

Movements of the Japanese Red Army and the "Yodo-go" Group

I. Movements of the Japanese Red Army

1. History of Their Activities

The Japanese Red Army (JRA) is an international terrorist organization that was established by a faction of an extremist group who committed felonious crimes, such as attacks on police stations, bank raids, and the like in Japan with the objective of revolutionizing the country based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, and to ultimately unify the world under communism. It was formed abroad after the members fled from Japan in search of a base for their revolutionary activities while advocating the "Plan to Construct International Bases."

Through contact with the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine" , which was committing frequent terrorist attacks at the time, Fusako Shigenobu and other leading members of the JRA established their activity base in the Middle East. In May 1972, three of its members randomly fired automatic rifles at the Tel Aviv Lod Airport in Israel (now Ben Gurion International Airport), killing 24 people and leaving 76 others with serious or minor injuries. Since this incident, which is known as the "Tel Aviv Lod Airport Massacre," JRA members have committed a series of atrocious crimes around the world, such as seizing foreign embassies and highjacking aircraft. Among these incidents in particular, the Government of Japan was forced to release the JRA members imprisoned or detained on the occasion of the "Kuala Lumpur Incident" in August 1975, an incident in which the US Embassy and other facilities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia were occupied by their members, as well as the "Dacca Incident" in September 1977 in which a Japan Airlines aircraft leaving Paris for Tokyo was highjacked.

2. A String of the Members Arrested

The police made a string of arrests of the JRA members in Romania, Peru, Bolivia, and other countries by enhancing the coordination among the law enforcement and intelligence agencies of the relevant countries in pursuing the members across the world. Furthermore, five JRA members who were hiding in Lebanon, which has long been their activity base, were arrested in February 1997. Aside from Kozo Okamoto, who was granted political asylum in Lebanon, the remaining four members were sentenced to deportation in March 2000, and the police arrested and imprisoned the four on their return to Japan.



Arrest and imprisonment of four JRA members (March 2000) (Photo: Kyodo Press)

3. The Arrest of Top Executive Fusako Shigenobu and the Declaration to Dissolve the Japanese Red Army

The JRA positioned the Asian region, which is both geographically and culturally closer to Japan, as a new strategic base to consolidate its domestic organization and as an international battle front after having lost their former activity base of Lebanon. Amidst this situation, in November 2000 the police arrested Fusako Shigenobu, the top executive of the JRA, who was taking cover in Osaka.

Fusako Shigenobu proclaimed the disbanding of the JRA from behind bars in April 2001. The JRA confirmed this in the "May 30 Declaration (a statement that the JRA issues every year around May 30 in commemoration of the 'Tel Aviv Lod Airport Massacre')" issued in May of the same year.

However, it still gives high praise to the "Tel Aviv Lod Airport Massacre" in this declaration. Furthermore, the members established a new organization "Rentai" (later renamed to "Movement "Rentai'") in December of the same year, and it has started its operations and activities as a virtual successor organization to the JRA.

4. Police Measures

With the arrest of Fusako Shigenobu, the JRA is now placing the restructuring of its organization and the construction of new activity bases as its top priorities. Therefore, the prospect of its members to resume terrorist activities is low at this point relatively speaking. Nevertheless, its nature as a terrorist organization is unchanged, and therefore the danger remains. The police are engaging in efforts for the early discovery and arrest of the seven JRA fugitives, as well as striving to contain their activities.



The JRA members currently placed on the international wanted list by Japan

II. Movements of the "Yodo-go" Group

1. The Hijacking of the "Yodo-go" and the Movements of the "Yodo-go" Group

The hijacking of the "Yodo-go" took place on March 31, 1970, when nine members of "KYOSANDO SEKIGUN-HA," or the Red Army Faction of the Communist League, armed with Japanese swords, steel pipes, and bombs hijacked Japan Airlines Flight 351 from Tokyo to Fukuoka, commonly known as the "Yodo-go." They took a total of 129 hostages, including 122 passengers and seven crew members, and demanded that the plane be taken to North Korea. After releasing some of the hostages at Fukuoka Airport and some at South Korea's Kimp'o Airport, the plane eventually landed in Mirim Airport in North Korea on April 3 where the hijackers surrendered themselves to the North Korean authority.

The police placed these "Yodo-go" hijackers on the international wanted list through Interpol, and in May 1988 arrested one of them who had been hiding in Japan using an illegally-obtained passport. Furthermore, Yoshimi Tanaka was arrested by Thai authorities and turned over to the custody of the Japanese police in March 2000. In addition, the deaths of two other hijackers in North Korea, including the leader, Takamaro Tamiya, have already been confirmed. Therefore, it is assumed that the following five are currently residing in North Korea:

Takahiro Konishi, Shiro Akagi, Kimihiro Uomoto (former surname: Abe), Moriaki Wakabayashi, and Takeshi Okamoto. (One of them is said to be dead, but this has not been confirmed.)



Hostages leaving the Japan Airline "Yodo-go" at the Fukuoka Airport (March 1970) (Photo: Kyodo Press)

At the same time, there were six suspicious Japanese women who had been in contact with North Korean agents in Europe throughout the 1980s. To restrict their activities overseas in the interest of preventing terrorism, MOFA ordered them to turn in their passports in August 1988.



"Yodo-go" hijackers being interviewed by the media in Pyongyang (From left to right: Kimihiro Uomoto, Takahiro Konishi, Shiro Akagi, Moriaki Wakabayashi) (September 2004) (Photo: Kyodo Press)

It was found in 1992 that all of these women were wives (one of them was the ex-wife) of the "Yodo-go" hijackers. The police have placed the five women who disobeyed the order to return their passports, excluding the ex-wife, on the international wanted list for suspected violation of the Passport Law.

The "Yodo-go" group continues to actively assert its position through organizational publications, the Internet, and other media from North Korea, based on its close relationship with the North Korean authority. It has made the return of every member to Japan its priority.

The "Yodo-go" hijackers have been making an appeal through organizational publications for an agreement to allow the early return of all of them to Japan, and there is a movement toward this end. In June 2004, they sent a letter to the North Korean authority requesting assistance for their return to Japan. In response, the authority reiterated their position that they would not oppose their return to Japan.

Regarding the wives of the "Yodo-go" hijackers and other group members, by 2003 three have returned to Japan and have been arrested. Tamiko Uomoto, who had been placed on the international wanted list for suspected Passport Law violations as well as forgery and use of signed or sealed private documents (as she allegedly opened a bank account using a false name), was arrested in February 2004 upon her return to Japan. In October of the same year, Kyoko Tanaka, who had been on the international wanted list for Passport Law violation, was also arrested upon her return. Regarding their children, seventeen have returned to Japan so far.

2. Involvement in the Suspected Cases of Abduction of Japanese Nationals in Europe

In March 2002, the ex-wife of the "Yodo-go" hijacker testified that she had been given orders by their leader, Takamaro Tamiya, who had been instructed by then President Kim Il-Sung of North Korea, to "realize a revolution passed down through the generations." She said she had approached and deceived Keiko Arimoto, who was studying in London in 1983, and brought her to Kim Yu-Chol of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), and Kimihiro Uomoto in Copenhagen, Denmark who was taken to North Korea. As a result of comprehensively examining this testimony and other findings collected thus far, the police have concluded that the "Yodo-go" group was deeply involved in the abduction of Japanese nationals under the direction of the KWP, with the aim of implementing a Japanese revolution based on Kim Il-Sung's doctrine.

The police obtained an arrest warrant for Kimihiro Uomoto in September 2002 and have placed him on the international wanted list for the suspected kidnapping of Keiko Arimoto for the purpose of marriage.



"Yodo-go" hijackers currently placed on the international wanted list by Japan