

An Active Japanese Foreign Policy Impeded by a Frustrated Public in the Post-Cold War Era

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Abstract

The Japanese government sought to take a more active foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, especially after the Gulf War. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made a significant foreign policy decision to visit Pyongyang in September 2002 to begin a process of normalizing relations with North Korea. The move was intended to be emblematic of a reorientation of Japan's foreign policy onto a new course that was realist, activist, and suited to the post-Cold War era. However, an unmanageable level of domestic frustration among the Japanese people impeded the Japanese government in taking this new orientation any further. This frustration was born out of despondency over domestic economic conditions in the 1990s, the impotence of being an economic superpower with little foreign policy stature, and the emotional shock that came from learning that Japanese citizens had been kidnapped by North Korean agents. Focusing on the conditions that contributed to the development of a more active Japanese foreign policy and those that eventually undermined it (at least for now), this paper, being critical of the propensity of mass opinion to affect foreign policy, suggests that mass bigotry and popular passions can generate an irrational outcome that prevents decision makers from executing a rational foreign policy.

Key words: abduction, Pyongyang Declaration, Junichiro Koizumi, North Korea, Kim Jong Il

Introduction

American hegemony during the Cold War allowed Japanese pacifism free reign. Japan was able to maintain a low profile with regard to foreign policy and the Japanese people had little concern for national security. As a result, although Japan had become an economic superpower by the early 1980s, it played no corresponding role in foreign policy and global security issues. This disparity frustrated some Japanese. However, the frustration was kept in check by the economic benefits and social and political stability of the post-World War II period. With the end of the Cold War, Japan's foreign policy elite sought to formulate a more active, multilateral, and independent foreign policy. The highlight of this more active policy was Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's historic visit to Pyongyang in September 2002. However, years of frustration finally erupted when the Japanese people realized that North Korean agents had in fact abducted Japanese nationals. This outcry prevented Japan from moving forward with a more active multilateral security strategy for itself in the Asian region.

This paper first examines US-Japan relations during the Cold War. It then reviews the reasons why Japan began to pursue a more active foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Finally, it focuses on the conditions that contributed to the development of such a policy and the factors that eventually undermined this development. One of the threads running through the paper is that decision makers can be prevented from executing a rational foreign policy. Rather, popular passions and mass bigotry can generate irrational outcomes.

US–Japan Relations since World War II

Two major factors contributed to a stable international system for the half-century after World War II. First, during the Cold War there was a bipolar world of antagonism between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The existence of the threatening “other,” the Soviet Union, was a critical element in US efforts to realize the hegemonic ambition of achieving and maintaining unity and integrity in the Western bloc. The bipolar Cold War framework gave the Japanese people no choice but to endure the Japan-US security treaty, the stationing of US military forces in Japan, and Japan’s gradual remilitarization in accordance with US wishes.

The second factor was the existence of the United States as a hegemon in the West. During the allied occupation of Japan, General Headquarters (GHQ) controlled Japan’s foreign trade and exempted Japan from the heavy burden of its huge trade deficit, much of which was underwritten by American aid. US assistance amounted to \$404 million in 1947 and \$461 million in 1948, accounting for 92 percent of Japanese imports in 1947 and 75 percent in 1948.¹ US economic assistance to Japan continued in various ways after the occupation.²

In addition, the Japanese people’s deep-rooted pacifist sentiment had a significant influence on the nature of Japan’s foreign policy and its relations with the United States. Many Japanese civilian leaders became willing to cooperate with GHQ to demilitarize the country, and to reduce the risk of a domestic social revolution while at the same time consolidating their grip on political power. Japan’s surrender and

¹G. C. Allen, *Japan’s Economic Recovery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 33; Catherine Edwards, “US Policy Towards Japan, 1945-1951: Rejection of Revolution,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), p. 163.

²Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

the end of militarism brought no immediate relief to the continuing misery of millions. Because falling bombs was replaced by serious hyperinflation and food shortages, and a general loss of hope, the Japanese people desperately needed someone to blame for their misfortunes. Consequently, Japan's civilian leaders held the militarists and ultra-nationalists wholly responsible for the ravages of war and its aftermath, thus gratifying the nation's political and psychological need for scapegoats. Japan's civilian leadership defined the Asia-Pacific War as a great aberration, wrought by a group of extremists who cared nothing about taking Japan down a path toward disaster. Article 9 post-war Japanese constitution was the ultimate measure of how power had shifted from the clique of militarists and ultra-nationalists into the hands of civilians.³

During the Cold War, the Japanese people were little aware of national security issues. Courtesy of US military protection, they enjoyed a peace that would continue as long as Japan remained in the Western bloc.⁴ In practical terms, Japan's post-war security consisted of subservience to US wishes at the expense of any dialogue over regional security issues with its Asian neighbors. Consequently, Japan tended to have a strong sense of inward-looking, one-country pacifism and of isolation from other Asian countries.⁵

³“The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes,” The Japanese Constitution, Article 9, at http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Japan/English/english-Constitution.html#CHAPTER_II.

⁴Tatsuo Urano, “Nihon no Anzen Hoshō to ‘Kyōkuto Yuji’” (Japan's security and military conflicts in the Far East), *Seikei Kenkyū*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (January 1998), p. 357.

⁵Shuichi Wada, “Ajia Taiheiyo ni okeru Takokukan Anzenhoshō Wakugumi to Nihon” (Multilateral security framework and Japan in the Asia-Pacific region), *Seisaku Kenkyū Forum*, Vol. 503 (June 2002), p. 7.

An Active Foreign Policy after the Cold War

When the Cold War ended, Japan had to re-define its political and security relationship with the United States and re-consider its position in the international community. Japan suddenly found itself under pressure from various countries and international bodies to play a more significant political, military, and financial role in global affairs.

Japan's policy toward North Korea was the most vivid representation of a new, more activist post-Cold War foreign policy. In an attempt to establish itself as a post-Cold War regional leader in Asia, Tokyo took the initiative in attempting to construct a more amicable relationship with North Korea. Japan embarked on this approach by first offering a formal apology by Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita for Japan's aggression during the Asia-Pacific War made on March 30, 1989. In September 1990, Shin Kanemaru, a former Vice President of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and Makoto Tanabe, Vice President of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), led a team of Diet members (13 from the LDP and 9 from the JSP) to North Korea. They brought a letter from Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu that expressed a sincere apology for Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula and a desire to take the first step to overcome difficulties in order to establish a friendly relationship.

North Korea became an international hot spot in February 1993 when it declined a request from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for agency inspectors to be permitted to examine nuclear waste-related sites near Yongbyon. North Korea's refusal immediately caused alarm and suspicion at the IAEA and in the capitals of some countries that Pyongyang was working toward the development of nuclear weapons. Suspicions about the possible existence of such a program reached their peak in March 1993, when

North Korea announced its intention of withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Then in May 1993, North Korea fired a Nodong missile over Japan. Over the next 12 months, tensions between Japan and North Korea escalated, with North Korean rhetoric becoming ever more hostile. Faced by this series of events, it dawned on Japan's diplomatic elite that North Korea's potentially threatening posture had become an issue that might have a direct bearing on Japan's national security.

In a bid to ease regional tensions, in October 1994, the United States negotiated the "Agreed Framework" (the Geneva Agreement) with North Korea. The agreement contained a US promise to construct two light-water nuclear reactors for North Korea in exchange for that country's commitment to suspend its nuclear weapons development activities. The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was created in 1995 to help fund the construction of the reactors. The United States was in charge of the diplomacy that led up to KEDO, but South Korea and Japan were asked to finance the actual reactor construction and KEDO operations. Regardless of the diplomatic benefits made possible by the Agreed Framework, Japan could not fail to observe that the United States had gone over its head to negotiate one-on-one with North Korea about issues that have a direct bearing on Japan's national security. Japan exerted little influence over the contents of this agreement, but that did not stop the United States and Korea from assigning Japan the role of providing financial backing for the KEDO project.⁶

Because the Agreed Framework represented a dramatic instance of unilateral negotiation by the United States with North Korea in the absence of close consultations with Tokyo, Japan began to distrust

⁶Narahiko Toyoshita, "Shinkyu Gaidolain no Hikaku Bunseki to Nihon Gaiko" (Comparative analysis of old and new guidelines and Japanese diplomacy), *Ritsumeikan Kokusai Chiki Kenkyu*, Vol. 17 (January 2001), p. 60.

post-Cold War US diplomatic orientation. The Japanese government now began to fear that the United States might resort to preemptive military attacks against North Korea or, alternatively, to unilaterally improve its relationship with Pyongyang without giving due consideration to Japan's interests.⁷ This prompted Japan to re-examine the strategic role of the US-Japan alliance and the future of Japanese diplomacy in East Asia.

In August 1994, the Advisory Group on Defense Issues – the prime minister's private advisory group on Japan's security policy in the 21st century – issued a report titled “The Modality of the Security and Defense Capability of Japan: The Outlook for the 21st Century.” The report recommended that “from now on, Japan should make an active contribution to establishing order” in the region, encouraging Japan to shift from total reliance on its alliance with the United States to a more proactive posture in its diplomacy and security strategy.⁸

Domestic Conditions for a Proactive post-Cold War Foreign Policy

Not only the international environment but also domestic conditions in Japan underwent significant changes in the late 20th century. When the JSP won a major victory in Upper House elections in 1989 under Chairwoman Takako Doi, the party had a real possibility of becoming a junior member of a ruling coalition. Unfortunately, by being close to political power, the JSP was faced with a severe dilemma: In the area of foreign policy, how would it balance its core

⁷ Masao Okonogi, “Kitachosen Mondai to Nihon Gaiko” (North Korean issues and Japanese diplomacy), *Ajia Jiho*, Vol. 34, No. 9 (September 2003), pp. 11-12.

⁸ Advisory Group on Defense Issues, “The Modality of the Security and Defense Capability of Japan - The Outlook for the 21st Century,” at <http://www.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~worldjpn/documents/texts/JPSC/19940812.O1J.html>.

defense of Japan's peace constitution, the party's *raison d'être*, and other long-standing ideals with the need to become more flexible if it wanted a seat at the table of power? In the end, the JSP failed to strike a workable balance. Under Tomiichi Murayama, the successor to Doi and a compromise choice as prime minister, the JSP abandoned many of its ideals, which resulted in an exodus of party members and near dissolution of the party.⁹

As for the LDP, Kanemaru's resignation from the Diet, because of the Sagawa Kyubin scandal, precipitated a severe power struggle within the Keiseikai (Takeshita) Faction, the largest and most powerful faction in the LDP, which led to an internal split in the party. Ichiro Ozawa, a former LDP Secretary-General and a senior member of the Keiseikai, led his followers to vote for a no-confidence motion against the cabinet of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. This motion was passed in June 1993. Miyazawa immediately dissolved the Lower House and Ozawa and his followers broke away from the LDP to form the Japan Renewal Party (JRP).

In the Lower House election that took place in July 1993, the LDP failed to secure a majority of seats. In August, a seven-party coalition government under Morihiro Hosokawa of the Japan New Party (JNP) was established. The supporters of the three main coalition parties, the JRP, the JNP, and Sakigake, were quite widely distributed across the conservative-progressive ideological spectrum, but in comparison with LDP or JSP supporters, the bulk of support was clustered around the moderate middle.¹⁰ Consequently, despite a series of re-groupings among coalition members, the coalition, in whatever form, tended to implement policies that were more con-

⁹Jiro Yamaguchi, "To Kaikaku no Seijigaku" (Politics of party reform), in Jiro Yamaguchi and Masumi Ishikawa (eds.), *Nihon Shakaito* (The Japan Socialist Party), (Tokyo: Keizai Hyoronsha, 2003), pp. 130-131.

¹⁰Ikuo Kabashima, *Seiken Kotai to Yukensha no Taido Henyo* (Changes of administrations and voters' changes in attitudes), (Bokutakusha, 1998), p. 45.

servative and realistic than those promoted by the JSP, but more progressive than those of the LDP. Especially in their foreign and security policies, the various coalition governments were more flexible than the LDP ever was during the Cold War, placing much emphasis on multilateral strategies for Japan in the Asia-Pacific region.

Unlike the LDP governments, Japan's coalition governments clearly strove to offer apologies for Japan's military aggression during the Asia-Pacific War. But this conciliatory move in turn rekindled nationalist right-wing sentiment, including among leading politicians.¹¹ In a May 1994 interview with the *Mainichi Newspaper*, Justice Minister Shigeto Nagano, a JRP member, stated that it was "wrong to define the Pacific War as a war of aggression" as "Japan stood up for survival because it was in danger of being crushed, ... [and] Japan thought seriously about liberating its colonies." Nagano even claimed that the "Allied Powers should be blamed for having driven Japan that far. The aims of the war were fundamentally permissible and justifiable at that time." Nagano also said the massacre in Nanjing, China was a "fabrication."¹² During an August 1994 news conference, Environment Agency Director General Shin Sakurai, an LDP member, argued that "Japan had no intention of waging a war of aggression" and that it was thanks to Japan's occupation of Asian nations before and during World War II "that most of them were able to become independent from European colonial rule." He added that as a result of winning their independence, "education in these countries also spread significantly, thus building an enormous momentum for their subsequent economic rehabilitation."¹³

¹¹Yoshibumi Wakamiya, "Kokusaiteki Shiya kara Mita Jiminto Tandoku Seiken Shuen no 10nen" (A decade after the end of LDP single administration from international perspective), *Seikatsu Keizai Seisaku*, Vol. 495 (August 2003), pp. 4-5.

¹²*Mainichi Shimbun*, May 5, 1994.

¹³*Asahi Shimbun*, August 13, 1994.

Notwithstanding the willingness among the succession of coalition governments (including the LDP after 1994 as a member of coalition governments) to create more friendly relations with Japan's Asian neighbors, the strategy of multilateral engagement was not a policy alternative to the Japan-US bilateral alliance. The governments' orientation was a pragmatic supplement to the bilateral alliance and the Japanese government took advantage of this in order to increase its independence from the United States.¹⁴ In April 1996, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and President Bill Clinton issued the "Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century," which confirmed that the Japan-US "partnership would remain vital in the 21st century."¹⁵ In June 1996, Japan and the United States concluded the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement that established terms and conditions for a mutual exchange of goods such as fuel, water, and food and services, including transportation and maintenance between Japan and the United States.¹⁶ In September 1997, the two countries issued a "Review of the Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation," the so-called "new guidelines" that created "a solid basis for more effective and credible US-Japan cooperation under normal circumstances, in case of an armed attack against Japan, and in situations in areas surrounding Japan."¹⁷

The LDP formed a coalition government in June 1994. From that time until 2005, it was unable to win a majority of seats in the Lower

¹⁴ Peter J. Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara, "Japan, Asian-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/2002), p. 166.

¹⁵ "Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century," April 17, 1996, online at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/security.html>.

¹⁶ "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement," June 28, 1996, at <http://www.jda.go.jp/j/library/treaty/acsa/acsa.htm>.

¹⁷ "Completion of the Review of the Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation," September 23, 1997, at <http://www.jca.apc.org/~kaymaru/Guideline/guidelines-e.html#anchor3033373>.

House, forcing it to cooperate with one or more parties to win passage of legislation. The LDP had to concede security issues to other parties, to some extent, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Sakigake, and later Komeito, each of which has a strong anti-military alliance posture. The conservative wing of the LDP may have been frustrated because their party had to agree to a more progressive foreign policy orientation, but the conservatives had no choice but to continue supporting the LDP because no influential conservative political party alternative existed.¹⁸ This resulted in policies that were more independent of US wishes, an anti-military alliance, and pro-multilateral, flexible security, and foreign policies.¹⁹ Japan and the United States established the Japan-US Special Action Committee on Okinawa in November 1995 to deal with consolidation of US bases in Okinawa. The result was an agreement in December 1996 that the United States would return 50 square kilometers (approximately 21 percent of the base area) to Japan. In order to persuade the SDP and the New Party Sakigake to support the new defense guidelines, Prime Minister Hashimoto pledged to continue to press for a reduction of US Marines in Okinawa, to seek the return of Futenma Base, and to press for greater consolidation of US military bases in Japan.²⁰

As for relations with North Korea, former LDP Vice Prime Minister Michio Watanabe, JSP President Wataru Kubo, and Sakigake Chairman Yukio Hatoyama led a delegation of Diet members to Pyongyang in March 1995 to resume diplomatic normalization talks. During these talks, Japan's delivery of rice supplies to North Korea was a major issue, while the troublesome issue of abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents was

¹⁸ Kabashima, *Seiken Kotai*, p. 189.

¹⁹ Yumi Hiwatari, "Seiken Unei" (Operation of political administration), in Nobuhiro Hiwatari and Mari Miura (eds.), *Ryudoki no Nihon Seiji* (Japanese politics in transitional era), (Tokyo: Daigaku Shuppankai, 2002), pp. 119, 125-126.

²⁰ Yumi Hiwatari, "Seiken Unei," pp. 118-119.

left off the agenda. Following these talks, in June 1995, the Japanese government decided to send 300,000 tons of rice to North Korea, and added 200,000 more tons in October. Yohei Kono, Japan's Foreign Minister, believed that Japan should have a "sunshine policy" toward North Korea. He argued that sending abundant rice supplies would establish favorable conditions for a resumption of diplomatic normalization talks.²¹

Abductions

Around the same time as an aid program based on rice shipments was taking shape, there were prominent news reports about possible abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents in years past. These reports provided further impetus to the rise of nationalism in Japan. In January 1997, Representative Shingo Nishimura submitted to the government "an inquiry letter of intent with respect to Japanese kidnappings and abductions by North Korean secret agents."²² In February, the *Sankei Newspaper*, *AERA* (a weekly magazine), and TV Asahi revealed that Megumi Yokota, a 13-year-old schoolgirl who had gone missing on her way home from school, was a probable victim of abduction by North Koreans. In the same month, the Budget Committee in the Lower House officially took up the issue of Megumi Yokota as a possible case of abduction. This was followed by the establishment, in March, of the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea and, in April, the Federation of Diet Members for Rescuing Japanese Nationals Allegedly Abducted by North Korea (FDMA). In May, the Japanese government issued an official announcement that it strongly suspected that North Korean

²¹ *Yomiuri Shimibun*, June 22, 1995 and September 15, 1995.

²² See online at <http://www.n-shingo.com/katudou1/kyushutu.html>.

agents were involved in abducting ten people in the course of seven missing-people incidents. The abduction issue struck a very human chord in Japan, aroused feelings of nationalism, and led to unfortunate acts of discrimination against Koreans. The mass media presented to Japan the image of evil North Korean agents sent to Japan to abduct innocent Japanese, including a little girl. However, Japan's Foreign Ministry and certain leading Diet members tried to prevent this issue from derailing Japan's vigorous post-Cold War diplomatic efforts to establish ties with North Korea. Rice producers, the shipping and storage industries, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Diet members who had close connections with businesses that stood to profit from Japanese shipments of humanitarian aid supplies to North Korea were also worried by the abduction issue. An emotional and intensely hostile backlash against North Korea became evident, with some politicians and bureaucrats playing a leading role. This caused significant harm to negotiations for better relations between North Korea and Japan.

In addition to strong suspicions of abductions of Japanese nationals, Japanese authorities started to pay close attention to the flow of funds from the Korean community in Japan to Pyongyang through Chogin Credit Associations that had been established for pro-Pyongyang Korean residents in Japan by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. In December 1993, Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata stated to the Japan National Press Club that the Cabinet Research Office had discovered that 200 billion yen worth of funds and materials were transmitted to North Korea annually. In May 1994, US Senator John McCain, speaking before the full US Senate, said that he was given information by Prime Minister Hata (during the latter's time as Japan's Foreign Minister) that showed that the amount of money and materials from Korean residents in Japan sent to North Korea amounted to 1.8 billion dollars, out of which 600 to 700 million

dollars was cash, representing more than 40 percent of North Korea's acquisition of foreign currency and over 8 percent of North Korea's GNP.²³ In May 1997, Chogin Osaka Credit Association went bankrupt and it was taken over by the Chogin Kinki Credit Association in November 1997. In May 1998, the Japanese government infused public funds, amounting to over 310 billion yen, into the Chogin Kinki Credit Association. By the end of 2002, the Japanese government infused or had formally decided to infuse approximately 1.4 trillion yen into the failed Chogin Credit Union groups in Japan. The Japanese media reported that the Chogin Credit Union groups were allegedly responsible for sending funds into North Korea. There were reports that the Japanese people were robbed of 1.4 trillion yen, the amount spent by the government to attempt a financial rescue of the Chogin groups, which had been used to maintain the current regime in North Korea.

Some politicians and activists took advantage of the controversy over abductions to become widely known or to advance their political agendas or careers. For example, claiming that the root cause of the abduction problem lay in the lack of proper national defense planning and patriotic spirit among Japanese people, Representative Shingo Nishimura argued that Japan should become much more nationalistic and patriotic and it should upgrade its defense system, including the development of nuclear weapons.²⁴ On the other hand, Daizaburo Hashizume, a professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology and a well-known newspaper columnist, argued that the least expensive and most effective method for Japan to defend the country against possible missile attacks from North Korea was to solidify the US-Japan

²³ Katsumi Sato, *Nihon Gaiko wa Naze Chosen Hanto ni Yowainoka* (Why Japanese diplomacy is weak in the Korean Peninsula?), (Soshisha, 2002), pp. 44-45.

²⁴ Shingo Nishimura, *Tatakai wa Mada Tsuzuiteiru* (Fighting still continues), (Tendensha, 2003), pp. 5-10.

alliance. The United States could assure retaliation against North Korea if the latter attacked Japan, while Japan could cooperate with the United States to develop a missile defense system to prevent North Korea's long-range missiles from reaching the US mainland. In order to solve the abduction problem, Tsutomu Nishioka, permanent Vice Chairperson of the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, advocated strengthening the Japan-US alliance and introducing a missile defense system and nuclear weapons into Japan. He even argued that "without the destruction of Kim Jong Il's regime, we should not negotiate with North Korea for normalization."²⁵ Susumu Nishibe, President of Shumei University, a former member of the Society for Composing a New Textbook on History (an ultra-conservative group which promotes a more patriotic interpretation of Japanese history) and an anti-US independent-minded conservative critic, claims that Japan should not worry about such a small power like North Korea. Or Japan should not respond to the North Korean threat by depending solely on the United States, but should autonomously, use all means possible, including nuclear weapons, against not only a weak country like North Korea but also against North Korea's backers, China and Russia.²⁶ Opinion in favor of Japan imposing severe sanctions on North Korea is getting stronger. Toru Hasuike, Chairman of the Association of Victim Families Kidnapped by North Koreans (AVFKNK), began to suspect that the AVFKNK was being used by these militarist politicians and ambitious activists. Hasuike claimed, "the AVFKNK was originally a group of people who tried to rescue abducted relatives; however, recently, there are some people who advocate 'Overthrow Kim Jong

²⁵ Tsutomu Nishioka and Daizaburo Hashizume, "Niccho Kokko Seijoka wa Hitsuyo nai" (There is no need for Japan-North Korea normalization), *Voice*, Vol. 321 (2004), p. 168.

²⁶ Susumu Nishibe, "Kitachosen gotokiwo 'Kyo'i' ni Sodatanowa Dareda" (Who fostered North Korea as 'threat?'), *Shokun* (October 2003), pp. 58-59.

Il's Regime!' ... It seems to me that the current AVFKNK has become a political pressure group."²⁷

Ordinary citizens do not normally possess adequate knowledge of, have expertise on or even interest in international politics, let alone national security. This allows the foreign policy and national security elite to take the initiative to formulate policy and to lead the public effectively about policy.²⁸ However, the abduction issue was an exception. Encouraged by a small number of well-connected people skilled at organizing and mobilizing the community, such as Katsumi Sato, Director of the Modern Korea Institute, and Kazuhiro Araki, Secretary General of the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN), relatives of the alleged abductees and their supporters became very active and vocal. The group has resorted to issuing militant statements and blunt, imprudent demands. For this group, solving the abduction issue is the most important foreign policy issue confronting Japan. It believes that the Japanese government should freely use whatever tools are available in order to pressure North Korea to resolve the abduction issue immediately. Nishioka has made forceful demands that the Japanese government put the abduction problem at the top of the country's list of national priorities.²⁹ Hasuike has insisted that the government should invoke the right to exercise collective self-defense based on the fact that abduction is state-supported terrorism.³⁰

In the face of the pressure generated by the abductees' families

²⁷ *FLASH*, April 19, 2005.

²⁸ Masamori Sase, "Anzen Hoshō wo Meguru Nihonjin no Ishiki/Taido" (Japanese consciousness/attitudes concerning national security), *Chian Forum*, Vol. 58 (October 1999), pp. 39-40.

²⁹ Tsutomu Nishioka, *Rachi Kazoku tonō 6nen Senso* (The six-year war with the abductees' families), (Fusosha, 2003), p. 191.

³⁰ Toru Hasuike, "Henbo shita Otouto ni Hageshiku Sematta Jikkei no Shogeki Shogen" (The elder brother's shocking attestation who made severe efforts to convince his brother), *Seiron*, Vol. 366 (2003), p. 67.

and their supporters, including some high-profile politicians, the Japanese Foreign Ministry realized that it could no longer simply ignore the abduction issue. When Japanese and North Korean officials met in Beijing in August 1997 for informal talks, the Japanese side asked North Korea to help in finding out what happened to those Japanese who had “gone missing,” the term used instead of “kidnapped.” North Korea agreed to investigate this issue through a joint Japan-North Korean team of Red Cross officials. In June 1998, the North Korean Red Cross notified Japan that none of the “missing” Japanese had been found. Both Japan and North Korea expected that they could put an end to this troublesome issue and move on to normalization talks.³¹

In November 1997, Yoshiro Mori, LDP General Council Chairman, led a group of Diet members of the ruling coalition parties to North Korea. At the last plenary session, Mori said that the abduction issue is “an intractable problem” and strongly demanded that North Korea “try to find a way to solve it.” A North Korean representative replied, “please do not mention this issue anymore. This is a complete fabrication that only irritates us.” At the plenary session, this same representative also argued that “before taking up the complete fabrication of the abduction issue, Japan should show its response to the issue of wartime comfort women.”³² The abduction has been a tricky hurdle for the Japanese government; it has tried to evade the problem in the hope that it would disappear in time.

In August 1998, North Korea launched a Taepo Dong 1, a long-range missile that flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean. Caught by surprise, the Japanese government announced mild

³¹ Eric Johnston, “The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics,” *JPRI Working Paper*, No. 101 (June 2004), online at <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp101.html>.

³² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November 12 and 14, 1997.

sanctions in September 1998, including a freeze on the resumption of negotiations concerning diplomatic relations and a halt to food aid. As early as August 30, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka announced that if North Korea promised not to launch a second Taepo Dong , Japan would be willing to resume official talks and resume emergency food assistance.³³

The Japanese government tried hard to bury the abduction issue in order to move forward with what it felt were more constructive and important issues. In October 1998, the Japanese ambassador to China, expressing frustration at the media coverage of suspected abductee Megumi Yokota, said that there was no hard evidence of the kidnapping.³⁴ In November 1999, Nonaka, then LDP Acting Secretary-General, insisted that progress on the issue of alleged abductions should not become a prerequisite for resumption of official negotiations between Japan and North Korea, arguing: “Indeed, there are many problems ... however, if we begin to discuss this matter [the alleged abductions of Japanese], they would say, ‘what about Japan’s 36-year colonial rule? Japan abducted many human beings [from the Korean Peninsula].’ We would be bogged down in an unproductive argument.”³⁵ In December 1999, former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama led a group to visit Pyongyang. Family members of alleged abducted Japanese requested that the delegate members not abandon the campaign to unearth information about the alleged abductees for the sake of hastily resuming diplomatic relations. In response, Murayama emphasized the priority the Japanese government placed on the resumption of negotiations: “Because it is a matter concerning Japanese sovereignty, we will discuss it with the Korean Workers’

³³ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 31, 1999.

³⁴ Johnston, “The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics,” at <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp101.html>.

³⁵ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November 24, 1999.

Party.” However, he continued, “it is not a good idea to make the solution of the abduction issue a prerequisite for government-to-government negotiation. In order to solve this problem, it is necessary to provide an opportunity for both governments to have a discussion.”³⁶ To many, Japanese sovereignty had obviously been violated by North Korean agents, and Japan’s somewhat meek response badly wounded Japanese pride. This evoked an emotional response that was in favor of revengeful actions by the Japanese government against North Korea.

In April 2001, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi came into office. Because Koizumi had a weak power base in his own LDP party, he had to continuously make direct appeals to public opinion to overcome the political forces, even within his own party, that were opposed to him.³⁷ Much of the public was attracted by Koizumi’s unconventional, even maverick image, hoping he had some magical powers to end the country’s protracted economic crisis without too much pain. With a 70-80 percent approval rating early in his administration, Koizumi was on record as one of the most popular prime ministers in Japanese history.

After experiencing a decade of miserable economic performance and political instability in the 1990s, Japanese people began to accept that a new consensus in favor of some fundamental political changes was unavoidable. Koizumi was extremely sensitive to this change in the public mood and tried to stay out in front of popular sentiment.³⁸ The crowd-pleasing political style adopted by Koizumi can be characterized as populism based on catchy and sensational slogans

³⁶ *Yomiuri Shimibun*, November 30, 1999.

³⁷ Tomohito Shinoda, “Koizumi Shusho no Ridashippu to Anzen Hosho Seisaku Katei” (Prime Minister Koizumi’s leadership and process of national security policies), *Nihon Seiji Kenkyu*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (July 2004), pp. 62-63.

³⁸ Gerald L. Curtis, *Nagatacho Seiji no Kobo* (The logic of Japanese politics), (Shinchosha, 2001), p. 9.

such as “Demolish the LDP from within” and “No pain without gain,”³⁹ which he pledged when he first came to office.

Populism, however, was a double-edged sword. It helped to boost Koizumi’s popularity while at the same time it sensationalized the misfortune, outrage, agony, and the indignation of families of the (at the time) alleged abductees. Turning serious news into sensationalized reporting promoted a tendency to view politics and international relations as entertainment, making theater out of politics.⁴⁰ The mass media mobilized popular support to take a tough stand against North Korea. Dramatizations presented by the TV gossip shows became popular that provided simple, dichotomous, good-or-evil pictures of politics, politicians, and even of international affairs. Hitoshi Tanaka, Japan’s Deputy Foreign Minister, has justifiably complained that issues such as the abductions and the Japan-North Korean relationship should be handled calmly, not made the objects of wild speculations on tabloid TV shows.⁴¹

In March 2002, Megumi Yao, the ex-wife of one of the Yodogo hijackers,⁴² testified that she had induced a Japanese woman by the name of Keiko Arimoto to come to North Korea for an attractive job, and apologized with tears in her eyes to Arimoto’s parents as she explained how Keiko had become a captive of North Korea. Yao’s testimony was front-page news in Japan. In 2002, Katsumi Sato published a book in which he revealed that LDP political kingpins

³⁹ Takeshi Nakai, “*Jikochu no Kabeno Nakade Kangaeru Chikara*” wo *Suteta Nihonjin* (The Japanese people that discarded “ability to consider surrounded by the wall of self-centered people”), (Mikasa Shobo, 2004), p. 183; Toshiki Sato, “Shinku to Nekkyo” (Vacuum and enthusiasm), *Daikokai*, Vol. 40 (2001), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁰ Ohtake, “Nihon ni okeru Telepolitikus,” p. 6.

⁴¹ Hitoshi Tanaka, “Gaiko no Konnichiteki Kadai” (Today’s diplomatic challenges), *Gaiko Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (February 2004), p. 50.

⁴² Japan Red Army members hijacked the “Yodogo,” a Japan Air Line airplane in March 1970, and forced it to fly to Pyongyang, where the members defected to North Korea.

Kanamaru and Tanabe secretly received three billion yen and two billion yen respectively from the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, about one year after their visit to North Korea in 1990, suggesting that they and other pro-North Korean politicians were bribed to ignore the abduction issue.⁴³

Hawkish Diet members, including Katsuei Hirasawa, Shingo Nishimura, and Yuriko Koike, formed a new organization in late March 2002 for the purpose of promoting an uncompromising position on the abduction issue, a full investigation of the Chogin Credit Unions, a moratorium on all cash transfers from Japan to North Korea, and a new legislation that would forbid Korean residents (but not citizens) of Japan from returning to Japan after visiting North Korea.

On September 17, 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi flew to Pyongyang for a one-day summit with North Korean General Secretary Kim Jong Il. At the conclusion of their talks, the two leaders signed the Pyongyang Declaration, a bilateral agreement that marked a major diplomatic triumph for Japan. Koizumi's visit to North Korea was a welcome attempt to reverse the long-standing, untenable political situation on the peninsula. In addition, the visit signaled that Japan was searching for a way to become more active in international affairs. Thus, the Koizumi trip can be seen as the first step by Japan to change the nature of a half-century of subservience to the United States in its foreign relations.

But the most dramatic news that followed the conclusion of the summit concerned the alleged abductees. North Korea had officially declared that it had information about 13 Japanese nationals whom North Korea agents had kidnapped roughly two decades previously. Of these 13, eight, including Megumi Yokota and Keiko Arimoto,

⁴³ Katsumi Sato, *Nihon Gaiko ha Naze Chosen Hanto ni Yowainoka* (Why Japanese diplomacy is weak in the Korean Peninsula?), (Soshisha, 2002).

were said to have died. Five, including two of the three couples who had been initially reported missing by the *Sankei Newspaper* in 1980, were still alive, while Hitomi Soga, who had disappeared with her mother from Sadoshima Island in 1978, was also identified as an abductee still living. All had families, and Megumi Yokota, North Korea said, had left behind a daughter who was now 15 years old. The two governments reached an agreement to allow the five abducted Japanese, but not the rest of their families, to visit Japan. On October 16, 2002, the five living abductees revealed by North Korea – Yasushi Chimura, Fukie Hamamoto, Kaoru Hasuike, Yukiko Okudo, and Hitomi Soga – returned to Japan. With this homecoming, covered extensively by all the major media, Prime Minister Koizumi said he hoped that the abduction issue could be put to rest.

Instead, Kim's admission that North Korea had in fact abducted Japanese nationals brought out a range of emotions – shock, joy, relief, even white-hot rage – among the abductees' families, their supporters, and the general public. Even though the international community was more interested in developments regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons program, the Japanese media, especially such right-wing magazine publications as *Shukan Bunshu* (a weekly), *Shokun*, *Seiron* and *Bungei Shunju* (three monthlies), and the *Sankei Newspaper* waged a vitriolic anti-North Korean campaign that included severe criticisms of Japan's Foreign Ministry, the Koizumi cabinet, and “pro-North Korean” politicians.⁴⁴ The Japanese version of *Newsweek* magazine called this outburst of vitriol “abduction hysteria” and said that it was distorting Japanese foreign policy toward North Korea.⁴⁵ The abduction issue became an all-consuming national *idée fixe* that had a substantial effect on other extremely important matters affecting the relationship between Japan and North

⁴⁴ Haruki Wada, “‘Rachi sareta’ Kokuron wo Dasshite” (Transcending ‘abducted’ popular opinions), *Sekai* (January 2004), pp. 251, 253.

⁴⁵ *Newsweek* (Japanese edition), October 22, 2003.

Korea.⁴⁶

This “hysteria” did not appear spontaneously, but was orchestrated by well-organized groups dealing with the abduction issues. Taking advantage of their close connection with the AVFKNK, the NARKN and FDMA, two groups that were led primarily by Katsumi Sato and Katsuei Hirasawa, skillfully orchestrated Japanese emotional dissatisfaction against the Japan-North Korea summit and the Pyongyang Declaration. These two groups found themselves to be the most powerful interest groups concerning the abduction issue, able to significantly influence debate within the Koizumi Cabinet, the Foreign Ministry, various political parties, and the mass media. Moreover, the Japanese mass media, surprised by both Kim Jong Il’s admission that North Korean agents had engaged in kidnapping of Japanese and the news of the death of eight Japanese abductees, apologized for doubting stories about the kidnappings and for only half-heartedly reporting the abduction issue. The attitude of the media took an about turn. For example, both NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster, and the commercial national TV stations provided marathon coverage of the first group of five abductees who returned to Japan in October 2002 and the later return of the Korean-born children of some of these abductees. As a whole, the coverage helped foster negative stereotypes and an unflattering image of North Koreans in Japan.⁴⁷

The 2002 return home of the five abductees got emotions racing even faster across the country, resulting in displays of bigoted nationalism by many ordinary Japanese, thus ensuring that the abduction issue would remain at Japan’s political center stage. Koizumi’s visit to North Korea was clearly a diplomatic achievement

⁴⁶ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Politics of Hysteria: America’s Iraq and Japan’s North Korea,” *Sekai* (February 2003), p. 234.

⁴⁷ Wada, “‘Rachi saretā’ Kokuron wo Dasshite,” p. 251.

for Japan, but it was overshadowed by the opening of the Pandora's box that was the abductee issue. Whatever activist, realist-oriented foreign policy Prime Minister Koizumi and his supporters in government had in mind for North Korea and for Japan's broader set of relations with other countries had to be put on hold.

Concluding Observations

The Japanese government sought to engage in a more active foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. But it was post-Cold War coalition governments, rather than the dominant LDP that proved to be more able to adopt a more flexible, multilateral foreign policy. However, an unmanageable level of domestic frustration prevented the government from fully adopting a new multilateralist orientation. The source of the Japanese people's frustration was Japan's skewed world status: The country was an economic giant, but at the same time a third-rate power when it came to issues of national security and foreign policy, a condition that was highlighted when the Cold War ended. This long-standing frustration, fueled by despondency over domestic economic conditions in the 1990s and, later, the emotional shock that came from learning that Japanese citizens had been kidnapped by North Korean agents, reached a point where it could not be contained anymore. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made a significant foreign policy decision to visit Pyongyang in 2002 to begin a process of normalizing relations with North Korea. This move was intended to be emblematic of a reorientation of Japan's foreign policy to a new realist, activist course and appropriate for the post-Cold War era. Unfortunately, the national release of emotional stress that was born of domestic frustration impeded the Japanese government from taking this new orientation any further.