

Some Friendly Advice for America

By Matsuyama Yukio

I was dispatched as a correspondent to Washington some 30 years ago, just after the inauguration of President John Kennedy, and U.S. diplomacy has been a constant matter of interest for me ever since. Looking back, I think the world should be truly grateful that the country with the strongest military force in history had no imperialistic ambitions but was a well-meaning democratic state that always took domestic and international public opinion into consideration. In this sense, I am basically a sympathizer and supporter of the manner in which the U.S. conducts relations with other nations. Like the foreign policies of other countries, however, American diplomacy is not without its blemishes and weak points. As an old friend of Uncle Sam's, therefore, I would like to offer the following constructive advice.

Double standards

First, Americans are much too rash in their efforts to realize justice. Of course, the battle to defeat evil and bring about justice both at home and abroad deserves praise in itself. The problem is that there is often no single justice; rather, there are as many justices as there are countries and races. Justice as seen by the White House or the U.N. Security Council cannot necessarily be considered absolute. One of the first lessons I learned after arriving in the United States was that a person's skin color, religion, or outlook on life did not matter and that we should be as magnanimous toward others as possible. On this point, I was very strongly moved by the depth of the American soul.

However, America strives very hard and over-hastily to push its values onto other countries, especially developing



The U.S. continues to pursue the role of number one despite the end of the Cold War and continued domestic economic instability.

nations (although I also believe that American values are more universal than those of other countries). Recently U.N. forces (led by American troops) turned to military force in order to attain justice in Somalia, but quite a large number of ordinary folk were caught in the crossfire. As far as the deceased are concerned, it is the same cruel, regrettable thing whether you are killed by terrorists or by U.N. troops. Did not America pull out of the Vietnam War because it realized that pushing justice by force had its limits? We should never forget that America's drive—one unreasonable effort after another—to prevent the spread of communism across the whole of Vietnam had a tragic ending. The world always has its injustices. For the Japanese, the illegal occupation of the so-called Northern Territories by the Soviet Union (now Russia) for nearly half a century represents a gross injustice

indeed.

Second, American diplomacy tends to be opportunistic. Since the Gulf War, America has looked upon President Saddam Hussein of Iraq as a monster, but which country is it that has bullied Iraq into becoming a military power? Even former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Eagleton admitted that America's policy toward Iraq was a failure. Viewed from the standpoint of a third country, America seems to have been displaying plain showmanship. This opportunism has been particularly evident in America's policy toward Asia. Supporting any regime that joined the battle against communism, however corrupt it might have been, America provided assistance to such despots as Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.

In Japan, America supported Kishi Nobusuke, a member of the wartime

cabinet of Prime Minister Tojo Hideki, because it thought that Kishi would contribute most to U.S. interests in the Far East. In Germany, however, America showed dislike to the bitter end toward anyone who had been connected with the Hitler regime. I remember when a former-West German foreign minister visited the National Press Club in Washington D.C., he had to face a barrage of questions about his relationship with the Nazis during the war. When then-Prime Minister Kishi held a press conference at the same place a little earlier, however, nobody sought to question his past at all.

The same can be said about America's attitude toward the United Nations. Recently Washington has begun to stress the importance of the United Nations' role, but in the past it treated the organization with scorn. When I was in charge of our bureau in New York, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations was George Bush, who looked on the organization disdainfully as a playground and vent hole for developing countries.

The administrations of both President Ronald Reagan and President Bush bullied the United Nations in a manner that was quite unbecoming to a major power. They failed to make contributory payment, pulled out of the International Labor Organization, and refused to cooperate with U.N. educational, scientific, or cultural organizations. At the time of the Gulf War, the United States exerted strong pressure on Japan to respect the U.N. Security Council's resolution on sanctions against Iraq, yet surely this represents a biased approach unless Washington also takes a sterner attitude toward Israel over the Security Council's famous Resolution 242.

Third, America's diplomacy is far too self-centered and egoistical. Of course, it is only natural for all countries to adopt self-centered policies, but this egoism of a great power stands out conspicuously in Washington's case. During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis the United States responded to the Soviet Union's persistent claim that it had not placed any missiles in Cuba by releasing material evidence in the form

of aerial photographs taken from a U-2 plane. Emotionally, I fully supported President Kennedy's hard-line approach, but I could not help wondering why the U. S. had the right to freely violate Cuban airspace even though the two countries were not at war. Just imagine the uproar that would occur if the reverse had happened and Cuban reconnaissance planes were to break into U.S. territory to take snap shots.

Meeting of many worlds

Although former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has been self-critical, saying that the United States was too egoistic in Grenada and Panama, U.S. presidents in general have tended to look on Latin America as the United States' backyard and to behave as if U.S. sovereignty extends to the region.

A similar thing can be said for Asia. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon put pressure on Japan to cooperate in containing China, but suddenly Washington announced, without bothering to inform Japan beforehand, that President Nixon would visit China. Such behavior violates the joint communique between Japan and the United States, which stipulates that either party should consult the other beforehand in the case of any important change of policy regarding Asia. As a result, the Japanese government, which had remained loyal to Washington, suffered a complete loss of face.

A number of years ago, the U.S. commander of the Pacific Fleet visited the director general of Japan's Defense Agency and offered praise for a fine defense budget. His statement greatly angered one Japanese diplomat, a pro-American, who pointed out indignantly that the Americans no longer occupied Japan. If a Japanese foreign or finance minister were to visit one of the developing country that depend entirely on assistance from Japan and praised the country's latest budget as a fine one, it probably would create an uproar and trigger a wave of nationalism in that country.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige once remarked that

Japanese culture would have to be changed if friction between Japan and the United States were to be eliminated. I felt obliged to counter this argument by saying that the economic friction will not be removed without changes in the attitudes of American business managers and the work ethics of American people.

Six months after I began working as a correspondent in Washington, my wife and baby joined me. Going to meet them at the airport, I cuddled my baby but refrained from kissing my wife. Thereupon several American friends commented that the Japanese were very strange indeed; if you love each other, they said, you should kiss. I explained that the Japanese do not kiss in public, to which they replied that this was wrong. Thirty or so years on, these American friends have all divorced, while I continue to enjoy a stable relationship with my wife. Expressions of affection cannot be absolute, either.

At present the United States is suffering from serious fiscal problems—or so people say. Actually the deficit could be wiped away in a jiffy if only America would place a higher tax on gasoline, which is about one-fourth as cheap as in Japan, and sell Alaskan oil to Japan. But it is unable to take these steps. Symbolic of this selfishness is the attitude of most Americans that it is only natural for foreigners to be able to speak English. Whenever I run into some linguistic difficulty during a discussion in English, I always make the comment, "In Japan we call people who speak two languages bilingual, people who speak three languages trilingual, and people who speak one language American."

Fourth, American diplomacy demonstrates that the strong do not understand the mentality of the weak. When I was stationed in Washington, a riot occurred in Panama following a broken promise by the U.S. Army to fly both the Panamanian and American flags together; instead they hoisted only the Stars and Stripes. When I visited the scene, I saw clearly that the disturbance represented an outburst of pent-up frustrations. The headquarters of the U.S. mili-



The feeling of intoxication which swept the U.S. following the Gulf War climaxed with the victory parades in June 1991.

tary in Panama is more luxurious than the Panamanian presidential residence. The U.S. Army base has seven golf courses while the city of Panama has only one. The quality of water in Panama is so bad that people have to buy water from the American zone. Of course, the privileges of the U.S. Army, which safeguards the Panama Canal Treaty, are quite legal. But nevertheless the Panamanian people see the Americans as invading their territory and controlling their right to pursue their own happiness.

In Japan also, the U.S. military bases near Tokyo are surrounded by small, matchbox dwellings which have to put up with some awful noise pollution. Members of the U.S. Congress and top officials of the Pentagon do not understand these Japanese worries, because when they think of U.S. military bases, they imagine bases in the vast deserts of Texas or California, where people do not live. With the sole exception of 1812, when the White House was

burned down by British troops, the Americans have not experienced occupation by a foreign army, so they do not appreciate how unpleasant it is to have a foreign military base in one's country, whatever the reason.

Following the Tiananmen Square incident, the United States has forcefully pressed China on the issue of human rights. From the point of view of the Chinese leaders, however, the biggest human right involves feeding a population of 1.2 billion. (In the past as many as 400 million people perished from starvation.) For this purpose, stability of the state and society are essential. The Tiananmen incident, in which the Chinese Army suppressed a mass movement for democracy, was captured on television and therefore angered the world.

Another very bloody incident which occurred in a remote part of China during the Cultural Revolution did not make it onto our television screens, however, so America said nothing.

Washington has saved its criticism only for Tiananmen. We also have to sympathize with the feelings of the Chinese, who wonder what on earth white people did for human rights in China during the Opium War and Boxer Rebellion and remember the sign at the entrance to a park in Shanghai prohibiting entry to "Dogs and Chinese."

Fifth, American diplomacy is controlled by too many lawyers or people with legalistic ideas. Such people always hurry to settle matters with only a short-term perspective. The negative factors that were left for international politics to deal with in the postwar period because of the rush to reach a compromise with the Soviet Union at Yalta is a case in point. In the end this hastiness can be said to have boosted Stalinism. Japan and Poland have suffered vexatious legacies in the form of territorial problems. Lawyers have a habit of adhering to "justice" and "vested interests." From the perspective of developing countries, however, justice,

vested interests and the status quo are sources of skepticism and dissatisfaction themselves. This can be immediately understood when one remembers how unreasonable it was for China to lose Hong Kong as a result of the Opium War.

Americans probably think it is only natural for the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States—to have certain privileges, but the Japanese, for example, see this as an inequality. Japan forked out \$13 million during the Gulf War, despite the fact that it was not a permanent member of the council that adopted the resolution on sanctions against Iraq. If the United States were placed in Japan's position, it probably would have pleaded "no taxation without representation" and not have given a cent.

Sixth, in comparison with Japanese envoys, who are nearly all career diplomats, many American ambassadors, and especially those in important posts, are political appointees. This factor certainly has its good points, but too many completely unqualified people are appointed as a reward for their assistance during presidential election campaigns. Ambassadors who know nothing about the country to which they are posted and who spend the entire time socializing instead of carrying out serious diplomatic activities do nothing but bring down America's image.

As soon as the Cold War ended and the threat of a nuclear war had been eliminated, nationalism flared up across the globe. In a sense, American diplomacy can be said to have become even more complex today than it was during the period of confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union. Militarily it is still the dominant power, but economically it must look toward cooperation from Japan and other countries. The need for America to become a diplomatically strong country, therefore, looks likely to increase.

Matsuyama Yukio, who served as a director and chief writer of the Asahi Shimbun until June 1993, specializes in issues such as diplomacy and politics.