

JAPAN AND NORTH KOREA:

BONES OF CONTENTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relations between Japan and North Korea continue to deteriorate due to concerns over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and past abductions of Japanese citizens. Nearly a decade and a half of efforts at normalising relations between the countries have faltered due to Pyongyang's unwillingness to give up that program or come clean over the abductions. For Japan, normalisation would help preserve regional stability and represent one more step toward closure on its wartime history; for North Korea, it would potentially produce the single greatest economic infusion for reviving its moribund economy. Indeed, the prospect of normalisation with Japan is one of the leading incentives that can be offered to North Korea in a deal to end the North's nuclear programs.

North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile development, along with its history of infiltrating agents into Japan, have elevated the country's importance in Japanese defence planning, particularly after it tested a missile that over-flew Japan in August 1998. The North Korean threat has been cited as justification for missile defence and satellite development, constitutional revisions, and reinvigoration of the military alliance with the U.S. In fact, Japan's military posture is moving away from homeland defence towards readily deployable forces, although to date they have assumed non-combat-related roles.

While the nuclear issue is the paramount concern of policy-makers and security experts, the abduction issue is the primary focus of the Japanese public. Consequently, the government will not have full freedom to negotiate on the nuclear issue until it can satisfy its public that the abduction problem has been resolved or at least will be resolved in parallel. Conciliatory gestures by the North on the abduction dispute have backfired, particularly when claims that cremated remains were from one of the victims were said to be false. The techniques used to test the remains have come under fire from independent experts, further complicating the issue. A solution remains elusive, as it is unclear whether North Korea can make a sufficient accounting of its past crimes to appease Japanese public opinion. The North must do

better in providing a full accounting, but ultimately it will also take an act of political will by the Japanese government to conclude the wrangling over the issue.

Politicians and civic groups opposed to normalisation have seized on the abduction issue to push for sanctions against Pyongyang. Policy-makers, however, remain reluctant. The low and declining volume of bilateral trade calls into question how effective such sanctions would be in inducing a change in North Korean behaviour, while imposing them would reduce Tokyo's leverage. Thus, unilateral sanctions are unlikely, though Japan would probably go along with any multilateral program. For now, Tokyo is content with "virtual" sanctions, new regulations which have the effect of restricting access to Japanese ports by North Korean vessels.

The pro-Pyongyang organisation for Korean-Japanese, *Chosen Soren*, continues to play a role in bilateral relations, although it has been shrinking in both numbers and economic influence. Often pointed to as a key source of foreign currency for the Kim Jong-il regime, the amounts sent have been steadily declining, while the government has tightened regulations. Nonetheless, a combination of resentment at discrimination, ethnic pride and institutional momentum keep *Chosen Soren* alive. Given North Korea's failed economy and international pariah status, as well as the social discrimination which Koreans in Japan face by identifying themselves with North Korea, the decline of *Chosen Soren* is perhaps less surprising than its continued relevance.

While the Japanese government is deeply concerned about North Korea's nuclear weapons, there is an overwhelming consensus in Japan that it would not pursue its own nuclear option, at least in the short to medium term. As long as the U.S. nuclear umbrella is credible, a nuclear capability would have more costs than benefits for Tokyo.

As prospects improve for resuming the nuclear talks, Japan should both dangle the carrot of normalised relations and be prepared to wield the stick of

sanctions. To win public support for such an approach, it will need to present North Korea with clear guidelines for what must be done to solve the abduction issue. Showing how much normal relations with Japan could help North Korea if these two issues were resolved may be the best way for Japan to play a major role in finally bringing Pyongyang's nuclear threat to an end.

Seoul/Brussels, 27 June 2005

JAPAN AND NORTH KOREA: BONES OF CONTENTION

I. INTRODUCTION

With its aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, North Korea has emerged as the most immediate threat to Japanese security. Japanese media, however, gives the impression that North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals is the central, if not only issue in bilateral relations. The public's preoccupation with the kidnappings is hampering Japan's ability to play a positive role in ridding North Korea of its nuclear weapons. While normalisation of relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang remains one of the primary incentives for North Korea to make a deal to end the nuclear standoff, offering that incentive is not feasible so long as the abduction issue also remains unresolved. In addition, the two countries will need to overcome decades of mutual mistrust.

Although it has been 60 years since the end of Japan's colonisation of the Korean Peninsula, its legacy remains a major defining characteristic for the North Korean regime. Japan's often brutal rule lasted from 1905 to 1945,¹ during which time an attempt was made to wipe out Korea's identity as a separate nation. North Korea's founder and "eternal president", Kim Il-sung, cut his teeth in the guerrilla war against the Japanese in Manchuria during the late 1930s.² From kindergarten onward, North Koreans are taught highly embellished accounts of the Great Leader's exploits against the imperialist aggressors. Kim's anti-colonial credentials remain the primary basis for legitimising the rule of his son, Kim Jong-il. The importance that the regime places on this legacy is a significant complicating factor for improving relations. Pyongyang cannot afford domestically to be seen as giving in to Japanese demands, while Japanese public opinion seeks signs of contrition from North Korea for its bad behaviour in more recent times.

Japan largely ignored North Korea throughout the Cold War. Politically, it accepted South Korea's argument that it was the only legitimate Korean state, while militarily it relied on the United States to protect it against aggression. Consequently, while the presence of a sizable ethnic minority did sensitise Japanese somewhat to problems on the Korean Peninsula, for the most part North Korea did not figure prominently in public discourse. Events of the last decade -- North Korea's 1998 Taepodong missile launch, spy ship incursions, and revelations regarding abductions of Japanese citizens -- have thrust North Korea into the forefront of Japanese security concerns. In the process, public opinion has come to view the country almost entirely through a negative lens.

This unrelentingly negative image has limited the ability of policy-makers to take part in South Korean and other international engagement efforts toward North Korea. In general, Japan has been supportive of engagement as a means of solving the nuclear problem; it was the second largest contributor to the Geneva Agreed Framework (which ended the first nuclear crisis in 1994), and has provided more than \$250 million³ of humanitarian aid since 1995. But the government is coming under increasing political pressure to impose sanctions, from politicians within both the ruling and opposition parties, family members of abduction victims, and right-wing groups hoping to promote regime change. While domestic politics drives the debate, Japan has a vital role to play in international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the nuclear crisis.⁴ However, the bilateral issues between the two countries need to be cleared up if any real progress is to be made on the multilateral front.⁵

¹ Japan established a protectorate over Korea in 1905 and formally annexed it in 1910.

² See Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York, 1988).

³ Figures denoted in dollars (\$) in this report are in U.S. dollars.

⁴ Crisis Group Asia Report N°87, *North Korea: Where Next for the Nuclear Talks?*, 15 November 2004.

⁵ Crisis Group wishes to thank Prof. Samuel Gildart of Meikai University and Kim Hyun-ku for their invaluable assistance with the preparation of this report.

II. THE STRUGGLE FOR NORMALISATION

A. MOTIVATIONS

Normalisation talks between North Korea and Japan are now in their fourteenth year, with little progress toward resolution. Given the importance that Pyongyang places on international recognition as a means of assuring regime survival -- and the practical benefits that might flow to its economy if it had a normal relationship with its rich neighbour -- the resolution of outstanding issues with Japan is a vital component to solving the nuclear issue. Despite the negative views of North Korea prevalent in Japan, normalisation remains a goal of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro⁶ and those closest to him. There are two primary motivations for Japan. One is that North Korea is the only country formally occupied by Japan with which it has not normalised relations. "North Korea is the only leftover issue from World War II, other than the Kuriles dispute with Russia", notes Kimiya Tadashi, a political scientist at Tokyo University.⁷ The second reason is security; Japan sees normalisation as an important component in resolving the nuclear issue and bringing North Korea into the international community, thus helping to ensure stability in North East Asia. These issues have resonance with the public. A May 2004 *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll found that 84 per cent of respondents supported normalisation, although only 30 per cent felt it should be done "as quickly as possible".⁸

From North Korea's standpoint, the main advantage would be economic. Under the 1965 Japan-South Korea treaty, Tokyo provided Seoul with \$800 million in grants and loans. Japan is on record as agreeing to provide an equivalent amount, adjusted for inflation, to North Korea upon normalisation. Government officials and analysts say the actual amount would be a subject for negotiations.⁹ Okuda Satoshi, Director of the East Asia Studies Group at the Institute of Developing Economies, estimates it would be in the neighbourhood of \$4 to \$6 billion, if differences of population between North and South

Korea are considered.¹⁰ Other estimates, like that of Mark Manyin of the Congressional Research Service, have been \$8 to \$10 billion, without accounting for population differences.¹¹ Regardless of the exact amount, the prospect of large-scale economic aid as part of a normalisation agreement is one of the main incentives for North Korea to give up its nuclear programs.

Japanese companies were eager for normalisation with South Korea as a means of opening up investment opportunities in a neighbouring country. Enthusiasm for North Korea is considerably more muted. "The problem is how the money is spent. In the case of South Korea, Japan gave loans that helped develop export industries, which in turn became suppliers for Japanese companies. But North Korea has a lot of heavy industries", which hold little interest for Japanese investors.¹²

A large part of this lack of interest by Japanese companies stems from North Korea's poor record of paying its bills to foreign investors. In 1972, after U.S. President Nixon's trip to China spawned a brief détente in North East Asia, the Import-Export Bank of Japan began allowing export financing for North Korea. The oil crisis of September 1973 caused a sudden drop in the price of non-ferrous metals, North Korea's primary export item, leaving it unable to pay for imports. As a result, the bank cut off export financing in December 1974, leaving Japanese companies holding about \$1 billion in debt from North Korea.¹³ It is likely that debt would be subtracted from North Korea's compensation package. Sawaike Shinobu, President of the East Asia Trade Research Board, which represents the companies holding the debt, has been negotiating with North Korea to sign promissory notes for repayment following normalisation.¹⁴ While some individual businessmen have lobbied the government for

⁶ This report presents Japanese names by following the Japanese convention of using the family name followed by the given name.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

⁸ <http://db.yomiuri.co.jp/dpscripts/DpDetail.dll?Detail> (in Japanese). The survey was conducted by telephone among 1,118 adults on 24 May 2004.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Tokyo, 24 and 25 January 2005.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

¹¹ Mark E. Manyin, "North Korea-Japan Relations: The Normalisation Talks and the Compensation/Reparations Issue", Congressional Research Service (CRS) report for the U.S. Congress, 13 June 2001.

¹² Crisis Group Interview, Nakagawa Masahiko, Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO, Chiba, 24 January 2005.

¹³ Mimura Mitsuhiro, "The Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow of the Economic Relationship between Japan and the DPRK", *Korea's Economy*, Vol. 20, p. 91, 2004, published by the Korea Economic Institute.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, 18 April 2005. The companies in question are mostly affiliates of large trading firms that were created for doing business with communist countries.

normalisation, most companies have kept their interest quiet to avoid antagonising public opinion.¹⁵

Japanese companies have shown no inclination to stay ahead of political developments.¹⁶ North Korea's low per capita income and relatively small population provide little incentive for them to divert investments.¹⁷ The country may have some potential as a source of raw materials, such as coal for use by the steel industry, although some observers find that unlikely given its low quality.¹⁸ However, Japan lacks information about what North Korea has to sell. The Institute of Developing Economies, a division of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), would like to send a research team to get such information but cannot until relations are normalised.¹⁹

Japanese payments as part of a normalisation deal would likely take the form of overseas development assistance (ODA) for infrastructure projects. ODA is big business in Japan, particularly for the construction industry, which has difficulty generating domestic demand due to the chronically sluggish economy and overabundance of roads and bridges.²⁰ Companies that have extensive ODA experience do not need much lead time to conduct the necessary research for a new project, so until normalisation appears imminent, no major studies are likely.²¹

B. THE ROAD SO FAR

South Korean President Roh Tae-woo's engagement policy in the final years of the Cold War resulted in normalised relations with many of North Korea's communist allies, including China and the Soviet Union. This led to concerns in both Pyongyang and Tokyo about the North's possible diplomatic isolation and a consequent attempt at their own rapprochement. The first step was a trip to North Korea in September 1990 by a bipartisan delegation led by Liberal

Democratic Party (LDP) kingmaker Kanemaru Shin and included members of the Socialist Party. While the latter were acting primarily out of ideology, Kanemaru's motivations may have been more remuneration-driven; a raid on his office in 1993 uncovered unmarked gold bars that were alleged (though never proven) to have originated in North Korea.²² He was charged with tax evasion before his death in 1996.²³

The delegation's visit resulted in the Tripartite Declaration by Japan's Socialist Party and the North Korean Worker's Party, calling for early government-level talks on normalisation. These opened in 1991 but collapsed a year later after eight rounds because of the North's refusal to discuss kidnapping allegations. It may have also been the case that the diplomats responsible for conducting the negotiations were less enthusiastic than the politicians behind the Tripartite Declaration.²⁴

Over the next several years, relations made halting progress, with politicians rather than diplomats continuing to take the lead. Those who took up normalisation tended to fall into three categories: older politicians who wanted to see Japan's colonial legacy finally put to rest; leftists from the Socialist Party with an ideological interest in reaching out to their communist neighbour; and rural politicians who wanted to promote government food aid to North Korea as a way of buying up Japanese farmers' excess rice.²⁵ There also have been allegations -- but no formal charges -- that some took bribes from either North Korea itself or pro-Pyongyang, ethnic Koreans in Japan.

While direct bilateral talks were making little progress, Japan became an active player in the multilateral attempts to engage North Korea in the mid-1990s. After the U.S.-brokered Agreed Framework of 1994 froze North Korea's plutonium production, Japan agreed to pay \$1 billion toward construction of two light-water reactors in the North. It also began in 1995 to donate food aid in response to the famine conditions there. North Korea made its own conciliatory gestures

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Lee Chan-woo, Program Officer, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Seoul, 21 April 2005.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Mimura Mitsuhiro, Researcher, Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA), Niigata, 1 April 2005.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Okada Satoshi, Director, East Asian Studies Group, JETRO, Chiba, 24 January 2005.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 19 April 2005.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Okada Satoshi, Director, East Asian Studies Group, JETRO, Chiba, 24 January 2005.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Lee Jong-won, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, 27 January 2005.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Mimura Mitsuhiro, Researcher, Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA), Niigata, 1 April 2005.

²² Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics", Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper no. 101 (June 2004); <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp101.html>.

²³ Louise D. Hayes, *Introduction to Japanese Politics* (Armonk, NY & London, 2005), pp. 109-111.

²⁴ Young C. Kim, "North Korea Confronts Japan: Politics of Normalisation and Rice", in Byung Chul Koh (ed.), *North Korea and the World*, (Kyungnam University Press, 2004).

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kawasaki Go, *Asahi Shimbun* reporter, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

in response to Japanese demands. In November 1997, during a visit by another parliamentary delegation, Pyongyang for the first time allowed the Japanese women who had immigrated to North Korea with their Korean husbands in the 1960s to visit their families in Japan and agreed to investigate the cases of Japanese "missing persons".²⁶

Relations began another downward cycle, however, when North Korea fired a multi-stage rocket over Japanese territory in August 1998, heightening the public's perception of a military threat. The sinking of a North Korean spy ship in 2002 increased the concern, and the growing numbers of North Korean defectors coming to South Korea via China brought tales not only of abductions of Japanese, which had long been suspected, but also of drug trafficking and smuggling of weapons technology by North Korean ships that visited Japan.²⁷

Another bipartisan delegation, led by former Socialist Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, visited North Korea in December 1999, resulting in informal understandings that Japan would provide further rice aid if Pyongyang began normalisation talks in earnest. Nevertheless, two rounds of government-level talks made little progress.²⁸

In 2001, as it was preparing to launch its economic reforms,²⁹ North Korea made back-channel overtures on restarting the talks. Tanaka Hitoshi, then Director General of the Foreign Ministry's Bureau of East Asian Affairs, sensed that the North recognised the need for Japanese aid to revive its economy and was prepared to address the issues that had to be resolved first.³⁰ Tanaka was the leader of a small group within the ministry which wanted to re-orient Japanese diplomacy to play a larger regional role more independent of the U.S. It is widely believed that he had developed a line of communication to a high-level "Mr. X" within the North Korean leadership.³¹

Tanaka became the key figure in the subsequent engagement effort and the target for its critics. His role in the negotiations was so dominant that he allegedly even kept Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko out of

the loop, although the ministry denies this.³² Yamamoto Ichida, a prominent LDP Diet Member, accused him of monopolising contacts with the North: "His role wasn't proper for a diplomat".³³ During the back-channel talks, North Korea indicated it was willing to confess to abducting Japanese citizens,³⁴ setting the stage for Prime Minister Koizumi's trip to Pyongyang in September 2002 to meet with Kim Jong-il.

While the identity of Tanaka's Mr. X has never been revealed, the North Korean Foreign Ministry seems to have been given the main responsibility for dealing with Japan. The primary contacts for Japanese officials and Diet members between this first summit and the second in May 2004 were Chong Tae-hwa, who held the position of Ambassador for Normalisation Talks, and Song Il-ho, the Deputy Director General of the Foreign Ministry's Asia Bureau, who has also previously held posts within the Workers' Party.³⁵ Chong is rumoured to have retired, while Song is believed to have been promoted to Director General. At the summits themselves, Vice Foreign Minister Kang Seok-ju was the senior official to join Kim Jong-il on the North Korean side.³⁶

Koizumi's decision to take up the normalisation issue personally may have been related to the ways in which he has been atypical of Japanese prime ministers. During most of Japanese history since World War II, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has held a monopoly on political power. Catering to economic interests rather than advancing an ideology, the LDP was less a coherent party than a coalition of factions that selected the prime minister through bargaining among themselves.³⁷ This system broke down in the late 1990s, as economic stagnation and a series of weak, uninspiring prime ministers led voters to turn against the old way of doing business. Governments changed frequently, and the LDP was briefly forced to enter a coalition with the Socialists to maintain power. Koizumi put an end to this upon taking office not as the head of a faction, but as a

²⁶ Young C. Kim, "North Korea Confronts Japan", op. cit.

²⁷ Emma Chanlett-Avery, "North Korean Supporters in Japan: Issues for U.S. Policy", Congressional Research Service Report RL32137, 7 November 2003.

²⁸ Young C. Kim, "North Korea Confronts Japan", op. cit.

²⁹ Crisis Group Asia Report N°96, *North Korea: Can the Iron Fist Accept the Invisible Hand?*, 25 April 2005.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tanaka Hitoshi, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

³¹ Crisis Group interviews, Tokyo, 30 and 31 March 2005.

³² Crisis Group interview, Japanese government official, 18 May 2005.

³³ Crisis Group interview, Yamamoto Ichida, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Japanese government official, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

³⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, Izumi Hajime, University of Shizuoka, 23 May 2005.

³⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, Japanese government official, 23 May 2005.

³⁷ Louise D. Hayes, *Introduction to Japanese Politics*, op. cit., pp. 68-88.

charismatic figure promising reform.³⁸ He needed personal successes to cement his popularity and ensure his legacy, and North Korea seemed the most likely candidate for a major diplomatic breakthrough.³⁹ The degree to which politics was the driving force behind Koizumi's moves is a matter of some debate. One Japanese official admitted there were political considerations behind his visit but argued they were not significant.⁴⁰ The summit meeting did have some short-term effect on Koizumi's popularity; according to a *Nikkei Shimbun* poll, the cabinet's approval rating jumped from 44 per cent in August 2002 to 61 per cent in October.⁴¹

As a result of the meeting, Kim Jong-il allowed five of the abductees to travel to Japan to visit their families but claimed that eight others had died. The summit also resulted in a joint Pyongyang Declaration, which laid out the basic principles for normalisation, while leaving the details for further negotiation. Japan made clear it would provide economic "cooperation" -- carefully avoiding the term "reparations", as it did when normalising with South Korea -- while North Korea pledged to end kidnappings, work to resolve the nuclear issue, and continue its moratorium on missile tests.⁴²

The triumph was short-lived, however, as domestic and international opponents of accommodation soon halted the momentum toward normalisation. After revelations by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage of American evidence about the North's heavily-enriched uranium (HEU) program failed to persuade Koizumi to put off the summit,⁴³ Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly traveled to Pyongyang the next month to make the accusations about that program which set off the current nuclear crisis.⁴⁴ This has caused some observers to speculate that the U.S. move may have been at least partially motivated

by a desire to rein in Japan.⁴⁵ However Charles Pritchard, U.S. Special Envoy to North Korea at the time, says Koizumi told President Bush about his planned trip three weeks in advance, and Bush told him to go ahead but be cautious about promising too much.⁴⁶ Fukuda Yasuo, Cabinet Secretary at the time of the summit and current hopeful to become the next prime minister, likewise denies the U.S. raised any objection. He does, however, believe Washington may have mistakenly thought Japan would normalise relations with North Korea before the nuclear issue was resolved.⁴⁷ Izumi Hajime, a leading Korean expert at the University of Shizuoka, says there was some irritation among working-level officials at the State Department and Pentagon over Koizumi's visit but at the higher levels there was full agreement between the U.S. and Japan.⁴⁸

In Japan, Kim's admission about the kidnappings backfired. Instead of accepting it as a concession, critics of North Korea used the revelation to galvanise opposition to the regime. The two sides fell to wrangling over the fate of the family members the former abductees had left behind when they returned to Japan. The issue was smoothed over by a second Koizumi-Kim summit in May 2004, after which North Korea released the families of the five abductees, including a former U.S. army deserter and his children. While this second visit was widely criticised by the media, polls showed that most Japanese supported it.⁴⁹ A senior official interviewed by Crisis Group said, "in the end, North Korea made a series of concessions, and Japan gave virtually nothing in return".⁵⁰ However, as the Congressional Research Service's Mark Manyin points out, North Korea did receive a pledge of 250,000 metric tons of rice and \$10 million in other assistance.⁵¹

The public backlash also dampened the enthusiasm of Japanese officials for normalisation, particularly in the Foreign Ministry, which had become the main target for criticism. Tanaka Hitoshi especially has been a lightning rod for attacks, both physical -- a

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Kawasaki Go, *Asahi Shimbun* reporter, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Japanese journalist, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

⁴¹ "Koizumi Cabinet's approval rating climbed to 61 per cent", *Nikkei Shimbun*, 4 October 2002.

⁴² A text of the Pyongyang Declaration is available at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html.

⁴³ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group Asia Report N°61, *North Korea: A Phased Negotiation Strategy*, 1 August 2003.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Lee Deog-won, Tokyo, 27 January 2005.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, Charles Pritchard, Brookings Institution, 20 May 2005.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, Fukuda Yasuo, 18 April 2005.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, Izumi Hajime, 23 May 2005.

⁴⁹ "More than 60 per cent of Japanese approve Koizumi visit: Polls", Agence France-Presse, 24 May 2004.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

⁵¹ Crisis Group e-mail correspondence, 26 May 2005.

bomb was found in his garage on 10 September 2003 -- and verbal, with Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara saying he "deserved" the attack.⁵² "The message officials take from Tanaka's experience is that caution is the better course of action", argues one official. "Boldness is too risky."⁵³ Izumi Hajime fears that when Tanaka leaves the ministry, which may happen in the third quarter of 2005, there will be no catalyst for moving the normalisation process forward, other than Koizumi himself.⁵⁴

While the abduction problem remains the most contentious issue, it is not the only obstacle to normalisation. Even if North Korea makes a sufficient accounting to satisfy public opinion, Japan will not be in a position to normalise relations without a solution to the nuclear crisis. Since that requires a U.S.-North Korea agreement,⁵⁵ the North has little incentive to solve outstanding issues with Japan until significant progress has been made at the six-party talks. For this reason, and because Pyongyang's anger and frustration over the Japanese reaction to its gestures on abductions is likely to outweigh any hopes that it might have of peeling Japan away from the United States, it is unlikely there will be much short-term progress on normalisation. A senior Japanese official says Tokyo is prepared to play a "critical role in resolving the nuclear crisis at the right moment", perhaps similar to how the UK assisted in ending the Libyan nuclear program in 2003.⁵⁶

III. CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

A. SECURITY CONCERNS

While abductions have become the central public issue in bilateral relations, the security threat posed by Pyongyang -- the nuclear programs, development of weapons of mass destruction and delivery vehicles that can target the entire Japanese territory -- is ultimately of far greater importance. North Korea has also been implicated in espionage and smuggling in Japan and is believed to have close ties with Japanese criminal organisations. Japanese policy-makers are further concerned about the consequences of a North Korean collapse or sudden reunification of the Korean Peninsula. For its part, North Korea fears the changes in Japan's security posture and its role in the U.S. alliance structure.

1. Six-party talks

Because of the threat posed by a nuclear North Korea, Japan has been an active participant in diplomatic efforts to induce Pyongyang to give up its activities. Japan pledged \$1 billion to the project to build two light-water reactors under the 1994 Agreed Framework and would likely support a new nuclear deal at a similar level.⁵⁷ It has been a primary actor in the six-party talks process. Indeed, those talks were first suggested by Japan during a visit to Tokyo by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell on his way to attend South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun's inauguration in February 2003.⁵⁸ Since then, the U.S. and Japan "have marched pretty much in lockstep" in dealing with the North Korean nuclear problem.⁵⁹ An example of their close coordination is Washington's acquiescence to including the abduction issue in the six-party talks agenda, even though Charles Pritchard, the former U.S. Special Envoy for North Korea, considered it a "sideshow".⁶⁰ North Korea's reaction has been to try to bar Japan from future talks.

Japan's closeness to the U.S. position is in stark contrast to South Korea, which has frequently clashed with the Bush administration's approach to Pyongyang. Partially, this is because Japan views engagement with

⁵² Takahashi Junko, "Ishihara unrepentant over bomb barb", *Japan Times*, 12 September 2003.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, Tokyo, 18 March and 19 April 2005.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 March 2005.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group Report, *North Korea: A Phased Negotiation Strategy*, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Japanese official, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, Charles Pritchard, Brookings Institution, 20 May 2005.

⁵⁹ Brad Glosserman, "U.S.-Japan Relations: Vindication", *Comparative Connections*, 4th Quarter 2002, http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0204Qus_japan.html.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 May 2005.

North Korea as a means for solving outstanding issues, while for Seoul improving relations with Pyongyang is an end in itself.⁶¹ Koizumi's close personal relations with Bush also are important. During the Clinton administration, Japan went through seven different prime ministers, making it difficult to develop personal ties.⁶² Koizumi, however, was able to forge close ties with the American president as a result of Japan's strong support for the U.S. war on terrorism.⁶³ Koizumi used this personal relationship when he met with Bush at the G8 summit in Sea Island, Georgia, in June 2004, following his second trip to Pyongyang, to convince his American counterpart that North Korea was serious about negotiations. According to Pritchard, that discussion "had everything to do" with the U.S. decision to make a serious offer to North Korea in the third round of the six-party talks.⁶⁴

2. WMD and missiles

The primary threat posed by North Korea is its development of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Indeed, it could be argued that Japan is the country most threatened by those programs. The August 1998 launch of a Taepodong rocket over Japan, combined with North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons, demonstrated Pyongyang's ability to hit Japanese territory with a missile potentially carrying a nuclear warhead. North Korea is believed to have deployed about 100 Nodong missiles, which have the range to hit anywhere in Japan, as well as approximately 500 Scuds of "various types", among which the Scud-D can reach the easternmost part of the country.⁶⁵ If conventionally armed, the Nodong missiles would likely not be accurate enough to target Japanese or American military assets in Japan but they could be used as a terror weapon against civilians.⁶⁶ There is considerable debate within the U.S.

intelligence community on whether North Korea has miniaturised a nuclear warhead to fit on an existing missile.⁶⁷ In contrast to its known ability to target Japan, its ability to hit U.S. territory with a long-range ballistic missile remains "theoretical", according to April 2005 Senate testimony by Vice Admiral Lowell F. Jacoby, head of the Defence Intelligence Agency. The 1998 test of the Taepodong-1, which would have the range to reach Hawaii and Alaska, was only partially successful, as the third stage failed. The Taepodong-2, which would have the range to hit the U.S. west coast, is believed to be under development but has never been tested.⁶⁸ North Korea continues to test short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan, most recently on 1 May 2005, but these lack the range to hit Japan and are seen more as attempts to provoke than indicators of any technological advances.⁶⁹

Strategy as well as capability suggests that Japan would be the most likely target should North Korean WMD ever be used. Under the U.S.-Japan Defence Cooperation Guidelines revised in 1997, Japan would serve as a rear staging and support area for U.S. troops in any Korean contingency, making it a logical target. "In the past, if North Korea attacked South Korea, the battleground would be on the Korean Peninsula. But because of North Korea's missile development, it now poses a direct threat to Japan", notes Kurata Hideya of Kyorin University.⁷⁰ A nuclear attack against South Korea would be both unnecessary, given North Korea's ability to inflict great damage with conventional artillery, and impractical, given the danger of fallout hitting the North. However, nuclear warheads could be delivered by ship or missile against military facilities in Japan to make up for the lack of accuracy of longer range conventional weapons.

3. Trans-national crime

North Korea's espionage and criminal activities are of secondary concern. It has long taken advantage of proximity to infiltrate agents onto the Japanese islands using submersible watercraft. In 2002 Japanese naval forces sunk a spy ship that had penetrated territorial waters. In the past, North Korea also used Japan as a staging area for terrorist attacks

⁶¹ Crisis Group Asia Report N°89, *Korea Background: How the South Views its Brother from Another Planet*, 14 December 2004.

⁶² Crisis Group telephone interview, Charles Pritchard, Brookings Institution, 20 May 2003.

⁶³ Brad Glosserman, "U.S.-Japan Relations: Mr. Koizumi's Payback", *Comparative Connections*, 2nd Quarter 2004, http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0402Qus_japan.html.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 May 2004. For the U.S. offer to North Korea, see Crisis Group Report, *North Korea: A Phased Negotiation Strategy*, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

⁶⁵ "North Korea's Weapons Programs: A Net Assessment", International Institute for Strategic Studies (January 2004). For North Korea's missile inventory, see the website of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, http://www.nti.org/db/profiles/dprk/msl/cap/NKM_CcGO.html.

⁶⁶ "North Korea's Weapons Programs", op. cit., pp. 104-105.

⁶⁷ Bradley Graham and Glenn Kessler, "N. Korean nuclear advance is cited", *The Washington Post*, 29 April 2005, p. A01.

⁶⁸ David C. Wright, "Assessment of the North Korean Missile Threat", Centre for International Policy, http://www.ciponline.org/asia/reports/task_force/Wright.htm.

⁶⁹ "North's missile a modified SS-21", *Joongang Ilbo*, 4 May 2005 (in Korean).

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Seoul, 29 January 2005.

against South Korea, although the last such incident was in 1987, when two agents posing as Japanese tourists blew up an airliner.

North Korea also is widely suspected of involvement in a range of criminal activities in Japan, such as drug smuggling and counterfeiting, and of connections with Japanese *yakuza* (gangsters or criminal gangs). In 1997, Japanese customs seized 154 pounds of Chinese-produced methamphetamines from a North Korean ship. In January 1999, officials seized 440 pounds of that synthetic drug (known in Korea as philopon and elsewhere as shabu, ice or crystal meth) that had been offloaded to local crime groups by a North Korean vessel disguised as a fishing boat. In May 1999, a shipment of 100 kilos of the drug destined for Japan was intercepted in South Korea.⁷¹ In March 2005, more than 100 suspected counterfeit \$100 bills were found on a North Korean cargo ship that called at Sakaiminato port, Tottori Prefecture.⁷² Such unacceptable behaviour, which shows Pyongyang to be its own worst enemy, has only deepened Japanese antipathy.

4. Korean reunification

Beyond the short-term concerns, Japan remains wary in a broader strategic sense about the possible consequences of Korean reunification. Since shortly after the Korean War, it has based its security policy on the assumption that the Koreas would remain divided for the foreseeable future. Any change would require a re-evaluation of Japan's security posture.⁷³ How it would view reunification depends entirely on the form it would take. Militarily, Japan is concerned that Korean unification could lead to a break in the U.S.-South Korean alliance system. In a worst case, this could cause Korea to move closer to China, further weakening Japan's position vis-à-vis that rising power.⁷⁴ Even the spectre of a neutral Korea worries Japanese analysts, as it would leave Japan as the sole U.S. ally in the region. In this scenario, Charles M. Perry and Toshi Yoshihara of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis argue:

Japanese policy-makers might then be hard pressed to justify prolonging a substantial U.S. presence in Japan, especially without a clear threat or mission...This suggests that an American presence in Japan is much more linked with the existence of a similar presence in the ROK than is generally believed and understood. Indeed, the elimination of either forward-deployed posture would most likely undermine the rationale for the other.⁷⁵

Other experts, however, see this scenario as unlikely. According to one, "Unified Korea is likely to become a capitalist country with a security arrangement with the U.S., which is China's worst nightmare".⁷⁶ Another notes that Korean unification would require a great deal of economic aid, which would not be forthcoming from China and Russia, so Korea would need to remain within the U.S.-Japan alliance system.⁷⁷

Japan also has economic worries regarding unification. Sudden reunification could lead to a flood of North Korean refugees,⁷⁸ although that is considered unlikely because they could more easily reach China or South Korea.⁷⁹ A Japan Defence Agency official told Crisis Group that Japan has contingency plans for handling North Korean refugees in case of collapse but believes that the actual number would likely be very small.⁸⁰ Some observers, such as Funabashi Yoichi of *Asahi Shimbun*, believe large numbers of Japanese-born North Koreans might seek to return to Japan following a collapse.⁸¹ According to one Japanese official, while the government expects perhaps "hundreds" of North Korean refugees would reach Japan, it does not distinguish between former Japanese residents and other North Koreans,⁸² as ethnic Koreans who moved from Japan to North Korea lack legal status to return.⁸³ Nevertheless, even though absolute numbers would likely be very small, the potential for North

⁷¹ Crisis Group e-mail correspondence with Christopher Hughes, University of Warwick, 7 April 2005.

⁷² "\$100 bills suspected to be bogus found on N. Korean ship", *Kyodo News*, 30 March 2005, summarised in Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report, 30 March 2005, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/2005/mar/ndr30mar05.html#item8>.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Nam Ki-jeong, visiting professor, Tohoku University, Tokyo, 27 January 2005.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Kurata Hideya, Professor of Security Studies, Kyorin University, Seoul, 29 January 2005.

⁷⁵ Charles M. Perry and Toshi Yoshihara, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Preparing for Korean Reconciliation and Beyond* (Brassey's, 2003).

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Okonogi Masao, Keio University, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kurata Hideya, Seoul, 29 January 2005.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Ooki Jun, NHK, 26 January 2005.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Japanese security analyst, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

⁸¹ Crisis Group e-mail exchange, 19 May 2005. For an idea of the number of Japanese-born North Koreans, see Section C below.

⁸² Crisis Group telephone interview, 23 May 2005.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Japanese security analyst, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

Korean refugees is enough of a concern to the government that it is conducting at least one exercise to develop countermeasures.⁸⁴

Of greater concern is that the burden of reunification could lead to economic collapse in South Korea, which would have negative ramifications for the Japanese economy. If this can be avoided through a gradual reunification process, Japanese fears would be greatly alleviated. "Slow reunification would encourage North East Asian economic cooperation -- that's not a bad scenario", argues Keio University's Okonogi.⁸⁵

5. The North Korean view

North Korea views Japan's military development as a threat second only to Washington's "hostile policy". Japan Defence Agency Director Norota Hosei in March 1999 asserted Japan had the right to launch defensive air strikes against North Korean missile bases, a position echoed four years later by his successor, Ishiba Shigeru. While such pronouncements may not form a doctrine of pre-emption, as some observers believed,⁸⁶ they are a new potential threat for North Korea to guard against. Pyongyang's fear of a Japanese military build-up is driven by suspicions that Tokyo has never fully come to grips with its imperialistic past. The yearly visits by Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours several war criminals, occasional statements by prominent Japanese officials justifying the colonisation of Korea, and moves to expunge references to war crimes from textbooks reinforce this belief.⁸⁷

B. ABDUCTIONS

While far less important than the nuclear issue to regional security, the North's reprehensible kidnapping of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s remains the most important bilateral issue from the standpoint of Japanese public opinion. Because of this, the abduction issue will need to be resolved if normalisation is to be offered to North Korea as an

inducement for giving up its nuclear weapons. The first indications that North Korea may have been involved in the disappearance of Japanese citizens came in an article in the conservative *Sankei Shimbun* on 7 January 1980, which discussed the cases of three couples who had disappeared in the summer of 1978, including the testimony of a fourth couple who had been tied up by unknown assailants who fled when they heard someone approaching. It noted that the attackers spoke accented Japanese and carried guns and other items difficult to obtain in Japan, and that the attack took place near a beach where residents had reported strange lights and short-wave radio transmissions. Based on this, the article speculated the kidnappings had been carried out by foreign agents. The report was dismissed by the government and police as mere speculation at the time.⁸⁸

According to a North Korean spy who defected to South Korea in 1993, the abductees were taken to a secret military academy to train agents in Japanese language and culture. When North Korean agent Kim Hyon-hee was captured after blowing up a South Korean airliner in 1987, she confessed to being taught Japanese by an abducted woman. However, Hirasawa Katsuei, a parliamentarian from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party with a background in law enforcement, believes that identity theft was the motivation for the abductions, rather than building up a stable of Japanese language teachers, since North Korea already had an abundance of native Japanese speakers.⁸⁹ In 1985, a North Korean agent was arrested carrying a fake passport with the name of a Japanese man who had disappeared five years earlier.⁹⁰ Elimination of accidental witnesses to North Korean spying activities also likely played a role.⁹¹

Despite the mounting evidence of North Korean culpability in the 1980s, the Japanese government was slow to investigate the disappearances. The official position was that there was no proof North Korea was behind the kidnappings, and since Japan had no formal relations with Pyongyang, it could do little. Behind the scenes, certain Japanese politicians were already manoeuvring to open normalisation talks and feared the revelations could derail the process.⁹²

The kidnappings finally broke into the Japanese public consciousness in 1997. An Myong-jin, a North

⁸⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, Japanese government official, 23 May 2005.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005. The prospects for North East Asian economic cooperation will be the subject of a future Crisis Group report.

⁸⁶ Christopher Hughes, *Japan's Security Agenda: Military, Economic & Environmental Dimensions* (London, 2004), p. 172, pp. 88-89.

⁸⁷ See for example, "Revival of ultra 'Yamato Nationalism'", Korean Central News Agency, 17 May 2005.

⁸⁸ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

⁹⁰ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Hirasawa Katsuei, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

⁹² Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

Korean defector to the South, had met two years earlier in Seoul with Ishitaka Kenji, a producer for Asahi Broadcasting and told what he knew about the kidnappings. An's credibility was questioned, however, and the news media largely ignored the story. In October 1996, Ishitaka published an article in *Modern Korea* detailing what An had said, including the story of a woman who had been kidnapped as a teenager. Based on the description, the parents of Yokota Megumi, who disappeared from Niigata in 1977 at the age of thirteen, identified her.⁹³ She immediately became the poster child for the kidnapping issue.

Prior to the Yokota Megumi revelations, the Japanese public paid little attention to North Korea. The news media, however, has given a great deal of coverage to the kidnapping issue, bringing a flood of negative images of North Korea into Japanese homes.⁹⁴ Ooki Jun, a senior correspondent at the Japanese broadcaster NHK, says the media gives so much coverage to the issue because it is a human interest story, with powerful images of the crying relatives. "Media people understand that the nuclear issue is more important but the general public doesn't feel the reality of the nuclear threat".⁹⁵ According to a poll conducted by the Cabinet Office in October 2004, when asked their concerns regarding North Korea, the highest percentage of respondents -- 88 per cent -- cited abductions.⁹⁶

1. Politicisation of the issue

The public reaction has allowed groups with right-wing agendas to move in from the margins and champion a popular cause. Conservative activists have joined with families of the kidnap victims to keep the issue prominent and push for a harder line against North Korea. Okonogi Masao, one of Japan's leading experts on the country, notes that many of these groups are led by people who were seeking the collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime long before the abductions became a hot issue.⁹⁷ A leading group involved in the issue is the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN), headed by Sato Katsumi, who has long championed regime change as Director of the Contemporary Korean Institute. Indeed, Shimada Yoichi, Vice Chairman of NARKN, admits the kidnapping issue is a tool, and regime change is the goal. "I think Kim

Jong-il is just disgusting. I myself would continue to pursue regime change even if the remaining abductees were released".⁹⁸ Eric Johnston, a deputy editor at the *Japan Times*, notes that while NARKN has no official position on anything other than the abduction issue, many of its members hold right-wing or nationalistic views. "Anybody who has ever attended a NARKN rally can be forgiven for thinking they've stumbled onto a right-wing hate rally rather than a gathering of 'ordinary citizens'".⁹⁹ Three of the six top leaders are also members of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform,¹⁰⁰ which has developed textbooks that the Chinese and both Korean governments have criticised as whitewashing Japan's colonial past.¹⁰¹

The prominence of right-wing nationalists in this group has caused unease among some family members of the kidnap victims. Yokota Megumi's father, Shigeru, stated, "We know Sato is a right-winger, but we need all the help we can get from whomever we can get it from....We just want the country to help us get our loved ones back".¹⁰² Other victims' families are less hesitant about the association. Hasuike Hatsue, whose son was one of the five returnees, spoke at a Diet committee hearing on revising Japan's "peace" constitution, while her other son spoke at a symposium in favour of textbook revision.¹⁰³

The abduction issue has become a political liability for politicians seen as "pro-North Korea", or at least as not taking a sufficiently hard-line stance. This includes members of the Social Democratic Party, who have long advocated normalising relations for ideological reasons, and whose leader, Doi Takako, was ousted from her Diet seat by a lesser known politician who had supported the abductees' families.¹⁰⁴ Certain members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also have suffered from their

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Okonogi Masao, Keio University, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

⁹⁶ <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h16/h16-gaikou/2-1.html> (in Japanese).

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 27 January 2005.

⁹⁹ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Mimura Mitsuhiro, "The Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow of the Economic Relationship", op. cit. The liberal *Asahi Shimbun* has done profiles of the backgrounds of NARKN leaders but most other Japanese newspapers present it as a grass roots organisation.

¹⁰¹ The rekindled textbook and territorial controversies between Japan, China and the two Koreas is to be the subject of a future Crisis Group report.

¹⁰² David McNeill and Andreas Hippin, "Has rightwing hijacked Japan abductee issue?", *Japan Times*, 15 April 2003.

¹⁰³ Eric Johnston, "Candidates pile on abduction bandwagon", *Japan Times*, 4 November 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Johnston, "Kin of kidnapped fret lack of focus on Pyongyang in upper house poll", *Japan Times*, 2 July 2004. Doi returned to the Diet on a proportional seat.

associations with North Korea. The atmosphere has reached the point that, according to a Diet member who requested anonymity, even publicly admitting that the nuclear issue is more important would be "political suicide".¹⁰⁵ The issue has even seeped down to local politics, with at least one knowledgeable observer convinced that it was the deciding factor in the LDP's victory in the Niigata gubernatorial election in October 2004.¹⁰⁶

This has prompted some advocates of improving relations with North Korea to suggest new approaches to separate the abduction and normalisation issues. One parliamentarian, Nakagawa Masaharu of the leading opposition Democratic Party, favours treating abduction as a universal human rights problem. "The current government treats the abduction issue as a state-to-state issue, not a human rights issue. They look at it as an invasion of national sovereignty". If instead it is treated as a human rights issue and dealt with in multilateral forums, including the six-party talks, it would cease to act as a barrier to normalisation, he believes.¹⁰⁷ Funabashi Yoichi, Japan's leading foreign affairs columnist, also recommends adding abduction to an overall dialogue on North Korean human rights abuses, similar to the "third basket" approach toward the Soviet Union under the Helsinki process.¹⁰⁸ Japan has persuaded the U.S. to add the abduction problem to the list of outstanding issues that need to be resolved before North Korea can be removed from Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism.¹⁰⁹

Since coming to power in April 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi has walked a fine line, attempting to appease activists on the abduction issue while simultaneously pursuing normalisation. For the first goal, he appointed Abe Shinzo, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, to head a task force on the abduction issue. The conservative Abe has a long history of disdain for North Korea and

support for family members of the abductees¹¹⁰ but has thus far not supported calls for sanctions against Pyongyang. He is considered a leading candidate to succeed Koizumi, a prospect that worries some advocates of normalisation. "Japan's long-term Asia policy would be destroyed", says Okonogi Masao of Keio University. "We don't know if he'll actually act as he says, but if he does, Japan's relations with its neighbours would experience huge problems".¹¹¹

Kim Jong-il's surprising admission to the kidnappings at the 2002 summit only served to make the issue more complex. The original agreement between North Korea and Japan was for the abductees to return to Japan for a two-week visit. They would then go back to North Korea to meet with their children and jointly decide their futures. Family members in Japan and their supporters, however, objected, arguing that North Korea could not be trusted to keep its word. They demanded that the children be allowed to "return" to Japan, although none had ever set foot in the country, and many were unaware of their Japanese roots. Bowing to public pressure, the Foreign Ministry was forced to scrap the agreement, prompting outrage from Pyongyang.¹¹² One observer noted that while this incident was unfortunate, it was also somewhat inevitable due to the lack of trust between the two countries.¹¹³

In December 2003, LDP politician Hirasawa Katsuei, a long-time supporter of the abductees' families, held secret talks in Beijing with North Korean officials. He said they told him they felt cheated by the Japanese reaction, as they had been led to believe that all pending issues would be resolved at the summit. In April 2004, Hirasawa held a second secret meeting in Dalian, China (this time including Yamasaki Taku, a close friend of Koizumi) at which the North Koreans promised that if Koizumi returned to Pyongyang, he could bring back eight family members of the surviving victims.¹¹⁴ Koizumi made the second visit, returning with five family members, although former U.S. deserter Charles Jenkins, who had married Soga Hitomi, and his daughters refused to leave for fear that the U.S. military would arrest him for desertion.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 1 March 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 29 March 2005. Izumida Hirohiko, who promised to take strong measures to solve the abduction issue, received 345,000 votes to 299,000 for his nearest rival, Taga Hidetoshi, who had previously championed the civil rights of Korean-Japanese. Other sources interviewed for this report agreed that the abduction issue played a role in the election but disagreed on whether it was decisive. Crisis Group interviews, Niigata, 31 March and 1 April 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group e-mail communication, 19 May 2005. The reference is to the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe of August 1975.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, Charles Pritchard, Brookings Institution, 20 May 2005.

¹¹⁰ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean Abduction Issue", op. cit.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

¹¹² Eric Johnston, "The North Korean abduction issue", op. cit.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 29 January 2005.

¹¹⁴ Eric Johnston, "The North Korean abduction issue", op. cit.

¹¹⁵ Japan subsequently arranged for Jenkins and his daughters to meet Soga in Jakarta, where she persuaded them to go back with her to Japan. Jenkins reported for duty

2. The Yokota remains controversy

Following several months of negotiations, Japanese Foreign Ministry officials in November 2004 returned from Pyongyang with cremated remains that North Korea claimed belonged to Yokota Megumi, who reportedly committed suicide in 1993. A government official who has seen the remains says that the bone fragments among them appeared to have been deliberately broken up more than would be expected through normal cremation.¹¹⁶ Five samples were sent to the National Research Institute of Police Science in Tokyo, which failed to extract any DNA. Five additional samples were given to Professor Yoshii Tomio at Teikyo University. Using a process called nest polymerase chain reaction (nested PNR), which amplifies DNA twice instead of once as in conventional analysis, he announced that he had extracted DNA from two sources, and that neither matched the DNA from Yokota Megumi's umbilical cord, which her parents had preserved (a common custom in Japan). Yoshii expressed surprise that any DNA had survived cremation at 1,200 degrees Celsius.¹¹⁷ This was not the first time that remains handed over by North Korea have been questioned. On two occasions remains that it said "probably" belonged to a Japanese man abducted in Europe in 1980 were found by DNA tests to have belonged to a female.¹¹⁸

The prevailing sentiment in Japan was that North Korean officials, underestimating Japanese technology, had deliberately handed over false remains.¹¹⁹ Various theories have been put forth as to why North Korea would do this. One is that Yokota is still alive but Pyongyang does not want to release her because she knows too much about its espionage. Others believe Yokota may have suffered a mental breakdown as a result of her captivity, and to release her would only anger Japanese public opinion further. A third explanation is that Yokota may be dead but her true remains could not be located.¹²⁰

In an interview with the British journal *Nature*, however, Yoshii, the forensic expert, admitted he could not rule out that the samples had become contaminated

during testing.¹²¹ U.S. DNA expert Terry Melton told *Time* magazine that American labs do not use nested PNR because it carries a high risk of contamination. Since the *Nature* article was published, Yoshii was named the head of forensics in the Tokyo metropolitan police department and has refused to talk to more reporters. Suto Nobuhiko, a member of the opposition Democratic Party, said he wanted to call Yoshii to testify in a parliamentary hearing, but in his new position he cannot be compelled to appear without his employer's permission. Japanese government officials claim Yoshii was misquoted by *Nature*.¹²² In an editorial on 17 March 2005, that journal criticised the Japanese position, stating, "Dealing with North Korea is no fun, but it doesn't justify breaking the rules of separation of science and politics".¹²³ The charge that the DNA test was a plot of hard-line Japanese elements to derail moves toward improved relations,¹²⁴ widely dismissed when made, has thus gained a shred of credibility unusual for North Korean accusations.

While *Nature's* questioning of the DNA test received wide media coverage in South Korea and elsewhere, it seems to have gotten short shrift in the Japanese media.¹²⁵ Most Japanese newspapers continue to report on the issue as if it were an established fact that the remains did not come from Yokota.¹²⁶ An editorial in the English-language *Japan Times* on 3 March 2005 stated matter-of-factly that the DNA tests "proved" the remains were not hers.¹²⁷ David Cyranoski, the reporter who wrote the *Nature* articles, said he was contacted by four or five Japanese journalists but saw only one article that quoted him.¹²⁸ When asked about this debate, interviewees who are actively working on the abduction issue said that they had never heard that the DNA tests had come under question.¹²⁹ Yamamoto Ichida, a prominent LDP parliamentarian, said that as far as the public is concerned, it is a "fact" that the remains did not come

at a U.S. military base, where he was tried, convicted, sentenced to 30 days of house arrest, and given a dishonourable discharge.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹¹⁷ David Cyranoski, "DNA is burning issue as Japan and Korea clash over kidnaps", *Nature* Vol. 433, 3 February 2005, p. 445.

¹¹⁸ Gavan McCormack, "Disputed bones fracture Japan-N. Korea relations", *OhmyNews*, 20 April 2005.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Tokyo, 24-28 January 2005.

¹²¹ David Cyranoski, "DNA is burning issue as", op. cit.

¹²² David Cyranoski, "Job switch stymies Japan's abduction probe", *Nature*, Vol. 434, 7 April 2005, p. 685.

¹²³ "Politics versus reality", *Nature*, Vol. 434, 17 March 2005, p. 257.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Kim Myong-chol, Executive Director, Centre for Korean-American Peace, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

¹²⁵ Norimitsu Onishi, "About a kidnapping victim, DNA testing, and doubt", *International Herald Tribune*, 2 June 2005.

¹²⁶ Wada Haruki, "Solving the abductee's remains problem", *Hankyoreh*, 26 April 2005, p. 23 (in Korean).

¹²⁷ "Increase pressure on North Korea", *Japan Times*, 3 March 2005.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 29 March 2005.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

from Yokota.¹³⁰ Some observers, such as Wada Haruki, a prominent scholar at Tokyo University, have called for having the remains tested in a third country,¹³¹ but the Foreign Ministry says they were consumed in the tests and so this is impossible.¹³²

The flap over the remains demonstrates the difficulty that North Korea faces in trying to solve the abduction issue. While North Korea's track record of failing to abide by agreements justifies Japan's unwillingness to take Pyongyang at its word, to show conclusively that it no longer holds any Japanese citizens against their will puts North Korea in the impossible situation of trying to prove a negative. In addition to the dispute over the fate of the eight remaining abductees that the North has admitted to, Tokyo and Pyongyang cannot even agree on the total number of victims. Some Japanese civic groups, especially those representing the families of abductees, put this as high as 150, based on circumstantial evidence. Shimada Yoichi of NARKN maintains that "experts on missing persons" who have reviewed around 380 cases have determined that approximately 100 were probably committed by North Korea.¹³³ While the North has admitted to thirteen abductions, the Japanese government officially recognises sixteen abductees and has strong suspicions about seventeen more though the evidence is inconclusive.¹³⁴

The abduction issue is in many ways reminiscent of the problem of American soldiers missing in action (MIA) from the Vietnam War. Just as rumours circulated for many years of MIAs being spotted alive in Vietnam, stories circulate about North Korean refugees bringing out photographs of additional Japanese victims. Much as the Clinton administration had to ignore critics and make the decision that the MIA issue had been solved so it could normalise relations with Hanoi, it will ultimately take an act of political will by the Japanese government to end the wrangling over the abduction issue. One should be careful not to take the comparison too far. As the Asahi's Funabashi Yoichi points out, American MIAs were soldiers lost during wartime, while the abductees are innocent civilians.¹³⁵ However, the Congressional Research Service's Mark Manyin points out that the

North has not done as much as Vietnam did to address concerns. Moreover, there was considerable bipartisan support in Congress for the lifting of sanctions, while few in the Diet support such a move.¹³⁶

South Korean officials, while emphasising that they consider the problem a bilateral issue between Japan and North Korea, say they have tried to encourage Tokyo to find a solution. "Privately I'm telling my Japanese friends that there is no way of appeasing public opinion 100 per cent. Japan needs to set a yardstick -- I don't think they have....Japan needs to set a certain level of resolution and communicate to North Korea what that is".¹³⁷ Japanese observers believe that if some of the more symbolic cases, like that of Yokota Megumi, were solved, public opinion would become more favourable toward normalisation.¹³⁸ Public attention to the issue also appears to be cyclical; over 5,000 people attended a June 2004 session on the abduction issue sponsored by the Diet, while only 300 showed up for a similar meeting in January 2005.¹³⁹ Izumi Hajime of the University of Shizuoka believes that if North Korea were to send Yokota's daughter, Kim Hye-kyung, to Japan, it would neutralise the kidnapping issue.¹⁴⁰ However, Kim has a North Korean father and has never set foot in Japan.

The heavy emphasis Japan has placed on the kidnappings has opened it to charges of hypocrisy. Supporters of the North Korean position are quick to point out that the number of Japanese abducted by North Korea pales in comparison to the number of Koreans forcibly mobilised to serve the needs of Japan's war machine during World War II.¹⁴¹ The government has refused to pay individual compensation to these victims, a position consistently upheld by the courts.¹⁴² So Chung-on of the pro-North Korean General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (*Japanese Chosen Soren*;

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

¹³¹ Wada Haruki, "Solving the abductee's remains problem", *Hankyoreh*, 26 April 2005, p. 23 (in Korean).

¹³² Donald MacIntyre, "Bones of contention", *Time*, 4 April 2005.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 27 January 2005.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Japanese government official, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group e-mail correspondence, 22 June 2005.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group e-mail correspondence, 26 May 2005.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kimiya Tadashi, Tokyo, 25 January 2005; Ooki Jun, NHK Broadcasting, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Japanese Diet member, Tokyo, 2 March 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Kim Myong-chol, Executive Director, Centre for Korean-American Peace, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁴² Recently declassified South Korean documents show that, in the course of negotiating the 1965 Japan-South Korea peace treaty, Seoul agreed to forego all claims for individual compensation. Kwon Dae-yol and Kim Jung-hoon, "The Korean government gave up the right of individual claims against Japan", *Chosun Ilbo*, 18 January 2005 (in Korean).

Korean *Chochongryon*), argues: "My father was kidnapped by Japan, but Japan hides that crime while it demands that North Korea solve the abduction issue. Both cases happened in the past, and neither has been resolved, so both are present issues".¹⁴³ Even many Japanese feel this way; a poll jointly conducted by South Korea's *Dong-A Ilbo*, Japan's *Asahi Shimbun*, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences found that six out of ten believe the issue of colonial compensation has not been settled.¹⁴⁴

In a meeting with South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-Young on 17 June 2005, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il indicated a willingness to resume participation in six-party talks. Should this happen, Japan would be well advised to present North Korea with a concrete roadmap for solving the abduction issue. Given Pyongyang's penchant to "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity", there would be no guarantee that it would do what was required. But if Japan wants to play a positive role in ridding the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons, it should do what it can to break the current logjam in bilateral relations.

C. THE KOREAN-JAPANESE: ASSIMILATION AND DISCRIMINATION

Many Koreans emigrated to Japan during the colonial period, initially as students and businessmen, but later as forced labourers and military conscripts to support the Japanese war effort. It has been estimated that by 1945, roughly 2.3 million Koreans were living there. Most chose to be repatriated to South Korea immediately after the war, or to North Korea after 1959.¹⁴⁵ Those who remained were given the status of "special permanent residents". Their descendants must choose between becoming Japanese citizens or retaining permanent resident status as citizens of one of the Korean states. That nearly half a million chose the latter option, despite its disadvantages, speaks to the continued resentment felt by ethnic Koreans toward Japan, as well as the strength of family and school ties.

Like the Korean Peninsula itself, the Korean community in Japan has been undergoing enormous changes: social, political, and economic. After Japan's defeat in World War II, Koreans there split into two organisations, the communist-dominated League of Koreans and the anti-communist Association of Koreans in Japan (*Mindan*). Both were formed before the emergence of separate governments in the two halves of Korea. In 1955, North Korean President Kim Il-sung announced his desire to normalise relations with Japan. This led the League of Koreans to break its ties with the Japanese Communist Party, on the grounds that focusing on revolution within Japan could hamper normalisation. In place of the League, pro-Pyongyang Korean-Japanese formed the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. Although shrinking in numbers, it remains an important source of economic and political support for the Kim Jong-Il regime.

Initially, the majority of Korean-Japanese supported *Chosen Soren* because of its more nationalistic veneer.¹⁴⁶ In 1955 the Japanese police estimated that 90 per cent of all Koreans in Japan were pro-North Korea, even though more than 90 per cent had come from the southern part of the peninsula. This began to change with the signing of the South Korea-Japan peace treaty in 1965. By recognising Seoul, Japan opened up the possibility for Koreans in Japan to gain permanent residence status as citizens of South Korea. Those choosing North Korean citizenship, on the other hand, remained officially stateless, since Tokyo considered the Republic of Korea to be the sole legitimate government on the peninsula. Many Korean-Japanese switched loyalties to take advantage of the opportunities provided by this new status. Although Japan revised the law in 1991 to extend permanent residence status to *Chosen Soren* members as well, that organization continued to dwindle due to the declining economic fortunes of Pyongyang and death of Kim Il-sung, in contrast to the rapid economic growth and democratisation of the South. Today, *Mindan* numbers around 400,000, *Chosen Soren* only 100,000. Many more ethnic Koreans have opted for Japanese citizenship, especially the third and fourth-generations, who lack strong ties to their ancestral homeland.

Given North Korea's failed economy and international pariah status, as well as the social discrimination which Koreans in Japan face by identifying themselves with it, the decline of *Chosen Soren* is perhaps less surprising

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 28 January 2005.

¹⁴⁴ "6 out of 10 Japanese believe 'Japan's colonial reparations unsolved'", *Dong-A Ilbo*, 27 April 2005 (in Korean).

¹⁴⁵ Repatriation to North Korea was first opened up in 1959, closed in 1967, and reopened in 1971. By 1984, a total of 93,339 people had moved from Japan to North Korea, including about 6,600 Japanese nationals married to Koreans. While repatriation is still theoretically possible, in practice it is nowadays almost nonexistent. Sonia Ryang, "The North Korean Homeland in Japan", in Ryang (ed.), *Koreans in Japan* (Routledge, 2000), pp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁶ In North Korea, the communists purged Japanese collaborators from positions of influence, while in South Korea, President Syngman Rhee, himself a veteran of the independence movement, relied heavily on the support of pro-Japanese elements.

than its continued activity. Members attribute this to ongoing discrimination. So Chung-on, Director of the International Affairs Bureau of *Chosen Soren*, argues that Japan carries out a dual policy of discrimination and forced assimilation. If ethnic Koreans want to become citizens and thus avoid discrimination, they must hide their ethnic identity. The goal of *Chosen Soren* is not to return to North Korea, but to carve out a space for members within Japanese society. "The ideal would be for all the younger generation of Korean-Japanese to live in Japan with ethnic pride. Japan should change its policy away from trying to 'Yamato-ise' [Japan-ise] Koreans".¹⁴⁷ Bae Chol-eun of *Mindan* echoed these feelings. "Japan thinks that only the Yamato race lives in Japan, but people of ethnic Korean descent want to retain their ethnic identity. Japanese society is resistant toward people who are different".¹⁴⁸

Japan has taken steps to improve the status of ethnic Koreans. Those who take citizenship are no longer required to choose a Japanese name, although many still do to blend in more easily. Japan's most successful ethnic Koreans have maintained their Korean names, including Softbank Group chairman Sohn Jeong-eui and "pachinko king" Han Chang-wu, who are both billionaires and listed in *Forbes* as the eighth and 24th wealthiest Japanese respectively.¹⁴⁹ The lone Korean-Japanese in parliament, Baek Jin-hun, also uses his Korean name, and his business card proudly declares, "my father is Korean".¹⁵⁰ Since 1991, those who choose permanent residency status are no longer required to be fingerprinted and are not subject to deportation if convicted of a crime.¹⁵¹ They are still required to carry a foreign registration card but the police have stopped asking for it during routine traffic stops. In April 2004, the Ministry of Education allowed graduates of *Chosen Soren* schools to attend all national universities except the Tokyo Institute of Technology, although private and provincial universities are allowed to decide for themselves whether to open up their admissions.¹⁵²

Despite these improvements, both cultural and legal barriers to full integration remain. Many landlords will not rent apartments to people with Korean names unless they have a Japanese guarantor. Certain professions, including teaching, are still barred to non-citizens.¹⁵³ Chung Hyang-gyun, the Japanese-born daughter of a Korean father and Japanese mother who holds permanent residency as a South Korean, sued the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, where she was working as a nurse, for denying her the right to apply for a management position. In March 2005, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled in favour of her employer.¹⁵⁴

With their emphasis on ethnic pride and "authenticity", *Chosen Soren* members continue to regard North Korea as the more legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula, despite the South's democratisation. Kim Myong-chol, an ethnic Korean who often acts as an unofficial spokesman for North Korea, argues:

Legitimacy is not based on elections, but on whether the government speaks for the Korean people. Economic success doesn't confer legitimacy on the government. Why did South Korea send troops to Iraq? Because it lacks the independence to refuse to do so. That's why South Korea remains illegitimate, because it's dependent on the United States.¹⁵⁵

North Korea continues to provide economic and curriculum support for the *Chosen Soren* schools, which emphasise "authenticity" by teaching Korean language, culture, and history. In recent years, the schools have been opened to ethnic Koreans who do not belong to *Chosen Soren* and claim to count children of South Korean businessmen in Japan among their pupils.¹⁵⁶ *Chosen Soren* members dismiss the idea that *Mindan*'s greater numbers demonstrate increased Korean-Japanese identification with South Korea, arguing that the easier foreign travel afforded by South Korean citizenship is a motivating factor. As So Chung-on sees it, "*Mindan* is just for getting a passport".¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, So Chung-on, Director, International Affairs Bureau, General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

¹⁴⁹ "I have risen from the bottom to become one of Japan's wealthiest", *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, 9 June 2005 (in Korean)

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, 3 June 2005, Seoul. Baek became a Japanese citizen in 2003 in order to be eligible to join the House of Councillors the following year.

¹⁵¹ Before 1991, ethnic Koreans without Japanese citizenship could be deported to South Korea if given a sentence of seven years or more. Crisis Group interview, Bae Chol-eun, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interview, *Chosen Soren*, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interview, Bae Chol-eun, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Norimitsu Onishi, "Japan-born Koreans live in limbo", *International Herald Tribune*, 2-3 April 2005, p.3.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kim Myong-chol, Centre for Korean-American Peace, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, So Chung-on, Director, International Affairs Bureau, General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

MEET THE PARKS: A PRO-NORTH KOREAN FAMILY IN JAPAN

The Parks have run the same small Korean barbecue restaurant in a quiet Tokyo neighbourhood for nearly 30 years. The sign for the restaurant makes it abundantly clear that the family has not changed its name to Japanese, yet a table is rarely vacant until late in the evening. The family members are constantly in motion, speaking to each other in Japanese. The patriarch, Park Seung-ju (63), is a proud second-generation Korean-Japanese whose parents emigrated to Japan in the 1930s. Like most Koreans in Japan, his parents came from Kyeongsang Province at a time when there was no "North" or "South" Korea. He was able to visit his relatives there for the first time two years ago after the Seoul government relaxed restrictions on North Korean passport holders wishing to visit the South. His family ties to the North are more immediate: Two of his siblings were part of the wave of Koreans who went there in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

With family on both sides of the 38th parallel, Park, like his parents, thinks of himself as a "*Chosun saram*" (the traditional term for Koreans) who is neither North nor South Korean. Yet, Park retains a fierce loyalty to the Northern regime because it was the North which helped ethnic Koreans in Japan after the end of World War II. As he puts it, "They helped us in our time of greatest need, and it is only fair for us to help the North in its time of need". Park's wife, noticeably less comfortable speaking in Korean, expressed mixed loyalties. "We can speak Korean because of the support we received from North Korea", but adds, "I wish Kim Jong-il had died in the Yongchon train explosion" (Kim's car was rumoured to have passed hours before the explosion on 22 April 2004), only to be chided by her husband. The elder Park has visited his sisters in the North some ten times, often taking the Mangyongbong Ferry. He had originally planned to take the ferry again in April 2005 but his visit was delayed due to new Japanese regulations (see below). Yet, even he admits to limits in his loyalties to the North, declaring, "If Chairman Kim tries to pass on power to one of his sons, neither I nor the leadership of *Chosen Soren* will accept it. We intend to make this very clear to the North Korean leadership". Park confirmed that Korean-Japanese loyalties to the North are fading, especially with later generations. He proudly noted that his grandchildren attend *Chosen Soren* schools but enrolments are dwindling.

Park's sons help him run the restaurant but the eldest son also has an export business, selling used Japanese cars to North Korea. That son, Chan-su, asserted: "We are bringing development and the seeds of capitalism to North Korea". Father and son have quietly taught their relatives and friends in the North about the outside world and the functioning of markets. However, Chan-su notes that it has become much more difficult to sell cars to the North, because of both the new Japanese restrictions on North Korean ships and the North's increasing inability to pay. He hoped to visit the North in June for the World Cup qualifying football match between North Korea and Japan before it was moved to Bangkok due to unsportsmanlike conduct by North Korean "hooligans" after an earlier match against Iran.

Crisis Group interview, 18 April 2005. The names and some family details have been changed to protect the identity of the family.

On the national level, the ideological differences between *Chosen Soren* and *Mindan* persist, despite the easing of tensions between the two Koreas.¹⁵⁸ According to Bae Chol-eun of *Mindan*, *Chosen Soren* has refused to have contacts with *Mindan* because its president in 2004 denounced North Korea's nuclear weapons program.¹⁵⁹ On the regional level, however, relations between *Chosen Soren* and *Mindan* members are far more cordial.¹⁶⁰ Over the past few years, the

two organisations have held a joint golf tournament.¹⁶¹ In 2004, several teachers from the *Chosen Soren* school in Niigata visited South Korea. The Osaka headquarters of the two organisations have held joint commemorations of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule every 15 August since 2001.¹⁶² *Chosen Soren* students, like their Japanese counterparts, have

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group Report, *Korea Background: How the South Views its Brother from Another Planet*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 30 March 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Kim Jon-he, *Chosen Soren*, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, a *Chosen Soren* family, 18 April 2005.

¹⁶² Park Jung-un, "Chongryun, Mindan hold hands together", *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, 25 May 2005 (in Korean).

also been swept up by the "Korean wave", idolising South Korean actors and pop stars.¹⁶³

In 1979, Japan signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which obligated it to allow *Chosen Soren* members to travel back and forth to North Korea. Previously, Korean-Japanese who went to the North were unable to return. The result was the establishment of semi-regular ferry service between Wonsan in North Korea and Niigata in Japan. Nearly 5,000 Korean-Japanese visit annually on tours, business, school trips, or to see relatives. These visits have also become a conduit for remittances and other financial assistance from Korean-Japanese to the North. *Chosen Soren* members have complained about being forced to send money to ensure the well-being of family members.¹⁶⁴

The exact amount of money sent to North Korea from Korean-Japanese is unknown, as Japanese law only requires reporting of over 30 million yen (\$315,000) in remittances, or 1 million yen (\$10,500) in cash carried out of the country. Reported remittances dropped from \$4 million in 2002 to \$1 million in 2003, while the amount of cash carried by Korean-Japanese tourists into North Korea dropped from \$39 million to \$27 million.¹⁶⁵

Tighter inspections of North Korean vessels have also made it more difficult for Korean-Japanese to carry large amounts of unreported cash into the North, so knowledgeable sources consider the official figure to be credible.¹⁶⁶ The Japanese Diet in 2003 passed a law which empowers the government to halt the flow of cash from *Chosen Soren* members to North Korea, although the government has not done so. The bankruptcy of Chogin Kinki, the *Chosen Soren* credit union, in the wake of Japan's economic downturn, destroyed a major conduit for unregulated money flows to North Korea. Given all these constraints, some of the larger figures claimed for remittances are almost surely exaggerated. "It's physically and legally impossible to send the amount that some people claim is sent", argues *Chosen Soren's* So Chung-on.¹⁶⁷

The drop in remittances reflects *Chosen Soren's* decline in both numbers and finances. Its traditional sources of income were gambling (*pachinko*) and restaurants specialising in Korean barbeque (*yakiniku*). The former has suffered from Japan's stagnant economy, the latter from mad cow disease.¹⁶⁸ *Chosen Soren's* declining fortunes can also be seen in the state of its Korean-language schools. The one in Niigata city has only 23 students and ten teachers.¹⁶⁹ Nationwide, less than 12,000 students attend *Chosen Soren* schools.¹⁷⁰ Because the schools receive no government money, they have to rely on donations from parents. "We pay taxes the same as Japanese but we receive no support from the government", complains Kim Byong-chan, a teacher.¹⁷¹ Some prefectures, however, do support *Chosen* schools, to the tune of \$9 million per year.¹⁷² *Chosen Soren* has been seeking to obtain the same level of national subsidies as Japanese private schools receive, thus far without success.¹⁷³

In addition to the money and consumer goods that *Chosen Soren* members send to North Korea, they have been accused of playing a role in the North's illicit activities, such as drug smuggling and abductions. Some *Chosen Soren* members are believed to have strong ties with Japanese *yakuza* groups operating in Osaka. Some of these gangsters have long been suspected of having on their payroll Japanese politicians who could be counted on to prevent close inspection of questionable activities. However, Go Kawasaki, a reporter with *Asahi Shimbun*, believes money was never the key to *Chosen Soren's* political influence; rather it was the unique ability to provide access to North Korea. There were rumours that *Chosen Soren* played a role in Koizumi's second visit

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, Kim Byong-chan, teacher, Chosen School, Niigata, 1 April 2005.

¹⁶⁴ Ryang, "The North Korean Homeland in Japan", op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview with government official, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 28 February 2005.

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, So Chung-on, Director, International Affairs Bureau, General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, Tokyo, 24 January 2005

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Kim Jon-he, *Chosen Soren* Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Kim Byong-chan, Niigata, 1 April 2005. Kim pointed out that the school has nine classes for those 23 students, thus requiring the abnormally high teacher-student ratio. It may also be that the teachers, graduates of *Chosen Soren's* university, have few other employment options.

¹⁷⁰ Park Jung-un, "The 50th anniversary of Chongryon in Japan -- its worries", *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, 25 May 2005 (in Korean).

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Niigata, 1 April 2005. Prior to 2003, the Niigata city government granted the Chosen school exemption from property taxes. On 25 February 2005, the *Chosen* school initiated a lawsuit against the city attempting to restore their tax-exempt status. Crisis Group interview, Niigata city officials, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, Japanese government official, Tokyo, 19 April 2005.

¹⁷³ Park Jung-un, "Hope is educating the next generation", *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, 25 May 2005 (in Korean).

to Pyongyang.¹⁷⁴ Since normalisation negotiations began, however, Japan has several lines of communication with North Korea, so *Chosen Soren's* importance has waned. With the increased focus on the kidnapping issue, just the hint of association with *Chosen Soren* has become a kiss of death for any Japanese politician, essentially destroying whatever political clout the group once had.

Chosen Soren's association with North Korea has made it the target of hate crimes by Japanese nationalists. Crisis Group researchers who visited the *Chosen Soren* office in Niigata were shown a stack of hate mail, some including lewd photographs, accusing the organisation of complicity in the disappearance of Yokota Megumi and others. One envelope, unopened, contained a razor blade. On 31 July 2003, a shot was fired at the headquarters' garage.¹⁷⁵ The perpetrator was apprehended and found to be a member of a group with close ties to Nishimura Shingo, a Diet member who has been an outspoken critic of North Korea.¹⁷⁶ Students at the *Chosen* school in Niigata have stopped wearing traditional Korean clothes to prevent harassment.¹⁷⁷ Japanese NGOs who provide aid to North Korea have reported verbal harassment but no actual violence. They credit the police with keeping right-wing demonstrations under control.¹⁷⁸

D. TRADE

Although Japan is North Korea's third largest trade partner, volume has been dropping from a peak of around \$500 million in 1980. Japanese exports to North Korea have fallen from nearly \$175 million in 1998 to \$91 million in 2003, while imports have dropped from \$218 million to \$173 million over the same period.¹⁷⁹ About half of Japanese imports from the North are marine products, such as shellfish, while the rest are goods manufactured in factories owned by Korean-Japanese. Exports primarily are used, relatively high-end goods like automobiles and bicycles. Because North Korea's ability to purchase such items is limited,

Japan is the only country with which it enjoys a trade surplus.¹⁸⁰

The political climate in Japan is the primary reason for the drop in bilateral trade but there are other factors as well. Countries outside the World Trade Organisation like North Korea are at a distinct disadvantage. This is especially true given the growing importance of China, which recently supplanted the U.S. as Japan's leading trade partner. With so much potential in that country, Japanese companies have shown little interest in North Korea. The only Japanese companies currently operating there are owned by Korean-Japanese, most of whom are affiliated with *Chosen Soren*. Not only have the numbers of pro-North Koreans among the Korean-Japanese been decreasing, but their spending power has declined from its heyday in the 1980s due to the bursting of Japan's economic bubble. The result has been a vast reduction in the amount of money invested in North Korea by Korean-Japanese.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Izumi Hajime, 18 April 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁷⁶ "Six people arrested for 'nation-building volunteer army' cases", *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 December 2003 (in Japanese).

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kim Byong-chan, Niigata, 1 April 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kumaoka Michiya, President, Japan Volunteer Centre, Tokyo, 28 March 2005; Kawamura Go, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁷⁹ Figures provided to Crisis Group by the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), 18 January 2005.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Japanese government official, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Nakagawa Masahiko, JETRO, Chiba, Japan, 24 January 2005.

IV. JAPANESE RESPONSES AND OPTIONS

In the wake of Prime Minister Koizumi's second visit to Pyongyang, calls have increased by Diet members and supporters of the abductees' families to impose sanctions on North Korea. Pyongyang's announcement on 10 February 2005 that it has built nuclear weapons and was "suspending" participation in the six-party talks has added to the chorus. Policymakers, however, are reluctant to take a move they see as unlikely to be effective and that might reduce Japan's leverage and exacerbate the nuclear crisis. Japan is moving ahead with "virtual" sanctions and increasing its military capabilities to deal with contingencies, however, and there is growing speculation on the conditions under which it would pursue its own nuclear weapons program.

A. SANCTIONS, "VIRTUAL" AND OTHERWISE

While Japan has been slow to move forward with formal sanctions, it has begun to enforce certain regulations that are widely seen as "virtual sanctions". Chief among these is a law that came into force on 1 March 2005 requiring all ships over 100 tons entering Japanese harbours to have liability insurance against fuel spills. According to the Ministry of Transport, only 2.5 per cent of the 982 North Korean vessels that visited Japanese ports in 2003 had such insurance.¹⁸² Given the high cost of insurance and the poor state of repair of most North Korean vessels, many analysts expect the law to hurt Pyongyang's sales of marine products to Japan. In 2003, over 400 North Korean fishing ships visited Japanese ports; only sixteen are now allowed back.¹⁸³ There were only 29 North Korean port calls in March 2005, down from 115 in March 2004.¹⁸⁴ On 18 May 2005, North Korea's Mangyongbong Ferry, the main conveyance for people and goods between the two countries, visited for the first time since the law went into place, after obtaining the required insurance.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² "North Korean ships warned as Japan starts checks on foreign vessels", *Kyodo News*, 1 March 2005.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Niigata Port official, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Takahara Kanako, "Veiled North Korea sanction takes toll on port calls", *Japan Times*, 6 April 2005.

¹⁸⁵ "North Korea ferry calls, insurance in hand", *Japan Times*, 19 May 2005.

In 2004, Japan enacted a law requiring the labelling of marine products by country of origin. This will presumably make it easier for consumers to boycott North Korean products, as urged by activists on the abduction issue. But Nakagawa Masahiko, an expert on North Korea at the Institute of Developing Economies at JETRO, suggests North Korea may be able to get around both the regulation and the boycott by transporting its products on Russian or other third-party ships.¹⁸⁶

The low and declining volume of bilateral trade calls into question how effective more explicit sanctions would be in inducing a change in North Korean behaviour.¹⁸⁷ Policy-makers and analysts worry that if Japan places unilateral sanctions on North Korea and they fail to have their desired effect, the result will be a loss of Japanese influence on North Korean issues.¹⁸⁸ Officials also worry about belligerent North Korean responses¹⁸⁹ and do not want to be seen as responsible for scuttling the six-party talks.¹⁹⁰ Historically, Japan has never imposed unilateral sanctions on another country, largely because it is a maritime nation highly dependant on foreign trade. It has, however, always adhered to sanctions regimes imposed by UN resolutions.¹⁹¹ Thus, unilateral sanctions remain unlikely, but Japan would probably go along with any multilateral program.

Politically, however, support for sanctions has been gaining momentum, especially since the controversy over Yokota Megumi's remains and North Korea's announcement that it had become a nuclear power. A telephone poll conducted by *Nikkei Shimbun* in November 2004 found that 73 per cent of respondents felt Japan should consider economic sanctions as part of a tougher negotiating stance.¹⁹² In Niigata prefecture, where Yokota Megumi disappeared, the legislature passed a resolution calling on the government to impose sanctions, with only communist and socialist members

¹⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, Nakagawa Masahiko, JETRO, Chiba, Japan, 24 January 2005; also Crisis Group interviews, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁸⁷ The effectiveness of sanctions against North Korea will be the subject of a future Crisis Group report.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Tokyo and Seoul, 24-29 January 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, government official, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Nagashima Akihisa, Japan House of Representatives, 2 March 2005.

¹⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Mimura Mitsuhiro, Researcher, ERINA, Niigata, 1 April 2005.

¹⁹² "Nikkei Public Opinion Poll" (in Japanese), November 2004.

in opposition.¹⁹³ The result is a strong split between policy and political circles over the issue.

A study by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party released on 15 February 2005 suggested Japanese sanctions could reduce North Korea's GDP by between 1.3 per cent and 7 per cent.¹⁹⁴ "The time has come to play the pressure card; that's the key to breaking out of this stalemate", argues Yamamoto Ichida, the Diet member who led the study team. He says that while bilateral trade is small in total terms, it directly benefits the North's leaders, so cutting it off could change Pyongyang's attitude.¹⁹⁵

Trade with Japan accounts for only around 8 per cent of North Korea's total foreign trade, while foreign trade as a whole accounts for only about one-seventh of its GNP.¹⁹⁶ While North Korea's exports of marine products and textiles to Japan dropped by \$62 million in 2003, exports of the same products to China rose by \$77 million, a net gain of \$15 million in foreign export earnings.¹⁹⁷ Sanctions would have a negligible effect on the Japanese economy, except for certain local industries, since trade with North Korea makes up less than 0.5 per cent of total trade volume.¹⁹⁸

B. MILITARY BUILD-UP

During the Cold War, Japan's security concerns were primarily focused on the Soviet Union. Nowadays, North Korea is seen as posing the most immediate threat, while looming in the background is the fear that a rising China will contest Japan for regional hegemony.¹⁹⁹ These new threats coincide with the shift in Japan's strategic posture to a more active role within the U.S. military alliance, a change that has been strongly encouraged by successive administrations in Washington and is marked by a gradual move away

from Japan's post-World War II pledge to eschew military capabilities.²⁰⁰

While Article 9 of Japan's constitution renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation, it has been consistently interpreted as allowing military forces for self-defence purposes. Based on this interpretation, by 2000 Japan was spending \$44 billion on its military, the second largest amount in the world after the United States. These numbers are somewhat skewed by the strength of the yen, however, and military spending has remained fairly constant, around 6 per cent of government expenditures and less than 1 per cent of GDP throughout the 1990s.²⁰¹ Indeed, since Prime Minister Miki Takeo established the principle in 1976 that defence spending should not exceed 1 per cent of GDP, Japan has breached that limit only once, in 1986.²⁰² The five-year defence program for fiscal years 2005-2009 is consistent, calling for an upper limit of \$220 billion.²⁰³

Historically, Japan has avoided acquiring offensive military projection capabilities, viewing them as unconstitutional. In 1999, however, the Air Self-Defence Forces (ASDF) were allowed to acquire in-flight refuelling capabilities, providing power projection capabilities that were previously lacking.²⁰⁴ In accordance with the National Defence Program Guideline, approved by the Cabinet and Security Council on 10 December 2004, Japan plans to shift its armed forces to "multi-functional, flexible and effective defence forces that are highly ready, mobile, adaptable, and multi-purpose, and are equipped with state-of-the-art technologies and intelligence capabilities", while at the same time "reducing equipment and personnel earmarked for large-scale invasion".²⁰⁵ Japan's military posture is thus moving away from homeland defence and more towards readily deployable forces.

Since being criticised for giving only financial support to the 1991 Gulf War, Japan began revising its laws to allow for greater participation in international peacekeeping efforts, as well as more active military

¹⁹³ Crisis Group interview, Niigata, 31 March 2005.

¹⁹⁴ "Japanese Economic Sanctions Could Cause at most a 7 per cent Decrease in North Korea's GDP" (in Korean), Korean Trade/Investment Promotion Agency, 15 February 2005, <http://www.kotra.or.kr/main/trade/nk/main.jsp>.

¹⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 18 April 2005.

¹⁹⁶ Figures from the website of the Korea Trade/Investment Promotion Agency: www.kotra.ac.kr.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, government official, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

¹⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 24 January 2005.

²⁰⁰ Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Re-Emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power", *Adelphi Paper* 368-9, November 2004, pp. 97-115.

²⁰¹ Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Security Agenda: Military, Economic & Environmental Dimensions* (London, 2004), p. 172.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 138.

²⁰³ "Mid-Term Defence Program (2005-2009)", available at the website of the Japan Defence Agency, http://www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f_work/taikou05/e17tyuuki.pdf.

²⁰⁴ Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Security Agenda*, op. cit., p. 173.

²⁰⁵ "Mid-Term Defense Program (2005-2009)", op. cit.

cooperation with the U.S. Since 1992, it has enacted 21 pieces of security legislation, including nine in 2004.²⁰⁶ Most are designed to enhance Japanese coordination with Washington in security contingencies, including a law on ship interdiction to facilitate participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). While the reality of the North Korean threat to Japan should not be dismissed, it has certainly been useful for galvanising public opinion in favour of changes that the government was already pursuing.²⁰⁷

An example can be seen in cooperation with the U.S. on missile defence. Japan first agreed to participate in the U.S. Strategic Defence Initiative in 1986 and by 1998 had spent \$5.1 million researching ballistic missile defence.²⁰⁸ The Taepodong rocket launch in August 1998 accelerated this process, resulting in an agreement in December 1998 to undertake joint research on building a theatre missile defence. This raised alarm bells in Beijing, which fears that theatre missile defence, ostensibly developed to protect Japan, could easily be diverted in case of a Taiwan Strait contingency,²⁰⁹ especially ship-based anti-missile systems. Some Japanese security experts dismiss this concern, noting that the system Japan is developing is designed to shoot down Nodong-class missiles. Switching to target longer-range Chinese missiles, they argue, would require expensive purchases of new Aegis destroyers²¹⁰ and would be a long-term process. In a Taiwan Straits contingency, however, China would likely rely on missiles with similar range as the Nodong, making Japan's ship-based missile defence potentially usable.²¹¹

In addition to improving its capabilities in missile defence and reconnaissance satellites, Japan is also reconfiguring its military doctrine. In 1997, it agreed with the U.S. on revised Defence Guidelines calling

for Japan to support U.S. forces in "situations in areas surrounding Japan". While the government has denied the guidelines are aimed at any particular country, it has been widely understood to refer to North Korea. On 19 February 2005, a joint statement by Japan and the U.S. which listed resolution of the Taiwan issue as a "common strategic objective" has extended the de facto reach of the area to the Taiwan Strait.²¹² This position was reiterated by Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka in a speech in New York on 29 April, in which he stated that Taiwan was included in the definition of the "Far East" under the U.S.-Japan security treaty.²¹³ So doctrine as well as hardware can be made to serve both North Korean and Chinese contingencies.

C. WILL JAPAN GO NUCLEAR?

North Korea's nuclear development has led some politicians and analysts to broach the previously taboo subject of Japan building its own nuclear weapons capability. Nakanishi Terumasa, a political science professor at Kyoto University, has argued that Japan should declare its intention to become a nuclear power only if three conditions are met: a wavering of the U.S. security commitment, extension of Chinese naval power, and continuing ambiguity regarding North Korea's nuclear status.²¹⁴ Kenichi Omae, a nuclear scientist by training and leading social commentator, argues that given its large reserves of plutonium, Japan could build a nuclear weapon within three months.²¹⁵ The Federation of Atomic Scientists estimates that it would take "as little as a year's time".²¹⁶ Takubo Masafumi, a prominent anti-nuclear activist, points out that since Japan has ample supplies of plutonium, the exact amount of time required to build a weapon is not particularly relevant.²¹⁷ Japan has sufficient fissile material to construct a formidable nuclear arsenal, even if a recent spate of minor accidents at nuclear power plants may lead the public to turn against nuclear power. The stockpile of

²⁰⁶ Richard Tanter, "Japanese militarisation and the Bush doctrine", *Japan Focus*, 15 February 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/221.html>.

²⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kimiya Tadashi, Associate Professor, Tokyo University, 25 January 2005.

²⁰⁸ Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Re-Emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power", op. cit., p. 108.

²⁰⁹ "China slams missile-defence plan", *Kyodo News*, 4 September 2003.

²¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Japanese security analysts, Tokyo, 24 January 2005. Japan already has four Aegis-equipped destroyers, "Mid-Term Defence Program (2005-2009)", op. cit.

²¹¹ Crisis Group e-mail exchange, Wade Huntley, Director of Disarmament and Non-proliferation Program, Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia, 13 May 2005.

²¹² "Joint Statement: U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee", <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html>.

²¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs press conference, 6 May 2005, <http://www.infojapan.org/announce/press/2005/5/0506.html#6>.

²¹⁴ Nakanishi Terumasa, "Japan's decision for nuclear armament", *Syokun*, Vol. 81, No. 7, August 2003, p. 176 (in Japanese).

²¹⁵ "If Japan makes up its mind to do so, it could build nukes in 90 days", *Joongang Ilbo*, 24 February 2005 (in Korean).

²¹⁶ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/japan/nuke/>.

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 29 March 2005.

reactor-grade plutonium is estimated at more than five tons, sufficient to manufacture hundreds of nuclear weapons.²¹⁸

U.S. officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney and former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton, have publicly raised the spectre that Japan may nuclearise in response to North Korea's program.²¹⁹ The conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer has gone so far as to advocate that the U.S. should threaten China that Washington will facilitate this unless Beijing does more to rein in North Korea's nuclear program.²²⁰

Japan's "nuclear allergy" as the only country ever to experience a nuclear attack remains a constraint on nuclear development but one that is weakening. As Suzuki Tatsujiro, a leading Japanese nuclear expert, points out, the younger generation has no memories of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs and so less fear of nuclear weapons than their parents and grandparents. While this has not led to a strong push, ideas that were unthinkable just ten years ago are now being openly discussed.²²¹ Japan's policy toward nuclear weapons has been based since 1967 on the "three non-nuclear principles": not to build, deploy, or introduce nuclear weapons into the country. Declassified documents, however, reveal that the third principle was frequently violated by allowing U.S. ships carrying nuclear weapons into Japanese ports under cover of Washington's "neither confirm nor deny" policy.²²² In response, some people argue that Japan should face up to reality and reduce the formula to "two non-nuclear principles", which would allow the U.S. to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan

should the need arise.²²³ A poll conducted in July 2003 found that 37 per cent of respondents felt Japan should consider acquiring nuclear weapons if North Korea declared it had them²²⁴ -- as it subsequently has done.

Nevertheless, Japanese experts interviewed for this report were universal in their appraisal that North Korean possession of nuclear weapons is an insufficient condition for pushing Japan to consider the nuclear option seriously. According to Suzuki, "Most policy-makers already believe that North Korea has nuclear weapons, so their acquisition wouldn't constitute a red line. A direct demonstration of a nuclear capability might embolden the pro-nuclear forces, but probably wouldn't be enough to push Japan over the edge".²²⁵ As long as the public and policymakers are confident of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, there is no reason for Japan to seek a *force de frappe*. While the Soviet Union's formidable nuclear arsenal may have led some Western Europeans to question whether the U.S. would really have been willing to trade Washington or New York for Paris or London, North Korea's arsenal lacks both the size and the long-range capabilities to deter U.S. retaliation in response to a first strike against Japan. "Even if North Korea conducts nuclear tests, it doesn't follow that the [U.S. nuclear] umbrella is no longer effective", notes Funabashi Yoichi, the foreign affairs columnist.²²⁶ A study commissioned by the government in 1968 determined that the political and diplomatic costs of developing nuclear weapons would outweigh any military advantages. A similar study by the Japanese Defence Agency in 1995, while it has never been made public, reportedly reached the same conclusion.²²⁷

Other experts echo these viewpoints. Kimiya Tadashi of Tokyo University estimates that if the government were to decide on nuclearisation, it would take five to ten years to build a public consensus,²²⁸ while Ooki Jun at NHK thinks it would take ten to twenty

²¹⁸ Kurt M. Campbell and Tsuyoshi Sunohara, "Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable", in Kurt Campbell, Robert Einhorn, and Mitchell Reiss (ed.), *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Brookings Institution, 2004), p. 243.

²¹⁹ Funabashi Yoichi, "Japan must stand by its non-nuclear policy", *Asahi Shimbun*, 9 September 2003.

²²⁰ Richard Tanter, "Japanese militarisation and the Bush doctrine", *Japan Focus*, 15 February 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/221.html>. China's policy toward North Korea will be the subject of a future Crisis Group report.

²²¹ Crisis Group interview, Suzuki Tatsujiro, Policy Analysis Group, Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

²²² Hans M. Kristensen, "Japan Under the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella: U.S. Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War Planning in Japan during the Cold War", *Nautilus Institute Working Paper*, July 1999, <http://nautilus.org/archives/library/security/papers/japan.PDF>.

²²³ Crisis Group interview, Suzuki Tatsujiro, Policy Analysis Group, Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

²²⁴ Kurt M. Campbell and Tsuyoshi Sunohara, "Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable", op. cit., p. 242.

²²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Suzuki Tatsujiro, Policy Analysis Group, Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

²²⁶ Funabashi Yoichi, "Japan must stand by its non-nuclear policy", op. cit.

²²⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Tsuyoshi Sunohara, "Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable", op. cit., pp. 223-227.

²²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 25 January 2005.

years.²²⁹ Kurata Hideya, a security expert at Kyorin University, notes that developing nuclear weapons would cost Japan a lot; it would have to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and would lose much international prestige in the process, which would raise anxiety about Japan and so reduce its security.²³⁰ Okonogi Masao of Keio University also believes that the decision to develop missile defence with the U.S. has dampened enthusiasm for a nuclear deterrent.²³¹ Nagashima Akihisa, a Diet member from the opposition Democratic Party, does not believe Japan would go nuclear under any circumstances.²³²

V. CONCLUSION

The abduction of Japanese citizens has so captured the mind of the public that it sometimes appears to be the only contentious bilateral issue. In reality, North Korea's nuclear and missile development are far more important for Japan's overall security, as most experts concede. The public appears to understand this for the most part but pressure groups and the media keep the abduction issue at the forefront of popular consciousness. Solving it is the precondition for making progress in relations, but it remains unclear what a full accounting on North Korea's part would look like.

Even if the abduction issue is solved, normalisation cannot be achieved until the nuclear issue is settled. Japan is decidedly less willing than China and South Korea to tolerate continuing ambiguity in North Korea's nuclear program. Because of this, Pyongyang has little incentive to resolve the abductions issue while the six-party nuclear talks are stalled. At the same time, normalisation is one of the major incentives for inducing North Korea to give up its nuclear program, but one that it cannot receive as long as the abduction issue remains outstanding. This suggests that until both problems are addressed, progress on either one is unlikely.

While the North Korean threat is usually cited as the primary motivation for the ongoing changes in Japan's military posture, in reality these changes are part of the country's re-evaluation of its regional role, particularly its response to a rising China, and would have taken place regardless of Pyongyang's actions. Japan's long-term military strategy can best be understood as increasing its military responsibilities within the context of its alliance with the U.S. As long as Washington retains a forward posture in the Asia-Pacific, Japan is likely to remain its closest ally there and eschew independent nuclear capabilities. North Korea's nuclear threat will not directly change this but if the disagreements between South Korea and the U.S. over dealing with it split the Seoul-Washington alliance, Japan would have to consider the consequences of being the only American ally in North East Asia.

The two Koizumi trips to Pyongyang were a bold attempt at a strategic breakout. Such a gesture is unlikely to be attempted again any time soon, regardless of the results of Japan's next election cycle. Domestically, attempting engagement with North Korea is too politically risky. Internationally, Japan cannot move independently of developments in U.S.-North Korea relations. While Japan ultimately has a vital role to play in solving the problem North Korea represents for regional security, no new initiatives are likely to originate in Tokyo for the time being.

Seoul/Brussels, 27 June 2005

²²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

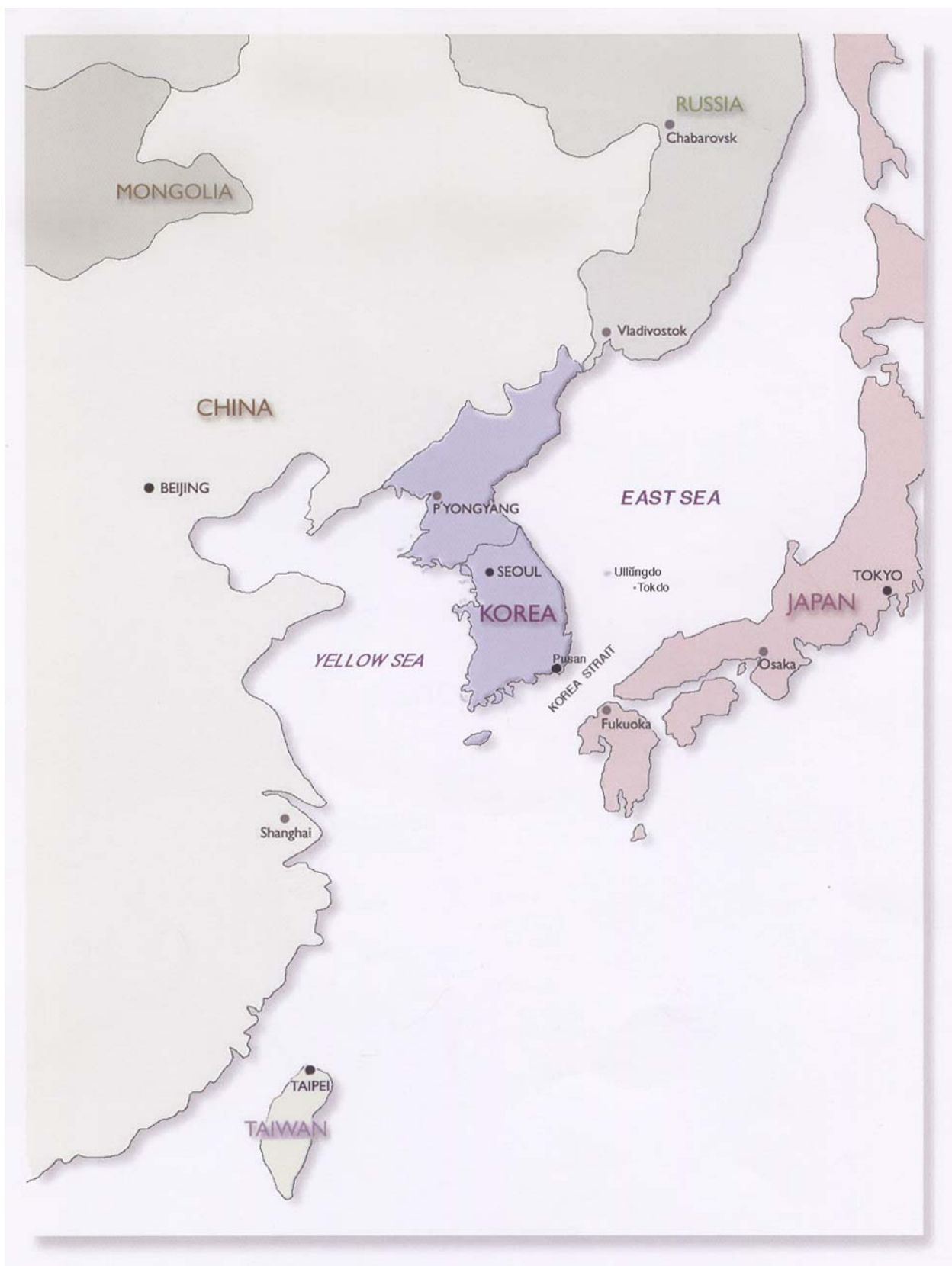
²³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Seoul, 29 January 2005.

²³¹ Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 26 January 2005.

²³² Crisis Group interview, Tokyo, 2 March 2005.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF NORTH EAST ASIA



APPENDIX B

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As at June 2005