

# The United States at War

By *Iokibe Makoto*

Why did the United States under President George W. Bush decide to wage war?

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks are no doubt the reason.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was called "America's Century," the single direct attack on the soil of the most powerful country – the United States – was Pearl Harbor by Japanese troops. This was the first time that U.S. centers had come under attack since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the war between Great Britain and the United States (1812-1814), when Washington, D.C. was engulfed in flames. We can imagine the magnitude of the shock caused by the Sept. 11 incident, which synchronized attacks on nerve centers in New York and Washington, D.C. and claimed thousands of lives.

The United States, separated from foreign powers by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, has enjoyed a favorable security environment unlike any other country in the world. For a long time, the country was able to develop its civil society without worrying about foreign threats. This favorable environment certainly helped shape the generous spirit and idealistic views of the American people. The United States is a republic founded on principles, and its national credo has been to build a different "new world" from the long-established European countries. The country has in fact built one of the few respectable societies in the world, and the Americans are proud of this.

This, however, did not lead Americans to be indifferent to their own security or take lenient security measures. Rather, because there were no threats, they react even more strongly than people in other countries when a threat becomes reality. In addition, because the United States offers a principle-oriented vision of a so-called "new world," the desire for national security to protect one's country

from foreign threats is further strengthened. For Americans, fighting foreign enemies can often be considered a "holy war" to stand up for freedom, human rights and democracy.

In other words, the United States is a rare, open, free and liberalized country in the world, but at the same time, it is a fierce fighter with a strong sense of mission. And now, we are looking at the United States when it is in combat.

Speaking of a "holy war," this was a controversial subject in Europe during the Middle Ages. For example, there was an issue of "whether war is permissible against heathens because of their pagan beliefs." In Europe at that time, Christianity had attained the position as the absolute universal religion. Not a few people believed that heathens were God's enemies, and it was God's wish to subjugate them. This may not be hard to understand, since even today, suicidal attacks by Muslims upholding their belief in *jihad* have shaken the world. If anything, this simple argument of combatting heresy should be considered as the nature of primordial religions that has neither been socialized nor rationalized.

A more generalized similarity can be seen in the issue, "whether use of force is permissible against non-democratic regimes for their democratization," that was put forth in the post-Cold War period. The end of the Cold War confirmed the victory of liberal democracy, and like Christianity in the Middle Ages, human rights and democracy have become a sort of universal ideology in the era of globalization. As in the case with Europe against Yugoslavia, or the United States against Iraq, we are witnessing even today that there are quite a few people who prefer to rush toward the use of force, claiming that "Lord, this is our holy mission."

By the way, in response to the assertion that "one may assault heathens," the

greatest medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, voiced his criticism. He said that heathens could not be assaulted due only to their heathenism, and that war was justified only if there was serious punishability such as specific acts of invasion on the part of heathens.

Then, when was war thought to be justified? It seems that the following three conditions were considered. (Sawada Kazuo, *Thomas Aquinas Study*, Nanso-sha)

The first is, as I noted above, the punishability of the opposing party, or the legitimacy to start war on the subject's side. War is not justified unless there is a strong enough and concrete reason. Secondly, all other measures except war must have been attempted, and no other solution to the problem exists. One should not easily start a war that leads to destruction and misery, and war must be the last resort. Thirdly, the objective or outcome of the war must balance with the sacrifices and cost. If the war should become a lengthy morass, it will only bring more misery even if there was a good legitimate reason and no other way out. A politically wise solution resulting in less evil should be sought.

These views seem to hold considerable validity. What kind of outcomes would result from applying these conditions to the two wars under the Bush administration – namely the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq?

The third point on the consequences and outcome of the wars is the most obvious. Even Afghanistan, proudly known for its tough resistance against foreign enemies by taking advantage of its rocky terrain, was helpless before the advanced military power of the U.S. troops. The result of the war against Iraq is clear no matter how long or short it lasts. During the Gulf War of 1991, Saddam Hussein's huge military power, built up using revenues from oil, did not stand a chance against the U.S.



Photo: THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

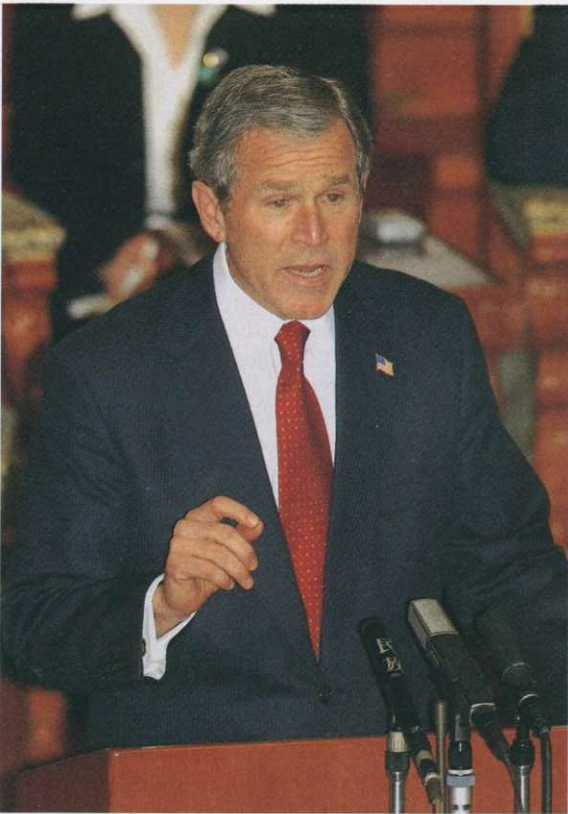


Photo: REUTERS • SUN



George W. Bush (left) decided to wage war against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein (right) without a second UN resolution

troops. The power difference between the U.S. and Iraqi troops is bigger today. While the Vietnam War became a long morass and ended in a complete collapse as mentioned above in the third factor, there is no such risk in the case of the war with Iraq.

If there were apprehensions, they would be Saddam's desperate and destructive tactics. It is not clear whether Iraq is capable of launching missiles against Israel, but his tactics could include putting domestic oil fields on fire; destroying dams; self-destructive and determined resistance using available weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons; using foreigners in Iraq and its own citizens as shields to allow U.S. troops to kill and wound them en masse; and making the United States and the international community pay for the unbearable cost of misery. Even though these will not affect the consequences of the war, will Saddam risk creating appalling pandemonium in order to kill as many Iraqi and U.S. soldiers to accompany him to the hell?

Concerning the second point on whether other measures have been attempted, in the case of Afghanistan,

there was no possibility that the Taliban regime harboring Osama bin Laden and others would respond. On the other hand, while Iraq's Saddam was accepting United Nation's (UN) inspections, he had repeatedly played games to retain his power of resistance. The Bush administration had good reason to point out that Iraq had not seriously accepted a thorough inspection, but we cannot rule out the possibility of disarmament of weapons of mass destruction through inspections carried out under heavy military siege. They were still at a point of examining whether all other measures had been tried.

The above first condition of punishability and legitimacy is after all the most important issue. The UN Charter recognizes, for one thing, war that exercises the right of self-defense, and for another, a collaborative war among UN member nations for "restraint and punishment" against acts of aggression. In recent years, with stronger emphasis on protecting human rights, there is a growing tendency to consider large-scale, serious violations of human rights, such as genocide, as a just cause for UN military intervention. This is exemplified in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) air strikes over Yugoslavia.

The Gulf War of 1991 was a war

based on a UN resolution in light of the apparent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Therefore, it was justifiable under current international standards. The war in Afghanistan was a retaliation or follow-up in response to the attacks on U.S. nerve centers by terrorist organizations. Although some legal ambiguities remain since one party was a non-state entity, it can be tolerated within the reasonability of human society.

On the contrary, legitimacy was not enough to start a war against Iraq. It is said that there is a risk of Iraq providing weapons of mass destruction to terrorist organizations in order to attack the United States. Of course, there is such a risk. However, to start a war against a foreign country because of concerns of what might happen in the uncertain future is an undesirable deviation. Ultimately, the only reason is the suspicion that Iraq has not followed its promise to abandon the weapons of mass destruction that it held at the end of the Gulf War, and continues to hide and even develop them. I myself also believe this to be conceivable. There is absolutely no doubt that Saddam is an overly ambitious, hideous dictator. However, while UN inspectors are working to uncover evidence, was there a reason to discontinue their work and start a war?

Military actions were urged due to seasonal conditions, and internal pressure was building up within the U.S.



Photo: REUTERS • SUN



The UN Security Council tried to solve the issue of Iraq through diplomatic means

government, but these are motives of the party concerned and do not justify war. Plausible explanations have been given such as, Bush jr. is trying to make up for his father's mismanagement, or the aim is to secure oil. However, should a nation start a war for such reasons? Is the true objective to overthrow Israel's enemy and guarantee security for Israel? Wouldn't that start a vicious circle or create adverse effects? Bush delivered a speech saying he wants to bring democracy to the Middle East by overthrowing Saddam. This does not seem to be the true motive he had at the beginning, but seems like a reasoning added in the process. If in fact this was his real intention, this is not the right solution, as in the case of killing heathens. Conversion should not be forced using swords.

What will the United States under the leadership of Bush gain by the current war under the situation of shaky legitimacy? Most likely, military victory on the one hand, and global resentment on the other.

The United States, with its overwhelming military superiority, falls into an illusion that it is almighty, and suffers an unexpected loss and falls from the height of its prosperity – this was the case in the Vietnam War. But it is different this time around. The present U.S. military superiority has reached a higher level, and there is no risk of the war developing into a morass. Rather, what is worrying is that, despite a victory, the United States is not able to win

international approval, and anti-American sentiment spreads. This would be a situation where the problem remains unresolved even after winning a victory, and the United States faces more troublesome opponents and has to resort to war again.

A good historical example of this situation is the battle between the Chinese Xiang Yu and Liu Bang. Xiang Yu was a military genius and won numerous battles. However, the rough-natured Xiang Yu was not fully trusted by his people, and the more he won, the more he was surrounded by enemies. Xiang Yu was defeated by Liu Bang who was awkward in battle but wise and sensible in politics, and knew how to win public confidence. The United States, with an overwhelming military power that is greater than those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> nations combined, is at risk of falling into the illusion that it is almighty and thus following in the steps of Xiang Yu. Maybe it is time to reflect on the words of Sun Tzu; "To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."

I do not intend to limit this argument to the historical facts of the Orient. Karl von Clausewitz in his *On War* mentions that contrary to the common perception, defense is a stronger form than offense. The defensive side not only has the advantages of using geographical and time-related resources.

He was also keen to point out the psychological aspects of legitimacy saying that the offensive side tends to be the violent one, but the defensive side is able to more easily attain national unity and win international approval while staying in one's own country. Clausewitz witnessed the mechanism in which Napoléon Bonaparte, who launched attacks to win a series of battles and achieved what seemed like a glorious victory, in fact found out that he had lost the hearts of his European people and failed as a result of the side effects of attack and victory itself. The historical events of Xiang Yu and Napoléon were later repeated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Adolf Hitler and in militaristic prewar Japan.

It was the United Kingdom and the United States which took defensive positions to urge the fall of Napoléon, Hitler and militaristic Japan, but it seems like an irony of history that these countries have now started a offensive war without full legitimacy. A consolation for the United States seems to be that the target of the attack, Saddam, is a true villain. I hope that this will help the United States to avoid becoming too deeply involved and get through this war-obsessed season.

I am sure that the United States is capable of doing this. During World War II, the United States not only took advantage of the defensive side, but also made a great effort to establish the free trade system and the foundations of the UN. It offered the world a free market system and provided hope for peace during the tough post-war period. I would like to hope that Japan will urge its ally, the United States, to revisit those days again so that the two countries can join efforts to start creating a free and fair world for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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