

North Korea as a State Sponsor of Terrorism: Views from Tokyo and Pyongyang

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Abstract

This paper examines the interconnections between American, Japanese, and North Korean policies and perspectives, mainly as they have pertained to North Korea's inclusion on the US State Department's list of states that support terrorism. In this context, this paper pays especially close attention to the very troubled Japan-North Korean relationship. It shows that the recent movement by the Bush administration away from the hard-line policy that it maintained for several years, which had been tainted by Cold War politics, has proven effective in improving relations between Washington and Pyongyang. However, relations between Japan and North Korea have remained severely strained by historical problems and animosities, which stem from the Cold War and earlier. This paper concludes by providing practical approaches to bring Japan and North Korea to rapprochement.

Key Words: US terrorist list, Japan-North Korea relations, US North Korean policy, abduction issue, rapprochement

For the first time in its 1983 report on global terrorism, the US State Department named the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) a state sponsor of terrorism, maintaining that it was responsible for carrying out the bombing that occurred in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar) in October. The State Department called the Rangoon bombing, which took the lives of a number of people, including a few South Korean officials, the "most vicious terrorist attack in Asia in 1983." For a few years after 1983, North Korea was on the State Department's watch list; the DPRK was not directly involved in terrorist activities, said the US government, but rather supplying funds, weapons, and training to terrorist organizations.¹ In July 1985, President Reagan declared that North Korea was one of a small number of states "involved in acts of war against the government and the people of the United States," a charge to which Pyongyang retorted was tantamount to – using what became a trite refrain – a "declaration of war."²

On January 20, 1988, the Reagan administration re-designated the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism. This was less than two months after the bombing of a KAL (Korean Air Lines) flight, which Seoul maintained had been perpetrated by North Korea. Calling the KAL bombing the "single most lethal international terrorist attack" that took place in 1987, the US State Department also indicated in its report that this event marked "the return of North Korea as an active agent of state terrorism."³ Around this time, the Reagan administration maintained that Pyongyang just does not "live up to the standards of civilized behavior."⁴

1-US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1983*, Washington, DC, September 1984; also see reports for 1984-1986, all accessed from the Lawson Terrorism Information Center at www.terrorisminfo.mipt.org/Patterns-of-Global-Terrorism.asp.

2-"North Korea, Iran and Libya Respond to Reagan Charges," *The Associated Press*, July 10, 1985, LexisNexis Academic (www.lexisnexis.com).

3-US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1987*, Washington, DC, August 1988, accessed from the Lawson Terrorism Information Center at www.terrorisminfo.mipt.org/Patterns-of-Global-Terrorism.asp; US Department of State, *State Sponsors of Terrorism*, Washington, DC, accessed from at www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.

4-Daryl Plunk, "North Korea: Exporting Terrorism?" *Asian Studies Backgrounder*, No. 74,

The DPRK disavowed both the Rangoon and the KAL bombings. Pyongyang blamed the Rangoon bombing on the South's authoritarian president, the "traitor" Chun Doo-hwan. It maintained that the "South Korean puppets" were responsible for the KAL bombing.⁵

The cooperative efforts between Tokyo and Pyongyang that were required for a number of years to implement and sustain the relocation of tens of thousands of *zainichi* (permanent Korean residents of Japan) to North Korea beginning in 1959 notwithstanding, the DPRK and Japan were unable to garner enough mutual trust to establish diplomatic relations.⁶ The tensions associated with the Cold War, which included Washington's continuing abhorrence of communism, the failure to officially end to the Korean War, and Japan's security alliance with the United States prevented Tokyo and Pyongyang from engaging in serious discussions to resolve historical problems and establish normal diplomatic relations.

Thus, soon after the Burmese government announced that the DPRK was responsible for the bombing in Rangoon, Tokyo adopted "the position that such terrorism is impermissible in international society," and for a while imposed several (largely symbolic) sanctions on North Korea.⁷ At about the same time, Tokyo began providing munificent rice and financial assistance to Burma. Pyongyang charged that the "puppets" in Seoul "begged the US imperialists and the Japanese reactionaries to press Burmese authorities to

The Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, February 25, 1988, accessed at www.heritage.org/research/asiaandthepacific/asb74.cfm on January 24, 2008.

⁵- See, "What Does the Japanese Reactionaries' Generosity Mean?" *Rodong Shinmun*, November 12, 1983; "Voice of the Revolutionary Party for Reunification," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, December 2, 1983; "North Korea 'Solemnly' Denies Part in KAL Crash," *United Press International*, January 15, 1988; "N. Korea Denounces UN Debate on Plane Bombing," *United Press International*, February 17, 1988 (all from LexisNexis Academic); "Suspect in Korean Crash Recovers from Poisoning," *New York Times*, December 6, 1987.

⁶- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

⁷- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook: 1984 Edition* (Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1984), chapter 3; "Japan Announced Action Against North Korea," *Japan Economic Newswire*, November 7, 1983 (LexisNexis Academic).

shift responsibility [for the bombing] onto us” and that the food and financial assistance from Tokyo was “a generous reward” for wrongly making the DPRK culpable for the Rangoon bombing.⁸ Tokyo also sanctioned the DPRK soon after the KAL bombing. In a statement issued by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late January 1988, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Keizo Obuchi maintained that the government of Japan was “convinced that the incident was caused by organized terrorism from North Korea.” Because of this, his government decided to impose (effectively the same symbolic) sanctions as it did in the aftermath of the Rangoon bombing. Maintaining the DPRK’s innocence, a spokesperson for the foreign ministry stated that the sanctions “slander his country.”⁹ Aggravated by its place on the US State Department’s list of countries sponsoring terrorism and facing more serious sanctions from Washington, Pyongyang decided that it would do what it could to demonstrate its displeasure to the Reagan administration. Pyongyang announced in January 1988 that it would discontinue all associations with US diplomats, stop allowing Americans to enter the DPRK and end all discussions dealing with the return of the ashes of US soldiers killed in the Korean War.¹⁰

With the Cold War rapidly nearing an end, Japan and the DPRK held the first round of normalization talks in January 1991. Unlike South Korea, which was able to establish diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965, normalization talks between Tokyo and Pyongyang went nowhere. During the third round of normalization talks with the DPRK in May 1991, Tokyo brought up the case of Lee Un-hae. Tokyo suspected Lee was actually Yaeko Taguchi, a Japanese woman who had been abducted by North Korean

⁸- “What Does the Japanese Reactionaries’ Generosity Mean?” *Rodong Shinmun*, November 12, 1983 (LexisNexis Academic).

⁹- “Japan Announces Sanctions against N. Korea over KAL Bombing,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, January 27, 1988 (LexisNexis Academic).

¹⁰- “North Korea Slaps US with Sanctions,” *United Press International*, January 25, 1988 (LexisNexis Academic).

agents in the late 1970s. By November 1992, Japan and the DPRK had held eight rounds of talks to normalize relations, all unsuccessful. The DPRK delegation left the eighth round of normalization talks after refusing to give the Japanese side satisfactory answers to questions about Lee Un-hae. Tokyo also believed that Lee (Taguchi) had instructed Kim Hyon-hui – the woman who had been convicted for her part in the 1987 KAL bombing and who had maintained that she was a DPRK agent – to speak Japanese and to behave like a Japanese person.¹¹

Onset: Japanese Abduction Issue

The abduction issue – the Japanese nationals who were abducted by North Korea during the 1970s and 1980s – first surfaced in January 1980 when the *Sankei Shimbun* published a front-page story about several Japanese citizens who had been missing since the late 1970s and supposedly had been kidnapped from coastal areas in Japan by unspecified foreign agents. However, Tokyo and most of the people of Japan paid little attention to these suspected abductions until a number of years later when Kim Hyon-hui divulged during the interrogation on the KAL bombing that her instructor in North Korea was a Japanese woman who very much resembled Yaeko Taguchi. That Taguchi had gone missing on the same beach as a Japanese man suspected of being kidnapped in the mid 1980s simultaneously pushed the abduction issue into the public eye and pointed an accusatory finger at North Korea.¹² The DPRK continued to insist for years

¹¹– Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Outline and Background of Abduction Cases of Japanese Nationals by North Korea*, Tokyo, April 2002, accessed at www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/abduct.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea*, Tokyo, April 2006; Policy Research Council, Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, *Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan North Korea Depends on Resolution of Abduction Issue*, Tokyo, 2001, accessed at www.jimin.jp/jimin/english/news/news00.html.

¹²– Eric Johnston, “The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Policy,” Japan Policy Research Institute, Working Paper, No. 101, June 2004.

that it had no connection to the kidnapping of Japanese nationals. Pyongyang blamed the suspected abductions, including that of the highly publicized case of the young teen Megumi Yokota, on Seoul's Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP), formerly called the Korea Central Intelligence Agency, which it also said was responsible for the KAL bombing. However, Pyongyang's determination to bolster its position that the DPRK had not been involved in the abduction of Japanese nationals, and particularly in the kidnapping of Megumi Yokota, caused it to go way too far. Pyongyang stated that it was not much of a secret that Megumi Yokota had been "an agent of the 'ANSP.'"¹³

Surging nationalism in Japan beginning in the first half of the 1990s fit well with the Japanese right's efforts to politicize the abduction issue. When Japan-North Korean normalization talks recommenced in 2000 after more than a seven-year interruption, Tokyo stressed in each of the three rounds of discussions held during the year that Pyongyang must deal with the suspected abductions. While Pyongyang told Tokyo during the talks that the DPRK Red Cross would continue with the investigation of the suspected "missing persons," it also emphasized that the abduction issue should not be addressed during the normalization discussions.¹⁴ Hoping to create an environment politically conducive to rapprochement, Tokyo resumed food aid to North Korea in 2000, which had ended right after the DPRK launched a Taepodong 1 missile that flew over Japanese territory in August 1998. Japanese conservatives, however, did not support the government's decision, maintaining that food aid to North Korea should not be restarted until Pyongyang demonstrated its willingness to deal with the abduction issue, as well as address Japan's nuclear and missile concerns

¹³- "Japanese Papers Used by S. Korea in Anti-DPRK Campaign," *Korean Central News Agency*, February 11, 1997; "Truth on 'Suspected Kidnapping of Japanese Girl,'" *Korean Central News Agency*, April 28, 1997.

¹⁴- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Outline and Background of Abduction Cases of Japanese Nationals by North Korea*, Tokyo, April 2002.

relating to the DPRK. The last round of the Japan-North Korean normalization talks held in 2000 ended without resolving any major problems and without agreeing to a time to resume discussions.¹⁵ As it turned out, this poor ending to the rapprochement effort gave Japanese nationalists and organizations pushing hard for the resolution of the kidnapping problem more time – two years – to promote and further politicize the abduction issue.

Thus, prior to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's first one-day trip to Pyongyang in September 2002, Tokyo had already made an unambiguous commitment to resolve the abduction issue before rapprochement could occur between Japan and North Korea. About a week before Koizumi's trip to the DPRK, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda reaffirmed the government's position by informing a Diet committee that Tokyo had given high priority to the kidnappings and that it would "be difficult to ensure a comprehensive resolution [of Japan-North Korea problems] without any progress being made on this issue."¹⁶

Kim Jong-il's admission to Koizumi during their September 2002 summit that DPRK agents had perpetrated the abductions, although without official authorization, became the impetus for the resumption, after a two-year lapse, of Japan-North Korean normalization talks at the end of October. However, by this time President Bush had already designated North Korea as part of the "axis of evil." Moreover, the Bush administration had made it clear to Koizumi that normalization of Japan-North Korea relations should not occur until there was a resolution of the nuclear issue – the problem that emerged in early October 2002 when a US delegation to the DPRK accused Pyongyang of having a clandestine uranium-

¹⁵-Mark Manyin, *North Korea-Japan Relations: The Normalization Talks and the Compensation/Repatriations Issue*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, June 13, 2001.

¹⁶-"Abduction Issue Key to Resuming Normalization Talks: Fukuda," *Kyodo News*, September 12, 2002.

enrichment program to build nuclear weapons.¹⁷ In a meeting in Tokyo about two weeks before the 12th round of Japan-North Korean normalization talks began in late October 2002, US Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker advised Director-General of the Defense Agency Shigeru Ishiba that Japan should be circumspect in the upcoming discussions with the DPRK. To this the hawkish Ishiba responded that Tokyo had reaffirmed that the DPRK was a “heinous” terrorist state.¹⁸

Arbitrariness

Aside from Pyongyang claiming South Korean culpability for the Rangoon and KAL bombings and despite the popular view that Kim Jong-il planned and authorized both of them,¹⁹ there were lingering suspicions that Seoul had been less than forthright about the 1987 airline tragedy. In July 2004, the chief representative of the families of the victims of the KAL catastrophe published a book maintaining that the South Korean government’s report on the bombing that appeared in January 1988 “was all made up.” Among other things, the book also claimed that Kim Hyon-hui was a double agent working for both South and North Korea, a charge that dovetailed with continuing rumors that the military-controlled South Korean government engineered the November 1987 bombing so that it could influence the results of the upcoming presidential election.²⁰

The US State Department never again linked Pyongyang in its reports on global terrorism to the 1983 Rangoon bombing after its 1996

¹⁷ - Anthony DiFilippo, “Security Trials, Nuclear Tribulations and Rapprochement in Japan-North Korean Relations,” *The Journal of Pacific Asia*, Vol. 11, 2004, pp. 7-31.

¹⁸ - “Baker Calls for Caution,” *Daily Yomiuri*, October 13, 2002, NewsBank (www.newsbank.com).

¹⁹ - Michael Mazarr, “Kim Jong-il: Strategy and Psychology,” Korea Economic Institute, *Academic Paper Series*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2006, p. 3.

²⁰ - “Two Opposing Views Speak on Truth of KAL Case,” *Korea Times*, July 19, 2004 (LexisNexis Academic).

publication, although this document did assert that Seoul thought that DPRK agents had been connected to the killing of a South Korean official in Russia.²¹ In its 1997 report, the State Department added another new allegation, maintaining that Pyongyang “may have been responsible” for killing a DPRK defector in South Korea.²² Although the State Department’s 1998 report dropped the allegations of Pyongyang’s part in murdering the DPRK defector and the South Korean official in Moscow, it continued to mention the KAL bombing and that North Korea was still harboring members of the Japanese Red Army who commandeered a Japan Airlines flight in 1970, forcing it to land in North Korea.²³ Still well before Osama Bin Ladin gained his spot in infamy for his connection to the suicidal hijackers who killed thousands in New York City in September 2001, the State Department asserted in its 1999 report that North Korea retained “links” to him “and his network,” presumably by selling weapons to support terrorist activities. However, for the first time since 1988 when the Reagan administration redesignated the DPRK a state sponsor of terrorism, the 1999 report made no direct or indirect reference to the 1987 KAL bombing. The 1999 report also indicated that it was a good sign that North Korea had made statements during the year rejecting all types of terrorism.²⁴

Consistent with the improved relationship between the Clinton administration and Pyongyang during 2000, the political tone describing the reasons for North Korea remaining on the US State Department’s list of countries sponsoring terrorism was changing for the better. The 2000 report on global terrorism began by indicating that Pyongyang’s participation in

21- US State Department, *1996 Patterns of Global Terrorism Report*, Washington, DC, July 1997, accessed at www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996Report/1996index.html.

22- US State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1997*, Washington, DC, April 1998, accessed at www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1997Report/1997index.html.

23- US State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1998*, Washington, DC, April 1999, accessed at www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1998Report/1998index.html.

24- US State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999*, Washington, DC, April 2000, accessed at www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1999Report/1999index.html.

three rounds of bilateral discussions with Washington on international terrorism led to a joint statement on this matter between the United States and the DPRK.

Issued on October 6, 2000, the joint statement between Washington and Pyongyang stressed that both parties concurred that any kind of international terrorism was unacceptable and that it represented a threat to international security. The joint statement also emphasized the agreement between Washington and Pyongyang to cooperate in the difficult work to combat global terrorism. Significantly, the joint statement indicated that after Pyongyang satisfies the demands of US law, Washington “will work in cooperation with the DPRK with the aim of removing the DPRK from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.”²⁵ For Pyongyang, the Clinton administration’s willingness to remove the DPRK from the list of states sponsoring terrorism, first suggested in 1999, confirmed that Washington’s policy was no longer viable. Pyongyang maintained that the DPRK had been “unreasonably” connected to terrorism, that its continued appearance on the State Department’s list was a remnant of the Cold War, and that its removal would improve bilateral relations with the United States.²⁶

The State Department’s 2000 report on global terrorism also dropped the explicit mention of the linkage between Bin Ladin and the DPRK, saying only as it did the previous year and as it would continue to do in a similar fashion until the publication of its 2002 report that Pyongyang “may have sold” weapons to terrorist organizations.²⁷ But despite its relatively improved tone, because the 2000 report on global terrorism was not published until

²⁵ - US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*, Washington, DC, April 30, 2001, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2000/2441.htm; US Department of State, *Statement by Richard Boucher, Spokesman, Joint US-DPRK Statement on International Terrorism*, October 6, 2000, accessed at GlobalSecurity.org, www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/2000/dprk-001006c.htm.

²⁶ - “US Expresses Political Will to De-list DPRK as ‘State Sponsor of Terrorism,’” *Korean Central News Agency*, October 7, 2000.

²⁷ - US State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*.

the end of April 2001, Pyongyang was paying much more attention to the hostile policy of the new Bush administration than to the particulars discussed in the document. Especially disturbing to Pyongyang was that the Clinton administration's apparent willingness to remove North Korea from the list of states sponsoring terrorism was incompatible with the "anti-DPRK diatribe" emanating from the Bush administration. Pyongyang stressed that Washington's decade-long bombing of Iraq and the new Bush administration's recent air attacks, which took the lives of numerous Iraqi civilians while injuring many others, served as a clear indication that the United States was practicing international terrorism.²⁸

Not too long after the Bush administration took office in 2001, it rejected its predecessor's engagement of Pyongyang and soon undertook a policy review of North Korea. In addition to a number of senior officials within the Bush administration having major doubts about the trustworthiness of North Korea, the president himself early on expressed his distrust of Kim Jong-il.²⁹ Although not all senior officials within the Bush administration wanted to abandon the engagement track adopted by its predecessor, the hard-line policy easily prevailed over continuity well before the completion of the policy review in June 2001.³⁰ The day before South Korean President Kim Dae-jung met with President Bush at the White House on March 7, Secretary of State Colin Powell said, "We do plan to engage North Korea to pick up where President Clinton left off." However, just a day later Bush

²⁸- "KCNA Refutes US Report on Terrorism," *Korean Central News Agency*, May 3, 2001; "Foreign Ministry Spokesman Assails US Report on Terrorism," *Korean Central News Agency*, May 4, 2001.

²⁹- Elise Vander Vennet and Marvin Ott, *Incorrect Assumptions: A Critical Review of US Policy Toward North Korea*, National Defense University, National War College, Washington, DC 2002; The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by President Bush and President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea*, March 7, 2001, accessed at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010307-6.html.

³⁰- The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Statement by the President*, Washington, DC, June 13, 2001, accessed at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010611-4.html#.

clarified things by stating, “We will not be negotiating with North Korea.”³¹ Publicly the Bush administration continued to maintain that it accepted the reconciliation approach that was inherent to Kim Dae-jung’s “sunshine policy.”³² But Bush’s snubbing of Kim when he visited the White House together with the US president’s serious reservations about the practicality of the “sunshine policy” indicated to Seoul that Washington’s DPRK policy would be quite different from what it was just several months before.³³

Thus, the US State Department’s discussion of North Korea in its 2001 report on global terrorism unmistakably bore the full footprint of the Bush administration. Although Pyongyang had not been accused of any new terrorist act during 2001, the State Department’s discussion of North Korea in the report from the beginning made clear that the Bush administration’s interpretation of past events differed markedly from its predecessor. Calling the DPRK’s efforts to deal with global terrorism “disappointing,” the 2001 report also maintained that Pyongyang’s failure to discuss the advancement and execution of the 1994 Agreed Framework, the US-DPRK accord that froze North Korea’s plutonium reprocessing facilities, mostly in Yongbyon, was problematic. Specifically, the report made the manifestly selective quantum leap from the static status of the Agreed Framework, which the hard-liners in the administration despised, to Bush’s concern that after the attacks on the United States on September 11 there was a disturbing connection between weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism, particularly with regard to nuclear development and proliferation.³⁴

³¹- US Department of State, *Interview on NBC’s Meet the Press with Tim Russert*, Washington, DC, December 29, 2002, accessed at www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/16240.htm.

³²- US Department of State, *Briefing on Policy Toward North Korea*, Honolulu, Hawaii, May 26, 2001, accessed at www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/mm/2001/3114.htm.

³³- Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007), pp. 70-74.

³⁴- US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*, Washington, DC, May 21, 2002, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2001/html/10249.htm.

North Korea reacted harshly to the 2001 report, calling it a “foolish attempt” by Bush to legitimate his accusation that the DPRK is part of an “axis of evil,” while lambasting Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for claiming that Pyongyang had sold WMD to terrorist organizations with which it previously established ties. Significantly, Pyongyang questioned the Bush administration’s reasoning: it wanted cooperation from the DPRK to combat international terrorism and at the same time it had abandoned the joint statement on international terrorism between the United States and North Korea issued in October 2000.³⁵

The US State Department’s 2002 report again described Pyongyang’s responses in dealing with terrorism as “disappointing.” Although the report mentioned that after the September 11 attacks on the United States Pyongyang published a statement re-emphasizing its aversion to terrorism, signed the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and joined the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, overall the document concluded that the DPRK did little to deal effectively with terrorism. Missing since the 1998 report, the 2002 document alluded to the 1987 KAL bombing, while also introducing the DPRK’s international sales of missile technology to Syria and Libya – two other nations designated as state sponsors of terrorism.³⁶

The week before the US State Department issued its 2002 global terrorism report on April 30, 2003, China hosted delegations from Washington and Pyongyang for three days of talks in Beijing intended to resolve the worsening DPRK nuclear crisis. Assessing the outcome of these unsuccessful talks, Pyongyang reasoned that Washington had to develop “a sincere will to make a bold switchover in its policy toward the DPRK.”³⁷

³⁵- “KCNA on US Remarks on ‘Sponsors of Terrorism,’” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 27, 2002.

³⁶- US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, Washington, DC, April 30, 2003, 2002, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2002/html/19988.htm.

³⁷- “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on the US Attitude toward DPRK-US Talks,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 25, 2003.

Perceiving sustained hostility from Washington – that by this time involved the revelation that the Bush administration had developed plans to launch nuclear strikes against several countries, including North Korea – Pyongyang again voiced its strong objection to the 2002 terrorism report, calling the Bush administration’s DPRK policy “preposterous.”³⁸

Shortly before the publication of the 2002 report, Japan’s defense chief Shigeru Ishiba made hawkish remarks that quickly got Pyongyang’s attention. Similar to a position he first articulated about two months earlier, Ishiba stated in late March 2003 when he was visiting Seoul that Japan’s constitution did not prohibit it from carrying out a preemptive strike against the DPRK, should it believe there existed an imminent threat from North Korean missiles.³⁹ Although Pyongyang had conducted two short-range missile tests in February and March 2003, neither Tokyo nor Washington viewed them as threatening. Despite the DPRK’s continuing efforts to bolster its *songun* (military-first) policy, the worsening North Korean nuclear crisis caused Pyongyang to feel increasingly threatened by the United States and Japan. Reacting harshly to the threat of preemptive attack from Japan and its heightening military preparedness, including the launching of spy satellites, Pyongyang at the same time disapprovingly stressed that Tokyo completely endorsed the “state-sponsored terrorism” undertaken by the United States against Iraq and its people.⁴⁰ Concerned about the combined military power of the United States and Japan, Pyongyang maintained that Washington and Tokyo had been conspiring and colluding to launch a preemptive attack on the DPRK.⁴¹

³⁸- “US Hit for Pulling Up DPRK over Terrorism,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 5, 2003.

³⁹- “Preemptive Strike against N. Korea won’t be Unconstitutional: Japan Defense Chief,” *Agence France Presse*, March 30, 2003; “Ishiba: Japan to ‘Counterattack’ if N. Korea Prepares to Attack,” *Daily Yomiuri*, January 25, 2003 (both from LexisNexis Academic).

⁴⁰- “KCNA Blasts Japan’s Reckless Call for ‘Preemptive Attack,’” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 1, 2003; “KCNA Urges Japan to Behave with Discretion,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 9, 2003.

⁴¹- “North Korea Assails US-Japan ‘Collusion’ for Preemptive Attack,” *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, April 2, 2003 (source: Central Broadcasting Station, Pyongyang, LexisNexis Academic).

Japanese Abduction Issue Added to US Terrorism Report

Kim Jong-il's admission to Koizumi that North Korean agents had been responsible for the kidnappings of Japanese nationals added considerable thrust to the nationalists' efforts to keep public attention focused squarely on the abduction issue, something that the media in Japan eagerly obliged. Now, the abductions had become the most politicized issue in Japan. Sidestepping the myriad atrocities connected to Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula and the "comfort women" issue, Japanese conservatives were quick to increase the criticism of North Korea in the wake of the Koizumi-Kim summit in September 2002. Meeting with members of the abductees' families just days after the Koizumi-Kim summit, soon-to-be-appointed Director-General of the Defense Agency Ishiba stated that Japan "should view North Korea as [a] terrorist state" and "shouldn't have diplomatic ties with" it until Pyongyang expresses contrition and makes restitution for the kidnappings.⁴²

Many months before Kim's admission to Koizumi in September 2002 Japanese nationalists and members of the abductees' families had sought the Bush administration's assistance in dealing with the abduction issue.⁴³ Having eventually secured a meeting with the second-ranking official in the US State Department, members of the abductees' families were told in Washington by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in March 2003 that the Bush administration would bring up the abduction issue every time it talks with Pyongyang. What is more, at this meeting Armitage fully agreed with Megumi's father, Shigeru Yokota, that because the abduction issue was still unresolved, it should be properly viewed as an enduring terrorism

⁴²- "Abductees' Kin Express Sorrow, Anger," *Daily Yomiuri*, September 18, 2002 (NewsBank).

⁴³- "Bush Arrives in Tokyo, Keeps Hard Line on "Axis,"" *The Japan Times Online*, February 18, 2002; "Kin Thank Koizumi for Raising Abduction Issue," *The Japan Times Online*, February 19, 2002.

matter.⁴⁴ Yokota's position on the abduction issue mirrored that of Japanese nationalists. Then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, one of the most committed nationalists pushing for a hard-line position to resolve the abduction issue, met with members of the abductees' families very soon after they returned to Japan from their trip to the United States. Abe, who had played a big part in arranging the meetings that the members of the abductees' families had with American officials, stated at this time, "It was fruitful in that the United States formally expressed its view that the abductions were terrorism."⁴⁵ In March 2003, another well-known nationalist, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, asked (and answered) a rhetorical question, "Why doesn't the Japanese government judge the abduction [issue] as terrorism? I think it is terrorism."⁴⁶ But at this time there was still some reluctance in Tokyo, particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to equate the abductions to terrorism. Publicly unwilling to characterize the abduction issue as terrorism, Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoriko Kawaguchi created somewhat of political stir when she met with members of the abductees' families in March. However, during a subsequent meeting of the Liberal Democratic Party, Kawaguchi yielded, saying that she believed the abductions complied with the criteria to be classified as terrorism.⁴⁷

Because of the constant push coming from Japanese nationalists and the organizations representing the abductees and their families, Tokyo began to urge the Bush administration in 2003 to include the abduction issue as a reason for the DPRK being identified as a state sponsor of terrorism

44- "Armitage Says US Will Raise Abductee Issue," *Daily Yomiuri*, March 7, 2003 (LexisNexis Academic).

45- "Koizumi to Seek Convincing Resolution to Abduction Issue," *Japan Economic Newswire*, March 10, 2003 (LexisNexis Academic).

46- "Nationalist Keeps Eye on Japan's Top Job," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2003 (LexisNexis Academic).

47- "Ministry Slammed over Handling of Abductions," *Daily Yomiuri*, April 25, 2003 (NewsBank).

in the US State Department's report.⁴⁸ During a visit to Tokyo in February 2004, Armitage again met with members of the abductees' families, telling them that the abduction issue would be included as a reason for North Korea being designated as a country supporting terrorism in the US State Department's forthcoming report.⁴⁹ Armitage also told them that the United States would bring up Japan's concerns about the abduction issue at the six-party talks,⁵⁰ something that the other four participants, Russia, China, South Korea, and certainly the DPRK, did not support. Also in February 2004, John Bolton, then the hard-line Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, declared, "North Korea remains on the list of state sponsors of terrorism and I can't think of any other way to describe the abduction of innocent civilians from Japan... as something other than acts of terrorism."⁵¹ At about this same time, Tokyo assured Shigeru Yokota that the Japanese delegation would bring up the abduction issue during the upcoming second round of the six-party talks, which had not convened since August 2003, even if it creates a problem there.⁵²

The sustained pressure by Japanese nationalists and members of the abductees' families to keep the abduction issue alone at the top of Tokyo's foreign policy agenda, along with the media attention in Japan given to the kidnappings, which whetted the public's disdain for North Korea while maintaining high levels of popular sympathy, came to a head in spring 2004. The publication in late April 2004 of the US State Department's 2003 report on global terrorism for the first time mentioned the abduction issue as one of

⁴⁸- Mark Manyin, *Japan-North Korea: Selected Issues*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, November 26, 2003.

⁴⁹- "Abduction Issue Key to N. Korea Removal from Terror List: US," *Japan Economic Newswire*, April 1, 2004 (LexisNexis Academic).

⁵⁰- "Armitage: Abductions on Agenda," *International Herald Tribune-Asahi Shimbun*, February 3, 2004 (NewsBank).

⁵¹- US Department of State, *International Security Issues, Arms Control Matters, and Non-proliferation*, Beijing, February 16, 2004, accessed at www.state.gov/us/rm/29723.htm.

⁵²- "N. Korea to Face Pressure over Abductees at Six-Nation Talks," *Mainichi Daily News*, February 3, 2004 (LexisNexis Academic).

the reasons for North Korea's designation as a country supporting terrorism.⁵³ Koizumi's close relationship with Bush, together with the push from the hard-liners within his administration who viewed the kidnappings as consistent with the roguish behavior of the DPRK, made the inclusion of the abduction issue in the US terrorist report that much easier, especially since Japan had already become part of the "coalition of the willing" in Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, Tokyo did not have to wait for the publication of the US State Department's 2003 report on international terrorism to get the final confirmation of the news. A few days before the report's publication, Armitage told visiting Japanese Minister of the Environment Yuriko Koike that the abduction issue would be cited as a reason for North Korea being designated as a country sponsoring terrorism.⁵⁴ Even before this, on April 1, 2004, the Bush administration strongly suggested that the abduction issue would be named in the US State Department's 2003 report on international terrorism. The State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Cofer Black, told the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism that the kidnapping of Japanese nationals by North Korea is "one of the most important" reasons for it being identified as a country that supports terrorism.⁵⁵

While Japan welcomed the initial appearance of the abduction issue as additional reason for North Korea being identified as a country that supports terrorism,⁵⁶ Pyongyang saw it as just another indication of the Bush administration's hard-line DPRK policy. The DPRK's position was that

⁵³ - United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*, Washington, DC, April 29, 2004, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/tls/crt/2003/31644.htm.

⁵⁴ - "Armitage Confirms Inclusion of Abduction Issue in US Report," *Kyodo News*, April 26, 2004.

⁵⁵ - "Abduction Issue Key to N. Korea Removal from Terror List: US," *Japan Economic Newswire*, April 1, 2004 (LexisNexis Academic).

⁵⁶ - "US Mentions Abduction Issue for the first Time in Terrorism Report," *Kyodo News*, April 30, 2004; "US Report Gives Japan Leverage on Abductions," *Daily Yomiuri*, May 1, 2004 (both from NewsBank).

the Pyongyang Declaration, signed by Kim Jong-il and Koizumi when the latter visited North Korea in September 2002, had resolved the abduction issue. Pyongyang further maintained that, because the abduction issue was between Japan and the DPRK, it was “none of [Washington’s] business.”⁵⁷ Although Seoul had estimated that the DPRK had kidnapped 486 South Koreans from the Korean War to the end of 2004,⁵⁸ these abductions had not become politicized in South Korea as they had in Japan. Expressing frustration over President Kim Dae-jung’s failure to take meaningful steps to deal with the kidnappings, a leader of an organization representing the families of the South Korean abductees stated in September 2000, “We got nothing from the ‘sunshine policy.’ No warmth of the policy has reached us.”⁵⁹ In contrast to the Japanese abductees discussed in the US State Department’s 2003 report on global terrorism, the Bush administration did not mention the South Korean kidnappings until the publication of the 2005 document.⁶⁰

The policy differences on the abduction issue between the Clinton and the Bush administrations are worth noting. The Clinton administration had worked hard with Tokyo beginning in 1996 to strengthen the US-Japan security alliance, partly because of the perceived threat from the DPRK.⁶¹ Still, the Clinton administration had reconciled many of the problems it had with Pyongyang by late 2000; because it had moved away from the Cold War mindset, the prospects for rapprochement between the United States and

⁵⁷ “US Accusations against DPRK over ‘Issue of Terrorism’ Denounced,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 3, 2004.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Unification, *The White Paper on Korean Unification 2005*, Seoul, 2005.

⁵⁹ The Republic of Korea, *Korea.net*, “Lee HC [Hoi-chang] Pledges Best Efforts for Return of Abductees from North,” Seoul, September 7, 2000, accessed at www.korea.net/News/News/NewsView.asp?serial_no=20000906022.

⁶⁰ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, Washington, DC, April 28, 2006, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2005/64337.htm>.

⁶¹ Anthony DiFilippo, *The Challenges of the US-Japan Security Arrangement: Competing Security Transitions in a Changing International Environment* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

the DPRK were then greater than they had ever been in the past. Although the Clinton administration understood the importance of the – then alleged – abduction issue to Japan, it made clear to Tokyo in late 2000 that the delisting of North Korea as a terrorist state was not contingent on the resolution of the kidnapping problem.⁶² In contrast, early on the many neocons within the Bush administration quickly adopted a position on the abduction issue that closely paralleled that of the right in Japan and, in particular, that of Japanese nationalists. For more than a decade, Japanese conservatives and nationalists have visibly distanced themselves from nuclear disarmament as a practical international agenda item and have taken a noticeably assertive stance on military matters, prompting concerns in Northeast Asia about Japanese remilitarization. Japanese nationalists have been pushing very hard since the early 1990s to make Japan a “normal country” (*fustuu kokka*) with a strong military that will both actively participate in international security operations (that is, those supported by Washington) and impose sanctions on a state whose actions are viewed as threatening.⁶³ Thus, not surprisingly, a policy synergism quickly evolved on the abduction issue between the Bush neocons and Japanese nationalists. Because the kidnappings elicited a popular *ad hominem* reaction, it became easier for Tokyo to justify the hard-line approach that the Bush administration had adopted toward North Korea, which included the US president’s fitful reminder that all options are on the table. All this makes it much easier to appreciate the response that Cofer Black gave at a press conference announcing the publication of the US State Department’s 2003 report on global terrorism. Asked why, since it was hardly a new problem between Tokyo and Pyongyang, the abduction issue was only then being mentioned for the first time in the report, Black responded by saying “the Department of State

⁶² Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy*, p. 86.

⁶³ Anthony DiFilippo, *Japan’s Nuclear Disarmament Policy and the US Security Umbrella* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

thought it was important; it was a key issue.”⁶⁴

Increasing Momentum

In the eyes of many in Tokyo, the Bush administration had placed its imprimatur on the abduction issue by designating the kidnappings acts of terrorism. The inclusion of the Japanese kidnappings as one of reasons for the DPRK being identified as a state sponsor of terrorism thus created in Japan what then seemed to be the indelible belief that not until the abduction issue was resolved could North Korea be taken off of the State Department’s list.⁶⁵

By the time Koizumi made his second trip to Pyongyang in May 2004, Tokyo had become unalterably locked into prioritizing the abduction issue, even though the DPRK nuclear crisis was progressively worsening. The second Koizumi-Kim summit ended on a reasonably good note, with Tokyo promising to send food and humanitarian aid to North Korea and Pyongyang committing to the reinvestigation of the abductions. However, three rounds of Japanese-DPRK talks between August and November 2004 resolved nothing on the abduction issue. Because of the incessant politicizing of the kidnappings and the emotionalism associated with them, shortly after the first round of bilateral talks held in August the Japanese public had already become very dissatisfied with Pyongyang’s failure to resolve the abduction issue. A survey conducted by The *Yomiuri Shimbun* in September 2004 showed that over 70 percent of the respondents did not want Tokyo to provide additional aid to North Korea and more than 85 percent felt that Pyongyang was not committed to an enthusiastic rein-

⁶⁴-US Department of State, *Ambassador J. Cofer Black, Coordinator, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism*, Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, DC, April 29, 2004.

⁶⁵-“Abductees’ Kin Top Priority in Talks/Threat of Sanctions,” *Daily Yomiuri*, May 4, 2004 (NewsBank).

vestigation of the abduction issue.⁶⁶

Japanese-DPRK relations worsened when Tokyo announced in December 2004 that DNA tests showed that the remains that Pyongyang said belonged to Megumi Yokota, as well as another abductee, were not theirs. Tokyo's evaluation of Pyongyang's reinvestigation of the abduction issue concluded that "the information and physical evidence provided by the DPRK to date is not at all adequate" to explain the fate of the abductees.⁶⁷ But even before Tokyo made public its conclusions about the kidnappings based on the information provided by North Korea, Pyongyang had reasoned that Japanese nationalists were much less concerned with resolving the abduction issue than with using it for ulterior reasons. Insisting that the remains were Megumi Yokota's and that the abduction issue had already been settled with Pyongyang Declaration, the DPRK maintained that the Japanese "ultra-right" had two reasons for not wanting to resolve this matter. First, by leaving the abduction issue unresolved, Pyongyang maintained that Japanese nationalists could continue to cast the DPRK in an unfavorable light, a strategy that would allow Japan to avoid coming to terms with the history problem that remains unsettled with North Korea. Second, by sustaining an anti-DPRK sentiment in Japan, "the ultra-right" could pursue their real objective, which is to escalate Tokyo's hostile policy toward North Korea.⁶⁸

Whether or not Pyongyang has been veracious with Tokyo about the abductions is not yet evident. But it is clear that Tokyo, following Washington's lead, did adopt and has maintained a hard-line policy toward the DPRK. Pleased that the Bush administration had designated the

⁶⁶- "Few Support Provision of Aid to North Korea," *Daily Yomiuri*, September 17, 2004 (NewsBank).

⁶⁷- Government of Japan, *Reinvestigation Concerning the Abductees Whose Safety Remains Unknown*, Tokyo, December 24, 2004.

⁶⁸- "KCNA Takes Ultra-Right Forces of Japan Accountable," *Korean Central News Agency*, December 23, 2004.

kidnapping of Japanese nationals as terrorism, Tokyo felt comfortable reiterating its pledge that normalization of relations with North Korea could only take place after there has been a resolution to the abduction issue. In accordance with the joint statement issued in September 2005 that came out of the fourth round of the six-party talks,⁶⁹ Japan and the DPRK held normalization talks in Beijing. Angered because the Bush administration had previously indicated that it was freezing DPRK funds at the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) in the Macau area of China and never especially pleased that Japan was participating in the six-party talks, Pyongyang felt that there was no reason to return to these multilateral discussions, which ultimately did not resume until December 2006. With plenty of distrust on both sides, the normalization talks between Japan and the DPRK that took place February 2006 ended on no better of a note than they had begun on.

Although Koizumi worked hard to internationalize the abduction issue, it was noticeably ratcheted up when nationalist Shinzo Abe became prime minister in September 2006. Abe immediately created the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, which he led, to further articulate policy. In November 2006, the Japanese government identified another abductee, bringing the total to 17 – five of whom have returned to Japan.

But Pyongyang's actions only exacerbated problems. Working hard to demonstrate the advancement of *songun*, Pyongyang announced in February 2005 that it had developed nuclear weapons. With the six-party talks on hold because of the DPRK's demand that Washington lift the financial sanctions imposed on its funds at the BDA, North Korea launched a series of missiles in July 2006 and detonated a plutonium-based nuclear device in October 2006. Easily interpreted as aggressive actions, Japan and the United States imposed sanctions on the DPRK, as did the UN Security Council.

⁶⁹- US Department of State, *Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks*, Beijing, September 19, 2005, accessed at www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm.

The Unraveling

By the end of 2006, three important factors converged to convince the Bush administration that a policy change was necessary if it wanted to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. First, the mid-term congressional elections in November 2006 resulted in the republicans losing control of both the House and the Senate to the democrats, who had won office in large part because of the lack of public support for the war in Iraq. Second, by the end of 2006 a number of the neocons had left the administration, those who had provided the push for the hard-line DPRK policy. Third, the administration's policies had proven to be unsuccessful with the countries that the president had identified in 2002 as constituting the "axis of evil." Thus, concerned about the president's legacy and desiring to lessen the brunt of criticism directed at the administration's failed policies, the move from a hard-line to a somewhat conciliatory DPRK policy offered the best hope.

The February 2007 six-party talks, according to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, produced a "breakthrough" that would permit significant movement on the September 2005 joint statement.⁷⁰ Designed in two phases, the February Agreement, in addition to requiring a complete accounting from the DPRK of all of its nuclear programs, would ultimately disable North Korea's capability to produce nuclear weapons in exchange for a significant amount of energy, economic, and humanitarian aid.⁷¹ Although the agreement called for the other five other parties in the six-way talks to work together to assist the DPRK during the initial phase, Prime Minister Abe stressed that Japan's position that it "cannot provide support without a resolution of the abduction issue remains unchanged."⁷²

⁷⁰-US Department of State, Secretary Condoleezza Rice, *Briefing on the Agreement Reached at the Six-Party Talks in Beijing*, Washington, DC, February 13, 2007, accessed at www.state.gov/secretary/im/2007/feb/80496.htm.

⁷¹-US Department of State, *North Korea - Denuclearization Action Plan*, Washington, DC, February 13, 2007, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80479.htm>.

⁷²- "Japan Nixes Energy Aid to North Korea under New Agreement, Cites Abduction Issue," *Mainichi Daily News*, February 13, 2007.

The February 2007 action plan also called for the creation of working groups that would attempt to normalize relations between the United States and the DPRK and between the latter and Japan. After the Japan-DPRK working-group talks held in March 2007 quickly ended because of serious disagreements on the abduction issue, Pyongyang berated Japan for its failure to directly address the crimes that it committed against the Korean people in the past, which it said “are more horrendous” than the kidnappings that Tokyo continues to give such high priority to. Attempting to stake out the political high ground, Pyongyang maintained that it is not that important whether or not Japan provides energy assistance to the DPRK, since this aid would not have too much of an impact on the development of its economy; however, it also demanded that Tokyo “sincerely implement the agreement reached at the six-party talks.”⁷³

The February 2007 action plan agreed to at the six-party talks specified that Washington would begin the necessary work to remove the DPRK from the US State Department’s list of countries sponsoring terrorism and to relieve it from the adverse effects of the Trading with the Enemy Act. These two offers, which strongly suggest the arbitrariness of the terrorist designation, were probably made in November 2006 and again in January 2007 during bilateral discussions in Berlin between US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill and the DPRK’s Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan. In Berlin, Hill and Kim are believed to have signed a memorandum of understanding that closely resembled the February action plan.⁷⁴

Suddenly, the Bush administration was willing to remove the terrorist

⁷³- “KCNA Blasts Japan’s Scheme to Scuttle Six-Party Talks,” *Korean Central News Agency*, March 20, 2007.

⁷⁴- Larry Niksch, *North Korea: Terrorism List Removal?* Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, December 11, 2007; “Washington, Pyongyang Signed Nuclear Memorandum Last Month,” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 8, 2007; “Hill Denies Signing Alleged Memorandum with DPRK,” *Xinhua Online*, February 8, 2007.

label from the DPRK in exchange for a resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis. Had the Bush administration followed the conciliatory course adopted in 2000 by its predecessor, which included not connecting the abduction issue to the removal of North Korea from the US list of countries sponsoring terrorism, Pyongyang would not have been constantly assailing Washington for embracing a hostile policy, which it often maintained was a prelude to war. A genuine commitment to the continuation of a conciliatory approach by the Bush administration would have increased mutual trust and in all probability would have precluded Pyongyang from making the imprudent and provocative decision to detonate a nuclear device. By doing this, Pyongyang provided US hardliners, including those that left the Bush administration, with more political grist for the mill that many of them have used in their continuing efforts to derail the negotiating policy approach that has made progress in resolving the DPRK nuclear crisis.

At first, Tokyo was in a state of denial, not willing to believe that the Bush administration would actually remove North Korea from the State Department's list. The day after the February six-party talks concluded Prime Minister Abe and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki did their best to try to make sense out of what happened in Beijing. Abe stated, "The process toward removing the designation and the actual removing of the designation after all conditions are fulfilled are separate things," stressing also that the United States "fully understands that the abduction issue is an extremely important issue for us." Referring to the action plan to denuclearize North Korea, Shiozaki similarly maintained, "The agreement was to begin the process of removing the designation, not of removing it."⁷⁵ That the Bush administration had declared its intention to start the process of de-listing the DPRK also appears not to have fully registered with the members of the abductees' families and their backers. In March 2007, they

⁷⁵ - "N. Korea Stays on US Terrorist List Until Abduction Issue Solved: Japan," *Kyodo News*, February 14, 2007.

proposed that the Japanese government create legislation that would designate North Korea a state that sponsors terrorism, just as the United States had done.⁷⁶

The Bush administration continued to keep alive the idea that delisting would not occur until there was a resolution to the abduction issue. However, in reality it was steadily and subtly making the case that, while supporting Japan's efforts to resolve the abduction issue, this was not a prerequisite for removing the DPRK from the State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorism. When Abe visited Bush at Camp David in April 2007, the president must have privately told the prime minister that his administration had not changed its position on the abduction issue. In a joint press briefing Abe stated, "With regard to the abduction issue, President Bush once again expresses unvarying commitment to support the government of Japan."⁷⁷ However, the Bush administration was now ready for the first time to clarify its new position on the kidnappings, since Secretary of State Rice later told Abe something much different at the presidential retreat. Rice informed Abe that the resolution of the abduction issue did not have to occur before Washington removes North Korea from the State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorism.⁷⁸

Just a few days after Abe's visit to Camp David, the Bush administration dropped the second shoe on Tokyo. The US State Department's new report on global terrorism indicated that the Bush administration had both mollified and changed its position on the abduction issue. Significantly, this report stated that Washington and Pyongyang, as stipulated in the agreement reached at the six-party talks held in February 2007, would initiate

⁷⁶- "Abductees' Kin Want N. Korea Named as Sponsor of Terrorism," *The Japan Times Online*, March 12, 2007.

⁷⁷- The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *President Bush and Prime Minister Abe of Japan Participate in Joint Press Availability*, Camp David, Maryland, April 27, 2007.

⁷⁸- "Rice Downplays Link between N. Korea Abductions and Terror Status Issues," *Jiji Press*, May 12, 2007 (NewsBank); "Abductions No Bar to US Delisting of North," *Asahi Shimbun*, May 14, 2007.

the process of taking the DPRK off of the State Department's list of countries supporting terrorism.⁷⁹ Attempting to check the process set in motion, Abe's special adviser on the abduction issue, Kyoko Nakayama, made a firm request to a senior official in the State Department during her visit to Washington in May not to remove North Korea from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism until there has been a satisfactory resolution to the kidnappings.⁸⁰

The resolution of the BDA row between Washington and Pyongyang was an unambiguous indication that the Bush administration had moved away from its hard-line DPRK policy. But this did nothing to assuage Tokyo's problem with North Korea. While resolving the nuclear and missile issues has always been important to Tokyo, policymakers had backed Japan into a corner by remaining unrelentingly obsessed with the kidnappings. For its part, Pyongyang has continued to insist that the abduction issue has already been resolved. Thus, when delegates from Japan and the DPRK met for two days in September 2007 to discuss the possibility of holding normalization talks, while the atmosphere was less acerbic than the March meetings, both sides remained deadlocked.⁸¹ The day after the talks ended the Abe government announced that it would extend for an additional six months the sanctions that Japan had imposed on North Korea following its nuclear test.⁸² In office just days, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's cabinet approved the extension of the sanctions in late September because, as Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura stated, "There is basically no progress" in settling the abduction issue and so "we are not in a situation in which we can

⁷⁹ - US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2006*, Washington, DC, April 30, 2007, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2006/82736.htm; US Department of State, *Briefing on Release of 2006 Country Reports on Global Terrorism*, Washington, DC, April 30, 2007, accessed at www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/07/83999.htm.

⁸⁰ - "Nakayama Urges US not to Remove N. Korea from Terrorist List," *Kyodo News*, May 31, 2007.

⁸¹ - "N. Korea Talks Less Bitter, But No Results," *Asahi Shimbun*, September 8, 2007.

⁸² - "Government to Extend N. Korea Sanctions," *Daily Yomiuri Online*, September 7, 2007.

stop or ease the sanctions.”⁸³ Calling them provocative, since they would only worsen DPRK-Japan relations, Pyongyang stated, “It does not make any sense to talk about normalizing relations while challenging the dialogue partner with sanctions.”⁸⁴

Meanwhile, working-group discussions between the United States and the DPRK held in Geneva in early September 2007 ended on a favorable note, clearing the way for more progress to be made at the six-party talks, which took place at the end of the month. Pyongyang indicated right after these working-group talks that there had been a consensus reached in Geneva to “neutralize” its nuclear facilities by the end of December and that in exchange Washington agreed to “de-listing the DPRK as a terrorism sponsor and lifting all sanctions that have been applied according to the Trading with the Enemy Act.”⁸⁵ Although Christopher Hill stated that the DPRK had agreed to disable its nuclear facilities and to give a complete accounting of its nuclear programs by the end of the December, in contrast to Pyongyang, he pointed out that North Korea still had work to do before it could be removed from the State Department’s terrorism list.⁸⁶

At the September six-party talks the DPRK formally agreed to disable its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and to make a complete declaration of its nuclear programs, both by the end of the year. For its part, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to remove the DPRK from its list of states sponsoring terrorism and to end the restraints imposed on North Korea by the Trading with the Enemy Act in conjunction with actions taken by

⁸³ - “Sanctions on North Korea to be Extended Six Months,” *The Japan Times Online*, October 1, 2007.

⁸⁴ - “Japan’s Extension of Sanctions against DPRK Flailed,” *Korean Central News Agency*, October 24, 2007.

⁸⁵ - “Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Recent DPRK-US Talks,” *Korean Central News Agency*, September 3, 2007.

⁸⁶ - “North Korea Says US Will Lift Sanctions,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2007; “US Denies Accord to Remove N. Korea from Terrorism List,” *Kyodo News*, September 4, 2007.

Pyongyang agreed to at working-group meetings between the two countries.⁸⁷ Realizing that time was not on its side, the Japanese went on the offensive. Prime Minister Fukuda's special advisor on the abduction issue Kyoko Nakayama stressed that not releasing people that it had kidnapped makes North Korea a terrorist state, adding that if Washington de-lists the DPRK and disregards the kidnappings, "You can expect that relations between Japan and the United States will not improve."⁸⁸ Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura similarly commented that the removal of North Korea from the list of states sponsoring terrorism "certainly would not have a good influence on the Japan-US relationship."⁸⁹

By the fall 2007, the Bush administration had become determined to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis, despite Tokyo's position on the abduction issue. State Department Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey (unwittingly) confirmed that the Bush administration had adopted the policy of its predecessor when, in referring to the abduction issue and the removal of North Korea from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, he indicated, "The two are not necessarily specifically linked."⁹⁰ When Prime Minister Fukuda visited Bush at the White House in November 2007, Bush thanked Japan for its support in the six-party talks, which he said are making progress in disabling North Korea's nuclear weapons program and in stemming its proliferation activities. When it came to the abduction issue, Bush reached deep into his emotional pocket, the one where just the right empathic words are kept for use, even though they have no bearing on US policy. With Fukuda by his side, Bush reminisced about his heartrending

⁸⁷ - US Department of State, *Six-Party Talks: Second-Phase Actions for the Implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement*, Washington, DC, October 3, 2007, accessed at www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2007/oct/93217.htm.

⁸⁸ - "Japan Warns US over North Korea," *Agence France-Presse*, October 25, 2007.

⁸⁹ - "N. Korea Removal from Blacklist May Hurt Japan-US Ties: Machimura," *Kyodo News*, November 12, 2007.

⁹⁰ - "N. Korea's Terror Status not Linked to Abduction Issue: US," *Kyodo News*, November 13, 2007.

moments when he met with Megumi Yokota's mother at the White House in April 2006, saying to her, "and I'm going to tell the Japanese people once again, we will not forget this issue."⁹¹

With the disablement process underway in November 2007, Tokyo heard more bad news that seemingly brought closer the day when the Bush administration would de-list North Korea. Referring to North Korea's continuing provision of refuge to members of the Japanese Army, which had long been a reason why it has been designated as a country sponsoring terrorism, a high-ranking State Department official pointed out in late November, "I think that is something Japan and the DPRK have to sort out among themselves."⁹²

Although the disablement process at Yongbyon continued to make satisfactory progress, Pyongyang did not meet the agreed deadline of December 31. However, it was not the disablement process that bothered Washington; rather, it was that the declaration submitted by Pyongyang did not, according to the Bush administration, give a full accounting of the DPRK's nuclear facilities. The Bush administration has remained particularly concerned that two things be completely explained in the declaration: the DPRK's uranium-enrichment program, which precipitated the North Korean nuclear crisis in October 2002, and North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities in Syria.

In early January 2008 a spokesperson for the DPRK Foreign Ministry announced that, although the disablement process had previously moved along at a quick and steady pace, Pyongyang now "is compelled to adjust the disablement of some nuclear facilities [based] on the principle of 'action for action,'" which had been agreed to at the six-party talks held in September

⁹¹- The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *President Bush and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan in Joint Statements*, Washington, DC, November 16, 2007, accessed at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071116-8.html.

⁹²- "US De-links JAL Hijackers, North Korea Terror Status," *The Japan Times Online*, November 23, 2007.

2005. The foreign ministry justified the decision to slow down the disablement process by stating that the shipment of heavy fuel oil and other materials had not been arriving in the DPRK as per the agreement reached with the other countries involved in the six-party talks. The foreign ministry continued to deny the existence of a uranium-enrichment program and that the DPRK had provided nuclear assistance to Syria. The foreign ministry also indicated that it had informed Washington of its nuclear programs in November and stressed that the Bush administration has not kept its promises to remove the DPRK from the US terrorist list and to disassociate it from the Trading with the Enemy Act.⁹³

Although Japan remained steadfast in not contributing to the DPRK assistance package, which had been agreed to at the six-party talks, until satisfactory progress had been made on the abduction issue, this did not stop Tokyo from commenting on Pyongyang's failure to meet the deadline. On the last day of December 2007, a spokesperson for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, "It is unfortunate that this declaration has not been provided yet."⁹⁴ A month later Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura again called attention to the fact that "a complete declaration has not yet been made" and that Pyongyang "must take appropriate action" so that the goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula can be realized.

Recently, Pyongyang has continued to call on Japan to withdraw from the six-party talks, arguing that, unlike the other countries, it has not met its obligations. Pyongyang has maintained that Tokyo's intention is to infuse divisiveness into the six-party process, since its principal objective is not to resolve the nuclear crisis. Rather, what Tokyo wants first and foremost, says Pyongyang, is to bring increasing pressure on the DPRK to deal with the

⁹³- "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of October 3 Agreement," *Korean Central News Agency*, January 4, 2008.

⁹⁴- "Refiling: Japan Urges N. Korea to Declare All Nuclear Programs Immediately," *Kyodo News*, December 31, 2007; "Japan Reiterates Call on North Korea to Fulfill Nuclear Commitments," *Kyodo News*, January 29, 2008.

abduction issue; and failing this, to spoil the six-party talks.⁹⁵

Feelings of Abandonment

Despite Tokyo's warnings to Washington and its efforts intended to persuade the Bush administration to recommit to not de-listing North Korea until there has been progress made on the abduction issue, the best it could get has been generically weak political comments, such as the United States "will not abandon Japan's concerns over the abductees." Significantly departing from when it had maintained the hard-line policy that the abduction issue was unequivocally state sponsored terrorism, the Bush administration's position had morphed into oversimplified optimism: satisfactory movement on the nuclear issue will lead to normalization talks with Pyongyang, which in turn will give Washington a way to influence the DPRK to settle the abduction issue.⁹⁶

Tokyo's discontent with Washington's willingness to de-list North Korea, conditioned on what happens with regard to the nuclear issue, appears to have quickly spread to the Japanese public. In the wake of the six-party talks held in September 2007, the Japanese Cabinet Office's annual survey on public attitudes of foreign countries found that the percentage of respondents that believed that Japan's relationship with the United States was in trouble reached an all-time high of 20 percent, increasing sharply from 12 percent in 2006.⁹⁷ Although Tokyo appeared placid, even after Bush failed to refer to North Korea in his State of the Union Address that he gave in January 2008, by this time Japan had serious concerns that, should

⁹⁵- "Japan Accused of Standing in Way of Six-Party Talks," *Korean Central News Agency*, February 19, 2008.

⁹⁶- "De-listing N. Korea not to Hurt Ties with Japan: US Official," *Kyodo News*, December 13, 2007.

⁹⁷- "Record 20% of Japanese Say US-Japan Relations not Good," *Asahi Shimbun*, December 3, 2007.

there be more progress on the nuclear issue, North Korea would be removed from the US terrorist list.⁹⁸

Conclusion: From Divisiveness to Synthesis

Rather than try to move the United States completely out of the Cold War mire that had trapped and repressed its relationship with the DPRK for more than five decades, the Bush administration decided for several years that the best policy approach was to reject the conciliatory efforts adopted – albeit late – by the Clinton White House. For Japan, its imperial and militarist past, which involved the decades-long annexation of the Korean peninsula, created major problems with both Koreas from the time they came into existence in 1948 and for years thereafter. The eventual normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea mitigated some of their past problems. Moreover, that both remained strong allies of the United States and that all three were on the same side during the Cold War helped somewhat to dampen tensions between Seoul and Tokyo. However, Japan and North Korea remained on opposite sides of the political divide occasioned by the Cold War and this, when combined with their troubled history, resulted in an adversarial relationship that continues to the present day. Thus, not only did the politics of the Cold War create major and persistent problems in the relations between the United States and the DPRK and between the latter and Japan, they have continued through the post-Cold War years.

Since the State Department's terrorism reports have often indicated that North Korea is not known to have been involved in terrorist activities since 1987, whether its initial placement and reappearance on the US list for the Rangoon and KAL bombings were justified, the result of Cold War

⁹⁸ - "Japan Remains Calm over Bush not Mentioning N. Korea in Speech," *Japan Economic Newswire*, January 29, 2008 (LexisNexis Academic).

politics, or both became moot long ago. Indeed, there often is some amount of arbitrariness associated with being identified as, and retaining the designation of, a state supporting terrorism, as North Korea has been for many years. But North Korea is not the only country where this arbitrariness can be discerned.

For example, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, some of its Eastern European allies, and Cuba were named as countries supporting terrorist activities. In early 1987, President Reagan proclaimed that there was a “conclusive” connection between the increase in global terrorism and the Soviet Union. Reagan maintained that, although Moscow did not have direct relations with terrorist groups, it provided military equipment, funds, and advice to revolutionary states, such as North Korea and Cuba, which in turn worked with terrorists and radicals.⁹⁹ Cuba’s continued designation as a state sponsor of terrorism in recent years has raised the question that its appearance on the list is more of a political matter than anything else.¹⁰⁰

Regarding the DPRK, although the members of the Japanese Red Army hijacked a Japanese airliner in 1970, this matter was not mentioned in the US State Department reports on global terrorism until the publication of its 1988 issue. Still more evidence of the arbitrary application of North Korea’s continued designation as a state sponsor of terrorism emerged after Kim Jong-il acknowledged in September 2002 the DPRK’s culpability for kidnapping Japanese nationals. These abductions were not mentioned in the US State Department’s 2002 report on global terrorism published in April 2003 but rather – 19 months later – for the first time, in its 2003 issue. Put differently, after the trilateral talks in April 2003 between the United

⁹⁹- “Reagan: ‘Conclusive’ Link between Soviet Union, Terrorism” *United Press International*, January 29, 1987 (LexisNexus Academic).

¹⁰⁰- Mark Sullivan, *Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List*, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, May 13, 2005; Raphael Perl, *The Department of State’s Patterns of Global Terrorism Report: Trends, State Sponsors, and Related Issues*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, June 1, 2004.

States, China, and the DPRK and two rounds of six-party talks in August 2003 and in February 2004 failed to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis, Washington's hard-line policy accommodated Tokyo, which had been urging its ally to include the abduction issue in its report on global terrorism.

With somewhat less pressure from the far right, the Bush administration made evident in early 2007 its decision to abandon its hard-line DPRK policy and move away from the Cold War paradigm that had guided its relations with Pyongyang since 2001. Although the motivation for doing this has been self-serving and hardly pristine, since in the midst of policy failures scoring a political victory with an "axis of evil" country would certainly improve Bush's legacy, nonetheless the administration's efforts to free Washington from the Cold War constraints that have largely shaped its approach to the DPRK are significant progress. North Korea's desire to establish a permanent peace with the United States, so long as it does not feel threatened by Washington, has also helped to loosen the Cold War mold that has served to maintain confrontational relations.

However, Tokyo and Pyongyang have yet to deal with the problems that have caused their bilateral relationship to be characterized chiefly by distrust and enmity. Hard-liners in both Japan and the DPRK remain adamant, unwilling to demonstrate the flexibility needed to move toward rapprochement. That conditions in Japan have worsened for Chongryon Koreans since Kim Jong-il admitted to the abductions in 2002 provides a powerful testimony to the very troubled relationship between Tokyo and Pyongyang,¹⁰¹ as does the significant Japanese concern not only with the kidnappings but also with the DPRK nuclear and missile issues.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹-Anthony DiFilippo, "Targeting Chongryun?" *Policy Forum Online*, Nautilus Institute, Center for the Pacific Rim, University of San Francisco, October 11, 2007, www.nautilus.org/fora/security/07076DiFilippo.html.

¹⁰²- See survey results of Japanese attitudes on North Korean issues from Japan's Cabinet Office, December 2006, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, accessed at www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/poll-06-17.htm.

Tokyo and Pyongyang must first develop a mindset of détente, which will be enormously helpful in their appreciating the advantages of working equitably to resolve the DPRK's concerns stemming from the history problem and Japan's connected to the abduction issue. Both sets of problems, as unfortunate as they are, happened in the distant past; to settle them, they must be viewed with historical lens and not those that distort the prospect of an improved present and future. Therefore, resolving these problems will require that Tokyo and Pyongyang fully recognize that concessions from both are necessary and that rapprochement offers far more to Japan and the DPRK than does the status quo, which has its roots deeply embedded in a past that has fossilized uncompromising and parochial perspectives on both sides.

Whether or not Washington removes the DPRK from the US State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorism and frees it from the constraints imposed by the Trading with the Enemy Act is not nearly as important to Japan and North Korea as Tokyo and Pyongyang jettisoning the Cold War mentality that has crippled bilateral relations. However, should the United States remove the DPRK from its terrorist list and end the restrictions connected to the Trading with the Enemy Act, Tokyo and Pyongyang would then have the opportunity to make good use of the propitious political wake created by Washington and begin seriously working to establish normal diplomatic relations.

Moreover, significant and determined steps to normalize Japan-North Korean relations will markedly improve the security environment in Northeast Asia. Such an environment, ideally without the terrorist label being applied to North Korea, will add impetus to efforts to unify the Korean peninsula.

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