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By Oda Takashi

Thursday, June 16, 2005 is a date that will be etched in memory as the day Japan's proposal for United Nations reform was dealt a fatal blow by the U.S. government.

The United States' proposal on reform of the U.N. Security Council released that day calls for expansion of membership from the current 15 to 19 or 20, by adding "two or so" permanent members to the current five--Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States--as well as two or three additional nonpermanent members.

The U.S. government reiterated its support for Japan's bid for permanent membership of the council, but the U.S. proposal is a huge embarrassment and trouble for Japan. That is because it will most likely drive a wedge between the so-called Group of Four--Japan, Brazil, Germany and India--and in the end will prevent Japan's entry into the club of permanent members.

In May, the G-4 disclosed its framework resolution calling for six new permanent and four new nonpermanent members, expanding membership of the council from 15 to 25.

Last November, the 16-member High-Level Panel advising U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan presented two options for expanding the U.N. Security Council. The G-4 resolution is based on the panel's proposal to expand the

council's membership to 24 by adding six permanent and three nonpermanent seats.

The U.S. proposal is much more restrictive than the G-4 proposal in terms of expanding council membership.

Perhaps what Washington expects most of the Security Council is to make it more effective as far as U.S. national interests are concerned. The United States intends to limit veto rights to the current five permanent members, even if membership is expanded. The United States appears unwilling to see the decision-making process of the council complicated as a result of more Asian or African countries winning permanent membership.

In fact, the dominant view in the U.S. Congress, among both Democrats and Republicans, is strongly against expanding the Security Council because doing so would most likely make the body less efficient.

The United States is also reluctant to grant a permanent seat to Germany, which opposed the Iraq war.

Washington included reform proposals beyond Security Council change, including the creation of a Peace Building Commission to shoulder post-conflict reconstruction works and replacing the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller Human Rights Council.

The additional proposals are seen as an attempt to prevent all focus being on Security Council reforms.

The U.S. proposal calls for a "criteria-based

approach" in choosing new Security Council members based on factors such as economic size, population, military capacity, commitment to democracy and human rights, financial contribution to the United Nations, contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations and record on counterterrorism and nonproliferation.

The U.S. proposal, it seems, is most unlikely to attract a flood of support from Asian and African countries.

The real intention of the United States appears to be to shelve Security Council expansion for a very long time.

Japan is finding itself in a very difficult position after being used as a tool of the United States.

The G-4, planning to submit the framework resolution in June or July, has prepared the draft that includes a compromise with the United States and other permanent members, such as freezing the use of veto rights by new permanent members for 15 years from the moment the present U.N. Charter is revised until it comes up for review. To no avail, Japan has led efforts to persuade the United States to at least not block the G-4 plan.

The G-4 plan may also meet growing opposition in each region from such countries as Argentina, China, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan and South Korea because they received a boost from the U.S. proposal.

China, especially, likely will work hard to maintain its status as Asia's only permanent member of the Security Council.

How should Japan deal with the U.S. proposal and how should it reconstruct its strategy toward September's U.N. General Assembly session, where the main reform battle will be fought.

"Japan can't buy this [U.S.] proposal. We'll stick to cooperation among the G-4 and the four countries must stand together. We'll continue

to seek [the United States'] understanding," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told reporters Friday at the Prime Minister's Office.

Support from two-thirds of the 191 U.N. member countries, or 128 votes, is necessary for the resolution to be adopted. The G-4 countries have already worked closely to expand support and it is largely thanks to the G-4's unity that Security Council reform has become at least as plausible as it is now. It is therefore extremely difficult for Japan to change the course for the time being.

And even if the G-4 resolution is adopted by the General Assembly, a new U.N. Charter that incorporates the names of the new permanent member countries will not take effect unless it is ratified by at least 128 countries--including five permanent Security Council members. Gaining understanding from the United States for the G-4 plan is not likely to be easy because of the wide gulf between the United States and G-4 proposals.

The G-4 resolution's failure to be adopted will mean not only a setback for Japanese diplomacy, but a traumatic experience for Japan if its bid for permanent membership is blocked by the proposal of the United States, Japan's most important ally.

Japan, as far as financial contributions to the United Nations is concerned, is paying more than the total of all P-5 countries except the United States. But it seems as though the P-5 group is only teasing a hen--Japan--letting it warm an unfertilized egg in vain and the egg is called a permanent membership of the Security Council. How long will this have to go on?

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