of Iraq. Not only in Iraq, but also in Southeast Asia, bomb attacks killed 12 people and injured about 150 people at the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, in August. Japan condemns all of these terrorist attacks in the strongest terms and expresses its deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families of these horrendous terrorist acts. They cannot be justified on any grounds. These recent attacks clearly show, leaving no room for argument, that the threat of international terrorism remains extremely serious worldwide.

Another concern, which demonstrates high threat of terrorism, is a series of statements issued by Al Qaeda leaders, especially the one by Usama bin Laden.

On October 18, Al Jazeera, a major Arabic-language TV station based in Qatar, broadcasted a statement issued by Usama bin Laden. That statement indicts that Usama bin Laden is still alive, and he calls on all Muslims to participate in jihad against the U.S. in the context of the situation in Iraq.

International efforts with respect to the fight against terrorism by Al Qaeda have so far borne important fruit. It is said that approximately two thirds of Al Qaeda’s top leaders have been killed or captured, and more than 8,000 Al Qaeda operatives or associates have been detained in more than 100 countries. But we are faced with continuous challenges by terrorism. We must sustain our efforts in the fight against terrorism. The current situation within and surrounding Afghanistan, especially the security situation, still remains grim. Although efforts to find and detain key Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders have made progress, there are still some leaders, including Usama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Omal, who have managed to evade international pursuit.

Furthermore, Al Qaeda seems to be recruiting new members while retaining a dangerously high degree of mobility around the world. At the same time, terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda and related Islamic extremist organizations have taken place in the Middle East, Africa, Russia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. It is believed that a soft
coalition has been forged between Al Qaeda and local Islamic extremist organizations. Terrorists have taken advantage of globalization in transferring money, goods, and their ideology.

2 Terrorist Threat in Asia

Due to its geographical, historical and cultural links with Asia, Japan has a particular interest in the security and stability of this region, especially in Southeast Asian countries where a series of terrorist attacks have taken place. The economic ties and flow of people between Japan and Southeast Asia are stronger and more active than those between Japan and, for example, the Middle East or Africa. The burgeoning Islamic extremism in this region therefore poses a serious threat to our nation and its interests as well.

We can roughly divide Southeast Asian terrorist groups into two categories. One is those who do not remain in one country and act on a regional level. The other is those who remain and act mainly within one country.

Concerning the former, Jemaah Islamiyah is a typical example. Jemaah Islamiyah is a major terrorist group in Southeast Asia, and it is suspected of involvement in the Bali bombing and bombing against Marriott Hotel in Jakarta. It is also suspected of having strong ties with Al Qaeda and their activities are thought to have radicalized after they gained financial and technical support from Al Qaeda. In August, Riduan Isamuddin, known as Hambali, who is suspected of being Al Qaeda’s top operative in Asia and one of the top leaders of Jemaah Islamiyah, was captured in Thailand. He is thought to be the liaison between Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda. This arrest was an outcome of joint efforts by concerned countries and Japan highly values those concerted efforts. Although the arrest of Hambali is a great achievement in the fight against terrorism, the threat of terrorism in this region remains high. The Bali bombing was a milestone in the fight against terrorism, as it announced to the world the seriousness of the threat in Southeast Asia and showed that terrorist groups might easily target economic or entertainment establishments.

As for the domestic terrorist groups, in the southern parts of the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Abu Sayyaf Group and the New People’s Army (NPA) are active, and there have been bombing incidents in Mindanao. Compared to Al Qaeda and its related groups, there is a wider window of opportunity for a government to negotiate with these terrorist groups.

Not only Southeast Asia, but in South Asia region, as demonstrated by the bombing in Mumbai on August 25, which killed 52 people, terrorism remains a great threat to security and stability in this region. Japan sincerely hopes that the international community will cooperate to eradicate terrorism from South Asia.
3 Terrorism in Japan

Japan is suffering from its indigenous terrorist groups too. I have to mention the Japanese Red Army, which perpetrated various terrorist attacks all over the world in the 1970s and 1980s, such as terrorist attacks at the Lod Airport massacre in Tel Aviv in 1972. Additionally, Japanese people have been victims of horrendous terrorist activities within Japan. For instance, in 1995, Aum Shinrikyō, a religious cult, committed chemical terrorism, by dispersing sarin gas in the subway in the heart of Tōkyō, killing 12 people and injuring about 8,000 people. As a result of police investigation, a huge facility of Aum Shinrikyō located near the foot of Mt. Fuji was found. Now, most of the members of the cult who committed crimes were arrested, tried, and sentenced. The group is placed under surveillance of the Public Security Intelligence Agency in accordance with the Act Pertaining to Control Organizations that Commit Indiscriminate Murder, which was enacted after the sarin gas attack.

4 Counter-Terrorism Measures by the Japanese Government

What are the counter-terrorism measures by Japanese government? As we review the global, regional, and domestic threat of terrorism, it is unacceptable to turn a blind eye to this threat or to consider it as a lower priority compared with other policy objectives, in view of the extremely negative impact that terrorism has on the politics and the economies of states, as well as on the security of innocent people. We must be determined in our fight against terrorism.

In countering terrorism, I believe, the following three points are essential: firstly, to deny safe haven to terrorists, secondly, to deny means for terrorist activities to terrorists, and thirdly, to overcome vulnerabilities to terrorist activities.

From the perspective of the first point, it is important to conclude all of the counter-terrorism conventions and protocols, which oblige their parties to punish those engaged in terrorist activities by their domestic law or by extraditing them to other parties concerned. Having concluded the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism last year, Japan is now a party to all the twelve existing conventions and protocols relating counter-terrorism. Actually, the number of countries, which concluded, for example, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11 were only four. Now, the number of party states to this convention has increased to as many as 92. This statistic reflects the remarkable effort by the international community. However, in order to carry out effective counter-terrorism measures against terrorists, who act transnationally and enhance the level of cooperation to further narrow a safe haven for terrorists, it is imperative for all states in the world to conclude all the twelve counter-terrorism conventions and protocols as soon as possible. In this regard, Japan held a seminar for Asian countries in October 2003 in Tōkyō, with participation of an expert from the Council of the European Union, to share the experiences of Japan and other countries to conclude and implement counter-terrorism conventions, focusing on the convention on the suppression of financing of terrorism.
From the perspective of the second point, it is essential to cut off the fund for terrorists and to prevent that weapons fall into hands of terrorists. In taking measures against terrorist financing, it is of great importance to conclude the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism as well as to implement fully the UN Security Council Resolution 1373, which requires all states to freeze the fund to be used for terrorist purposes. So far, Japan has frozen assets of 403 individuals and entities in total, including those associated with Taliban or Al Qaeda in accordance with UNSCR 1267, 1333, and 1390, and non-Taliban or non-Al-Qaeda one such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in accordance with UNSCR 1390. Thus, 173 countries, including Japan, have issued orders to freeze the assets of terrorists and terror networks are reported to have lost access to nearly 200 million U.S.$ around the world.

Concerning the third point, which is to overcome vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks, it is important to enhance protection of critical infrastructure such as nuclear facilities and transportation facilities. I admit, however, that this is easier said than done to a certain extent. As is the case with the recent terrorist bombings worldwide, when terrorists are targeting so-called “soft targets,” it is difficult to predict in advance where and by whom an attack will take place, and so the scope of necessary counter-measures becomes broader. Although it is becoming more difficult to counter such terrorist attacks, we must strengthen our efforts to prevent them.

5 International Counter-Terrorism Cooperation by the Japanese Government and Cooperation between Japan and Europe

I would like to elaborate international counter-terrorism cooperation by the Japanese Government and the cooperation between Japan and Europe. Since September 11, 2001, the international community has strengthened its efforts to fight against terrorism, and much progress has been made to this date. On the military front, the U.S. and other international forces have been conducting military operations against Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan and the adjacent areas. In order to support this international effort, Japan enacted the Special Measures Law on Anti-Terrorism and it has been engaged in refueling activities to the vessels in maritime interdiction operation. As the continuation of the anti-terrorism activities is still on high demand, Japan extended the law last month, so that Japan can continue its activities as refueling assistance to the operation.

The fight against terrorism is not limited to military front. Multiple cooperation in a wide range of fields by the international community is required to prevent terrorism by terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, which act freely and transnationally. Furthermore, to prevent terrorism, not only cooperation between governments, but cooperation among private sectors and individual citizens is necessary. Japan and Germany are both victims of terrorism. As for Japan, ten Japanese people were killed by the massacre launched by Islamic extremists in Luxor, Egypt, in 1997. Japanese experts engaged in development assistance were abducted by Uzbekistan Islamic Movement, an Al Qaeda related organization, in Kyrgyzstan, in 1999. Concerning Germany, fourteen Germans were reported to be killed in the bombing in the Island of Djerba, Tunisia, in April 2002. In the terrorist attacks of September 11, approximately 3,000 people from
about eighty countries, including Japan and many European countries, were killed. To make Japan, Europe and other parts of the world terrorism free region, I believe that Japan and European countries, including Germany, still have to play a leading role in preventing and eradicating international terrorism. From such perspective, counter-terrorism cooperation in the international framework such as UN and G8 is very important. Also, to prevent developing countries from becoming a safe haven for terrorists, it is necessary for Japan and Europe to cooperate in building capacity of these countries to fight against terrorism. In this respect, Japan holds seminars and receives trainees mainly from Asian countries in six fields: immigration, export control, aviation security, law enforcement, customs cooperation, and maritime security. Lastly, as indicated in the Joint Declaration on Terrorism issued by Japan and the EU in December 2001, Japan and the EU should strengthen consultation, cooperation and coordination in fighting terrorism. In this respect, I will make the most of my visit this time by having exchanges of views with the German counterparts for furthering the cooperation between Japan and Germany.

6 Conclusion

The international community must be united in the fight against terrorism.

Therefore, I highly appreciate that this kind of meeting is timely held. This symposium will greatly contribute to generating and strengthening a common will to combat terrorism among the international community. We must reject any attempt to regard the war on terror as the war between West and Islam.

I hope this symposium will be an occasion to develop further understanding and cooperation between Japan and Germany.