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Direction of Vietnam and China: Interviews with Ambassador to South Vietnam KITAHARA, and Consul General in Hong Kong OKADA

The Asia-Pacific Region Ambassadorial Conference opened at the Foreign Ministry on the 1st. The Nihon Keizai sought interviews with Ambassador to South Vietnam Hideo KITAHARA and Consul General in Hong Kong Akira OKADA on this occasion, and asked them for their frank views on the present state of the Vietnam war and prospects for peace, and the present state of China, after the 9th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and its future foreign policy.

Interview with Ambassador to South Vietnam KITAHARA:

Question: What is the present situation of the war?

KITAHARA: Large-scale movements by military troops cannot be carried out either by the North or the Viet Cong side. Actions on division scales ended with the offensive after Tet in February of this year. Since then, they are laying main emphasis on increasing the number of the dead and wounded in the U.S. Forces, with rocket attacks by small units. On the other hand, they have not given up the operations of surrounding Saigon. However, rumors of a July offensive are rife, and they may carry out intermittent attacks of the usual kind, using small units. Their biggest aim is to put pressure on the THIEU Government. Their other aim is to increase the U.S. Forces' casualty thus affecting U.S. domestic public opinion.

Question: What will be the effects of the 25,000-man withdrawal of the U.S. Forces, and what effects will there be if the U.S. side were to withdraw 50,000 men by the end of this year?

KITAHARA: I do not think there will be any really harmful effects. However, in the case of withdrawing 50,000 men, one-third will be combat units. To withdraw 15,000 men from the combat forces is a considerably big thing, after all, for a country actually fighting a war. Also, if the South Vietnamese Forces are left solely in charge, there is such problems as the North side's bringing weapons hidden under vegetables, and bribing the South Vietnamese forces. Therefore, when one is in the field, one feels that there are aspects that the South Vietnamese forces are far from taking over from the U.S. Forces.

However, when viewed comprehensively from the overall situation, they naturally have room to take over, and it is something which they must do, too. That is because the biggest momentum or turning point, which will determine the responses of the North in future peace negotiations lies in to what extent Vietnamization can be realized (take-over by the Vietnamese). For instance, if South Vietna were to equip forces of about 800,000 or 1,000,000 men with arms, train and modernize them to a considerable extent in the next two years, the North will seriously consider that they cannot afford such a situation, and may enter into political negotiations.

As to the question of whether there are any really tangible forces in Vietnam, it is, after all, the so-called infra-structure, centering on the Army. Even though one may talk about political parties, they are not possible. Therefore, I think there is no other way for the U.S. but to try to use President THIEU effectively, somehow or other. I think that it would be a grave failure if the situation were to develop where the U.S. side must very quickly replace the THIEU Government, whether for the reasons of internal public opinion or other reasons. The reputation of the THIEU Government in the world is strangely very bad. However, watching the situation actually in the field, one feels that there is no one except him, at least at the present time.

Question: I suppose the aim is to shift to a coalition government, with the THIEU Government itself re-modelling itself into something like the PARK Government in the ROK. In such a case, however, will not the present Constitution, which refuses to recognize even neutrality, become an obstacle?

KITAHARA: As a practical question, a coalition government will be difficult. In the case of adopting a coalition government formula, the Communist Party will undoubtedly be a minority party in the first election. However, when elections are repeated two or three times, I think there is a big possibility of its changing into a communist government. Therefore, when the way of Vietnam is regarded from a comprehensive and long-range perspective, I think the desirable way will be for the communist regime to exist in the North, while the South will be a nation belonging to the democratic, free nations' group, and for these two to co-exist together peacefully.

When this point is taken into consideration, is it not putting the cart before the horse to establish a neutral regime, for the sake of simply hastening the ending of the war? If a communist regime were to emerge in South Vietnam, I think it will be forced to move exactly according to the instructions from the North, in the end. In such a case, I think it will become farther removed from peace internally, and I think there is a strong possibility of its taking the form of civil wars continuing with greater intensity. Therefore, I think this war will end when a regime which has a democratic setup is realized in the South. I think that unless it takes the form which will enable the emergence of such a regime, it will end in a complete failure for the U.S. in actual substance. As one measure to reach this situation, there arise such questions as international guarantee or international supervision.

Question: However, in the case of Vietnam, I think there is the problem in the very fact that there has emerged the Liberation Front, from within the South itself, unlike the case of the ROK, for example. Also, the U.S. probably wants to withdraw quickly in some form or other. The North and the Liberation Front, on the other hand, are talking about a provisional government, a general election, and then a formal government. Is it not quite impossible to lead the situation in the direction which you mentioned just now?

KITAHARA: I think it cannot be realized in ordinary negotiations. I think it will also be considerably difficult to expect the Soviet Union to fulfill a political role to some extent. The North also knows fully well that the U.S. will absolutely not say that "it has now ended, and though it is not satisfactory, it will now leave." However, watching recent U.S. moves, one cannot but receive the impression that the U.S. side is coming to dislike the whole situation. In that case, there is a strong possibility that the North will reach the judgment that "if they persevere for another year or so, with their rockets and guerrilla tactics, the situation may change considerably and there is also no knowing what may happen to the THIEU Government."

I think it will be no easy matter to lead the situation to peace, somehow or other, and drag the North out to the peace negotiations table. The U.S. cannot withdraw from this war in a disgraceful manner, in any case. If it is necessary, it will station as many as 250,000 men there, even for five years. I think it should show a little more this aspect that it will do so and that it has no choice but to do so. I think by showing such an aspect, North Vietnam will come a little closer for the first time.

Question: What is your interpretation of the nature of the establishment of a provisional revolutionary government by the Liberation Front?

KITAHARA: In the final analysis, I think it has two aspects. One is that it has now formed a setup which takes the proper form of a government, and that it is a preparatory stage where it can now say that it has formed its own government, so let us now have talks for the formation of a coalition government. The other aspect is that even when it makes an offer of a coalition government and has various talks with the Saigon Government, if the Saigon Government continues to refuse to respond, then it may move in the direction of taking thorough-going actions. At the present time, I cannot make any comments. However, one thing which must not be forgotten from a long-range viewpoint is that, when viewed from the North Vietnamese side, it is the placing of one more cushion for North Vietnam's controlling the South.

Question: If we are to take an extremely optimistic outlook and assume that the take-over by the South Vietnamese Forces and the changing of posture by the THIEU Government will proceed considerably smoothly, what will provide the next breakthrough to peace in the next stage?

KITAHARA: The Constitution now in force can be revised as much as one wishes. The problem, however, will be that there will remain communist forces and Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam to some extent, although we do not know whether they will be ten percent or fifteen percent, as a hard fact. Conversely, too, there will also remain intact some anti-communist forces in the South, accounting for some 20 or 30 percent of the total population. I suppose political settlement means the settling of this problem smoothly somehow or other. However, in that kind of developing nations, it is undeniable that in an election, the side which holds the reins of government will absolutely be in the advantage. The ultimate question is whether a rapprochement in election techniques, which will be acceptable to both sides, under the grand cause of self-determination can be attained or not. Mr. THIEU's term of office does not expire until September, 1971. Therefore, I think it will be extremely difficult to do anything, until then, even in the point of the time factor.

Another point is to utilize whatever views for a compromise are produced as a result of negotiations, in Paris, or somewhere else, for the formula for an election, on the basis of an accord between the two sides, even before the question of the Constitution.

In other words, such questions as the relations with the Constitution can be handled as a secondary matter, to some extent, and carry out the first election somehow or other through a fair and democratic method first of all. I think international supervision will be needed for this. As for the political situation after an election, each side will compete with each other, with the propping up of the free nations' side and the communist camp, respectively. In such a case, the so-called form of a "mixed committee" may also be conceivable.

Question: Do you mean that the road to peace is still considerably distant?

KITAHARA: If you sound out the views of all the diplomatic missions in Saigon, I think the general consensus will be that there may perhaps be one more round of offensives even after the July offensive ends, but that they will probably enter into substantial negotiations concretely from around the middle of this autumn. I, however, think that a big question mark should be added to this view. Communism here is a kind of remarkable communism, even in the light of the history of Asian communism, especially in the light of Vietnamese communism. I think the very standard of their way of thinking about time and pace is entirely different from that considered by the people of the free world, especially by the United States, in pushing forward international politics.

Interview with Consul General in Hong Kong TANAKA

-- China Moving Toward "Politics of Compromise";
Changes in Relations with Japan Also Possible --

Question: I would like you to start from such questions as whether the so-called MAO-LIN setup has been stabilized with the ending of the 9th National Congress, whether Vice Chairman LIN Piao has really fully established his position as successor to Chairman MAO, and what position Premier CHOU En-lai occupies in this situation.

OKADA: As for the first point about whether the MAO-LIN Government has become stabilized or not, I think that the 9th National Congress was definitely a compromise and that it cannot be said that it was a "Congress for the celebration" of the unshakeable establishment of the MAO-LIN setup. That is because Chairman MAO himself called for their winning still greater solidarity in the future, and also because, even if you study Vice Chairman LIN Piao's political report very carefully, you cannot find any blue-print for the construction of the nation, such as what direction it will take in the future.

Chairman MAO said last November that "the treatise announced at the second Central Committee Plenum of the 7th-term of March, 1949, should be re-read." This was a policy platform, and briefly, the gist was that politics of compromise will be carried out. Judging from the fact that he gave the instruction that this will be the direction of construction in the future, it is observed that "politics of compromise" will be carried out in the future.

Just before and after the 9th National Congress, there appeared treatises concerning industrial policies and agricultural policies in the form of the People's Daily editorials. On the surface, they criticize the LIU Shao-chi line. However, there are appearing moves which hold that rational policies, or policies which respect economic rationality, such as the policies taken by LIU Shao-chi must be adopted once again. Consequently, I think it is possible to describe the present situation as coming to the stage where it will have to unite the nation in the next one year or one year and a half.

As for the position of Vice Chairman LIN Piao, he was certainly designated the successor in the Party Charter of the Chinese Communist Party. Among the 279 Central Committee members and alternate members chosen this time, 124 are persons connected with the Army. It can certainly be said that the present structure of China is being operated through the organization called the Army. However, China's armies are very strongly rooted in the land, and they do not move very much. In the Cultural Revolution this time, some parts of the Army, that is, the LIN Piao Army, moved. However, there are various arguments even among the experts in Hong Kong as to whether Vice Chairman LIN Piao really has the support of the Army. There are, however, hardly anyone who will say that the Army is backing up Vice Chairman LIN Piao unitedly as a whole.

As for the position of Premier CHOU En-lai, almost all members of the group supporting him have been purged. At the present time, probably the only person remaining is LI Hsien-nien. However, if China's political situation were to move more and more in the direction of rationalism in the future, it will not be able to manage if it were to disregard CHOU. He will probably fulfill a very important role. However, if the political situation in China should not proceed smoothly, despite this, then it is conceivable that politics will become still more fluid. Recently, there are some people in Hong Kong who even observe that, if the situation were to reach such a state by some chance, then even Premier CHOU may not be safe.

Question: Can we expect changes in China's Asian policy in the future?

OKADA: I think there is no possibility of its changing the spirit of supporting national liberation struggles. However, in regard to concrete diplomatic policies, I think some degree of changes are conceivable if you consider them in the context of plans for the 1970's, although there may not be any changes in the coming one or two years. For example, in the treatise written by Vice Chairman LIN Piao in 1965 and titled "Hurrah for People's Wars," he says that to rally together the agrarian regions of Asia and Africa, and surround and crush the U.S., which is the city, is one proper way of adapting the people's war on a global scale. However, with the development of the world situation, it is becoming clearer that such a way of thinking is completely a castle built on sand. Therefore, instead of stressing such questions very much, it is bringing to the fore the struggles against Soviet revisionism, which in form is similar to the denouncing of the LIU Shao-chi line. Generally speaking, I think the coloring of criticizing and attacking American imperialism is waning.

One point to which we must pay special attention in this connection is China's Asian policy in its relation to the Soviet Union's Asian policy. The Soviet Union is giving the impression that it is about to decide on the course of forming some kind of multi-lateral organization in Asia, in accordance with General Secretary BREZHNEV's plan. In such a case, how will China react? At present, it says that it is an operation to surround China, with the U.S. and the Soviet Union in conspiracy. However, it is not a question which can be dismissed merely by such statements. There is the possibility of China's making some efforts to overcome this situation, somehow or other. It has not yet been decided what form such efforts will take, but by around the middle of the 1970's, I feel that there will appear the possibility of its changing its Asian policy.

Question: What prospects do you have about the Vietnam war and China's reactions to it?

OKADA: In regard to the Vietnam war, China is developing the theory of liberation wars, which is to drive out the U.S. Forces from the Indo-China Peninsula. However, from November of last year, it is showing very delicate changes. It carried U.S. President JOHNSON's (then President) statement for the suspension of the bombings against the North and the North Vietnamese Government's statement in response, without any comments, and giving the same space to these two, in the People's Daily. China's tone in regard to the Vietnam war is gradually becoming lower since around the end of last year.

Judging from such facts, China has its hands more than full with the settling of domestic politics, at the present time. In external relations, it is only thinking about how to develop the problems with the Soviet Union, and it does not have time to tackle the Vietnam question. Of course, in the case of an international conference being set up, it will have to reserve its right of voice. Therefore, it does make some statements regarding the Vietnam question, but it cannot be said to be in a situation where it is capable of developing positive policies, with China taking the initiative, or in liaison with North Vietnam or with the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Question: There is the news about U.S. President NIXON's visiting Rumania after touring five Asian nations. What do you think of this?

OKADA: I think that Rumanian Chief of State CEAUSESCU has notified the Soviet Union, and that the U.S. has also probably notified it. It will be a gesture of everyone's recognizing CEAUSESCU's attitude of independence, without leaning either to the U.S. or the Soviet Union. The U.S. would also surely want to know wherein lies the limit of the Soviet Union's policy toward East Europe, that is, at what point the Soviet Union will give rise to a Czech incident. The U.S. would naturally wish to find out this limit, even in the sense of preventing a third world war. However, when this is viewed in the light of U.S.-Soviet relations, one of the U.S. policy is to foster poly-centralism in the world still further. Therefore, I think it will push this forward in such a form.

If this is viewed solely from the angle of Sino-U.S. relations, then there will naturally appear different points. Rumania is in very friendly relations with China. President NIXON will naturally wish to hear what the true intentions of the Chinese attitude toward the U.S. are from the top leaders of nations friendly toward China, such as Pakistan and Rumania, for example. He may also have points which he would like to convey to these leaders regarding the United States' true intentions toward China. Another point which we must not overlook in the BREZHNEV plan is that, although we generally tend to interpret it as a multilateral treaty organization for the containment of China, a more important point lies in the fact that the Soviet Union's securing a position of superiority in its relations with the U.S. by wedging itself into Asia, when the U.S. position in Asia after Vietnam gradually weakens, is as equally an important policy for the Soviet Union as its policy toward China. Consequently, in consideration of such a situation, I think there is great significance for President NIXON to discuss plans for the development of post-Vietnam Asia with the leaders of these countries, on the basis of this recognition.

Question: What are your views in regard to Japan-China relations after the 9th National Congress?

OKADA: There is no change in China's attitude in regard to Japan-China relations. However, I think we should judge with great care whether this unchanging attitude toward Japan is really the "unchanging principle" of the Chinese leaders toward Japan, or not. For example, when one considers the fact that LIU Shao-chi, who was revered almost as if he were a god, only up until two or three years ago, has now been purged, it is quite possible for any change to take place in its attitude toward Japan, depending on the changes in the international situation.

Question: Is it showing any reactions at the present time, when the extension of the Security Treaty and the Okinawa reversion question are placed on the actual agenda concretely?

OKADA: Yes, there are. However, there are no fierce voices of criticism against the SATO Cabinet, as at the time it denounced and attacked the KISHI Cabinet over the Security Treaty revision at the time. As you know, China at the time was aiming at attaining an extremely radical development under the three Red Flags and the Great Leap Forward, through the MAO Tse-tung-type irrationalism, completely throwing overboard its rational policies. In accordance with this, it was pushing forward a very stiff diplomatic attitude, not only toward Japan, but also toward Yugoslavia and even toward the Soviet Union. As a part of this, it took the sternest attitude toward Japan. At the present time, it has not yet started such a strong campaign as the one it developed against the KISHI Cabinet in 1960. However, it does not understand the heartfelt desire of the 100 million Japanese people for the reversion of Okinawa. If Okinawa is returned, and if it should reach the stage where there will be no nuclear weapons there, then it should be a welcome thing, even when viewed from the standpoint of China's security. Nevertheless, it puts forward the assertion that even if Okinawa should take such a form, all of Japan will be turned into a nuclear base. Viewed from our standpoint, we cannot but feel that it knows much too little about Japanese domestic politics, or perhaps, we should say that there are many aspects where it is misinterpreting the domestic situation in Japan. However, rather than such a question, the question of Japan's joining hands with the U.S. and the Soviet Union and is engaging in an encirclement operations against China is brought more to the fore at the present time. It is especially taking up the question of Japan's developing Siberia, and it uses such expressions as that the Soviet Union is trying to curry favor with Japan, selling Siberia to it.