

# JAPAN'S ENGAGEMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA, 1990-2000

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Japan stands at a critical junction in its relationship with the two Koreas. Tokyo, like Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang, faces a profound choice. It can strike out on a new path that will depart from the practices and priorities of the Cold War and, potentially, toward a durable peace in northeast Asia. Essential to this process is close trilateral coordination with Seoul and Washington, a process already underway. Success will require that all parties make major adjustments in their conduct, attitudes and priorities, particularly toward North Korea. The potential reward for these changes would be the improvement of both relations and prospects for peace and stability in northeast Asia.

Ultimately, a durable peace for the region will be possible only after Pyongyang relinquishes its reliance on coercion and fear as ways to pursue its national interests. For Japan, the dual policy of persistent engagement and restrained deterrence backed by trilateral diplomatic and military cooperation between Tokyo, Seoul and Washington appears the best approach.

Japan's decade of intermittent courtship with its neighbor the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) has yet to erase any of the formidable barriers that bar the normalization of their relationship. Nothing has improved between them in spite of several visits to Pyongyang by several prominent members of Japan's national legislature, the Diet, and numerous rounds of working level discussions between both sides' diplomats. The most recent round of talks was held December 21-23, 1999 in Beijing, China. They ended like all the others over the past decade—nothing was agreed upon except to meet again.

Japan's relationship with North Korea most likely will persist in a state of estrangement well into the foreseeable future, barring the abrupt disappearance of the incumbent regime under Kim Jong Il. The high expectations excited by deceased Diet member Shin Kanemaru's unprecedented visit to Pyongyang in 1990 linger now as a fading memory of what might have been. These expectations collided with revelations in the fall of 1992 that North Korea had not complied fully with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and shattered all hope of quick normalization. Numerous false starts followed the October 1994 signing of the Agreed Framework between the U.S. and the DPRK, but Japan-DPRK relations only seem to have worsened.

Japan, like the United States, stands at a critical junction in its increasingly complex relationship with the two Koreas. Tokyo, Washington, Beijing, Seoul and Pyongyang face a profound choice. On the one hand, they can all strike out on a new, albeit unchartered path that will lead away from the practices and priorities of the Cold War and, potentially, toward a durable peace in Northeast Asia. All sides would have to make major adjustments in their conduct, attitudes and relationships, particularly North Korea. The difficulties would be profound, but the potential reward could be equally profound—improved prospects for durable peace and stability in Northeast Asia. On the

other hand, these nations can continue on their conventional course, one defined by the perceptions, priorities, practices and relationships of the Cold War, as well as the legacies of World War II and the Korean War.

This latter path is well known to all. It embraces ideological rivalry, economic competition, intense mistrust, mutual hostility tempered by the Korean Armistice and the alignment of alliances that emerged during the Korean War. For half a century, however, this arrangement has perpetuated a highly volatile situation in Northeast Asia, and could too easily contribute to a resumption of the Korean War to resume. The choice, in short, is no less than one of eventual peace or war.

Our focus here will be on Japan and North Korea. What is obstructing their efforts to normalize relations? Have both sides endeavored to erase the intense mistrust forged by Japanese imperialism, and the loyalties and rivalries that linger from the Cold War? To what extent has Japan broken with its Cold War pattern of dealing with North Korea, reshuffled its long standing priorities and altered its approach to Pyongyang? To what extent has North Korea attempted to do likewise? Are its overtures to North Korea likely to promote a “new friendly relationship” as called for by the unidentified Japanese diplomat at the end of the December 1999 round of talks?

### **I. Global Warming in the Changing Diplomatic Context**

The international context for Japan’s relations with North Korea changed dramatically between 1990 and 1995. Moscow and Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang, and Tokyo and Beijing broke impressively with past patterns of confrontation and containment, and moved toward engagement and reconciliation. Moscow moved first by establishing full diplomatic relations with Seoul on January 1, 1991.<sup>1</sup> Also in 1991, the superpowers facilitated the simultaneous admission of North

and South Korea into the United Nations. Seoul and Pyongyang pursued their most productive and substantive dialogue that led to the signing of the Basic Agreement of December, 1991, the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchanges and Cooperation Between the South and North.<sup>2</sup> The United States followed South Korea's lead. President Bush had advanced the lessening of tensions on the Korean peninsula by announcing in his September 27, 1991 address to the American people the withdrawal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from around the globe.<sup>3</sup>

Several significant developments followed. The two Koreas announced their joint South-North Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in December 1991. The first ever high-level meeting between officials of the U.S. and DPRK governments was held in New York on January 21, 1992.<sup>4</sup> Pyongyang responded constructively by signing a nuclear safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and allowing IAEA inspectors to visit North Korea's foremost nuclear facility, the Nuclear Research Center at Yongbyon. Beijing rounded out the realignment by establishing diplomatic relations with Seoul on August 24, 1992.

Moscow and Beijing had moved decisively to break with past patterns while Washington and Tokyo moved hesitantly. Consequently, Seoul benefited the most while Pyongyang lagged far behind. Within two hectic years, 1991-92, Seoul had gained normal diplomatic and commercial relations with two superpowers, Moscow and Beijing. It had also gained admission to the United Nations, strengthened its alliance with the United States and witnessed Pyongyang's entry into

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1 Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas* (Indianapolis: Basic Books, 1997).

2 National Unification Board, *Intra-Korean Agreements* (Seoul: ROK Government, 1992).

3 George Bush, "New Initiatives to Reduce US Nuclear Forces," in: US Department of State, *Dispatch*. Vol. 2, No. 39, pp. 1-4.

4 Don Oberdorfer, *op cit*.

the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Despite some warming in Japan-DPRK relations, Tokyo remained a reliable friend and a valuable trading partner.

Pyongyang's initial gains were much less impressive. Actually, it had lost more than it had gained from the realignment. First the Communist Bloc and then the Soviet Union had evaporated. Gone was the major market for Pyongyang's exports. Also gone was the Soviet Union, the DPRK's long time ally, major trading partner, and the source of large amounts of foreign aid in the form of basic commodities like wheat and crude oil. China continued as a friend, but its adoption of a "two Korea" policy unnerved Pyongyang. North Korea's leader President Kim Il Sung (revered in the DPRK as the "Great Leader") sought to restore balance in the regional alignment by pursuing improved relations first with Tokyo and then Washington, D.C. Hopes of improving relations with Japan faltered in November 1992, but eventually Kim's son and successor Kim Jong Il established relations, albeit tentative, with the United States by their signing of the October 1994 Agreed Framework which defused the Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-94.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Burdens of the Past Over the Present

Tokyo's efforts to normalize relations with North Korea faltered and continue to lag far behind those of Washington, despite a two-year head start. Actually, the Japan-DPRK relationship remained essentially unchanged at the end of 1992 compared to 1990 when the two nations initiated their diplomatic dialogue. Even now, one decade later, the

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5 For discussions of the changing relations between the two Koreas and the super-powers between 1990 and 1994, see: Doug Joong Kim, editor, *Foreign Relations of North Korea* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1995), and Bae Ho Hahn and Chae-jin Lee, editors, *The Korean Peninsula and the Major Powers* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1998).

relationship appears to be even more problem-ridden than in 1990. What is blocking progress? Obviously, the reasons are numerous. Even more troublesome is the fact that some of these more potent difficulties are deeply ingrained both into legacy of the Japan-Korea relationship as well as into each nation's contemporary political fabric.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Ghosts of the Past***

At the conclusion of the December 21-23, 1999 Japan-DPRK talks held in Beijing, an unnamed senior Japanese official who took part in this round of talks was quoted in the press as having said, "... the most basic theme is how to clear up problems of bygone days and create a new friendly relationship."<sup>7</sup> In short, the long troubled history of mutual animosity between the Japanese and Korean peoples weighs heavily on the present. North and South Koreans disagree about many things, but not the history of their relations with Japan. Here they have much common ground and share deep distrust of the Japanese. They date their dislike of the Japanese from medieval times when pirates from Japan, whom Koreans named "wako" or "dwarfs," plundered Korea's east coast in the fifteenth century. Koreans' perception of the Japanese as a ruthless, brutal and war loving people was greatly enhanced when Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the sixteenth century unifier of feudal Japan, unleashed his samurai legions on the Korean peninsula in a futile effort to conquer China. The ensuing carnage of these invasions between 1592 and 1598 even today plague Japan's relations with the Korean people.

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6 Kenneth Pyle, "North Korea in U.S.-Japan Relations," an occasional paper of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Asia Program (Washington, D.C. January 1999). Also see: Byung Chul Koh, "Japan and Korea," pp. 55-60, in: Bae Ho Hahn and Chae-jin Lee, *op.cit.*

7 "Japan's Colonialist Past Looms in Talks with North Korea," Agence France Presse, in Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network (NAPSNET), December 23, 1999, Item I.1.

A recurring concern of modern Japan has been the potential for instability on the Korean peninsula. Dating from the mid-nineteenth century, Japan's rulers have feared that trouble on the Korean peninsula could adversely affect Japan's security. The first modern government of Japan under Emperor Meiji (reigned 1868-1912) determined the best response to the rise of imperialism in Northeast Asia was to create a Japanese empire. As the European empires of Great Britain, Russia, Germany and France scrambled at the turn of the century to carve up the Chinese empire among themselves, the leadership of Japan's imperial army came to view China's hapless tributary Korea as "a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan" if occupied by a hostile rival like Imperial Russia. Japan fought two victorious wars over Korea: the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. During the Sino-Japanese War, soldiers of the Imperial Japanese army determined that the queen of Korea was attempting to obstruct their efforts to expel China from the peninsula. One morning, Japanese soldiers invaded the palace grounds and murdered the queen. After chopping up her body, they burned the remains. Memories of this dreadful event and Japan's subsequent annexation and harsh colonial rule of Korea between 1910 and 1945, still poison Japan-Korea relations.<sup>8</sup>

Japan has attempted with mixed results during the latter half of the twentieth century to alter its negative image on the Korean peninsula. When Japan and South Korea normalized relations in 1965, the Japanese government recognized the Seoul government as the only legitimate government on the Korean peninsula, pledged to pay the South Korean government \$300 million over a ten-year period and granted Korean residents in Japan permanent residence.<sup>9</sup>

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8 Carter J. Eckert, Lee Ki-baik *et. al.*, *Korea Old and New - A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 1990).

9 Youngnok Koo, "The Conduct of Foreign Affairs," in Edward Reynolds Wright, editor, *Korean Politics in Transition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 221-222.

The effort assuaged some of South Koreans concerns, but did not address one that all Koreans, North and South, expect of Japan a formal, sincere apology for its colonization of Korea. Several Japanese prime ministers have made such apologies, beginning with Nakasone Yasuhiro during his 1983 visit to Seoul. Emperor Hirohito expressed his regrets to visiting South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan in September 1984 over “an unfortunate past between our two countries....”<sup>10</sup>

Japan has achieved impressive progress in its dealings with South Korea, but it has not even begun to erase its negative image in North Korea. Lingering issues from the past that still trouble Japan-DPRK relations include: Tokyo's 1965 recognition of Seoul as the sole legitimate government on the Korean peninsula, the amount of compensation Tokyo should pay Pyongyang for Japan's colonization of Korea, the Imperial Japanese Army's use of Korean women as “comfort” women, etc. The Japanese also have their list of claims rooted in the past: the return to Japan for trial and punishment of Japanese Red Army members who fled to North Korea after hijacking a Japan Airlines plane in 1972; North Korea's kidnapping of Japanese citizens to the DPRK for use as Japanese language instructors to train North Korean espionage agents and terrorists, visits to Japan by the Japanese citizen spouses of Koreans who returned to the DPRK between 1958 and 1984, and more than \$130 million North Korea owes Japanese businessmen for goods and services rendered more than a quarter of a century ago.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Cold War's Legacy—Friends and Foes***

Japan's foreign policy since the end of World War II has been

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10 B. C. Koh, “Japan and Korea,” in Hahn and Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

11 See Japan-DPRK Joint Declaration of 1990 quoted in full below. Regarding South Korea, see also: Kim Sang-woo, “Future of Korea-Japan Ties,” in *Korea Focus*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (September, October, 1998), pp. 48-49.



defined within the context of the so-called Yoshida Doctrine that dates from the mid-1950's. A separation was to be maintained between economic and political goals and strategies. Economic prosperity was to be achieved through unilateral initiatives abroad. National security, the preeminent political goal, was to be safeguarded through the U.S.-Japan alliance. The alliance required that Tokyo align its defense policies with those of the United States. For half a century, beginning with the Korean War, Japan has willingly played a supporting role for the U.S. military presence in East Asia while simultaneously engaging in intense economic competition with its closest ally.

The arrangement has served both nations well. Tokyo benefited from the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella and presence of U.S. Forces in Japan. Japan's "peace" constitution was narrowly interpreted and respected, assuaging neighboring nations' concerns that Japan might rearm. The arrangement also gained a cornucopia of Japanese goods access to the enormous U.S. domestic market. There was a price, but it seemed small relative to the benefits. The arrangement narrowed the range of foreign policy options available to Japan. Japan's friends and enemies were determined more by American priorities than those of Japan.

In terms of Japan-DPRK relations, however, the alliance presents profound and persistent problems. On the one hand, the U.S.-Japan alliance is a formidable impediment to the improvement of Japan-DPRK relations. Because of the alliance, Japan remains firmly committed to supporting the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia, specifically on the Korean peninsula. For Pyongyang, this is a serious irritant. The DPRK's continuing intense hostility toward Japan, on the other hand, excites pervasive public fear and insecurity among Japan's citizens and reinforces their commitment to their government's maintenance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Consequently, the Japanese government since 1996 has felt compelled to choose between improving relations with the DPRK or further alienating Pyongyang by reinforcing its

defense posture. Given North Korea's persistent development of ballistic missiles, hostile attitude to Japan and intransigence in addressing issues of concern to the Japanese people, the Japanese government has understandably chosen to take steps to reinforce its security. These have included subscribing to new U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines and a commitment to joint U.S.-Japan development of a Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system.

The inability of Japan and the DPRK to normalize their relations has contributed to a very significant realignment in Northeast Asia. The fear the U.S. and Japan share over North Korea's potential acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, primarily long range ballistic missiles since the U.S.-DPRK nuclear accord of 1994, has caused both to reinforce their defense postures in Northeast Asia. This has adversely affected Washington's and Tokyo's efforts to pursue *dtente* with Pyongyang. The DPRK, feeling increasingly threatened by the U.S.-Japan alliance, has sought safe haven in Beijing. The U.S.-Japan accord on TMD appears to have given Beijing and Pyongyang reasons to repair their relations.

Once again, the legacy of the past, in this case the Cold War, haunts the efforts of Japan and the DPRK to improve their relations. As each nation has sought to reinforce their alliance with their Cold War champion, the Japan-DPRK relationship has become further estranged. Frankly speaking, the true contestants in Northeast Asia would appear to be the United States and China. Japan and the DPRK would appear to be shadow boxers, each throwing punches at one another that are reality intended as blows aimed at Washington and Beijing.

### **III. Unilateralism and Frustrated Expectations**

The 1990's has been a decade of frustrated expectations for Japan in its pursuit of *dtente* with the DPRK. For the previous half century,

Japan's policy toward North Korea closely adhered to the dual tracks of containment and deterrence practiced by Seoul and Washington. Beginning in 1990, however, Japan's ruling political party leaders launched a quasi-official, unilateral diplomatic initiative aimed at normalizing diplomatic and commercial relations with Pyongyang. Japan's Foreign Ministry, concerned about criticism from its ally the U.S. and neighbor South Korea, hesitated. Caught between offending either the ROK or alienating powerful politicians in Tokyo, the Foreign Ministry opted to accommodate the Diet members' desires.<sup>12</sup>

Shin Kanemaru, then one of the most powerful members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and a member of the Diet's lower house, led the unprecedented bipartisan delegation to Pyongyang. He teamed up with Japan Socialist Party (JSP) Vice Chairman of the Central Executive Committee Tanabe Makoto, also a member of the Diet and since deceased. During their stay in Pyongyang on September 24 to 28, 1990, they held formal talks with their political equal, Korean Workers' Party (KWP) then General Secretary of the Central Committee Kim Young Sun. They also paid a courtesy call on DPRK President Kim Il Sung and delivered to him personal letters from the president of the LDP, Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki, and Chairwoman of the JSP's Central Executive Committee, Doi Takako.

The three politicians, representing their respective political parties, signed the "Joint Declaration" of September 28, 1990. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung sanctioned the accord the following day. An unofficial translation of the declaration's entire text follows:<sup>13</sup>

Considering that to normalize and develop Korea-Japan relations on the basis of the idea of independence, peace and friendship confirms to the interests of the peoples of the two countries and would contribute to peace and prosperity of a new Asia and the world, the

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12 Masao Okonogi, "Japan's Policy Toward North Korea: Diplomatic Normalization Talks and the Nuclear Inspection Issue," in Doug Joong Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-222.

13 Source: *People's Korea* at <<http://www.Korea-np.co.jp/pk>>

delegations of the three parties declare as follows:

1. The three parties consider that Japan should fully and officially apology and compensate to the DPRK for the enormous misfortunes and miseries imposed upon the Korean people for 36 years and the losses inflicted upon the Korean people in the ensuing 45 years after the war.

In his personal letter to president Kim Il sung, President Kaifu Toshiki of the LDP admitted that there was an unfortunate past imposed by Japan upon Korea and expressed the hope to improve the DPRK-Japan relations, saying, "Former Prime Minister Takeshita expressed deep remorse and regret over such unfortunate past at the Diet in March last year. I, as Prime Minister, share his views.

Head of the LDP delegation Kanemaru Shin, member of the House of Representatives, too, expressed the same apology for Japan's past colonial rule over the Korean people. The three parties consider that in connection with the establishment of the diplomatic relations, full compensation should be made by the Japanese government for the past 36 year long colonial rule and the losses inflicted upon the DPRK people in the ensuring 45 years.

2. The three parties consider that the abnormal state between the DPRK and Japan must be eliminated and diplomatic relations be established as soon as possible.

3. The three parties consider that, for the improvement of the relations between DPRK and Japan, it is necessary to develop exchanges between them in various domains including politics, economy and culture and, for the present, to use satellite communications and open direct air services between the two countries.

4. The three parties consider that the Koreans in Japan must not be discriminated against, their human rights and all national rights and legal status be respected and the Japanese government should guarantee them by law. The three parties regard it necessary for the Japanese authorities to remove the entries made in the Japanese passport as regards the DPRK.

5. The three parties consider that Korea is one and that the peaceful reunification through north-south dialogue accords with the national interests of the Korean people.

6. The three parties consider that it is necessary for them to make joint efforts for the building of a peaceful and free Asia and eliminate nuclear threats from all regions of the globe.

7. The three parties agreed to strongly recommend the start of inter-governmental negotiations for the realization of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the solution of all the outstanding problems within November 1990.

8. The three parties agreed to strengthen party relations and to further develop mutual cooperation between the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), and the LDP and between the WPK and the JSP in conformity with the desires of the two peoples and in the interest of peace in Asia and the world.

The "Joint Declaration" has since served, in Pyongyang's eyes, as the guiding principles for its normalization talks with the Japanese government. The Japanese government, however, does not share this view.<sup>14</sup>

Japan's unilateral approach worried Seoul. When Shin Kanemaru called on South Korea President Roh Tae Woo on October 8 to brief him about the visit to Pyongyang, President Roh urged Japan to:

- consult closely with South Korea once the Japan-DPRK talks began;
- urge North Korea to sign a nuclear safeguards agreement with the IAEA;
- withhold compensation to the DPRK until Japan-DPRK relations had been normalized and Japan was in a better position to monitor North Korea's use of the compensation fund to prevent it from benefiting the military;

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14 Hong Nack Kim, "North Korea's Policy Toward Japan in the Post-Cold War Era," in Doug Joong Kim, editor, *Foreign Relations of North Korea During Kim Il Sung's Last Days* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1994). Also see: Bae Ho Hahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-59.

- urge North Korea to reform and to open itself to the outside world.

The U.S. made a similar request to Japan.<sup>15</sup>

To assuage its ally and friend, the Japanese government adopted four guidelines for its talks with the DPRK. The talks should:

- promote peace and stability on the Korean peninsula;
- Japan-DPRK rapprochement should not undermine Japan's relations with Seoul;
- Japan was prepared to compensate North Korea for the 36 year period of its colonial rule, but not for the period since the end of World War II;
- North Korea's acceptance of IAEA inspections at its nuclear facilities was important to Japan's national security.<sup>16</sup>

Neither Washington nor Seoul had any further objections to Tokyo's engagement of Pyongyang in normalization talks.

Five weeks after the document had been signed, normalization talks commenced on November 11, 1990. Eventually, eight rounds of talks were held between Japan's chief negotiator Nakahira Noboru and his North Korean counterpart Chon In-chol until they were discontinued in November 1992. Despite the initial appearance of progress, the first eight rounds of official talks proved inconclusive. North Korea had demanded that Japan's emperor apologize to its people and compensate the DPRK government upwards of \$10 billion for Japan's colonization between 1910 and 1945. Japan countered that it had already paid compensation to South Korea and offered instead loans, investment and technology valued at about half the amount Pyongyang sought. Japan insisted that North Korea address allegations that it had kidnapped more than one dozen Japanese citizens to use to train North Korean covert agents in the Japanese language and culture. North

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15 Hong Nack Kim, "North Korea's Policy Toward Japan," in Doug Joong Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Korea adamantly rejected the request. Finally, mounting international suspicions about whether North Korea was hiding plutonium from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) caused Japan to formally suspend the talks. Finally in November 1992, without any enduring progress having been made, the talks were suspended.

Normalization, Pyongyang had hoped, would enable Tokyo to fill the commercial void left after the collapse of Communist Bloc in the late 1980's. Sixty percent of the DPRK's entire foreign trade had been with socialist nations. The Soviet Union and China had accounted for the bulk of this trade. As the Soviet Union slid into economic bankruptcy and political turmoil, Japan's trade with North Korea increased to the point of virtually matching that between Beijing and Pyongyang.

In anticipation of normalization of relations with Japan, the DPRK promulgated several laws designed to facilitate Japanese investment in joint ventures in North Korea. A sixty-member private trade mission from Japan arrived in Pyongyang on July 14, 1992 to seek out possible joint venture opportunities in North Korea's light industries and mining sector. In fact, in the fact that DPRK's two decade old trade deficit with Japan was abruptly reversed. North Korea actually had a positive trade balance with Japan during the two years that of normalization talks, 1990-92.<sup>17</sup>

Pyongyang had also hoped Japan would become a major partner in the Tumen River Development Project and its Free Economic and Trade Zone (FETZ) in North Korea's northeast corner. Since the mid-1980's North Korea had begun to promote the twin ports of Najin and Sonbong as a potential international port of trade. It aimed to create a

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17 Hong Nack Kim, "North Korea's Policy Toward Japan in the Post-Cold War Era," *op. cit.*; United Nations Development Program, *Development Cooperation - Democratic People's Republic of Korea 1993-94 Report* (Pyongyang, 1995), p. 20; . U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Programs Center, "Financial Transfers From Japan to the DPRK: Estimating the Unreported Flows," unpublished Memorandum of the North Korea Trade Project (July 1995), Table 1.

North Korean based hub of international trade that would serve Japan, China and the Soviet Union. Pyongyang hosted the October 1991 United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) conference that formalized the Tumen River Region Economic Development Programme. Representatives also attended from Japan, the ROK, China, the USSR and Mongolia attended the conference. As the project's centerpiece, Pyongyang declared the establishment of the Rajin/Sonbong Free Economic and Trade Zone (FETZ) on December 28, 1991.<sup>18</sup>

Although hardly in a position to press Japan, North Korea nevertheless pursued its usual negotiating strategy of striving for maximum gains while giving up only minimal concessions. North Korea overestimated Japan's eagerness to become an economic player in the North Korea market. To begin with, Japan's mainstream business community was increasingly reluctant to risk investment in North Korea. The Japanese government had stopped insuring Japanese investment in North Korea in 1986. At the time, North Korea owed Japanese firms more than \$600 million. But until diplomatic relations had been normalized, the Japanese government had no reason to make such guarantees. Then too, by 1991 Japan's economy was quickly sliding into recession. The "bubble economy" that had lifted Japan's economy to unprecedented prosperity in the 1980's had bust and with it any inclination to risk investment in North Korea's rapidly faltering and thoroughly isolated economy.

Support for the normalization talks also waned throughout the Japanese public and among Tokyo's allies. The Japanese public was reluctant to see its government make apologies to North Korea for past misdeeds without North Korea at least first agreeing to make good

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18 Lew Seok-jin, editor, *Tumen River Area Development Project* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1995), pp. 279-286. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), *DPRK Korea's Tumen River Area Rajin-Sonbong Free Economic and Trade Zone Investment Guide* (Exeter, UK: Icon publishing, 1993). Also, Development Cooperation - Democratic People's Republic of Korea 1993-94 Report, pp. 22-23.



faith effort to investigate allegations that some Japanese citizens had been kidnapped to North Korea. Then too, Seoul and Washington were pressing Tokyo to join their mounting multilateral campaign to get North Korea to make its nuclear program more transparent by cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspection program. Japan's frustrating effort in unilateral diplomacy with the DPRK ended when North Korea's delegation walked out of the November 1992 round of talks after adamantly refusing to discuss the plight of kidnapped Japanese citizens.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. Trilateral Diplomacy: Phase One

Beginning late in 1992 and continuing well into 1995, Japan eagerly pursued close coordination of its North Korea policy with the U.S. and South Korea. The first working level meeting between diplomats from the U.S., South Korea and Japan was held at the Department of State in February 1993. At the time, Seoul was so uncomfortable with the idea of trilateral cooperation that it insisted there had to be a bilateral U.S.-ROK meeting before the trilateral consultations could commence. Gradually, however, North Korea's continuing refusal to cooperate with the IAEA and intensifying suspicions about its nuclear intentions forged a solid trilateral bond between Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

Japan actively and vigorously supported the U.S. and ROK diplomatic offensive designed to convince North Korea to remain in the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. These efforts were centered in international fora such as the UN Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency. When U.S.-DPRK negotiations reached a dangerous impasse in May 1994, Japan supported

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19 Okonogi, *op.cit.*, pp. 208-211.

U.S. efforts to mobilize support in the United Nations for UN sanctions against the DPRK. After the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework had been signed in October 1994, Japan became an ardent supporter of the Korea Peninsula Energy Development Program (KEDO) established to finance the construction of two light water nuclear reactors in North Korea as promised in the U.S.-DPRK nuclear accord. Japan became one KEDO's founding members with membership on the executive board. Eventually the government of Japan pledged to contribute one billion dollars toward the reactor construction project.<sup>20</sup>

Unprecedented cooperation has developed between South Korea and Japan by the fall of 1994. Diplomats from both countries were routinely consulting one another in Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. They coordinated their efforts at the United Nations and the IAEA. In an unprecedented initiative, Japan and South Korea cautiously initiated limited cooperation in the area of defense. A working level dialogue began in 1994 between members of their respective armed forces. The sharing of intelligence began. The exchange of visits by ranking officials in each defense ministry and naval vessels followed. Japanese and South Korean naval officers took turns being assigned temporarily to one another's ships. Joint rescue at sea exercises have also taken place.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Trilateral Diplomacy Unravels***

Trilateral cooperation proved temporary. Pyongyang despised the arrangement, and repeatedly demanded that it cease. Seoul responded with repeated claims that Pyongyang was "trying to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul." The refrain became a diplomatic cliché. Pyongyang's displeasure, however, had little to do with ending

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20 Lee Eu-gene, "North Korea-Japan Rapprochement and Inter-Korea Relations," in *Korea Focus* (May-June 1995) Vol. 3, No. 3 (May-June 1995), pp. 22-38. National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review* (Tokyo, 1996), . pp. 2-3.

21 Japan Defense Agency, *Defense of Japan* (Tokyo: The Japan Times, 1997), p. 87.

the collaboration. Washington and Seoul must share responsibility for this. Despite Tokyo's consistent best efforts to be a reliable ally to the U.S. and a good friend to South Korea, Washington and Seoul only seemed to take Japan for granted.

Despite Japan's stagnate economy, Washington throughout 1995 and well into 1996 repeatedly pressed Tokyo for more of everything. Japan had publicly pledged in the fall of 1994 to finance a major portion of KEDO's LWR project. The Clinton Administration, having promised Congress shortly after the signing of the Agreed Framework that it would not seek substantial funds to finance the accord, pressed Japan to increase its contribution to KEDO. The Clinton Administration had belatedly realized that placing North Korea's spent nuclear fuel in long term, safe storage and supplying 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel annually to the DPRK would be more much more costly than anticipated. Japan's Foreign Ministry recognized the criticality of these projects, but was hard pressed to convince Japan's Diet to pay for something the U.S. Administration was hesitant to ask the U.S. Congress to fund. The Clinton Administration's repeated requests angered many prominent Japanese politicians in the Diet. Why, they wondered aloud, should Japan be expected to pay more after it had already pledge a huge sum of money and when the United States itself was putting up only a very small sum to implement an agreement it had negotiated with only marginal Japanese involvement?

While the Department of State was pressing Japan to increase its contribution to KEDO, the U.S. Department of Defense was asking Japan to increase its host nation support of U.S. military forces in Japan and to contribute to the development of the Theater Missile Defense system. Amid all of this, a U.S. serviceman stationed on Okinawa raped a Japanese schoolgirl in September 1995. The Japanese public was outraged, and so too was its government.<sup>22</sup>

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22 *East Asian Strategic Review*, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

Japan's Foreign Ministry found itself caught in the cross fire between the Diet and the Clinton Administration. What had begun in 1993 as a well-intended commitment on the part of the Japanese Foreign Ministry to promote trilateral cooperation between Tokyo, Washington and Seoul vis a vis Pyongyang had turned into a political nightmare by 1995. Adding injury to insult, Washington and Seoul excluded Japan for their consultations about the Joint Proposal for Four Party Talks proposal Presidents Clinton and Kim Young Sam made in April, 1996. Japan was taken completely by surprise. Support in the Japanese government for trilateral cooperation was severely eroded.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Problems with Seoul***

Japan's commitment to trilateral cooperation continued after the head of Japan's Social Democratic Party (SDPJ), Murayama Tomiichi, became prime minister at the end of June 1994. Murayama's policy toward North Korea adhered to the principles enunciated prior to the start of the first round of Japan-DPRK normalization talks in January 1991. The Agreed Framework had removed the nuclear issue as an impediment to the resumption of Japan-DPRK talks. An underlying inducement of the Agreed Framework was the normalization of relations between North Korea and other nations. Tokyo, after duly consulting with Seoul and Washington, resumed its efforts to engage Pyongyang in a diplomatic dialogue. As had been the case in 1990, members of the Diet took the initiative, not Japan's Foreign Ministry. Former Deputy Prime Minister Watanabe Michi of the LDP headed a delegation, which represented the political parties in Japan's ruling coalition. North Korea Workers Party Secretary for International affairs Kim Yong-sun greeted the delegation. Another agreement to resume

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23 Personal discussions with Japanese parliamentarians, businessmen and government officials in June and November 1995 and June 1998. *East Asian Strategic Review*, *op.cit.*, pp. 207-219.

normalization talks was reached on March 30. Relations briefly warmed. Pyongyang sent its Minister of Trade, Li Song Rok, to Tokyo at the end of May to encourage investment by Japan's Korean residents in North Korea's Free Trade Zone at Najin-Sonbong. The response was mixed. Nevertheless, the Murayama government extended the good will gesture of food aid.<sup>24</sup>

The March 1995 initiative nevertheless yielded no enduring results. The Japanese government had objected to the stipulation in the March 30 political party accord that there should not be any preconditions for the resumption of government to government talks, and the agreement was judged not be binding between the two governments. Working level diplomatic contacts nevertheless followed, but progress was immediately blocked by North Korea's refusal to respond to Japan's inquiries about Japanese citizens allegedly kidnapped by North Korea between 1977 and 1987.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, South Korean President Kim Young-Sam began to encounter increasing domestic criticism of his policies. Japan's approach to North Korea had simultaneously aroused Koreans' anti-Japanese sentiment. President Kim began to use Japan as a political whipping board beginning in the summer of 1995 and continuing until the end of his tenure in December 1997. He did so despite Tokyo's close coordination with Seoul on its overture to Pyongyang, eagerness to facilitate nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean peninsula, support for KEDO and close coordination with Seoul on all matters involving North Korea.

Kim's negative attitude toward Japan severely complicated efforts to maintain trilateral cooperation between Washington, Seoul and

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24 Hong Nack Kim, "Japan's Policy Toward The Two Koreas in the Post-Cold War Era," *International Journal of Korean Studies* (Spring 1997) Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 142-145 and pp. 144-145.

25 Korean Asia Pacific Peace Committee, "Memorandum on DPRK-Japan Relations," (February 1, 1998), *People's Korea on the Internet* (February 1, 1998).

Tokyo regarding policy toward North Korea. After Seoul agreed to send Pyongyang 150,000 tons of food aid in June, 1995, Tokyo won President Kim's approval to follow his gesture with even more food aid. The Korean public, however, reacted very negatively to President Kim's gesture to North Korea. By then, however, Tokyo had promised Pyongyang 300,000 metric tons of rice as a humanitarian gesture of good will in return for the aid North Korea had sent to victims of the January 1995 earthquake that had devastated the Kobe area west of Osaka. (Note: The United States had compelled Japan to purchase the rice as part of a trade dispute settlement. When the Japanese public refused to purchase and eat the rice, the Japanese government decided it would be best to reduce the expense of storing it by using the unwanted rice as humanitarian aid.) The aid please Pyongyang but angered Seoul, both its government and the public.

In August, 1995, torrential rains devastated North Korea's grain crops. Pyongyang appealed to the United Nations for food aid. Encouraged by Washington, Tokyo in September 1995 sent another 200,000 metric tons of food aid to the DPRK. President Kim chastised Japan. Later, when diplomatic representatives from Seoul, Tokyo and Washington held their first vice-ministerial level trilateral consultations in Honolulu on January 24, 1996, Tokyo found itself caught in the middle. Washington pushed Tokyo to supply more food aid to North Korea while Seoul argued against any more food aid. Tokyo sided with its irate neighbor South Korea. When they held the second vice-ministerial meeting on Cheju Island on May 14, again Seoul pressed Tokyo not to send additional rice assistance to North Korea. Despite Washington's displeasure, Tokyo concurred with Seoul's insistence.<sup>26</sup>

Japan-South Korea relations continued to deteriorate throughout 1996. Two weeks after the January 24 trilateral meeting in Honolulu,

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26 *EASR*, 1996-97, p. 244 and 247. Recollections as a U.S. diplomat who traveled frequently between Washington, Seoul, Pyongyang and Tokyo between 1995 and 1997.

President Kim on February 9 accused Japan of “infringement” on its sovereignty when Tokyo’s Foreign Minister Ikeda protested Seoul’s construction of a pier on a bilaterally disputed island, Tokto in Korean or Takeshima in Japanese. Also at issue was the name of the sea between the Korean peninsula and Japan. South Korea insisted the name should be changed from the “Sea of Japan” to the politically more neutral “East Sea.” Seoul’s position was historically sound since use of the “Sea of Japan” dated from the rise of Imperial Japan in the later half of the 19th Century. When the Japan-Korea fishing treaty came up for review in May 1996, the ensuing negotiations became tangled with the island and ocean name disputes. President Kim’s efforts to use Korean’s traditional dislike of Japan as a way to deflect criticism of his domestic political shortcomings succeeded in exciting anti-Japanese sentiment. On the other hand, the effort undermined trilateral cooperation and reduced diplomatic pressure on North Korea to be more forthcoming with Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.<sup>27</sup>

By the spring of 1996, trilateral cooperation had completely unraveled. Tokyo moved to repair its relationship with Washington and began to reconsider unilateral approaches to Pyongyang. No sooner had Washington and Seoul announced their Joint Four Party Proposal for talks with Pyongyang and Beijing than the two allies began to squabble over how best to realize their proposal. The discovery of heavily armed North Korean commandoes and their submarine on South Korea’s eastern coast frightened and outraged the people of

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27 B.C. Koh, *op.cit.*, pp. 39-50; *EASR*, 1996-97, p. 244. Hong Nack Kim, “Japan’s Policy Toward The Two Koreas in the Post-Cold War Era,” *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151. On February 9, 1996, Japanese Foreign Minister Ikeda claimed the ROK’s construction of a port facility on Takeshima Island (Tokto Island) “is a violation of Japan’s sovereignty.” South Korea’s foreign Ministry announced that the ROK “stance remains firm on not being able to accept Japan’s claims” to the island of Tokto (*East Asian Strategic Review*, *EASR*, p. 244). On February 15, 1996, the ROK Navy asserted ROK claims to Takeshima Island by sending a destroyer and fighter aircraft on a training mission to the island. Japan protested this action (*East Asian Strategic Review*, *EASR*, p. 245).

South Korea. President Kim responded to public pressure by shifting the goal of his North Korea policy from co-existence to isolation of the regime. Washington advised restraint and continued efforts to induce North Korean into further engagement of the outside world and reform. The dispute crystallized around advocates of a "hard landing," a collapse of the North Korean regime, verse a "soft landing" or gradual transformation of the regime along the same lines as China's experience. The debate split the Washington foreign policy community, both within and outside the Clinton Administration. Soon the Clinton Administration found its implementation of the Agreed Framework encountering increasingly severe criticism in the Republican dominated Congress.<sup>28</sup>

## V. A Return to Tradition

Tokyo concluded in the spring of 1996 that the harder it attempted to promote trilateral cooperation, the more it seemed to put itself into a no win situation vis-a-vis its ally the United States and neighbor the Republic of Korea. At home, Japan's sagging economy preoccupied its hesitant political leadership. Pursuing normal relations with Pyongyang fell to the bottom of Prime Minister Hashimoto's priority list. Relations with South Korea could also languish. The cautious Prime Minister Hashimoto shelved further effort at trilateral coordination of policy toward the DPRK. Instead, he reverted to Japan's traditional foreign policy of relying on the U.S.-Japan security alliance. As

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28 The main themes of this debate are summarized in the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force Report on North Korea. See : Morton Abramowitz and James T. Laney, co-chairs, *Managing Change on the Korean Peninsula* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1998). For a more detailed discussion of these views, see: Kim Kyung-won and Han Sung-joo, co-chairs, *Managing Change on the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: Seoul Press, 1998).



for the Korean peninsula, actions that might further irritate South Korea were to be minimized, but Japan would fulfill its commitments to KEDO. As for North Korea, the door for a possible unilateral approach would be retained as an option. Further effort at trilateral cooperation was suspended.

Prime Minister Hashimoto's priority was to improve relations with the U.S. The American servicemen's rape of a Japanese schoolgirl late in 1995 had jarred the Japanese public. A loud public debate ensued over the wisdom of continuing to host upwards of 70,000 U.S. military personnel in Japan, half of whom were stationed on Okinawa where the rape had occurred. Prime Minister Hashimoto and President Clinton calmed the debate when they met in April 1996 and issued a joint statement, which reiterated each side's continuing commitment to their close security alliance. The statement also called for a review of the "Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation." The review was to focus on "... the situation that may emerge in areas surrounding Japan..." This was a veiled reference to the Korean peninsula. The statement reassured the Japanese that they were in fact an equal partner in the alliance. Furthermore, it confirmed the need for the alliances continuity despite the end of the Cold War and the demise of their former common enemy. Together, the U.S. and Japan would reinforce their joint capability to deter possible attack by North Korea and its arsenal of ballistic missiles. As for diplomacy toward North Korea, this would be left to the U.S. and South Korea and their joint pursuit of four parties talks with North Korea and China. Meanwhile, Hashimoto would focus on improving relations with Russia.<sup>29</sup>

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29 Akira Ogawa, "Simulation: A Contingency on the Korean Peninsula, How the US and Japan Move According to the New Guidelines," *This Is Yomiuri Magazine* (November 1997). Nigel Holloway *et. al.*, "Not to Our Liking," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (June 26, 1997). "North Korea, Covering the Bases," *ibid.*, pp. 30-34. Japan Defense Agency, *Defense of Japan* (Tokyo: The Japan Times, 1997), pp. 114-115. For the text of the April 17, 1996 US-Japan statement, see: *EASR: 1996-97*, pp. 314-322.

The Japanese government endeavored to keep open various channels of communication with the DPRK in the hope of sensing a softening of Pyongyang's position regarding kidnapped Japanese citizens. A trickle of humanitarian aid continued to flow from Tokyo through the World Food Program to Pyongyang, and a small number of Japanese non-governmental humanitarian relief organizations were able to make visits to North Korea. Private visits by Koreans resident in Japan, members of the pro-DPRK Chosenren Association, continued to visit North Korea at normal levels for tourism and to visit relatives. Contacts between Japanese professors and their North Korean counterparts were encouraged and several visits were exchanged. Pyongyang, however, closed these academic channels after North Korea Workers Party Secretary for International Affairs Hwang Chang-Yop, ranked 24th in Pyongyang's ruling hierarchy, defected to South Korea from Beijing after a visit to Tokyo in February 1997.

Japan's politicians also continued their unilateral approaches to Pyongyang in 1997. The initial efforts proved futile, but persistence eventually yielded results. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) sent two delegations to Pyongyang. One was headed by Sakurai Shin, which spent March 28-31, 1997 in Pyongyang. A second delegation of six LDP members led by Japan's House of Representatives member Nakayama Masaaki visited Pyongyang from March 29 to 31, 1997. Nakayama had four hours of "frank and friendly" talks with Kim Yong Sun, chairman of North Korea's Asia Pacific Peace Committee and a ranking member of the Korea Workers (Communist) Party. Neither visit, however, did have any substantial results.<sup>30</sup>

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30 "LDP Starts Coordination to Provide New Assistance to DPRK," and "Interview with Head of LDP Delegation to the DPRK," in *People's Korea* (April 16, 1997 and March 29, 1998).

### ***Ruling Coalition Delegation to Pyongyang—November 1997***

Japan's unilateral strategy of keeping the channels of communication open and facilitating a trickle of "private" (Japanese Red Cross supplied) food aid to the DPRK finally paid concrete dividends in November 1997. Japan announced on October 11, 1997 that it was ending its the fifteen month long embargo on government food aid to the DPRK, initiated at Seoul's behest, and pledged \$27 million worth of food aid to the World Food Program for distribution to the DPRK.<sup>31</sup> North Korea responded with private talks in Beijing to work out the details of the first visit to Japan from North Korea of Japanese spouses of former Korean residents in Japan. The long awaited visited finally materialized on November 8 when fifteen Japanese wives arrived in Japan. The women represent 1,831 Japanese citizens who had married former Korean residents of Japan and accompanied their husbands to North Korea between 1959 and 1984. They ranged in age from 55 to 84 years old. Communication with relatives in Japan had been sporadic. Although warmly welcomed by the frantic Japanese mass media, receptions by the women's relatives were mixed. Nevertheless, the continuation of the visits by other small groups of women have tempered slightly Japan-DPRK animosity.<sup>32</sup>

A November 11 to 14, 1997 visit to Pyongyang by representatives of Japan's three party ruling coalition the Liberal Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party and Sakigake Party followed. The three Japanese political parties and their host in Pyongyang, the Korea Workers Party, issued a joint communique, which read in part:<sup>33</sup>

1. The sides, considering that the resumption of inter-governmental

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31 "Pyongyang, Tokyo Quietly Beat Path to Normalization Talks," *People's Korea*, (October 22, 1997).

32 "Fifteen Korean Women Visit Japan on Humanitarian Program," *People's Korea*, (November 8, 1997); . B. C. Koh, *op. cit.*

33 "WPK, Japanese Coalition Issue Communique," *People's Korea* (November 14, 1997).

talks for the normalization of Japan-DPRK diplomatic ties fully accords with the aspiration and demand of the two peoples, agreed to exercise the parties' influence to promote the reopening of the ninth round of full fledged inter-governmental talks as early as possible.

The Korean side stressed that the talks should be aimed at the improvement of relations between the two countries and it is necessary to refrain from hurting the other side and doing things unfavorable to the improvement of bilateral ties and to respect the will and desire of the two peoples and pursue mutually fair policies with an independent stand.

2. The sides shared the view that it is necessary to solve humanitarian and cooperation issues between the two countries even before the normalization of the bilateral diplomatic ties.

The Korean side expressed the willingness to continue to allow Japanese wives in Korea to visit their hometowns.

The chairman of the Korea-Japan friendship association said that the allegations regarding a missing Japanese girl are false and have nothing to do with the DPRK, nevertheless, the DPRK, taking the Japanese side's earnest request into account, may make an investigation into the case along with the investigation regarding other missing persons.

While in Korea, the Japanese delegation visited disaster-stricken areas and confirmed the urgency of food assistance. It expressed the willingness to ask the Japanese government to continue offering food aid to the DPRK through international organizations.

Both sides affirmed that the solution to the humanitarian and cooperation issues will be conducive to deepening mutual understanding and friendship and developing bilateral relations as it perfectly coincides with the international usage, the requirements of the present time and the interests and desires of the two peoples.

3. The sides considered that it is desirable for the ruling parties of the two countries to frequently visit each other and promote understanding with a view to creating an atmosphere favorable to the govern-

mental talks and successfully solving the humanitarian and cooperation issues. They agreed to further strengthen multilateral and bilateral visits and contacts between the ruling parties. The three-party ruling coalition delegation of Japan expressed gratitude to the Korea Workers Party for its warm hospitality.

Japan's unilateral political party approach seemed to produce at least tentative results. Certainly it yielded more concrete benefits for Japan than had been the case during the period of trilateral government-to-government cooperation with Washington and Seoul during the two previous years. The three political parties represented in the delegation had achieved what the Japanese Foreign Ministry had not been able to do since normalization talks began in January 1991. The Korea Workers Party in paragraph two of the communique broke with the DPRK government's long held, adamant refusal to discuss the case of missing Japanese citizens and indicated a willingness to investigate the matter. North Korea's previous refusal to do this, plus its non-compliance with the IAEA nuclear safeguards, had blocked resumption of Japan-DPRK normalization talks since the fall of 1992. A major impediment appeared to have been removed. Furthermore, the DPRK reaffirmed its pledge to allow the Japanese spouses of former Korean residents of Japan to visit relatives in Japan.

A full explanation for the Japan-DPRK *dtente* in November 1997, however, must await access to the diplomatic archives in both capitals. We can at least conjecture about some of the reasons. One may have been that the Japanese delegation, unlike the two earlier LDP delegations, represented a solid political coalition that Pyongyang may have concluded possessed the political influence essential to the fulfillment of any commitments made during a visit. Pyongyang, in short, seems to prefer to deal with politicians who can act decisively not just over the negotiating table, but more importantly once they have returned to their capital. Certainly this had been the case with Shin Kanemaru in 1990. Possibly the ruling Japanese political party coalition could deliver

on its promises. Another possible consideration in Pyongyang may have been to further distance Tokyo from Seoul by projecting a benign posture of the DPRK to Japan's most prominent politicians and the general public. This, Pyongyang may have hoped, would further diminish Tokyo's commitment to coordinating its North Korea policy with Seoul and Washington. Then too, Pyongyang probably hoped it could weaken Diet support for the new U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines by tempering its hostility toward Japan and responding constructively to some of Japan's humanitarian concerns. If in fact these were some of Pyongyang's aims, it did not achieve any of them. U.S.-Japan relations were again on a firm footing and South Koreans were about to elect a new president whose attitude toward Japan was much more positive than that of President Kim Young Sam.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Trilateral Cooperation Reconsidered***

Japan-DPRK relations began on a positive note in 1998, but soon turned icy once again. The second home visit of twelve Japanese spouses of former Korean residents of Japan took place between January 27 and February 2. Occasional encounters in New York and Singapore between diplomats from two nations failed to produce results. Then came very bad news in June. North Korea's Red Cross informed its Japanese counterpart that its investigation into allegations about missing Japanese citizens in the DPRK uncovered nothing. The DPRK once again denied any connection with the disappearance of missing Japanese citizens.<sup>35</sup>

The chilling of Japan-DPRK relations and the intersecting of

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34 "US-Japan Alliance Shifts Cloud Peace in Asia," editorial in *People's Korea*, October 8, 1997. DPRK Foreign Ministry Statement, "DPRK on Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation," *Korea Central News Agency*, April 29, 1998. in: *People's Korea*.

35 S. H. Cho, "Dad I'm Back Home," and "Hometown Visit of Japanese-Korean Women Urges Need for Normalized Relations," in *People's Korea* (February 4, 1998).

changes in Seoul and Pyongyang in 1998 convinced Tokyo to keep its options open regarding its North Korea policy. Priority would go to strengthening its defense posture through cooperation with Seoul and Washington. Tokyo would try to maintain its channels of unilateral communication to Pyongyang, but these efforts would be of secondary importance.

The first decisive development of 1998 was the inauguration of Kim Dae Jung as South Korea's president in February. President Kim immediately shifted from his predecessor's pursuit of North Korea's collapse to what the Korean press inappropriately nicknamed his "Sunshine" diplomacy. The new president's aim was to achieve *dtente*, and eventually reconciliation with Pyongyang while forging an international consensus supportive of his policy. In dealing with Pyongyang, Seoul would accent dialogue and peaceful coexistence, not just between the two Koreas but also between Seoul's allies and friends and Pyongyang.

At the time, however, many government officials, not just in Seoul but also in Washington and Tokyo, saw the policy as naive and idealistic. As for most South Koreans and Japanese at the time, they were more preoccupied with the consequences of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98 than with North Korea. Undeterred, President Kim set out in search of international support. During his visit to Washington, D.C. in May, he won qualified approval of his policy from the U.S.. Japan and China followed in the fall of 1998. Other important nations, including Great Britain, France and Russia voiced their support of South Korea's new engagement policy with the DPRK.

Secondly, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il reverted to his nation's conventional policy of coercive diplomacy. The DPRK was gradually regaining its composure after Kim Il Sung's death, the devastating floods in the summer of 1995 and pervasive famine throughout 1996. International humanitarian assistance and warming relations with China had buttressed DPRK leader Kim Jong Il's confidence that his regime would survive these calamities. The primary motivation for a

resumption of its coercive diplomacy, however, appears to have been Pyongyang's intensified concerns for its security prompted by the revised U.S.-Japan Security Guidelines. North Korea's leading official newspaper, *Nodong Shinmun*, almost daily beginning in the fall of 1997 insisted that Japan "... must renounce its policy of hostility toward Korea." This view is amply represented in an April 11, 1998 article which reads in part, "Japanese reactionaries have strengthened moves for a comeback (sic) to Korea, clamoring about a 'threat from North Korea.'" An 'overture' made by the LDP of Japan last year, which is called 'Japan-U.S. Joint Security Declaration and guarantee for Future Security,' states that 'capabilities' should be enhanced to cope with 'emergency' on the Korean peninsula. Also, the author had extensive private discussions with officers of the Korean People's Army in Pyongyang during the entire month of July 1997 that focused on their concerns regarding Japan's perceived "remilitarization."

### ***Pyongyang's Summer of Miscalculation***

As Seoul enhanced its international image, Pyongyang further discredited itself. In June, one week after South Korean business leader and founder of the Hyundai business group Chung Ju-yung had accompanied 1,000 cattle to famine stricken North Korea, a North Korean submarine was caught off South Korea's east coast, the second one in two years.<sup>36</sup> In July, North Korea's Foreign Ministry announced the DPRK would pull out of the Agreed Framework and resume its nuclear program if the U.S. did not fulfill its commitment to supply heavy fuel oil on schedule and in the amount promised. (The U.S. had always been behind in its deliveries of heavy fuel oil, and was still struggling to fund each delivery.) In August, the leak of highly classified intelligence about a suspected secret, new underground nuclear

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36 *Korea Focus* (July-August, 1998), Vol. 6, No. 4. (July-August, 1998), pp. 156-157.



facility at Kumchangni, DPRK created a sensation around the world. Before anyone could catch their breath, North Korea launched a three stage, long-range ballistic missile through Japanese air space into the North Pacific on August 31, 1998.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Japan Reacts to the Taepodong Launching***

Japan reacted with uncharacteristically vehement outrage to North Korea's launching of a missile through its air space. Japan's Diet adopted resolutions condemning North Korea's action. Further food aid and all cargo flights between Japan and Pyongyang were halted. On September 2, within days of the launching, Japan's Foreign Ministry announced it would suspend further financial support to KEDO. (Later the Foreign Ministry would reinstate Japan's pledge to contribute one billion dollars to the KEDO project, but actual release of the funding would require Diet approval.) Japan's defense cooperation with South Korea abruptly intensified. Japan's Defense Agency (JDA) became increasingly vocal in its concerns about North Korea's missile threat to Japan and the need to join the U.S. in the development of a Theater Missile Defense System (TMD).

Japan's economic sanctions on North Korea were more symbolic than substantive, but they nevertheless underscored and lent concreteness to the Japanese people's outrage with Pyongyang. All charter flights between the two countries were halted. This affected nine weekly cargo flights. More importantly, it caused the cancellation of fourteen passenger flights scheduled to carry Korean-Japanese residents to festivities commemorating Kim Jong Il's formal recognition as North

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37 Japan Defense Agency, "North Korean Missile Launch," unpublished and unsigned paper dated October 30, 1998; *Korea Focus* (9-10/98) Vol. 5, No. 6 (September-October 1998), p. 156. *The Far East Economic Review* (December 3, 1998 issue), citing the U.S. military commands in Hawaii and Seoul, reported details of previously classified contingency war plans aimed at defeating North Korea "in detail."

Korea's leader. This denied Pyongyang a significant amount of hard currency that would otherwise have contributed to the regime. Japanese government funded food aid had been halted in 1996 at the request of the South Korean government so there was no food aid scheduled to go to North Korea when this sanction was announced in September 1998. Private food aid funded by non-governmental organizations was allowed to continue. As for the diplomatic talks, these had been previously suspended.

Other Japanese government sanctions paradoxically included suspension of support for the Korea Peninsula Energy Development Organization's (KEDO) construction of light water nuclear reactors in North Korea, government food aid and bilateral diplomatic talks. This move affected the U.S. and South Korea more than North Korea. The intent, according to anonymous Japanese Foreign Ministry officials, was to send a clear message to Seoul and Washington that both should appreciate Japan's support for KEDO and realize that without that support, KEDO's implementation of the Agreed Framework would not be possible. After Seoul and Washington indicated they understood this message, Tokyo quietly allowed the "sanction" to evaporate at the end of October 1998.<sup>38</sup>

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38 *ABC News.com* as reported by the Associated Press, "Japan Ends Flights to North Korea," September 2, 1998. Tokyo decided to halt additional food aid to Pyongyang and to suspend normalization talks with the DPRK. *Korea Focus* (9-10/98), Vol. 6, No. 5 (September-October 1998), p. 156. On May 14, 1996, Japan, the U.S. and ROK held the second vice-ministerial meeting on Cheju Island. It was confirmed that there was no plan to send additional rice assistance to North Korea (*Asian Strategic Review, ASR*, p. 247). The day after (September 1, 1998) North Korea launched a Taepodong 1 ballistic missile over Japan's air space, Japan announced it would halt food aid to Pyongyang, suspend normalization talks and impose selected economic sanctions (*Korea Focus, KF* Vol. 6, No. 5 [September-October 1998], p. 156). On February 2, 1999, the Associated Press quoted Japan's Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura as having said Japan would not send food aid to the DPRK unless the DPRK takes "constructive measures" regarding its missile program (NAPSNET, "Japanese Food Aid for DPRK," February 2, 1999, item 2).

### ***Japan Defense Agency - Beyond Deterrence***

The timing of North Korea's launching could not have been better to promote defense cooperation between Japan and South Korea. ROK Defense Minister Chun Yong-taek was in Tokyo that day to meet Japan Defense Agency head Nakaga Fukushiro. Topping the agenda was the expansion of military cooperation. They agreed to open a high-level "hot line" between their respective ministries to facilitate rapid communication regarding developments on the Korean peninsula to coordinate measures against North Korea's missile development program. They also affirmed they would implement and elaborate previously agreed upon collaboration.<sup>39</sup>

But then the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) exceeded the needs of deterrence. Beginning immediately after the September launch, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Nunaka Hiromu repeatedly warned North Korea of the potential consequences if it repeated another missile launching without giving Japan prior notification. For months JDA officials reiterated Japan's "constitutional" and "sovereign" right to unilaterally strike North Korea's missile facilities.

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39 *KF* (9-10/98) Vol. 6, No. 5, p. 156. *EASR*. p. 235. 2/2/99, item I.3, "Japan and ROK naval officials will discuss Seoul's proposal that a joint naval exercise be held annually in the East China Sea," NAPSNET, February 2, 1999, item I. 3, p. 2. President Kim Dae Jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi during Kim's April 1998 visit to Tokyo agreed to initiate the joint exercises. ROK and Japanese defense ministers concurred on the specifics for the exercise when they met in Tokyo in September 1998. Joint exercise is intended to prepare for search and rescue missions of civilian ships in distress in the seas between the two countries (NAPSNET, March 12, 1999, I.7. p. 4). KYODO reported on March 11, 1999 that Japan and South Korea agreed to establish an emergency contact system using telephones and fax machines. The agreement was reached in January 1999 between Japanese Defense Agency head Hosei Norota and ROK Defense Minister Chun Yong-taek. The system will link the Japanese Defense Agency to the ROK Defense Ministry, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force to the ROK Navy, and the Air Self-Defense Force to the ROK Air Force.

Within this context, JDA continued to publicly advocate an unprecedented upgrading of Japan's ability to project its force capability beyond Japan. The program encompassed the development of intelligence satellite technology and the Theater Missile Defense System (TMD). It called for the purchase of tanker aircraft to refuel fighters in mid-flight. Tokyo's *Yomiuri Daily* February 24 issue quoted JDA Vice Minister Seiji Ema as having explained, "Tanker planes are needed to allow us to carry out new operations. They will enable combat air patrol planes to stay airborne longer, and they will also allow other plans to fly nonstop over long distances."<sup>40</sup>

### ***Japan-ROK Cooperation Intensifies***

When President Kim Dae Jung began a four-day visit to Japan on October 7, North Korea's missile launch one month earlier facilitated rapid repair of the damage his predecessor had done to Japan-Korea relations. Japanese Emperor Akihito expressed "deep sorrow" for the suffering that Koreans experienced during Japan's colonial rule. The next day, for the first time the apology was incorporated into a bilateral declaration between the two countries. In this "Joint Declaration on the New Korea-Japan Partnership for the 21st Century" dated October 8, 1998, President Kim Dae Jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi agreed to:<sup>41</sup>

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40 NAPSNET, March 15, 1999, pp. 2 and Air Strikes: NAPSNET, March 12, 1999, III. 1 & 2. "Watch Out for Japan's Defense Trend," *China's People's Daily*, March 11, 1999 cited Japan Defense Agency Director-General Taichi Sakaiya as having said Japan might take preemptive measures against military bases of any enemy country intending to attack Japan with missiles, a veiled reference to the DPRK. The PRC Foreign Minister spokesman was quoted as having said, "...we are quite surprised at the comments of Taichi Sakaiya.." NAPSNET, March 2, 1999, p. 7 and March 15, 1999, p. 2.

41 *Korea Focus*, vol. 6, no. 5 (September-October 1998), Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 148-152; *Korea Focus*, vol. 6, no. (November-December 1998), vol. 6. No. 6. p. 156.

“firmly maintain their respective security arrangements with the U.S. and further intensify their efforts for multilateral dialogue in order to guarantee peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

the two leaders shared the opinion that it is important that North Korea should pursue reform and openness and take a more constructive posture through dialogues for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. PM Obuchi supported President Kim’s North Korea policy to pursue active reconciliation and cooperation while maintaining a firm national defense posture.

“confirmed the importance of maintaining the Agreed Framework signed in Geneva in October 1994 between the U.S. and the DPRK.

“to support private-level cooperation for the successful organization of the 2002 World Cup and actively promote exchanges in culture and sports.

“continue bilateral consultations for the promotion of the status of Korean residents in Japan...

Trilateral diplomatic coordination intensified through the spring of 1999.

Washington and Tokyo focused on presenting Pyongyang a united diplomatic front by supporting President Kim Dae Jung’s policy of reconciliation. President Clinton had initiated the process during his November 1998 visit to Seoul. ROK Minister of Defense Chun Yong-taek and Secretary of Defense Cohen stated at a joint press conference in Seoul on January 29, 1999 that, “Secretary Cohen and I reconfirmed the unswerving U.S. support of Korea’s policy toward North Korea.”

During the same press conference, Secretary Cohen said, “We do not, in any way, want to substitute the U.S. for the direct dialogue that should occur between the North and South (Korea). ... we support President Kim’s engagement policy. We hope that will produce a very positive result, but we do not want, in any way, to either undercut that or interfere with that, because we believe that the best hope for resolving tensions and issues that exist between North and South Korea should be resolved between the two.”<sup>42</sup>

Former Defense Secretary William Perry, Washington's North Korea policy coordinator, upon his arrival in Seoul on March 8 released a statement, which read in part, "First, I believe President Kim's engagement policy is a very positive factor on which we should build. Indeed, President Clinton has affirmed U.S. support for the policy...." He reportedly reiterated the same point in subsequent meetings with Foreign Minister Hong Sun Yong. Japan's Prime Minister Obuchi said essentially the same thing during his March 19-21 state visit to Seoul.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Seoul Advises Caution***

JDA's continuing and unusually assertive vocalization of deterrence had unnerved not just Pyongyang, but also Washington and Seoul. Secretary of Defense Cohen during his January 29, 1999 press conference in Seoul knocked down rumors of possible military action against North Korea. When JDA did not temper its rhetoric, Seoul stepped into the picture. ROK Defense Minister Chun Yong-taek told the Seoul Foreign Correspondents Club on March 6 that, "If Japan launches a preemptive strike or if North Korea launches another missile and Japan retaliates, that is not acceptable to the ROK government. There is nothing more important than sustaining peace on the Korean peninsula. Close coordination between Japan, the ROK and U.S. forces is essential."<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, President Kim Dae Jung sought to refocus Washington and Tokyo on intensifying their diplomacy toward Pyongyang. On February 24, the ROK President proposed a new "package deal to Pyongyang." If it would curb its ballistic missile development and deployment, and end suspected nuclear weapons programs, South

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42 Official transcript of the press conference that followed the annual U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, reproduced in NAPSNET, Special Report, January 29, 1999, p. 1.

43 USIA transcript reproduced in NAPSNET, March 15, 1999, pp. 1-2.

44 NAPSNET, March 15, 1999, p. 4.

Korea would give the North food and economic aid, and the U.S. would end trade sanctions. Also, the U.S. and Japan would move to normalize relations with the DPRK.<sup>45</sup>

Japan responded quickly and positively to Kim Dae Jung's invitation. Early in March, Japanese diplomats held informal talks in Singapore with representatives of the quasi-DPRK government entity Asia-Pacific Peace Committee. Chief Japanese government spokesman Nunaka Hiromu was quoted in the press on March 12 as having said, "I would like to refrain from commenting specifically on informal negotiations, but I will not deny they took place.... Unofficial contacts between Japan and North Korea should be held at all possible places and times." The day before Nunaka's remarks, on March 11, Japanese House of Councilors member Akiko Domoto revealed plans to make a six-day visit to the DPRK at the invitation of the Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee. One week later, Prime Minister Obuchi's press secretary Sadaaki Numata told the press that Japan is ready to restore normal relations with the DPRK if it responds positively to Japan's concerns, including nuclear and missile issues. The aide was quoted to have said, "Our government waits for an answer from North Korea. ... "We have been making appeals to North Korea for talks about improving our relations." Another issue weighing heavy on the minds of Japanese officials from a humanitarian viewpoint is the DPRK's suspected abduction of Japanese citizens, Sadaaki added.<sup>46</sup>

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45 NAPSNET, February 26, 1999, I.3., p. 2., Reuters, "South Korea's Kim Seeks 'Package Deal' with N.Korea." Lim Dong-won, President Kim's adviser on national security and reunification issues, had visited Tokyo on February 2, 1999, to meet Japan's senior security and foreign policy officials. Lim sought support for ROK's position that Japan continue its engagement policy toward the DPRK. Lim made a similar appeal to US Presidential Adviser William Perry and Department of State Undersecretary for Political Affairs Pickering while in Washington, D.C. See: NAPSNET 2/2/99, ITEM II.2, p. 2, *Korea Herald*, "President's Aide in Japan for Talks on DPRK."

46 NAPSNET, March 12, 1999, I. 3. p. 2. Reuters based on a 3/11/99 Kyodo report, "Japan and North Korea Held Informal Talks - Kyodo," NAPSNET. 3/20/99. II.2.

Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo arrived in the ROK for a state visit from March 19-21 to discuss bilateral DPRK policy and economic cooperation issues with President Kim Dae Jung. After Obuchi had reiterated publicly Japan's support for President Kim's "sunshine diplomacy" toward the DPRK, Kim was quoted in the press as having said, "We have an intention to improve ties with North Korea. We urge North Korea to stop escalating confrontation and tension and open the door for reconciliation and exchanges. Our engagement policy is not an illusion." Prime Minister Obuchi reportedly responded, "Together with President Kim Dae Jung, I would like to tell North Korea that we are ready to improve our relations with North Korea."<sup>47</sup>

Trilateral cooperation was back on track. Despite the lingering disagreement over some specifics, the U.S., ROK and Japan had once again moved back toward trilateral cooperation and coordination of their policy toward North Korea. Clearly, this was a major consequence of Pyongyang summer of miscalculations. At the same time, President Kim's success in aligning for the first time in history the support of all four superpowers (China, Russia, Japan and the U.S.) for South Korea's policy toward the North merits considerable credit. The trilateral arrangement again reduced Pyongyang's ability to play one partner against the other. It brought greater precision and clarity to the U.S. negotiations with the DPRK concerning weapons of mass destruction in that it can more clearly distinguish between the potential bene-

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p.4. Korea Herald, "Japan Ready to Resume Talks with North Korea."

47 NAPSNET, February 23, 1999, II. 1. Chosun Ilbo, "DPRK Encouraged into World Community." The ROK government reportedly no longer opposes other nations normalizing relations with the DPRK (and made this clear at MOFA's annual meeting for ROK diplomatic mission chiefs. NAPSNET, 3/17/99.II.2. *Joongang Ilbo*, March 16, 1999). NAPSNET 3/23/99. I.3.p.2. Reuters and AP. NAPSNET. 3/20/99. Korea Herald, "President Kim calls on Washington, Tokyo to Seek Direct Ties with Pyongyang." President Kim Dae-Jung said, "Now I hope that Washington and Tokyo engage in direct exchange and cooperation with Pyongyang, instead of passing through Seoul."



fits and disadvantages of its conduct vis a vis the three nations. At the same time, trilateral cooperation is more likely to deter Pyongyang's reliance on coercive diplomacy to assert its interests.

### ***Pyongyang Goes to the Edge***

Pyongyang reacted to the resumption of trilateral cooperation and Kim Dae Jung's "package deal" offer first with an arrogant and provocative one-two combination of diplomatic and military punches, but later back-pedaled once it realized the extent to which it had put itself in a very disadvantageous and vulnerable position. Pyongyang first took aim at Tokyo. On February 1, 1999, the Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee of the Korean Workers Party issued a "Memorandum on DPRK-Japan Relations" via the DPRK's official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA). After a concise review of earlier efforts to restart normalization talks, the Committee accused Japan's "right-wing conservative forces" of having "slandered the DPRK over the missile test. Japan's negative attitude toward the DPRK was described as "a radical product of its hostile policy toward the DPRK." Japan was accused of answering "benevolence with evil, and favor with enmity." The memorandum concluded on a threatening note, "the character of the Korean people is to answer a sword with a sword, and rice cake with rice cake. Japan must ponder this."<sup>48</sup>

Six weeks later, Pyongyang summarily dismissed Seoul's offer of a "package deal." Radio Pyongyang on March 17, 1999 declared:

The Sunshine Policy is nothing more than a variant of engagement policy and, at bottom, both are anti-DPRK schemes that foster confrontation. (In regard to President Kim Dae Jung's February news conference statement that, "I desire a fair dialogue [between North and South Korea] that all the people can understand.") This is a fortu-

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48 KCNA, "Memorandum on DPRK-Japan Relations," Korea Central News Agency (KCNA), February 1, 1999 on the Internet at <*People's Korea* (80th issue)>.

itous response to the [DPRK's] Joint Council's February proposal for dialogue, but the fly in the ointment is that Kim continues to brandish the sunshine policy, which is antithetical to unification and to the interests of the Korean people. The South Korean power-holder asserts he will lead the DPRK to opening and reform via his sunshine policy. In fact, the policy is only a variation of the ROK's anti-DPRK, confrontational strategy. It rebuffs the DPRK's ideological tasks and aims to prepare the way for an invasion of the DPRK. The sunshine policy is pure fantasy; it can never exist. It is a pipe dream.

If South Korean officials really want unification, they must respond positively to our patriotic and pro-national proposal for dialogue, they must stop toadying to foreign powers, rescind the National Security Law, and guarantee complete freedom of action to individuals and organizations in the ROK's unification movement. These are absolute conditions that must be met before dialogue can begin. South Korea's power-holder must assume responsibility for advancing the sunshine policy that has interrupted the nation's unification, thereby disappointing the Korean people who long for unification.

(NOTE: Prior to this statement, the DPRK official newspaper, *Nodong Shinmun*, earlier had run an editorial which called for a broad dialogue with the South but reiterated three preconditions before dialogue as stated in the above text. "Toadying to foreign powers" was a reference to trilateral cooperation.)

Pyongyang then appeared to slam the door shut on any possibility of resuming dialogue with Tokyo when on March 23, Japanese Self Defense Forces spotted two intelligence-gathering ships off the northwest coast of Japan's main island (Honshu). In an unprecedented move, Japan's Naval Self Defense Forces fired at the two ships as they fled toward North Korea. The Japanese government sought to calm the public by not immediately identifying the armed ships as have come from the DPRK. The DPRK's Foreign Ministry three days later issued an adamant denial that denounced "Japanese reactionaries for an anti-DPRK smear campaign." Once again, the DPRK government publicly warned Japan's "reactionaries" to "action with prudence, mindful that

they will be wholly responsible for the grave consequence to be entailed by their reckless smear campaign against the DPRK.”<sup>49</sup>

Pyongyang’s anti-Japan rhetoric intensified further once Japan’s Diet passed on April 27, 1999 the Bill Concerning the Japan-U.S. Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, which embodied the revised U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines. North Korea’s Foreign Ministry noted the passage by issuing another statement on April 27 in which it claimed the legislation “may trigger escalating tension and an arms race in Asia...” and “...aims primarily at the DPRK.” The guidelines were seen as a consequence of the U.S./Japan/South Korea trilateral cooperation. Japan was warned that the guidelines would severely impede any improvement in relations. The statement concluded that Japan’s “aggressive anti-DPRK legislation” justified North Korea’s efforts to “increase its national defense capabilities.”<sup>50</sup>

### ***Pyongyang Back-Pedals***

Just as Japan and North Korea seemed destined for an even more serious confrontation than had been the case after the Taepodong missile test of August 31, 1998, Pyongyang backpedaled. The Korean Workers Party reopened a long dormant academic channel of communication to Japan and invited a Korea expert from Japan to engage in a “security dialogue.” Once assurances had been given early in August that the DPRK would not conduct another missile test, the “dialogue” was scheduled to commence early in September in a third country.

The overture’s earnestness and credibility were subsequently confirmed on August 10, 1999, by the DPRK government’s issuance of a statement entitled, “Japan Cannot See into the 21st Century as Long as Relations with the DPRK Remain Unsettled.” (KCNA, August 10,

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49 KCNA. “Statement by the Foreign Ministry Spokesman,” KCNA, March 27, 1999.

50 *Korea Central News Agency* (KCNA,) April 11, 1999.

1999) As had been the case with earlier, quasi-governmental statements, the history of Japan-DPRK relations were reviewed and judged to have been very negative.

But mid way through the statement, the tone changed and the DPRK government began to set forth its negotiating position if official talks with Japan resumed. Pyongyang said Japan would first have to liquidate “the crimes Japan committed against the Korean people in the past,...” Instead of repenting, Japan was accused of “persistently pursuing the U.S.-toeing policy and policy of hostility toward the DPRK ....” Plus Japan would have to be “obliged” to:

- stop pursuing the policy of stifling the DPRK;
- make a sincere apology and full compensation to the Korean people for all its past crimes; and
- if “Japan dare try to have a showdown of strength in a bid to find a pretext to realize its wild ambition of re-invasion (of Korea), we will have no option but to take corresponding countermeasures.”

The statement concluded with the enticing promise that, “If Japan opts to open good neighborly relations by liquidating the past, the DPRK will welcome it with pleasure.”

### ***Informal Japan-DPRK “Security Dialogue”***

Even before the statement’s release, the Korea Workers’ Party (KWP) had moved at the end of July to reopen one of its long closed private channels of communication to Japan. An element of the KWP invited a private Japanese citizen to initiate a “security dialogue.” With the full concurrence of Japan’s Foreign Ministry, the dialogue began in Beijing in early September. The KWP participants listed six reasons why the DPRK sought to resume engagement with Japan:

- Japan’s decision to launch its own intelligence satellite,
- U.S.-Japan collaboration on Theater Missile Defense,

- Japan's decision to fire on the DPRK's intelligence gathering ships in March, 1999,
- the revised U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines,
- Prime Minister Obuchi's public statement that he would ask the Diet to pass new laws to authorize the Japanese government to take emergency action in the event of a crisis in "a neighboring nation", i.e. on the Korean peninsula, and
- the Japan Defense Agency's decision to develop in-flight refueling capability for its combat aircraft.

The KWP participants during three days of informal "security dialogue" reportedly stated North Korea had concluded that Japan had made the decision to significantly expand its defense role and capability in Northeast Asia. Prior to Japan's adoption of the revised U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, North Korea apparently believed Japan would limit its role to "passive logistical support" of any U.S. military activity in the region. But now, Pyongyang had concluded, Japan had decided upon a much more active role. Japanese officials' earlier assertion "of a sovereign right" to defend Japan had surprised authorities in Pyongyang, and they subsequently concluded it would be best to resume talks with Japan to temper Japan's unexpected assertiveness, the KWP members reportedly stated.

The United States was also an important subject during the "security dialogue" in Beijing. Surprisingly, there was no mention of U.S. Presidential Adviser William Perry's policy report on U.S. policy toward the DPRK. Instead, the two KWP officials spoke at length about North Korea's lack of trust in the Clinton Administration. They referred to the letter President Clinton had sent to DPRK leader Kim Jong Il in conjunction with the signing of the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework of October 21, 1994. In his letter, President Clinton had given Kim Jong Il unqualified assurances that the U.S. government would fulfill its commitments according to the terms of the Agreed Framework. After five years of faltering implementation of the Agree-

ment, the DPRK had concluded that President Clinton's ability to fulfill his promises were severely handicapped by opposition to him in the U.S. Congress.

The DPRK government, the KWP officials claimed, had concluded that the Clinton Administration was no longer in a position to fulfill any future commitments to the DPRK. In other words, Pyongyang had concluded that President Clinton was a lame duck. As proof, the North Koreans cited the Clinton Administration's inability to gain Congressional approval of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Some in Pyongyang, the North Koreans continued, had decided it would be better to deal with a Republican Administration. Such an administration might press harder in negotiations, but it would be more likely to fulfill its commitments. At the same time, if the Democrats gained control of the Congress, the North Koreans expressed the belief that this would auger well for the future implementation of the Agreed Framework.

### ***Normalization Talks to Resume***

The August 10 KWP statement and the "security dialogue" in Pyongyang, according to confidential sources in Pyongyang, reflected DPRK leader Kim Jong Il's decision in July 1999 to resume normalization talks with Japan. By October, the stage was set for yet another visit to Pyongyang by a Japanese Parliamentary delegation. Former Prime Minister and Socialist Party President Murayama Tomiichi headed the subsequent Japanese Diet delegation visit of December 1-5, 1999. Murayama and DPRK Working Party (KWP) Central Committee Secretary for International Affairs Kim Yong Sun worked out a joint communique that "unconditionally" opened the way for a resumption of Japan-DPRK talks. The governments in Seoul and Washington immediately welcomed the Murayama-Kim Yong Sun understanding.<sup>51</sup>

The Japanese government, intent upon avoiding any appearance of

making it too easy for Pyongyang to resume the normalization talks and thus exciting public criticism, moved with deliberate caution. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Aoki Mikio was quoted in the Japanese press on December 2, as having stated, "... it will be quite difficult to conduct normal negotiations unless questions, including another missile launch, are resolved in a clear cut manner." Murayama, sensitive to the Obuchi Administration's concerns, coordinated closely with the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo. In his talks with Kim Yong Sun, Murayama had agreed any formal government-to-government talks should first address Japan's humanitarian concerns in a non-governmental channel.

Tokyo and Pyongyang thus agreed that representatives of the Japanese and DPRK Red Cross organizations would meet prior to any government-to-government talks. The agenda would address:

- the question of missing Japanese citizens allegedly kidnapped by the DPRK,
- Japanese food aid for the DPRK, and
- the next visit to Japan by the Japanese spouses of Koreans residing in the DPRK.

If these talks proved productive, government-to-government normalization talks could then resume.

As anticipated, the bilateral Red Cross talks held in Pyongyang December 19-21, 1999, readily yielded positive results. DPRK Red Cross vice Chairman Ho Hae Ryong and his Japanese counterpart Konoe Takaderu issued a joint statement on December 21 that read in part:<sup>52</sup>

1. Both sides decided to restart the third hometown visit of Japanese

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51 Seoul's Yonhap Press, Agence France Presse, and U.S. Department of State Spokesman Rubin at the daily noon briefing, December 3, 1999.

52 "Joint Statement on DPRK-Japan Red Cross Talks," *People's Korea*, December 22, 1999 on the Internet at <Korea-np.co.jp/p k /125th issue>.

women in the DPRK next spring (2000)

2. The DPRK side, considerate of the proposal made by its Japanese counterpart, decided to ask a relevant organ (i.e. the DPRK government) to conduct a thorough investigation into the Japanese missing persons on the list presented by the Japanese side.
3. ...the Japanese Red Cross Society decided to propose to the Japanese government that it resume humanitarian food aid at the earliest possible date....
4. Both sides decided to discuss further to settle the issue of the welfare and whereabouts of Korean victims missing before 1945.

Two separate rounds of Japan-DPRK talks followed. First, diplomats of each government met on December 22, 1999, to work out the general parameters for the resumption of formal normalization talks. Japan named career diplomat and current ambassador to Saudi Arabia Takano Tetsujiro as its representative to the forthcoming ninth round of Japan-DPRK normalization talks. The agenda was agreed upon in principle:

1. Historical problems (apology for past misdeeds,)
2. Economic issues (questions of compensation, reparations and property claims),
3. International and Security Issues (diplomatic normalization, nuclear and missile issues, Japan's involvement in Theater Missile Defense and North/South Korea dialogue).
4. Other Issues (humanitarian issues including the Japanese missing persons, food aid, and status of Koreans in Japan).

The date for the resumption of the normalization talks has yet to be set. A late February date was initially envisioned but has now be set back to March, at the earliest. Japan apparently requested the delay to allow its chief delegate time to return to Japan from Saudi Arabia and receive briefings about the issues he is to negotiate.



## VI. Future Prospects

Prospects for the resumption of Japan-DPRK talks are the best they have been since 1991, but actual normalization of relations is an entire different matter. Before Tokyo and Pyongyang can exchange ambassadors and resume normal commercial relations, they must resolve several politically sensitive and highly complex issues. Here we review the current status of these issues:

### *Humanitarian Issues*

Some progress toward resolution of these issues can be anticipated. The most difficult issue to resolve will remain the question of “missing” Japanese citizens. One possible tentative solution to this problem is for both sides to agree upon the establishment of a joint commission to investigate both sides’ claims of missing persons. This would allow the normalization talks to continue and to focus on other issues, particularly those involving questions of past history. The home visit by Japanese spouses of former Korean residents of Japan is no longer a major stumbling block. The question of Korean “Comfort Women,” however, remains an emotionally highly charged issue for Koreans, both in North and South Korea. The issue is also related to the problems of history, i.e. apologies and compensation.

“Missing” Japanese Citizens: (also commonly referred to as kidnapped or abducted persons)

Second to the question of transparency for North Korea’s nuclear program, this issue has blocked the resumption of Japan-DPRK normalization talks since 1992. The Japanese government has considerable evidence that North Korean agents between 1977 and 1980 kidnapped at least ten Japanese citizens ranging in age from 13 to 52. Another three Japanese citizens are believed to have been abducted by North

Korean agents in Europe and sent to North Korea between 1980 and 1982. Japan wants North Korea to cooperate fully in an investigation of what happened to several Japanese citizens kidnapped twenty years ago and believed to have been taken to North Korea.

Evidence of North Korea's involvement in these disappearances continues to mount. In 1977, a North Korean living in Japan confessed to police that he had abducted a Japanese security guard and turned him over to the crew of a North Korean submarine. Similar stories have appeared in the Japanese press. One of the most famous cases involves one of the two North Korean agents, Kim Hyon Hui, who bombed a South Korean jetliner in 1987. Ms. Kim, who was carrying a Japanese passport when arrested in Bangkok, told Japanese authorities that she had learned the Japanese language and customs from a Pyongyang resident named Li Un Hye. The Japanese police eventually identified Ms. Li as Yaeko Taguchi of Tokyo who had disappeared in 1979.

Until December 1999, North Korea adamantly and repeatedly refused to discuss these abductions with Japanese authorities, much to the keen displeasure of Japanese politicians and the general public.<sup>53</sup>

#### Japanese Spouses in North Korea:

The health and welfare of some 6,637 Japanese women married to Korean men and residing in North Korea remains a divisive issue. Between 1959 and 1982, about 93,000 Koreans resident in Japan immigrated to North Korea. Most made the move between 1960 and 1964. About 6,637 Japanese women accompanied their Korean husbands to North Korea. Of this number, 1,828 retained Japanese citizenship as of the early 1990's. Pyongyang had promised that the women could visit Japan every two or three years, but this was never allowed. In November 1998, the Japanese Red Cross was finally able to arrange the visit to

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53 *The Japan Times*, June 9, 1998, p. 3.

Japan of a small group of the women who had retained their Japanese citizenship. The results were mixed. Some of the women had tearful reunions with aging parents. Others, however, were rejected by their kinsmen after they had made pro-North Korean comments to journalists upon their arrival in Japan. No further visits are envisioned.<sup>54</sup>

#### Korean Comfort Women Issue:

The Japanese Imperial Armed Forces during World War II “drafted” upwards of 250,000 women from Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan to serve as “comfort women” or prostitutes for Japanese military personnel. Many of these women have long sought apologies and compensation from the Japanese government. The 54th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva March 16-April 24, 1997 condemned Japan’s past actions and urged the Japanese government to respond compassionately to the former “comfort women’s” grievances. The Japanese government refused to do so. On April 28, 1998, a Japanese District Court in Yamaguchi Prefecture ordered the central government to make an official apology and to pay compensation to ten former “comfort women” from South Korea. The Japanese government has refused to apply the ruling to all the former comfort women. The North Korean government is adamant that the Japanese government must compensate the comfort women residing in North Korea before bilateral relations can improve. So far the Japanese government has rejected this and all other claims.<sup>55</sup>

#### Korean Residents in Japan:

The Japanese government has taken several important steps since 1992 to defuse many of the core concerns of the Korean community in Japan. Ethnic Koreans must still register with local authorities, but they

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54 Library of Congress, *North Korea: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

55 *The People’s Korea* (Tokyo), June 6, 1998.

are no longer finger printed. History textbooks have undergone extensive revision to more accurately and comprehensively reflect Korea's cultural and intellectual contributions to Japanese culture and history, Japan's exploitation and abuse of Koreans prior to the end of World War II and continuing prejudice against Koreans in contemporary Japanese society. This issue, however, is no longer a major obstacle to normalization of Japan-DPRK relations.

Economic Issues:

The DPRK will want to address these and related issues very early in the normalization talks. Pyongyang is certain to present Tokyo a long list of grievances to strengthen its claims to a comprehensive apology from ranking Japanese officials, beginning with the emperor, for Japan's past misdeeds prior to 1945, a large compensation package that includes cash, long term loans and access to Japan's technology, market and private investment capital.

The Japanese government is prepared to apologize in a manner similar to the several apologies it has already made to the South Korean government and people. Here, South Korea could complicate the situation if it insists that Tokyo avoid any appearance of recognizing the DPRK government as a "legitimate" political entity on the Korean peninsula. In its 1965 normalization treaty with Seoul, Tokyo recognized the Republic of Korea as the sole legitimate government on the Korean peninsula.

The Japanese government will most likely attempt to limit the amount of compensation the DPRK can be expected to demand. Tokyo will point to its sizable contribution to the LWR project, approximately one billion dollars, as a portion of its compensation. Also, it is certain to present the DPRK with a long list of claims by Japanese corporations and citizens whose property was seized at the end of World War II by the DPRK government.

Unlike 1991, the DPRK cannot rely on the Korean community in

Japan and the Japanese business community in general to pressure the Japanese government to be generous in its economic dealings with the DPRK. Japan is no longer a source of large sums of private money for North Korea. The Kobe earthquake of January 1996 affected the largest concentration of Korean-Japanese residents in Japan. The Korean-Japanese community's economic vitality sustained severe damage. The usually large flow of money from this community to North Korea was diverted to rebuilding the Korean-Japanese community. Subsequently, deterioration of Japan-DPRK relations and the aging of the Korean-Japanese population in Japan has reduced the flow of money to North Korea. South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung then opened the way for Korean-Japanese to visit South Korea. Approximately 80 percent of Koreans in Japan trace their ancestry to South Korea. President Kim's benevolent act shifted the allegiance of many Korean-Japanese residents away from Pyongyang and toward Seoul.<sup>56</sup>

Prospects for growth in Japan-North Korea trade are dim. China remains North Korea's primary trade partner (\$656.3 million in 1997), accounting for 30 percent of North Korea's entire trade. Japan ranks second with 22.5 percent of total trade worth \$489.3 million. South Korea comes next with \$308 million, both direct North-South trade and trade between the two halves of Korea via third countries. But in 1997, North Korea's trade gap with Japan worsened significantly. North Korean exports to Japan declined by \$3 million while imports from Japan increased \$5 million.<sup>57</sup>

The shrinking Korean-Japanese business community involved in this trade is determined to reverse these trends and restore previous levels of trade. Many political observers in Japan believe these businessmen, aided by profits from Pachinko gambling parlors, have put up the large sums of money to induce prominent politicians like Prime

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56 Discussions between 1997 and 1999 with leaders of the Korean community in Japan and Japanese business leaders.

57 *A Handbook on North Korea* (Seoul: Naewoe Press, 1998), p. 33.

Minister Murayama and fourteen other members of the Diet to visit Pyongyang in late November 1999. This highly visible delegation struck a party-to-party deal with Korean Workers Party Secretary for International Affairs Kim Yong Sun that promises a resumption of bilateral government-to-government talks. This is all well and good, particularly for the Japanese politicians who are certain to have reaped significant financial support from the Korean-Japanese business community for traveling to Pyongyang. Numerous divisive issues remain to be resolved, however, before there can be any significant progress toward the normalization of Japan-DPRK relations.

### ***International and Security Issues***

#### U.S.-Japan Alliance and Trilateral Cooperation:

Pyongyang can be counted on to press Japan to forego its diplomatic and security cooperation with Washington and Seoul in conjunction. It will point to the revised U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines and the growing Japan-ROK defense cooperation as proof of Japan's alleged remilitarization and preparation to "re-invade" the DPRK. North Korea will insist these elements of Japan's foreign and security policies reflect its "hostile" attitude and continuing efforts to "strangle" the DPRK. Tokyo is highly unlikely to accommodate Pyongyang's demands in this regard. The U.S.-Japan Alliance remains the foundation of Japan's security policy. Also, Tokyo can be counted on to maintain its long held position that Pyongyang should resume dialogue with Seoul regarding the resolution of problems on the Korean peninsula.

#### Nuclear Issue:

Japan is certain to press Pyongyang to facilitate greater transparency for its nuclear program and to enhance the DPRK's cooperation with the IAEA. Tokyo can also be counted on to continue its support of the Korean peninsula Energy Development Organization's (KEDO)

light water nuclear reactor construction project at Shinpo, DPRK. Despite occasional disagreements with KEDO, Tokyo sees implementation of the Agreed Framework, including the reactor project, as a pillar of its security and nuclear non-proliferation policies in Northeast Asia.

#### Missile Issue:

Japan supports the U.S. and South Korea's insistence that North Korea cease its development, production and export of ballistic missiles. To counter North Korea's ballistic missile program, Japan has publicly committed financial and technical support for the U.S. Theater Missile Defense (TMD) program. TMD's aim is to equip the U.S. and Japan with the ability to use ballistic missiles to counter any ballistic missile attack from North Korea or China. North Korea will claim its development of missiles is a "sovereign" right, central to its defense needs in light of Japan's perceived "remilitarization."

## **VII. Conclusion**

Japan's re-emergence as a core member of the diplomatic coalition encompassing the United States and the Republic of Korea enhances prospects for gradual movement toward a more durable peace in Northeast Asia. For the first time in history, all the superpowers share common goals on the Korean peninsula - a peaceful, stable and nuclear free Korean peninsula where North and South Korea pursue reconciliation through direct dialogue. For Japan, progress in this regard is consistent with its priorities of ensuring its future security and prosperity.

Japan's policy toward North Korea has become increasingly sophisticated since it opened bilateral normalization talks with the DPRK in 1991. Despite repeated frustrations in dealing with North Korea, Tokyo

appears intent now to pursue a persistent policy of engagement of North Korea backed by a stance of resolute deterrence. At the same time, Tokyo, along with Washington and Seoul, appears to have learned that its primary interests are shared with its friends, and thus are best served through common, and not unilateral action both in the areas of diplomacy and security. Consequently, Tokyo is better prepared to negotiate with the DPRK from a position of strength and supported by its allies and friends. Tokyo's allies and friends would do well to recognize this and resolve support of Japan's efforts.

The process of achieving normalization with the DPRK is certain to be long and arduous. Japan's leaders must temper the public's expectations about how quickly progress can be achieved. The outstanding Japan-DPRK issues involving the past and security will be extremely difficult to resolve. Impatience on the part of the Japanese public would only undermine the ability of their government to achieve balanced progress toward normalization.

Pyongyang would do well to recognize the new realities of Japan's more sophisticated approach to bilateral normalization. Tokyo, despite its lingering economic recession of the past decade, remains an economic power in the global economy. North Korea's severely depressed economic situation is hardly an enticement to rush toward normalization. Nor can Pyongyang expect its conventional coercive diplomacy to have any significant impact on Japan. Pyongyang's miscalculations, both its repeatedly slighting of Japanese concerns regarding missing citizens and efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction, angered the Japanese public to the extent of facilitating the Japanese government's efforts to enhance the nation's defense posture.