

JAPANESE SECURITY AND PEACE REGIME ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

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The sharp rise of North Korea's threat to Japan's security in recent years has prompted Japan to play a more active role in the uncertain peace-building effort on the Korean peninsula. Indeed, Tokyo has adopted a multifaceted security policy toward the management of problems associated with a divided Korea. On the one hand, it has committed itself as a major underwriter of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and is a supporter of the Four-Party Peace Talks and other multilateral confidence and security building efforts in the region. On the other hand, Tokyo has also strengthened its long-standing bilateral military ties with Washington, sought ways to cooperate with Seoul on security matters, and unilaterally instituted measures to beef up its defense capabilities. In fact, Japan's trilateral cooperation with the United States and South Korea on diplomatic as well as military measures has limited North Korea's ability to exploit the inevitable differences in national priorities among the three democratic countries. The continuation and deepening of this cooperation should help in convincing Pyongyang that it needs to moderate its confrontational behavior. This should in turn increase the prospect of establishing a stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

Japan has vital security interests at stake in Korea, and it would be to Japan's advantage to see the establishment of a stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula. In fact, Japan in recent years has played an active role in the uncertain peace-building effort between North Korea on the one side and South Korea and the United States on the other.

Japan has committed itself as a key financial sponsor of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and is a supporter of the Four-Party Peace Talks and other multilateral confidence and security building efforts in the region. However, Japan has hedged these more optimistic bets by strengthening its long-standing bilateral military alliance with the United States, seeking ways to cooperate with South Korea on security matters, and unilaterally beefing up its own defense capabilities in case that things go very wrong on the Korean peninsula.

On the whole, this multifaceted Japanese security policy has had a positive impact on the maintenance of regional stability in Northeast Asia and the ongoing effort to build a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula. In particular, Japan's trilateral cooperation with the United States and South Korea on diplomatic as well as military measures has limited North Korea's ability to exploit the inevitable differences in national priorities among the three democratic countries. The continuation and deepening of this cooperation should prompt North Korea to make a realistic appraisal of its strategic options and moderate its belligerent behavior. This in turn should increase the prospect of creating a stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

I. The Problem of Divided Korea

Japan's active participation in the security affairs of the Korean peninsula is a post-Cold War phenomenon. Of course, during the Cold War, Japan stood with the United States and South Korea against com-

munist “expansionism” in Asia. However, Japan could, and did, take a more aloof stance toward Korea during this period given the fundamental intra-Korean nature of the conflict on the peninsula, the strong commitment of the United States to regional defense, and the simple fact that North Korea lacked the capability to directly harm Japan.

Unfortunately for Japan, the end of the Cold War only increased the security dilemma arising from the division of Korea. Namely, North Korea did not go the way of East Germany in Europe. In fact, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the entrance of China into the capitalist market system dramatically heightened the danger North Korea posed to Japan.

North Korea’s security was severely undermined by the demise of the Soviet Union. To make matters worse, Moscow and Beijing normalized their relations with Seoul in 1990 and 1992, respectively, to forge closer commercial links with the dynamic economy of South Korea. In the zero-sum contest between Pyongyang and Seoul, the end of the Cold War was a severe blow to North Korea. In order to cope with the changed strategic situation, North Korea forged ahead in the early 1990s with its nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs, acquiring the ability to directly threaten Japanese security.

There was an initial period of moderating behavior when Pyongyang was absorbing the shock of the loss of Soviet patronage and Japan reached out to North Korea following the lead of South Korea and the United States.¹ However, since then, North Korea has engaged in brinkmanship diplomacy aided by its nuclear weapons and missile development programs.

Arguably, Japan has been the country most troubled by the sharp

1 In the early 1990s, the United States reached out to North Korea in tandem with South Korea’s moderating inter-Korea policy. This resulted in North and South Korea signing the October 1991 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the February 1992 Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression and Exchange and Cooperation.

increase in North Korea's militancy in the post-Cold War period. South Korea and the United States have long dealt with misbehaving North Korea.² Indeed, the South Koreans have lived for decades under the constant threat of North Korean invasion and conventional artillery while the Americans do not fear, at least for now, North Korea's limited nuclear weapons and long-range missiles programs that remain untested and of questionable deterrent value against the United States.³

Tokyo's anxiety about Pyongyang reached a peak with the nuclear crisis of 1994. Two years earlier, the suspicion of North Korea's nuclear weapons development prompted the United States and the United Nations to begin tense and tortuous negotiations with North Korea. They demanded that North Korea accept special inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to assure the world that Pyongyang was not weaponizing its nuclear program. However, North Korea rejected a special inspection requested by the IAEA in February 1993 and declared that it would leave the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) regime in March 1993. The tension heightened by these North Korean actions was increased to a crisis level in April 1994 when North Korea removed spent fuel rods from its nuclear reactor in Yongbyon and refused to segregate rods that could provide evidence of a weapons program.⁴

The crisis was defused by former President Jimmy Carter's June 1994 visit to Pyongyang. Carter's meeting with Kim Il-Sung paved the

2 For example, in the past, North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo*, attacked the South Korean presidential mansion, shot down U.S. aircraft, instigated incidents in the DMZ, engaged in terrorist actions, etc.

3 Assessments by the CIA, the DIA, and NSA, and the Energy Department suggest that Pyongyang may have produced some crude nuclear weapons by reprocessing plutonium taken from the Yongbyon reactor during a 100 day period in 1989 when it was shut down. *New York Times*, 26 December 1993, p. 1 and p. 8.

4 For a comprehensive discussion of the North Korean nuclear issue, see Young Whan Kihl and Peter Hayes, eds. *Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: The Nuclear Issue and the Korean Peninsula* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

way for the signing of the Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea in October 1994. In the Agreed Framework, North Korea pledged to freeze its nuclear program under IAEA supervision. More specifically, Pyongyang agreed to stop the operation of its graphite reactors (with a high weaponization potential) in exchange for the provision of light-water ones (with a low weaponization potential).

The overall handling of the crisis was left to the United States, but Japan played an important supporting role in the nuclear diplomacy.⁵ Japan pledged cooperation with the United States and South Korea in operationalizing the Agreed Framework through a multilateral body called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO).⁶ Although South Korea took the primary responsibility for supplying North Korea with two light-water reactors, Japan agreed to make a significant financial contribution to the procurement of the reactors while the United States agreed to provide Pyongyang with fuel oil until the completion of the new reactors.

In addition to the nuclear threat, Japan also had to deal with the emergence of the North Korean long-range missile threat in the post-Cold War period. In May 1993, North Korea test-launched a missile, what is believed to be Nodong-1, into the Sea of Japan (called the East Sea by the Koreans). This test signaled to the alarmed Japanese that North Korea now possessed the missile capacity to attack cities in the southern half of Japan including Osaka, the nation's second largest city.

Even more upsetting to the Japanese was North Korea's launching of a rocket, Taepodong-1, in late August 1998. The missile entered the

5 Lead author's interviews with Japanese foreign ministry officials. Tokyo, fall of 1997.

6 Their cooperation led to the successful launching of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) in March 1995. The KEDO and North Korea concluded an agreement on the provision of two light-water nuclear power plants on the conditions that North Korea suspend its nuclear development program, remain a signatory to the NPT and observe its agreement with the IAEA. In this arrangement, South Korea and Japan committed themselves to shoulder between them most of the cost for the construction of the light-water nuclear power plants.

stratosphere in Japanese airspace and had a psychological impact on the Japanese equivalent to the Sputnik shock on the Americans in 1957. This event heightened their sense of vulnerability now that all Japanese cities, including Tokyo, fell within the reach of North Korean missiles possibly armed with weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

At about the same time, the United States acknowledged the intelligence that North Korea might be violating the terms of the Agreed Framework by constructing new underground facilities for nuclear weapons development near Kumchang-ni. This revelation alarmed the Japanese. Their irritation toward North Korea was aggravated when two North Korean spy ships were discovered in Japanese territorial waters in March 1999, an incident that led Japan Maritime Defense Force (JMSDF) escort ships to fire their guns in anger for the first time since the end of World War II.

All of Japan was on edge when North Korea appeared to be readying another test of its long-range missile in the summer of 1999. The newly instituted "Perry Process" (discussed below) and the beginning of the U.S.-North Korea bilateral missile talks in Berlin in the fall of 1999 gave much comfort to the Japanese as they seemed to be working in moderating North Korea's bellicose behavior. However, what is obvious is that, in the post-Cold War era, Japan has come to see North Korea as a clear and present danger and the establishment of a stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula as a national priority.

II. Coping with North Korea

In dealing with North Korea, Japan has employed methods ranging from diplomacy to bursts of naval gunfire. At the one end of the spectrum, it has supported various multilateral efforts to build a peace regime on the Korean peninsula, and at the other end it has expanded its military options given North Korea's provocative actions. To be

sure, this “full-set” approach to the North Korean problem has not been always in step with the security policies of the United States and South Korea. As it matures and becomes coordinated with the policies of the United States and South Korea, however, it should increase the prospect of a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula.

Multilateral Diplomacy

Japan has been a strong supporter of multilateral peace-building efforts on the Korean peninsula. These efforts include two Korean peninsula-specific measures, the participation in the KEDO and the support of the Four-Party Peace Talks, and one East Asia region-wide initiative, the encouragement of North Korean involvement in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In its multilateral diplomacy, however, Japan has been more often a follower or a supporter rather than a leader or an initiator. There are good reasons for this.

Because of its own self-imposed limit on military power, Japan has relied on the security protection extended by the United States. The dependence has resulted in Japan’s security policy being shaped mostly by that of the United States. This is particularly true of Japan’s policy toward the Korean peninsula.

Until the establishment of the KEDO in March 1995, the United States has shunned multilateral peace-building efforts on the Korean peninsula. During the Cold War, almost all initiatives of this type came from the Soviet Union, attempting to drive a wedge between the United States and its East Asian allies.⁷ The U.S. attitude toward multilateralism did not change much after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even today, Washington tends to view military readiness and deterrence as the key to peace and stability in Northeast Asia. It sees multilateralism as at best a distraction and at worst a threat to the San Francisco system

7 See David Youtz and Paul Midford, *A Northeast Asian Security Regime: Prospects After the Cold War* (Public Policy Paper 5) (New York: Institute for EastWest Studies, 1992).

of bilateral security alliances linking the United States to its Pacific rim allies.

The KEDO, however, is an exception to the rule necessitated by the U.S. need for a huge sum of money to finance the mission of the organization. Although an American heads the KEDO, Japan plays a prominent role in the organization that includes South Korea as well as European members. When the United States requested that Japan become a member of the organization and provide funds, Japan readily agreed since its national security was at stake.⁸ From the beginning, Japan took responsibility for a large portion of the money needed for providing North Korea with “safe” nuclear reactors, and, on 31 January 2000, Japan signed a formal agreement with the KEDO to provide about one billion dollars to fulfill its commitment.⁹

Japan’s policy toward the Korean peninsula has also been limited by the fact that, until the South Korea-U.S. Joint Announcement of the Four-Party Peace Talks proposal of 1996, South Korea held to the line that matters having to do with a new peace system on the Korean peninsula must be resolved through inter-Korean dialogue.¹⁰ The South Korean people’s sensitivity to what may be perceived as a Japanese interference in what they consider inter-Korean affairs is very high, and Japan has been careful not to offend South Korean sensibilities.¹¹

In fact, Japan has been shut out of the formal workings of the Four-Party Peace Talks process, and this has been a source of some unhappi-

8 Hang Nack Kim, “Japan’s Policy Toward the Two Koreas in the Post-Cold War Era,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 1, No 1 (Spring 1997), p. 143.

9 This figure represents the second largest contribution to the KEDO after that of South Korea. Of the estimated \$4.6 billion cost, Seoul pledged to provide \$3.22 billion, or 70 percent of the total, while Tokyo has committed \$1 billion, or 116.5 billion yen.

10 C. S. Eliot Kang, “The Four-Party Peace Talks: Lost Without a Map,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (October/December 1998), pp. 327-344.

11 Lead author’s interviews with Japanese foreign ministry officials, Tokyo, Japan, Spring 1998.

ness in Tokyo.¹² However, Japan has consistently supported the process. As the talks have become bogged down and North Korea has maneuvered successfully to make the process more bilateral (between itself and the United States), Tokyo no doubt feels less marginalized. Nonetheless, with South Korea's tacit approval, Japan has recently proposed a six-party security forum consisting of the two Koreas, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States.¹³ Also, Japan has been persistent in its effort to persuade North Korea to join the ARF, a multilateral security organization that Tokyo played a leading role in creating.¹⁴ What is clear is that, to the extent possible, Japan wants an official channel of communication with North Korea and to be involved in formal discussions with other concerned parties to promote peace and security on the Korean peninsula.

Trilateral Coordination

Japan has played an important but peripheral role in the multilateral peace-building efforts on the Korean peninsula, but it is a key principal in the "Perry Process." In fact, in important ways, the Four-Party Talks initiative toward North Korea has been supplanted by the Perry Process that combines the engagement (cum counter-proliferation)

12 Lead author's interviews with Japanese foreign ministry officials, Tokyo, Japan, Summer 1997.

13 More on multilateral regimes pertaining to the Korean peninsula, see Tae-Am Ohm, "Toward a New Phase of Multilateral Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Limited Multilateralism or Issue-Based Regionalism," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Winter 1997), pp. 137-164.

14 It is interesting to note that the original Japanese proposal of the ARF to ASEAN countries in July 1991 was made "despite American reservations about creating new security organizations." Mike Mochizuki sees Japan's promotion of multilateral security institutions as a hedge against a substantial withdrawal of US forces from East Asia. See Mike M. Mochizuki, "Japan as an Asia-Pacific Power," in Robert S. Ross, ed. *East Asia in Transition: Toward a New Regional Order* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 152-153

approach of the United States with South Korea's new "Sunshine Policy" and Japan's more wary and tough stance toward North Korea. The ultimate aim of the process, however, is the same as the goal of the Four-Party Peace Talks, the creation of a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

The Perry Process is a product of U.S. congressional discontent with the Clinton administration's handling of North Korea. Having doubts about the Agreed Framework and the efficacy of the KEDO and the Four-Party Peace Talks, Congress became even more skeptical with the August 1998 launch of the Taepodong-1 missile. It was also troubled by the Kumchang-ni affair in which the Clinton administration essentially exchanged a large food-aid shipment for the right to inspect a suspicious underground complex in Kumchang-ni that turned out to be no more than a hole in the ground.

With mounting domestic criticism, President Clinton named William S. Perry (a former Secretary of Defense respected by the congressional Republicans) as the U.S. North Korea Policy Coordinator in November 1998. Perry, with congressional consent, was charged with a full and complete review of U.S. policy toward North Korea and with producing a policy report by May 1999.

The Perry Report, issued only in September 1999, concluded that the United States should intensify its engagement with North Korea. The report recommended that the United States establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. It advocated, as a short-term measure, that the United States lift some economic sanctions in exchange for North Korea's suspension of its missile testing. It recommended that the mid-term goal of the United States should be getting the North Koreans to agree to cease engaging in nuclear and missile development. The ultimate goal, it stated, was the dismantling of the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula.

A key element of the peace-building process associated with the Perry Process is the trilateral coordination of the respective North

Korea policy of Japan, the United States, and South Korea. Of course, the United States and South Korea already had well-established channels of communication (ranging from the Combined Forces Command to the Four-Party Peace Talks process) to coordinate their North Korea policies. Japan, however, was not very well integrated into the network as it does not have a formal alliance relationship with South Korea and is a newcomer to managing the North Korean threat.

Indeed, before being integrated into the KEDO and, in particular, the Perry Process, Japan dealt with North Korea on its own if it had to deal with North Korea at all. The Perry Process brought Tokyo into a close trilateral coordination with Washington and Seoul in dealing with Pyongyang. This was all for the good because Japan acting alone had complicated the United States and South Korea's engagement strategy toward North Korea.

For example, when North Korea test-fired the Taepodong-1 over Japan in late August 1998, Japan reacted viscerally. On 1 September 1998, the Japanese government announced its decision to halt its KEDO involvement, suspend its normalization talks with North Korea, and freeze its food and other support to North Korea.¹⁵ Tokyo also threatened to impose additional unilateral sanctions on Pyongyang if the North Koreans tested another missile over the Japanese territory.

Neither the United States nor South Korea was very pleased by these Japanese actions. The policymakers in Washington and Seoul were particularly alarmed by Japan's threat to pull out of the KEDO project, which would have undermined the engagement policy of the

15 The Japanese government also announced its decision to consider measures to increase Japan's own information-gathering capacity, such as promotion of surveys on the use of visual image satellites, continue research on ballistic missile defense, and promote the early approval of bills related to the New Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation. And, on 2 September 1998, the government revoked its permission to North Korea's Air Koryo for nine chartered flights between Pyongyang and Nagoya and decided not to permit any further chartered flights. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Blue Book 1998*.

Clinton administration and the Sunshine Policy of the Kim Dae Jung administration. In fact, as a result of strong pressure from the United States and South Korea, Japan withdrew the suspension of its commitment to the KEDO on 21 October 1998.

The Perry Process, fortunately, has narrowed the policy gap among Japan, the United States and South Korea. It institutionalized trilateral policy coordination and led to the establishment of Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) in April 1999. This solidarity was clearly evident in their coordinated response to North Korea's plan to launch a Taepodong-2, which was expected on or around 9 September 1999, the 51st anniversary of the North Korean communist government. Since the preparation for the launch was detected in mid June and North Korea confirmed the plan in early July, the three countries deepened their coordination and issued strong warnings against another missile launch.¹⁶ The trilateral coordination culminated in the summit meeting of Prime Minister Obuchi, President Clinton, and President Kim on the occasion of the APEC meeting on 12 September of 1999, where they reiterated their determination to penalize North Korea if it proceeded with the planned missile launch.

This unity greatly facilitated the Berlin agreement on 13 September 1999 in which North Korea agreed to halt testing of long-range ballistic missiles in exchange for a commitment from the United States and Japan to move forward with economic assistance for the Pyongyang regime.¹⁷ After the agreement, Japan lifted the sanctions it had imposed on North Korea after the August 1998 missile launch.¹⁸ Indeed,

16 Japan warned North Korea on 5 August 1999 that it would suspend all cash remittances and goods shipments by Koreans living in Japan to North Korea if North Korea proceeded with its plan to test-fire a new long-range ballistic missile. *New York Times*, 9 August 1999.

17 *New York Times*, 13 September 1999.

18 In November 1999, Tokyo lifted the ban on chartered flights between Japan and North Korea. A month later, it lifted the freeze on food aid to Pyongyang and the suspension of the resumption of the bilateral normalization talks.

through the TCOG, Japan joined the United States and South Korea in sending North Korea the message that it had more things to gain through cooperation than confrontation and that the three countries were united in their resolve to counter any North Korean provocation.

Military Measures

Japan has also taken military measures to deal with the problem of divided Korea. Despite the pacifist inclination of many Japanese, the fact is that Japan is susceptible to North Korea's nuclear blackmail and its long-range missiles.¹⁹ Japan is particularly vulnerable because its military lacks offensive capacities to deter or counter North Korean attacks in contrast to the strong retaliatory capabilities possessed by the armed forces of the United States and, to a lesser extent, South Korea.

Feeling exposed, Japan has resorted to self-help measures that might have been considered unthinkable only a few years earlier. For example, in November 1998 Japan decided to acquire spy satellites for the first time. Although they have been billed as "multipurpose" satellites and, therefore, not included in the official defense budget, the decision to acquire them necessitated the Japanese government to override the Diet resolution of 1969 that limits the use of space technology to nonmilitary activities. In addition, in March 1999, Defense Agency Director General Hosei Norota told a Diet defense panel that Japan had the right to make preemptive military strikes if it felt a missile attack on Japan was imminent. This was a remarkable development in Japan's post-World War II security policy.

19 On Japan's pacifist "strategic culture," see Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 119-150 and "Unsheathing the Sword? Germany and Japan's Fractured Political-Military Cultures and the Problem of Burden Sharing," *World Affairs*, Vol. 158 (Spring 1996), pp. 174-191. See also Peter J. Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara, "Japan's National Security," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 84-118.

Although Japan at present does not have the capability to carry out such a threat, the statement was clearly made as a warning against North Korea testing another long-range missile over Japan.²⁰ To demonstrate its resolve, Japan has decided to acquire mid-air refueling aircraft to enable the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) to conduct long-range strike missions. Originally contemplated when North Korea test-fired its Nodong-1 missile into to the Sea of Japan/East Sea in 1993, the decision to acquire the capacity was announced by Prime Minister Obuchi during a meeting of the Japanese National Security Council in December 1999.²¹

Japan also moved to solidify its alliance with the United States by revising in September 1998 the guidelines for their security cooperation of 1976. Although it had been reluctant to increase security cooperation with the United States for the fear of “entrapment,” Japan now obviously feels that the benefits of a closer military alignment with the United States in case of a contingency on the Korean peninsula outweigh potential costs.²²

The new guidelines indeed represent a milestone in Japan-U.S. security relations since the mutual security treaty was signed during the Korean War. Whereas the Article 6 of the mutual security treaty limits Japan’s cooperation to little more than allowing U.S. forces to use bases in Japan, the new guidelines allow Japan during crises to supply those forces with non-lethal material assistance as well as open civilian ports and airfields. They also allow new missions for Japan’s Self-

20 *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 5 March 1999.

21 Following the North Korea’s first test-launch of a missile in May 1993, Japan included in its 1996-2000 Mid-Term Defense Program a plan to study and decide on the acquisition of airborne refueling capacity. See Boei-cho, *Boei Hakusho*, Heisei 10 nen ban [Defense White Paper, 1998 edition] (Tokyo: Okura-sho Insatsu-kyoku, 1998), p. 118

22 For a discussion on the concept of “entrapment,” see Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 38-43.

Defense Forces (SDFs). For example, the Japan Maritime SDF (JMSDF) could re-supply U.S. warships during a crisis, evacuate civilians and U.S. soldiers from dangerous situations, remove mines from the high seas, and enforce U.N. sanctions. The concrete operational language of the new guidelines is clearly designed to deal with a contingency on the Korean peninsula.

Japan has also agreed to deepen its cooperation with the United States on a joint project to develop a theater missile defense (TMD) system in September 1998, following the August 1998 launch of the Taepodong-1.²³ Japan's decision to make a significant financial commitment to the TMD project is noteworthy given its previous reluctance to do so because of its skepticism over the technological viability of the project and its large expected cost.²⁴

Furthermore, Japan has initiated security cooperation with South Korea in contrast to its earlier lack of willingness to forge a closer security tie during the Cold War. At the historic Obuchi-Kim summit in Tokyo in October 1998, Japan and South Korea agreed to increase their security cooperation to handle the mutual North Korean threat. Japan's eagerness to improve its relation with South Korea was reflected in its decision to include in the summit joint statement its first-ever written apology to the South Koreans for its oppressive colonial rule.

The summit was followed by such cooperative security measures as the establishment of military hotlines in May 1999 and the first joint naval "search and rescue exercise" in August 1999 when Japan, South Korea, and the United States were urging North Korea to abandon its plan to launch a Taepodong-2. This joint naval exercise is particularly noteworthy because it was no ordinary search and rescue exercise. The

23 *Asahi Shimbun*, 21 September 1998.

24 For more on Japan's previous reluctance about the TMD project, see Patrick M. Cronin and Michael J. Green, *Redefining the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Tokyo's National Defense Program*, McNair Paper 31 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1994), pp. 12-13.

five-day mission involved three MSDF destroyers, two ROK Navy destroyers, and aerial and intelligence support. The search and rescue component of the exercise was followed by joint formation training and tactical maneuvers. The latter part of the exercise was clearly conducted with a contingency involving North Korea in mind.

III. Looking Ahead

What is striking about Japan's security policy toward the Korean peninsula in the post-Cold War period is its multidimensionality. Given Japan's self-image and reputation as a "civilian power" and a pacifist country, the range and flexibility of Japanese security policy may surprise many, but, on the whole, it has contributed to a more effective regional response to the North Korean threat.²⁵

The continuation and deepening of Japan's "full-set" security strategy should increase the chance of building a stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula. In particular, Japan's active participation in the TCOG as well as its intensification of security cooperation with the United States and South Korea should increase the leverage of Tokyo, Washington, and Seoul over Pyongyang. The trilateral diplomatic coordination and security cooperation have already helped to pressure North Korea both to keep its Agreed Framework commitments and to continue negotiating the abandonment of its long-range missile program. An intensification of trilateral coordination and cooperation should help in convincing North Korea to consider seriously a permanent peace settlement and reconciliation with South Korea.

Toward this goal, the most important task that remains undone is the normalization of relations between North Korea on one side and Japan, the United States, and South Korea on the other. In fact, the

25 On Japan as a "civilian power," see Yoichi Funabashi, "Japan and the New World Order," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 5 (Winter 1991/92).

most important contribution that Japan can now make is, in coordination with the United States and South Korea, to go ahead with normalizing relations with North Korea.

Japan must avoid, however, getting ahead of the United States and, in particular, South Korea. Japan must keep in mind that its “solo” normalization drive in 1990 led to the development of tension and suspicion between Tokyo and Seoul. The absence of consultation and coordination at that time fed the South Korean paranoia that Tokyo was trying to prop up Pyongyang because of Japan’s desire to keep Korea divided.²⁶

Japan has cautiously embarked on this normalization task already. Unlike the situation in 1990, this time, Japan’s normalization effort has the support of Seoul and it complements the engagement strategy of its allies. Following the Berlin Agreement of September 1999, Japan lifted the ban on the charter flights between Japan and North Korea in early November. This was followed by the visit of a supra-partisan delegation headed by former Prime Minister Murayama to Pyongyang from 1 to 3 December. Following the visit, Japan lifted the freeze on normalization talks and the freeze on food aid on 14 December, thus lifting all the sanctions it had placed on North Korea following the August 1998 Taepodong-1 missile test. These developments in turn led to the initiation of the preliminary normalization talks between 19 and 21 December. It also led to Japan’s decision on 3 March 2000 to provide 100,000 tons of rice to North Korea as a humanitarian aid in order to promote a successful resumption of full-fledged normalization talks in April.²⁷

26 Japan’s offer of 500,000 tons of rice to North Korea in the summer of 1995 without consulting South Korea is another example. President Kim Young Sam criticized the Japanese action by saying “when there is no progress in the South-North Korean dialogue, Japan’s attempts to improve relations with North Korea in defiance of South Korea’s wishes can be construed by South Koreans as attempts to obstruct Korean reunification.” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 10 October 1995, cited in Hong Nack Kim, “Japan’s Policy Toward the Two Koreas in the Post-Cold War Era,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1997), p. 147.

Of course, negotiation with North Korea is never predictable, and there are many obstacles in the way of Japan-North Korea bilateral relations. Besides the nuclear weapons and missile issues, the primary obstacle has been the issue of the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents. So far, Japan's demand for progress on this issue as a condition for normalization and North Korea's denial of the abduction have prevented normalization talks from moving forward. Since North Korea is unlikely to admit the allegation, normalization talks would make little progress unless the Japanese government drops the resolution of this issue as a precondition. However, given the strong public support for the resolution of the abduction issue and little public interest in improving relations with North Korea, taking a soft stance on the issue is a highly risky proposition for the Japanese government.²⁸

Progress on the issues of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles could reduce Japan's strong public sentiment against North Korea and thereby help the Japanese government moderate its stance on the issue of abduction. In order to realize such progress, it is crucial for Japan to maintain its common front with the United States and South Korea in dealing with North Korea.

To be sure, the road to normalization has some tough obstacles. However, if all goes well, Japan should be able to gain a powerful leverage over North Korea through its promise of economic assistance, initially food aid but the most important prize being the reparation payment that may amount to as much as 10 billion dollars. This leverage should be able to strengthen not just Japan's position but also the engagement policy of the United States and the Sunshine Policy of

27 *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 3 March 2000.

28 A survey conducted by *Mainichi Shimbun* on 19-20 February 2000 revealed that only 10 percent of the respondents said that normalization talks with North Korea should be conducted "eagerly" while 60 percent favored a cautious approach. *Mainichi Shimbun*, 26 February 2000.

South Korea.

Indeed, Japan's normalization diplomacy in the context of the trilateral diplomatic coordination and cooperation in security matters should have a powerful moderating effect on North Korea. It should have the effect of greatly enlarging the size of the "carrot" dangling before North Korea as well as increasing the length of the "stick." It may turn out that Japan's diplomacy toward North Korea is more effective than the United States and South Korea's diplomacy in convincing the North Koreans that peace-building is more profitable than missile-building.

If Japan's current security policy has a drawback, it may be its negative impact on China. In particular, Tokyo's security cooperation with Washington and Seoul comes as an un-welcomed development to Beijing. China is nervous about the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance and the joint TMD project.²⁹ Indeed, many in China see the increased trilateral security cooperation as a precursor to a new collective security arrangement aimed at China.³⁰

On the other hand, this perception could increase Chinese cooperation in moderating the behavior of North Korea and thereby enhance the prospect of a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula. China may see a faster resolution of the divided Korea problem as being in its best interest rather than sustaining a bellicose North Korea that provokes the anger of Japan, the United States, and South Korea. In other words, Japan's closer security policy coordination with the United States and South Korea could increase China's stake in creating a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

29 On 10 December 1999 in Beijing, Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin issued a joint communique in which they criticized the development of new missile defense systems. *Asahi Shimbun*, 10 December 1999.

30 Lead author's interviews with Chinese security analysts and officials, Tokyo, Japan, Spring 1998. Also, for China's concern over a closer Japan-U.S. alliance, see Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 49-80.