

## *South Korea's Paradigm Shift in North Korean Policy and Trilateral Cooperation among the US, Japan, and Korea*

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes problems of triangle cooperation among Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo, while a new optimism is rising especially in Japan with the birth of the conservative South Korean government along with the Fukuda government which emphasizes Asian diplomacy. First, the new approach of President Lee Myung-bak's foreign and security policies, called the MB Doctrine, is explored. Secondly, the paper analyzes several constraints for the Lee administration to pursue the MB doctrine. Thirdly, it tries to show that Japan has to face policy dilemma in dealing with North Korea since it has no choice but to depend on development of US-North Korea as well as inter-Korean relations when it negotiates with North Korea. Finally, the paper suggests that the new opportunity for possible US-Japan-Korea's new trilateral cooperation will also give uncertain challenges for Japan as well as South Korea.

**Key Words:** MB doctrine, reciprocity, US-Japan-Korea trilateral cooperation, North Korea's nuclear issue, Japan-North Korea relations

## **Beginning of a New Era**

The birth of new conservative President Lee Myung-bak opens the door for resumption in trilateral cooperation among Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo in dealing with North Korea and more broadly with regional security in Northeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> President Lee has actually been eager to repair relations with the United States and Japan. As part of such efforts, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak made his five-day trip to the United States from April 15 with a pledge to open a new era of pragmatic diplomacy. President Lee also visited Japan on his way back from the United States. Under the liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration, relations with Washington were frayed over North Korean policy. Also, ties with Tokyo suffered from historical and territorial disputes including a Korean occupied island in the Sea of Japan or East Sea. These visits symbolized the importance of US-South Korea relations as well as South Korea-Japan relations in the Lee Myung-bak administration.

The summit meetings between President George W. Bush and President Lee Myung-bak successfully emphasized the value of the bilateral relationship between the United States and South Korea. First, South Korea and the United States made important progress toward repairing distrust in alliance that arose during the previous Roh Moo-hyun administration, especially regarding North Korea. Secondly, the United States and South Korea expanded the concept of alliance to “comprehensive strategic alliance” which purports to cope with comprehensive security threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as terrorism, proliferation of WMD, and others. Thirdly, the two leaders also committed to passing free trade agreements between the countries. As a result of the summit meetings, the United States and South Korea to some extent recovered trust in each other.

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<sup>1</sup>- There are many arguments to expect effective policy coordination among Korea, the United States, and Japan with the change in government in Seoul. See “Restoring Korea-US-Japan ‘virtual alliance,’” *Korea Herald*, April 18, 2008.

In addition, the talks between Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in Tokyo on April 21, 2008 marked a significant first step to repair Japan-Korea relations. President Lee has stated clearly his intention not to request Japan's apology for its wrongdoings in the past by saying that a forced apology is not a genuine apology. Rather, talks between Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and President Lee Myung-bak were devoted to "future-oriented discussion" without the prerequisite of a Japanese apology. The two leaders also agreed that a mature partnership involves expanded cooperation in the materials and parts industries, an increase in youth exchanges through such programs as working holidays, and frequent meetings between heads of the two governments.

In this paper, the author tries to analyze problems of triangle cooperation among Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo, while a new optimism is rising especially in Japan with the birth of the conservative South Korean government along with the Fukuda government which emphasizes Asian diplomacy. Prior to meeting with Prime Minister Fukuda, President Lee and President Bush confirmed that the two leaders would try to enhance the US-South Korea alliance and freeze a plan to reduce the number of US troops in South Korea. It is considered good news to deepen cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan as well as between Japan and South Korea. In Japan, for example conservative newspapers such as *Sankei Shimbun* suggested in its April 22<sup>nd</sup> editorial that it is vital for US-Japan-South Korea to exert a certain measure of pressure on North Korea to give up nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup> However, such optimism for better trilateral cooperation in dealing with North Korea needs to be explored in the context of inter-Korean relations as well as the likely prospect for US-South Korea-Japan policy coordination.

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<sup>2</sup>- *Sankei Shimbun*, April 22, 2008. Also see *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 22, 2008.

## Paradigm Shift: Pragmatic North Korean Policy

President Lee Myung-bak proposed initiatives for Denuclearization and Opening up North Korea to achieve a per capita income of \$3,000, once North Korea abandons its nuclear program and chooses the path to openness. South Korea will provide assistance to North Korea, so that it can raise the per capita income of North Korea to \$3,000 within 10 years.<sup>3</sup> The new approach of President Lee's foreign and security policies, called the MB Doctrine, comprises two pillars; engagement with North Korea, and a solid Korea-US alliance. While the details of the new approach remain unclear, the MB doctrine differs from the operating principle of the Sunshine Policy as well as from the Peace and Prosperity Policy during the previous liberal governments in at least the following three aspects.

Firstly, the MB doctrine emphasizes a "politics first, economy later" or "political-economic linkage" approach in dealing with North Korea. Previous liberal governments tried to separate politics and the economy when dealing with North Korea. According to Professor Moon Chung-in, considered one of the principal architects of the DJ doctrine or the Sunshine Policy, one of the major operating principles of the DJ doctrine is flexible dualism. The core aspect of this flexible dualism lies in the separation of politics and economy.<sup>4</sup> The DJ doctrine noticed that past governments failed to overcome the inter-Korean stalemate because they were preoccupied with the primacy of politics and its linkage with economy. Nevertheless, the MB doctrine emphasizes political-economic linkage, pleading that it will help

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<sup>3</sup>- Inauguration speech, February 25, 2008.

<sup>4</sup>- Flexible dualism can be summarized in the following four features: (1) Easy tasks first, difficult tasks later; (2) Economy first, politics later; (3) Non-governmental organization first, government later; and (4) give first, take later. Chung-in Moon, "Understanding the DJ Doctrine," in Chung-in Moon and David I. Steinberg, eds., *Kim Dae-jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Yonsei University Press, 1999), p. 39. Also, see Chung-in Moon, "The Kim Dae-jung Government and Changes in Inter-Korean Relations - In Defense of the Sunshine Policy," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. XXV, No. 4 (Winter 2001), p. 519.

build up the North Korean economy on the condition of complete denuclearization. In this sense, the MB doctrine is different from those of the last two liberal governments.

Secondly, North Korea needs to move first, and get support from South Korea later. The MB doctrine demands that North Korea initiate the dismantling of nuclear weapons *before* it receives economic cooperation from South Korea. In other words, North Korea's denuclearization, opening up North Korea, and promoting joint economic projects are supposed to be promoted in that sequence. This is also a fundamental shift in order since former Unification Minister Jeong Se-Hyun argued in his interviews that South Korea should move first, then North Korea will respond to inter-Korean relations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the "Denuclearization, Openness, 3000" initiative shows rather a different picture than the previous Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments. In a nutshell, it is North Korea that should move first (meaning denuclearization), then South Korea will respond with economic support.

Thirdly, the concept of reciprocity is emphasized in the Lee Myung-bak administration.<sup>6</sup> President Lee's pragmatism is reflected in the fact that the principle of reciprocity is stated in his North Korean policy. Former President Kim Dae-jung as well as Roh Moo-hyun in the past administrations made excessive economic concessions to North Korea in return for inter-Korean summits in 2000 and 2007. The so-called Sunshine Policy and Peace and Prosperity Policy of the two predecessors have been criticized for unconditional economic assistance to the North, while it refuses to give up its nuclear ambitions. On the other hand, the Lee administration negates the

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<sup>5</sup> - *Monthly Mal*, August 2006, p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> - Leon Sigal pointed out that critics correctly argue that engagement policy cannot be sustained for a long time either in Korea or the United States if it lacks reciprocity. The Lee Myung-bak government is fully aware of this point. Chon, Hyun-Joon, ed., *Pukhekmunaewi haepeopkwa jeonmang* [Solutions and Prospect for North Korean Nuclear Issues], *Joongang M&B*, 2003, p. 223.

Sunshine and Peace and Prosperity Policies and establishes the stance of his North Korean policy based on reciprocity and conditionality.

When discussing reciprocity, in order to make a conceptual clarification, it is useful to differentiate the notion of reciprocity into at least two conceptual categories: specific reciprocity and diffuse reciprocity. Specific reciprocity requires simultaneous exchange and the exchange is balanced at every moment. On the other hand, a pattern of diffuse reciprocity can be maintained only by a widespread sense of obligation. The exchange based on diffuse reciprocity takes place sequentially rather than simultaneously. Diffuse reciprocity may reduce the chances of unnecessary conflicts but exposes its practitioners to the danger of exploitation. In contrast to the possibility of exploitation, specific reciprocity deters non-conformance by focusing on responses in its practitioners' counterparts, but thereby restricts the possible bargains that can be reached.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, one could characterize the Sunshine Policy or the Peace and Prosperity Policy as based on the principle of diffuse reciprocity. The Sunshine Policy placed more emphasis on diffuse reciprocity than on specific reciprocity. The former Unification Minister Jeong Se-Hyun outlined the concept of reciprocity in inter-Korean relations during the Roh Moo-hyun government with the following three features: give first, take later; give more, take less; and give what the North needs and take what the North can give.<sup>8</sup> In other words, reciprocity in inter-Korean relations cannot be simultaneous, equal, or symmetrical. Both positive and negative aspects of diffuse reciprocity were seen in the policies of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments. The Sunshine Policy certainly promoted cooperation between North and South Korea, and succeeded in avoiding conflicts between them, but has been criticized for being exploited by North

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<sup>7</sup> - Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Westview Press, 1989), pp. 146-147, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> - *Monthly Mal*, *opt.cit.*, p. 169.

Korea.

In many cases, critics have pointed out the lack of reciprocity of the two preceding liberal governments. However, they often fail to grasp these two different kinds of reciprocity. When they criticize the previous liberal governments for their lack of reciprocity, they are usually referring to specific reciprocity. North Korea as well as liberal camps argue that inter-Korean relations have been promoted based on the concept of diffuse reciprocity. The Lee Myung-bak government has clearly rejected the approach of former governments based on diffuse reciprocity and seems to be moving toward adopting specific reciprocity. Although specific reciprocity could be applied to North Korea, a decade of experience of engagement policy shows us some lessons on how to think about the question of reciprocity.

Firstly, when reciprocity is applied to North Korean policy, as the United States is now doing, a step-by-step approach may be effective. The basic principle of the six-party talks is action for action. In principle, the United States and North Korea are required to move simultaneously while making sure that they each complete their own actions, respectively. Secondly, it is more plausible that North Korea's denuclearization and economic cooperation happens in parallel rather than in sequence. From the experience of the US-North Korea negotiations, when the US demanded that North Korea unilaterally take action, it has not worked well as shown in the case of the first Bush administration. Finally, a question still remains. Who shall initiate? It is usually the case that the United States moves first in the event of a US-North Korean stalemate. Possibly a combination of specific and diffuse reciprocity may prove to be the most effective. If simultaneous exchange alone were required, few agreements could be made.

## Limits of the MB Doctrine

The MB doctrine paints a rather different picture than the Sunshine Policy or Peace and Prosperity Policy of the previous governments. While the Lee Myung-bak government emphasizes the differences between its policy and those of its predecessors, it will also have to face at least the following three constraints in order to pursue the so-called MB doctrine.

First of all, North Korea's negative responses to the MB doctrine would require the Lee administration to be more flexible in dealing with North Korea. Since North Korea is likely to reject almost all stated policies of the MB doctrine, inter-Korean relations are expected to remain chilly as long as President Lee Myung-bak insists on pursuing the course of a hard-line policy toward North Korea. Since President Lee took office on February 25, 2008, the South Korean government has taken a tougher approach toward North Korea. South Korea vows to improve the relationship with the United States and associates economic cooperation with progress in the so-called North Korean nuclear crisis. President Lee Myung-bak has also pledged to review every inter-Korean accord agreed during a summit meeting between President Roh Moo-hyun and Chairman Kim Jong-il in October 3 in 2007 in Pyongyang. In response to these South Korean attitudes, North Korea denounced President Lee Myung-bak for its pro-US and anti-North Korean policies. Also, North Korea responded by expelling Seoul officials from a joint industrial complex in Gaeseong and fired test missiles in the West Sea on March 28. The North Korean stance came in apparent protest over the current Lee Myung-bak administration's tough policy in dealing with North Korea.

Considering harsh backlash from North Korea, President Lee proposed installing a permanent diplomatic channel between South and North Korea during an interview with the *Washington Post* when he visited the United States.<sup>9</sup> The liaison office proposal is designed to send a message

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<sup>9</sup>- *Washington Post*, April 18, 2008.



to the North that the South is ready to restart talks with the North. Therefore, the proposal to set up liaison offices in Seoul and Pyongyang is considered as an expression of President Lee's willingness to repair strained inter-Korean relations. However, the North has rejected the proposal, calling it "anti-unification garbage" through its main newspaper, the *Rodong Shinmun*.<sup>10</sup> North Korea criticized President Lee's proposal on at least the following two grounds. One, the North is still suspicious about the intentions of President Lee. The proposal is seen to lack sincerity because it originally emerged during a US media interview, without any prior consultation with the North.<sup>11</sup> President Lee proposed opening liaison offices in each capital to facilitate communication as a means to achieve his objectives: denuclearization of North Korea. Two, the North has interpreted this proposal as a message that the Lee Myung-bak administration is trying to downgrade inter-Korean relations from "special relations" of the same Korean nations to "normal diplomatic" relations between states.<sup>12</sup> President Lee Myung-bak had even initially suggested breaking up the Ministry of Unification and merging it with the Foreign Ministry which had played a major role in promoting inter-Korean relations in the past decade.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>- For North Korea's negative responses to President Lee's proposal, see *Korea Herald*, April 28, 2008; *Korea Times*, April 27, 2008.

<sup>11</sup>- *Korea Herald*, April 22, 2008.

<sup>12</sup>- Interviews with North Korean officials in Pyongyang, North Korea, April 28, 2008.

<sup>13</sup>- The abolition of the Unification Ministry may be a demonstration of the Lee administration's pragmatism. President Lee seems to vow to integrate inter-Korean engagement into South Korea's broader foreign policy. International Relations experts and North Korean experts often tend to have different views in dealing with North Korea. While in the previous Roh government North Korean experts played an important role, it seems that so far in the Lee administration IR experts mostly educated in the US have more access to President Lee's North Korean policy. According to The *Korea Herald* dated for December 21, 2007, the ideas of "political realists" such as Nam Sung-wook, professor of North Korean Studies at Korea University; Kim Woo-sang, International Relations professor at Yonsei University; Kim Tae-hyo, International Politics professor at Sung Kyung kwan University; Hyun In-taek, professor of Political Relations at Korea University; and professor Nam Joo-hong, Dean of the Graduate School of Political Science at Kyonggi University are embodied in President Lee's foreign and security policies.

Although the administration withdrew this plan due to severe criticism from opposing parties, President Lee's perceptions on inter-Korean relations are questioned from North Korea's perspective.

In Japan, the initiative by President Lee for the establishment of liaison offices is generally interpreted as softening of his North Korean policy. Therefore, when Prime Minister Fukuda met President Lee, the former asked the latter to convey his message to North Korean leaders that Japan is willing to offer a bonus once Japan and North Korea normalize relations, based on the assumption that liaison offices would be established in the Koreas.<sup>14</sup> However, considering North Korean responses and perceptions of President Lee's proposal, it is highly unlikely for both Koreas to move to establishing such liaison offices. As a result, Prime Minister Fukuda's message would not reach its destination through this channel and cannot be a gateway for the restarting of a Japan-North Korean dialogue.

Secondly, the crucial part of the "Denuclearization, Openness, 3000" initiative depends on US-North Korea nuclear negotiations as well as the obligations of the international agreements clearly stipulated in the September 19 and February 13 Joint Statement of the six-party talks. In other words, although South Korea is also one of the major players in the six-party talks, South Korea alone cannot pursue its own primary objectives such as denuclearization of North Korea. Although the MB doctrine clearly articulated its precondition of denuclearization of North Korea, in reality it is not in a primary position to deal with North Korean nuclear problems. Of course, the Lee Myung-bak government is fully aware of this reality, and therefore it clearly mentioned that South Korea strongly supports the progress between the United States and North Korean nuclear negotiations.

One of the major criticisms against an engagement policy during the last two administrations was that the Sunshine Policy or Peace and Prosperity Policy were not able to prevent North Korea from developing and

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<sup>14</sup> - *Sankei Shimbun*, April 22, 2008.

detonating nuclear bombs. Critics argue that the engagement policy only provided North Korea with huge amounts of assistance without any specific conditions, while North Korea responded to South Korean cooperation with nuclear experiments and missile tests. However, liberal scholars claim that there is no causal relation between engagement policy and North Korean nuclear explosions.<sup>15</sup> In other words, North Korean nuclear possession is not a result of engagement policy but rather a response to a security threat from the US.<sup>16</sup> If this logical reasoning is true, unless the United States guarantees North Korea's security, North Korea will never give up nuclear weapons regardless of South Korea's tough stance toward North Korea.

Thirdly, although the Lee Myung-bak government said that it will reassess the two agreements between former presidents of South Korea and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in 2000 and 2007 respectively, it will not be as easy as it assumes.<sup>17</sup> These agreements between South and North Korea were made by the then heads of state in both South and North Korea. If President Lee changes the course from the joint statement agreed during the liberal administrations, South Korea will lose trust from North Korea, and

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<sup>15</sup> - See for example Jung Hyun-jung, ed., *10.9 Hanbando wa haek* [10.9 The Korean Peninsula and Nuclear] (Seoul: Erum, 2006), pp. 189-215.

<sup>16</sup> - Many South Koreans seem to recognize this point. 46 percent of the respondents to the *Korea Times* poll said it is necessary to review and modify Seoul's North Korea Policy, but said the policy's principle should remain untouched. Considering the research was conducted after North Korea's test of nuclear devices, one could conclude that the poll result was rather surprising, *Korea Times*, November 1, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> - Of course, President Lee Myung-bak has not mentioned that the Lee government will not follow the two agreements. Rather, according to Rep. Park Jin, Secretary of the Foreign Affairs and the Unification Division on the Transition Team of the Lee government, the transition team looked closely into the agreements reached at the follow-up talks. Mr. Park emphasized that since they mostly include South Korea's economic assistance to North Korea, the transition team showed its willingness to stick to the principle that dismantling the nuclear programs of North Korea is the most important factor for the agreements to be realized, *Korea Herald*, December 31, 2007. The Lee Myung-bak government has attached four conditions to economic assistance to North Korea: progress in the denuclearization of North Korea; feasibility of inter-Korean business projects; availability of financial resources; and public support.

future dialogue between South and North Korea will be negatively affected especially when North Korea is viewing the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Inter-Korean Summit Agreement as the most important thing. In addition, South Korean people generally support the two agreements as well as engagement policy toward North Korea.<sup>18</sup>

Actually, the number of voices criticizing the Lee administration is increasing. First of all, politicians from opposition parties including the United Democratic Party and other parties attacked President Lee Myung-bak, arguing that since the inauguration of his new government, relations between South and North Korea have been heading toward a breakdown. They called on the administration to observe the agreements made during the previous administrations with the North Korean regime.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Lim Dong Won, director of the Sejong Institute who served as unification minister during the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1999 and 2001 recently urged President Lee Myung-bak to clarify whether to implement two inter-Korean accords. Former Unification Minister Lim criticized President Lee of showing little interest in implementing the accord at a lecture in Seoul.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the statement adopted by dignitaries including former President Kim Dae-jung when commemorating the eighth anniversary of the adoption of the June 15 Joint Declaration on June 13, 2008 called on the Lee government to respect and inherit the June 15 Joint Declaration, pointing out that the historic documents should be adhered to.<sup>21</sup> That

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<sup>18</sup>- According to the opinion poll, conducted by the Korea Research Center from September 22-23 upon the request of the Unification Ministry, 76.9 percent of respondents support for the Kim Dae-jung administration's engagement policy, *Korea Herald*, September 28, 2000. Also, According to an opinion poll conducted by the *Hankook Ilbo*, 74 percent of respondents thought the second inter-Korean summit between President Roh Moo-hyun and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il was successful, *Korea Times*, October 7, 2007. For a more comprehensive survey, see for example *2005 nyeondo tongil munje kukmin yeoron josa* [National Opinion Survey for Unification Problems 2005] (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2005).

<sup>19</sup>- *Korea Herald*, May 9, 2008.

<sup>20</sup>- *Korea Times*, May 28, 2008.

<sup>21</sup>- *Korea Herald*, June 13, 2008.

means it would be difficult for President Lee Myung-bak not to follow the terms of the two joint declarations signed by the two former Presidents because such policies would not be politically accepted in the context of domestic politics in South Korea.

Recently, the Lee Myung-bak government seems to be showing signs of softening its North Korean policy. For example, initially there were no indications that the Lee Myung-bak government would be sending food aid to the North. Recently, however, the Lee Myung-bak government has changed its stance from its original one of no aid unless nuclear breakthrough to a willingness to send food aid to North Korea. Regarding humanitarian assistance in North Korea, food aid is urgent. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that North Korea has a shortfall of about 1.66 million tons in cereals for the year ending in October, which would be the largest deficit in seven years. The WFP has warned of the situation in North Korea. The government proposed inter-Korean dialogue on the provision of 50,000 tons of corn to North Korea.

The change in policy is apparently an attempt to begin to redefine inter-Korean relations under President Lee's pragmatic North Korean policy since it would require North Korea to hold talks with South Korea. However the Lee administration faces a dilemma regarding food aid for North Korea. First of all, Seoul has to wait for a positive response from Pyongyang. The Lee Myung-bak government has set two preconditions for resuming humanitarian aid to North Korea. One is North Korea's open request to South Korea for help and the other is a domestic consensus for humanitarian aid. Considering that Pyongyang has been making an anti-Lee Myung-bak campaign with all its propaganda apparatus, North Korea is unlikely to make a request from South Korea at least for the time being. Secondly, the United States has decided to provide food aid of 50,000 tons of rice to North Korea as a result of positive development on US-North Korean nuclear talks. Although Cheong Wa Dae dismissed speculation that the recent im-

provement in dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang would minimize Seoul's role in any discussion regarding the peace and security of the Korean peninsula, such comments reflect Seoul's anxiety about closer relations between the United States and North Korea. One analyst argues that the Seoul government is losing yet another card it has to play in dealing with Korea.<sup>22</sup>

### **Dilemma for Japan's North Korean Policy**

Improving relations between the United States and South Korea seems to have a positive effect on ties between South Korea and Japan. In this sense, it becomes easier to form a new trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea in the wake of North Korea's conservative government. The basic objective of Japan's North Korean policy is to normalize relations between Japan and North Korea by solving the North Korean nuclear problem along with abduction issues through cooperation with the United States and South Korea. In this sense, restoring the South Korea-US-Japan virtual alliance is a positive sign for Japan's North Korean policy.

The basic idea behind Japan's policy toward North Korea is "dialogue and pressure."<sup>23</sup> While dialogue has been exchanged between Japan and North Korea through governmental contacts, Japan has also been taking measures to apply pressure on North Korea as a means to accomplish the above objectives. As for dialogue, Japan has had contacts with North Korea

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<sup>22</sup> Paik Hak-soon of Sejong Institute commented that Seoul's attempt to show the North that it will discuss with the United States the matter of rice aid only tells the North that even the humanitarian aid from Seoul needs discussion with Washington on the questions that a team of officials from the Foreign and Unification Ministries visits Washington to discuss the food aid from the United States to North Korea, *Korea Herald*, May 14, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, *Diplomatic Blue Book*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Various Issues.

through multiple channels such as the Japan-North Korea bilateral negotiations and the six-party talks. As for pressure, Japan has participated in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to cope with North Korean illegal activities including the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Furthermore, the “Law Amending in Part the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law” legislation introduced by the Diet and passed in 2004, allowing the Japanese government to regulate at its own discretion the transmittance of money, imports, and exports when determined necessary in order to maintain the peace and security of Japan. Such policy measures are considered one of the ways in which Japan is able to adopt pressure on North Korea.

However, according to Victor D. Cha, Japan has three dilemmas in its policy toward North Korea. Firstly, Japan has fewer chances than the United States and South Korea to distinguish the DPRK tactical behavior from the intentions that underlie it. Secondly, historical reconciliation remains an almost immovable obstacle. Thirdly, the strategic priorities that inform the United States and South Korea’s engagement policy are not necessarily in tune with those that inform Japan. Consequently this could isolate Japan even in a best-case scenario.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Cha argues the more US-ROK-Japan engagement is successful at achieving progress vis-à-vis US-DPRK and DPRK-ROK, the less likely there will be parallel progress on the Japan-DPRK dyad.

Due to the above restraints on Japan’s North Korean policy especially at the system level, Japan’s North Korean Policy tends to respond to newly emerging international environment as given rather than take initiatives for its own policy. The author once conceptualized Japan’s North Korean policy as a responsive engagement policy under the Koizumi administration.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>- Victor D. Cha, “Japan’s Engagement Dilemmas with North Korea,” *Asian Survey* 41, No. 4, 2001, pp. 549-563.

<sup>25</sup>- Sachio Nakato, “Japan’s Shifting North Korean Policy under Koizumi Administration: Toward Responsive Engagement,” Institute of International Relations and Area Studies, Ritsumeikan University, *Ritsumeikan International Affairs*, Vol. 2, 2004, pp. 141-157.

Since a whole range of issues, including the abduction of Japanese citizens and the missile and nuclear development program, needs to be addressed when Japan negotiates with North Korea, it has no choice but to depend on development of US-North Korea relations as well as inter-Korean relations. Such dependence gives Japan a policy dilemma in the following two ways.

Firstly, Japan must proceed with negotiations in solidarity with the United States and South Korea even when it pursues Japan's own agenda such as normalization between Japan and North Korea as well as the abduction issues, because especially when security concerns such as nuclear development, missile development are the issues, Japan alone cannot deal with these security issues. In addition, although Japan would provide economic cooperation to North Korea after normalization, which is clearly stated in Provision 2 of the Pyongyang Declaration, unless all these security concerns are resolved, economic cooperation with North Korea may hurt not only its own national interests, but also those of the international community including the United States and South Korea, and therefore, Japan cannot proceed with normalization talks with North Korea with its own judgment.

Secondly, although Japan has adopted "Dialogue and Pressure" as a means to ratchet up pressure through tough measures on North Korea, unless it abandons its nuclear weapons program and solves the kidnapping issues while avenues for dialogue remain open, such pressure from Japan is limited both in scope and effectiveness. Japan has imposed economic sanctions on North Korea due to its missile tests and nuclear experiments, in July 2007 and in October 2007 respectively. However, its effectiveness remains unclear especially when China and South Korea continue economic and humanitarian assistance to North Korea.<sup>26</sup> In actuality, economic sanctions may be more symbolic than anything else, to show Japan's

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<sup>26</sup>-David C. Kang, "Japan: US Partner or Focused on Abductees?" *The Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 2005), p. 113.



political will to tackle issues, especially the abduction problems. Also, the approach of Dialogue and Pressure was adopted when President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi held a summit in Crawford, Texas in May 2003. The Bush administration is now heading toward a more conciliatory approach with North Korea. As a result, Japan is behind in promoting negotiations with North Korea.

### **A New Era, but More Challenges for Japan**

As a result of the birth of the new conservative government in South Korea, the possibility of US-Japan-South Korea's new trilateral cooperation is now open. At the same time, however, the new opportunity will also give uncertain challenges for Japan in dealing with North Korea. First of all, it may not necessarily be easy for the United States, South Korea, and Japan, with their common values (democracy, freedom of speech, etc.), to exert a sufficient pressure on North Korea to solve the nuclear problems and kidnapping issues in Japan. While the Lee Myung-bak administration in South Korea has taken a sterner stance toward North Korea, the Fukuda administration in Japan has renewed its economic sanctions on North Korea for the next six months in April 11, 2008 despite recent progress in US-North Korea talks over North Korea's denuclearization.<sup>27</sup> However, the Bush administration began to show more flexibility and willingness in seeking peaceful solutions to the North Korean nuclear problem. The United States and North Korea are now taking a step-by-step approach in the second stage of the nuclear resolution articulated in the agreement of February 13. There are certainly policy differences between the United States and Japan as well as South Korea.

Secondly, if the United States and North Korea are moving toward

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<sup>27</sup> - *The Japan Times*, April 12, 2008.

denuclearization of North Korea along with initiating the process of removing the designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism and advancing the process of terminating invocation of the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to North Korea, policy coordination between South Korea and Japan would face major challenges. While the Lee Myung-bak administration will be providing huge economic assistance to North Korea contingent on the progress of US-North Korea nuclear negotiations, it will still be difficult for Japan, with its abduction issues with North Korea, to coordinate policy with the United States and South Korea. Japan has made it clear that unless the North Korean nuclear problems and missile issues as well as abduction issues are all solved, Japan will not normalize with North Korea.

Thirdly, along with development on the bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea, Japan and North Korea have just started to move forward. However, Japan will have to carefully coordinate its respective policies with the United States. North Korea agreed on June 13, 2008 that it would reinvestigate abductions of Japanese citizens which reversed its longstanding position that the issue had been settled. In return, Japan responded that it had agreed to lift economic sanctions imposed on North Korea for its nuclear program including the ban on travel between the two countries. Obviously the recent development at least partly seems to reflect North Korea's improving relations with the United States. North Korea wants its name to be taken off the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism, while Japan has opposed to it unless the abductions issue was resolved. Some observers claim Pyongyang is just pretending to make progress in Japan-North Korea relations since it wants rewards from the international community such as removal from the US list of terrorism-sponsoring states and energy assistance under the six-party talks. It is not clear if Japan-North Korea relations have moved one step further at this point. Japan will have to ask the United States to take North Korea off its list

of state sponsors of terrorism based on the progress of abduction issues.

Fourthly, as related to the above issues, the policy of “Dialogue and Pressure” from Japan will have to face the following dilemma. In reality, it seems that Japan-North Korea relations have not proceeded when pressure such as economic sanctions (and unilateral demands) were adopted. Dialogue between Japan and North Korea has occurred infrequently after Japan imposed economic sanctions. Needless to say, Japan can never solve the various issues it is concerned with without dialogue. However, on the other hand, if Japan does not exercise pressure, and proceeds with negotiations with North Korea with no prominent progress especially on abduction issues, it may have to face severe criticism within the country. For example, families of abduction victims expressed dissatisfaction with the government’s decision to ease part of its sanctions against Pyongyang despite no clear prospects of missing abductees returning to Japan. Also, according to a poll conducted by *Mainichi Shimbun*, 55 percent of respondents do not support partial ease of sanctions on North Korea.<sup>28</sup> At this moment, Japan has to wait to see how North Korea actually conducts this reinvestigation.

Inter-Korean relations may be chilled in the meantime under the Lee Myung-bak administration or may dramatically improve following the possible development of US-DPRK negotiations and following the implementation of terms agreed in the summit meetings between South and North Korea. Also, with recent subtle progress between Japan-North Korea relations following improving US-North Korea relations, *JoongAng Ilbo* in its editorial on June 13, 2008 warned that South Korea needs to revise its North Korean policy otherwise South Korea might end up isolated.<sup>29</sup> Although Japan-North Korea relations may not be expected to proceed easily due to the several restraints discussed in the above section such developments

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<sup>28</sup> - *Mainichi Shimbun*, June 15, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> - *JoongAng Ilbo*, June 13, 2008.

might urge South Korea to rethink its North Korean policy based on its pragmatism. Although uncertainty continues even after the new conservative President has taken office in South Korea, what does seem to be certain is that the birth of the Lee Myung-bak government does not mean South Korea will join with Japan to apply further pressure on North Korea, as Japan currently does or originally hoped.

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