

STIMSON



North Korea

Challenges for the US-Japan Alliance

Yuki Tatsumi
Editor



March 2011

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Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Preface.....	vii
<i>Ellen Laipson, President and CEO of the Stimson Center</i>	
Introduction.....	1
<i>Alan D. Romberg and Yoshihide Soeya</i>	
Chapter 1: America’s “North Korea Problem” and US–Japan Relations	8
<i>Balbina Y. Hwang</i>	
Chapter 2: North Korea Problems and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan.....	26
<i>Yasuhiro Izumikawa</i>	
Chapter 3: Japan–US Cooperation on North Korea: Regional Perspectives	44
<i>Katsuhisa Furukawa</i>	
Chapter 4: Regional Factors: China–North Korea Relations.....	62
<i>John S. Park</i>	
Chapter 5: North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan	69
<i>Scott A. Snyder</i>	
Chapter 6: The North Korea Challenge and Resonance with Regional Security Arrangements.....	81
<i>Ryo Sahashi</i>	
Chapter 7: Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance.....	93
<i>L. Gordon Flake</i>	
Conclusion: The Way Forward	104
<i>Yuki Tatsumi</i>	
About the Contributors	116

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABM	Antiballistic Missile
ACSA	Acquisition and Cross-Serving Agreement
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASDF	Air Self-Defense Force
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BDA	Banco Delta Asia
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defense
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CVID	Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Dismantlement
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FETA	Foreign Exchange and Trade Act
GSDF	Ground Self-Defense Force
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAI	Illegal Activities Initiative
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
JDA	Japan Defense Agency (Became Ministry of Defense of Japan in 2007)
(J)SDF	(Japan) Self-Defense Force
KEDO	Korean Peninsula Energy Development
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Japan)
MCAS	Marine Corps Air Station
MD	Missile Defense
MOD	Ministry of Defense of Japan

MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
MSDF	Maritime Self Defense Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPG	National Defense Program Guideline
NDPO	National Defense Program Outline
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships
RMC	Roles, Missions, and Capabilities
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
SDPJ	Social Democratic Party of Japan
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
TCOG	Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group
TMD	Theater Missile Defense
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WPK	Worker's Party of Korea

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Out gratitude also goes to the project’s contributors—L. Gordon Flake, Balbina Y. Hwang, John S. Park, Scott A. Snyder, Katsuhisa Furukawa, Yasuhiro Izumikawa, and Ryo Sahashi—who, despite their busy schedule, committed their time and efforts to the project. We would also like to thank Ken Jimbo for his participation in the two project workshops.

Weaving seven research papers into a single publication is not an easy task. As the project’s overall coordinator and the editor of this volume, I would like to thank Alison Yost and Shawn Woodley for their valuable assistance in the publication process. I am also thankful for Stimson’s communication team, headed by April Umminger, for helping me organize public outreach events to promote this publication. I would also like to thank Connor Cislo, Kent Mullen and Carolyn Posner who, as East Asia Program interns, worked tirelessly to edit the research papers and prepare them for publication. It would not have been possible to release this publication without their help.

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March 2011

Yuki Tatsumi
Senior Associate
East Asia Program

Preface

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present *North Korea: Challenge for the US–Japan Alliance*, edited by Yuki Tatsumi, Senior Associate at the Stimson Center. This is the latest volume in a series of works on Japan and its critical security alliance with the United States. In East Asia today, security challenges posed by North Korea—its illicit nuclear program and a record as a proliferator of nuclear and missile technologies—presents an urgent challenge to global peace and security.

This volume is a collection of seven essays authored by American and Japanese experts on Asian security issues, examining how North Korea’s behavior affects the US–Japan bilateral defense relationship, as well as their ability to coordinate their diplomatic efforts to address security challenges posed by Pyongyang. Collectively, the essays in the volume illustrate that North Korea has become a challenge for US–Japan diplomatic coordination, while at the same time serving as a catalyst for a deeper US–Japan bilateral defense relations. It also demonstrates the importance of the Republic of Korea, the other major American ally in the region, as the United States and Japan continue to grapple with the challenges posed by North Korea.

The Stimson Center expresses special thanks to the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership for its support to this project. We hope that this volume will contribute to the debate about how the countries in East Asia can face the security challenges that North Korea presents, and what role the US–Japan alliance can play to find lasting solution to stability in this vital region for world peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ellen Laipson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ellen" being more prominent and the last name "Laipson" following in a similar style.

Ellen Laipson
President and CEO

Introduction

Alan D. Romberg and Yoshihide Soeya

For well over a decade, since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993, the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) and others have sought to eliminate the nuclear program of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) while maintaining a robust regime in order to preserve the 1953 Armistice and prevent the renewed outbreak of hostilities on the peninsula.¹ The 1994 US–DPRK Agreed Framework led to an international effort to replace Pyongyang’s proliferation-prone, plutonium-based program with facilities that were more reliably resistant to proliferation and to produce “normal” relations between North Korea and the United States, as well as between North and South Korea.

That agreement was being implemented—albeit slowly—in the context of what seemed to be an overall improvement in the political atmosphere between North Korea and the United States under the Clinton administration when President George W. Bush came to office in January 2001. Bush took a far more jaundiced view of North Korea’s bona fide intentions and decided not to follow through on Clinton’s active diplomatic approach.

It was perhaps the mounting sense of “insecurity” caused by the hardline policy of the Bush administration that caused the DPRK to take the astonishing move to receive Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Pyongyang on September 17, 2002, and to agree to the “Pyongyang Declaration,” which outlined the basic framework and the course of action toward diplomatic normalization between Japan and North Korea. Koizumi’s visit became even more surprising after Kim Jong Il personally admitted the abduction of thirteen Japanese citizens (insisting eight out of the thirteen people were dead) during Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang. Five of the Japanese citizens were eventually allowed to return to Japan on a temporary basis, but Tokyo decided not to let them go back to North Korea as originally agreed. This became a stumbling block for further progress of normalization talks.

In the meantime, in mid-2002, intelligence sources confirmed long-standing suspicions that North Korea had made progress toward obtaining uranium enrichment capabilities that were not directly covered by the Agreed Framework but that offered an alternative, and less detectable, route to producing fissile material for the North’s nuclear weapons program. This discovery led to a rather harsh confrontation between Washington and Pyongyang in bilateral talks during then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James E. Kelly’s visit to Pyongyang in October 2002. Eventually, the discovery resulted in the total breakdown of the Agreed Framework and the existing denuclearization process. This killed the remaining, slim hope for normalization talks between Japan and North Korea.

¹ Hereafter, throughout this volume, DPRK will be generally referred to as North Korea and ROK as South Korea. They are also used interchangeably.

Under pressure from China, which feared the consequences if diplomacy were replaced by military confrontation, an effort developed among the United States, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and North Korea—known as the Six-Party Talks—to try to put the DPRK nuclear genie back in the bottle. This was known as the Six-Party Talks. After prolonged and agonizingly unproductive discussion, the Six-Party Talks eventually produced an “Agreed Statement of Principles” on September 19, 2005, laying out what was seen as a roadmap to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the integration of North Korea into normal relations with the other Six-Party Talks participants on terms that would economically benefit the people of the DPRK. For reasons well chronicled elsewhere and also discussed in this volume, adoption of measures to implement that agreement faltered. It was in this period that Pyongyang tested its nascent intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability (July 2006) and set off its first nuclear test (October 2006). Neither test was rated as highly successful by outside experts, but both were seen as ominous indicators of where North Korea was heading in terms of developing a deliverable nuclear weapons capability. Both were widely condemned by parties including the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC Res 1695, July 15, 2006 and UNSC Res 1718, October 14, 2006). Still, as the Six-Party Talks continued to deadlock, the impetus toward denuclearization waned. Two limited agreements in February and October 2007 held some promise of restoring momentum, but implementation of even those more limited agreements proved difficult. The process ground to a halt in late 2008, with the biggest issue being the verification of steps the North was taking.

The Obama administration took office in January 2009 with the agenda of exploring the resumption of dialogue with the North in an effort to put the Six-Party Talks back on track. However, it indicated that this would only be possible if Pyongyang ceased increasingly obvious preparations to launch another ICBM test. North Korea declined the offer and launched the ICBM in April 2009. Although the North received wide condemnation following this action (including by a UN Security Council President’s Statement on April 13, 2009), it set off a second nuclear test in May 2009. In response, the UN Security Council adopted yet another resolution criticizing North Korea and condemning the test (UNSC Res 1874, June 12, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, these developments stymied further progress for several months until the Obama administration’s Special Representative for North Korea Policy, Stephen W. Bosworth, traveled to Pyongyang in December 2009, and it seemed that a three-step scenario for resuming the Six-Party Talks was about to unfold. This effort was stopped dead in its tracks, however, when North Korea sank the South Korean naval vessel *Cheonan* in March 2010 and then in November shelled South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island “in response to” an ROK military exercise that fired artillery shells in a direction *away* from North Korea.

When this project was first conceived in the fall of 2008, tensions were growing in US–Japan relations over North Korea policy. During this period, the United States decided to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, “betraying” Japan in the eyes of many Japanese by seeming to give short shrift to the politically sensitive issue of the Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. By the time this project was fully launched in the fall of 2009, the new Japanese government under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) seemed to some to be downplaying the importance of

Japan's alliance with the United States and playing up the importance of its relations with China. This reflected the volatile nature of the politics of the issue and raised questions about how Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and his team would manage Japan's foreign policy and national security challenges, including those from North Korea.

It was in this context that seven policy experts on Asian and international security—four from the United States and three from Japan—formed a bi-national working group to consider the various important elements for the United States and Japan to consider as they map out their approach toward North Korea. Working group members were asked to contribute papers that focused on the following questions:

- What have been/could again potentially be sources of divergence between Tokyo and Washington in their respective approaches to North Korea?
- To what degree do domestic political factors, including public opinion, in the United States and Japan influence North Korea policy?
- What regional factors condition policy toward North Korea?
- What lessons can be learned from the successes and failures of US and Japanese attempts to coordinate North Korea policy?

During the course of drafting their papers, each author was asked to consider how his or her work fit into the assessments of the others in the group. Each was also asked to consider how the management of North Korea policy in both Japan and the United States would likely affect the overall US–Japan relationship. During the course of the project, the Working Group members met twice—once in Washington, DC, and once in Tokyo—to provide peer critiques of the papers and to discuss the questions listed above.

The volume opens with two papers that respectively look at US and Japanese policy priorities toward North Korea. In Chapter One, “America’s ‘North Korea Problem’ and US–Japan Relations,” Balbina Y. Hwang presents an American perspective on the balance between dealing with North Korea and managing alliance relations. In particular, she focuses on the interplay between the strategic objectives of the United States and Japan and examines the layers of overlapping—and sometimes competing—interests that, at least for a time, derailed efforts to coordinate goals and objectives. She argues that the Six-Party Talks were originally thought of as a forum where the converging objectives of all the countries involved, particularly between the United States and Japan, would override any differences and would lead to real progress on the North Korean issue. She points out, however, that the process instead created tension between the two allies due to their inability to reconcile their divergent policy priorities. She suggests that these differing objectives developed because of the substantially different histories the two countries have had with North Korea and because of the different types of security concerns each country faces. The Six-Party Talks were designed not only to overcome the challenges in coordinating diverging policy priorities such as these, but also to deal with the even greater disparities between the objectives of other countries and the gulf among national priorities as well as the rigid structure of the various regional alliances. These issues proved to be too much, and the talks stalled. She concludes by suggesting that if the Six-Party Talks are to succeed, the countries involved will need to assign higher priority to somehow finding ways to bridge their differences in policy objectives and priorities.

Chapter Two, “North Korea Problems and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan,” written by Yasuhiro Izumikawa, offers a Japanese perspective on the impact of the North Korean problem on the US–Japan relationship. By closely tracing the developments in Japan’s North Korea policy since the late 1990s, Izumikawa argues that the emergence of North Korea as a major security concern for Japan reminded policymakers in Tokyo of the continued value of the US–Japan alliance and the security guarantee that the United States provides. This, he argues, gave Japanese leaders both the incentive and justification for strengthening US–Japan defense relations. During the evolution of the relationship, however, Japan attempted to overcome many of the major obstacles inhibiting the normalization of relations with Pyongyang, most strikingly the issue of North Korea’s abductions of Japanese citizens. The subsequent failure of these attempts, along with further provocations from Pyongyang, allowed hardliners in Japan to dominate Tokyo’s policy toward the peninsula, ironically at a time when the United States seemed to be softening its own approach to the peninsula. He concludes by arguing that this situation poses a serious dilemma for Tokyo: Even though the Six-Party Talks and other multilateral efforts in the UN and elsewhere are still the best way for Japan to influence the situation, if Tokyo continues to take a hard-line stance on issues such as the resolution of the abductees issue it will put the success of these efforts at risk.

When considering the North Korean problem, it is especially important to pay attention to the views and objectives of the other participants of the Six-Party Talks—South Korea, China and Russia. In particular, it is important to assess the degree to which these other nations consider close US–Japan cooperation on North Korea to be desirable. In Chapter Three, “Japan–US cooperation on North Korea: Regional Perspectives,” Katsuhisa Furukawa analyzes the challenges North Korea presents to the US–Japan relationship and comprehensively examines the perspectives of other countries in the Six-Party Talks. He argues that the influence of US–Japan cooperation on dealing with North Korea, especially during the Six-Party Talks, has evolved due to the shifting national priorities and changing circumstances surrounding the negotiations. From the close US–Japan relationship during the administration of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, to the perceived isolation of Japan after the US’s decision to take a more active approach to North Korea in 2007–2008, to the continuation of working-level cooperation between Tokyo and Washington on North Korea under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009 despite strained US–Japanese political relations, the relationship between Japan and the United States has gone through wide swings. Furukawa claims this has had a large impact on the ability of these allies to coordinate strategies on North Korea. The view of US–Japan cooperation on North Korea by the other countries involved in the Six-Party Talks varies, but Furukawa demonstrates how each of the countries involved has worked to constrain the impact of this cooperation at one time or another. Furukawa assesses that, in the end, the US–Japan relationship may not necessarily be the most important component in the framework of the Six-Party process, but it remains an essential element in maintaining and shaping this framework.

In Chapter Four, “Regional Factors: China–North Korea Relations,” John S. Park begins by showing that, although the United States supports the Japanese on the issue of the abductions, other parties involved feel the Six-Party Talks are not the appropriate venue to resolve this issue. He then proceeds to demonstrate how regional cooperation has a large impact on the effectiveness of the Six-Party Talks, focusing on certain dynamics

that attract very little attention. Among these, he cites the close economic cooperation between the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) and the Communist Party of China (CCP), which acts as a major factor undermining the power of incentives and disincentives used during negotiations in the Six-Party Talks. He highlights the strength of US–Japan coordination on priorities, but shows how changing regional dynamics, specifically the strengthening of the US–ROK relationship, are diminishing the apparent importance of Japan in the negotiations and therefore diminishing the importance of coordination with Japan in the eyes of the United States. He also points out that China sees close US–Japan policy coordination as an impediment to the success of the talks, and that China therefore seeks to minimize the impact of that coordination on the Six-Party process. Park concludes that in order to maximize the chance of successfully denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, Japan and the United States, as well as South Korea, will need to effectively coordinate with China. Only in this way, he argues, will the region be able to successfully implement the formula of granting gradual economic, diplomatic and security benefits to North Korea in return for Pyongyang’s abandonment of “all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs” as called for in the September 2005 Agreed Statement of Principles.

In Chapter Five, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan,” Scott A. Snyder addresses the ability of the North Korean problem to present a challenge for policy coordination between Tokyo and Washington. He argues that while North Korea has been exceptionally skilled at exploiting what he calls “wedge issues” between Tokyo and Washington, this strategy has also been an inadvertent catalyst for more robust Northeast Asian regionalism over the last two decades. More importantly, Snyder argues, the security challenges from North Korea have served as a basis for strengthening alliance cooperation between the United States and Japan. Although the increased coordination has been a direct response to specific security threats and emergencies, it has resulted in greater overall coordination and consultation on several aspects of the existing security arrangement. Despite this increased coordination between the United States and Japan, however, Snyder argues that a failure to overcome deficiencies in the alliance structure, such as a lack of credibility in the minds of many Japanese of the US commitment to defend Japan, as well as poor US–Japan–ROK trilateral policy coordination, could undermine the effectiveness of the regional deterrence capabilities of the alliance. He concludes that overcoming these challenges would increase the capacity and effectiveness of the US–Japan alliance and therefore is very much in the interests of both the United States and Japan.

Chapter Six, “The North Korea Challenge and Resonance with Regional Security Arrangements,” provides a theoretical analysis of the impact of regional security arrangements on coping with the North Korean challenge. Ryo Sahashi argues that the means of addressing the situation have evolved, suggesting that this is because the challenges from the DPRK are multidimensional, so the methods for overcoming these challenges have had to adapt over time. Sahashi introduces a “three-tier approach” for analyzing security arrangements in the Asia–Pacific region, where strategic relationships based on US bilateral alliances represent the first-tier, functional regional security arrangements the second-tier, and regional cooperation frameworks building on the existing multinational mechanisms the third. The first tier, the strategic bilateral relationships, has traditionally been the foundation of East Asian security, but regional security arrangements such as the

Six-Party Talks and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) — the second tier — have played increasingly important roles. Regional cooperation frameworks built on existing multinational mechanisms (the third tier), such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), have yet to become effective and remain irrelevant to the North Korea challenge. Nevertheless, Sahashi argues that the goal of building an effective common approach remains important. Recent events have underlined the importance of all three layers of the security arrangement. Sahashi believes Japan and the United States must not only continue to utilize the first tier (bilateral security arrangement) but also to mobilize the second and third tiers in order to cope with the multidimensional threats created by North Korea.

Given the elements that were examined in previous chapters, what lessons should Japan and the United States draw as they continue to work to address the challenges posed by North Korea? In Chapter Seven, “Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance,” L. Gordon Flake explores how future US–Japan policy coordination on North Korea may impact the alliance. Flake argues that policy coordination between the two countries so far has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, he agrees with Scott Snyder’s analysis in Chapter Five that North Korea has long been a major influencing factor in the US–Japan alliance. Since Japan serves as a base for many US forces that would be used in a Korean contingency, the North Korean threat has served as a useful catalyst for alliance policy coordination. On the other hand, Flake demonstrates how public opinion in Japan has made US–Japan coordination of North Korea policy a double-edged sword: the unpopularity of North Korea in Japan facilitates coordination when the United States takes a harder-line approach toward North Korea, but coordination becomes much more challenging when Washington decides circumstances warrant engaging North Korea in dialogue. Flake also argues that recent dynamics in the region have changed the way North Korea policy is viewed by the countries involved with the issue, which has affected the judgment of which approaches might work best. Citing the tension in the US–Japan alliance following the political transition in Tokyo in September 2009 and the considerable improvement of US–ROK relations under the Lee Myung-bak administration in South Korea, Flake argues that US–Japan–ROK trilateral engagement has become much more important. On the other hand, he also suggests that since both the United States and Japan now overtly acknowledge China’s military buildup as a security concern, the importance of North Korea as a factor in policy coordination could diminish.

The volume ends with the Conclusion by Yuki Tatsumi, the coordinator of this project. In this section, Tatsumi highlights the key factors identified by the preceding seven chapters as critical in conceptualizing US–Japan cooperation in North Korea policy as the participants in the Six-Party Talks attempt to resume the negotiations. Based on the three identified key factors, Tatsumi proposes a couple of elements for consideration as Tokyo and Washington continue to explore ways to break the current stalemate in the Six-Party Talks.

The problems of 2008 and 2009 regarding US–Japan coordination of North Korea policy may have largely abated over the course of 2010, as Pyongyang’s outrageous behavior combined with determined efforts by Washington and Tokyo to strengthen alliance cohesion have healed many of the rifts. Nonetheless, as is discussed in this volume, there remain important differences between American and Japanese long-term strategic perceptions.

Moreover, domestic politics can be volatile and can affect foreign relations. While the alliance itself seems “safe” at this point, the potential for problems in the future, including over North Korea policy, has not gone away. In light of that, we hope that this volume will stand as a constructive contribution to the ongoing policy debates in Tokyo and Washington as both countries shape their approaches to resolving the North Korean challenges while simultaneously working to ensure the enduring vigor of the alliance.

Chapter One

America’s “North Korea Problem” and US–Japan Relations

Balbina Y. Hwang

Introduction

The difficulties encountered during the Six-Party Talks are manifestations of a larger dynamic deeply embedded within the broader challenges emanating from the Korean Peninsula. While the United States and Japan have successfully collaborated on joint strategic objectives, including maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the Asia–Pacific region for the last half-century, the alliance has also been at odds with the more specific national objectives of the two allies vis-à-vis North Korea: Tokyo’s ability to forge an independent and proactive policy towards North Korea has been hampered, while frustration in Washington over the inability to forge a unified consensus with Tokyo on North Korea policies has strained the alliance relationship. Thus, rather than serving as a useful mechanism to bridge differences and produce a unified policy, the alliance itself, rather than common objectives on the Korean Peninsula, became the focal point of US–Japan relations. As such, conventional wisdom tends to blame key leaders and bureaucrats working in the Six-Party process for the growth in mistrust and suspicion in Tokyo and Washington during this period. However, recent tensions are the symptoms and not the cause of misaligned strategic objectives in the region and a security structure too rigid to adjust to shifting regional and global dynamics. The Six-Party Talks are thus an interesting case study in the complex set of dynamics at play, rather than the process itself; as such, this chapter focuses on the former rather than the latter.

Much has already been written about the North Korean nuclear issue and the policies of the major powers in the region designed to address this problem. Even as this issue remains unresolved and continues to unfold today, a number of thorough and detailed studies tracing the history of the “first” nuclear crisis in the 1990s and the “second” or current phase beginning in the early 2000s continue to be published.¹ This chapter endeavors to add a new dimension to the existing literature by focusing on the impact of US efforts to coordinate policies with Japan during the last phase—currently on “hold” as of the publication of this volume—of the Six-Party process.

The inability of the Six-Party Talks to achieve any substantive progress despite almost seven years of grueling effort raises an intriguing puzzle: why did the Six-Party Talks

¹ For example, on the first nuclear crisis, see: Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy With North Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Joel Wit, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004). On the second nuclear crisis, from a Japanese perspective, see: Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Nuclear Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); the US perspective is the focus in: Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008).

become the focal point of contention between the United States and Japan when the cooperative process ostensibly emerged as a result of the converging objectives of all parties, particularly between Washington and Tokyo? This chapter unravels the apparent paradox by focusing on the interplay between the strategic objectives of the United States and Japan vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula, and examines in detail the complex layers of overlapping interests that unintentionally derailed the initial goals and objectives shared by the United States and Japan.

US Goals on the Korean Peninsula: A Historical Context

The Korean Peninsula has been the focal point of security tensions confronting every major power in the Northeast Asian region (including the United States) throughout the 20th century. Indeed, Korea was at the fulcrum of every major war engulfing East Asia in the last century, beginning with the region's first "modern" war, the Sino-Japanese War (1894): one declining great power (China) and another emerging power (Japan) wrestled for control of the Korean Peninsula. A decade later, control over the Korean Peninsula was once again the strategic premise of the Russo–Japanese War (1904), which brought Japan onto the world stage as the first Asian country to defeat a Western imperial power. Control over Korea was pivotal in Japanese plans to gain a foothold in mainland Asia, setting the stage for World War II. The uncertainty created by the division of the Korean Peninsula following World War II sowed the seeds of the Korean War, the first "hot" war of the Cold War era, and the fateful US entrenchment in Vietnam a decade later was arguably heavily influenced by American failure to thwart the spread of communism on the Korean Peninsula. In each of these first four cases, great powers fought over the Korean Peninsula not for the *intrinsic* value of Korea—its people, its culture, or its heritage—but rather for its *strategic* value. In large part due to its immutable geostrategic position, Korea has always been a focal point for the strategic interests of the great powers, and North Korea's nuclear ambitions have only increased its importance in the 21st century.

US involvement in Korea was late in comparison with the other great powers. China's suzerainty over Korea was centuries old, with Japanese and even Russian interests following closely after. Although Koreans point to American machinations on the Korean Peninsula as early as the infamous 1905 Taft–Katsura Agreement—which ended the Russo–Japanese war and marked the beginning of formal Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula²—America's strategic interest in Korea was ancillary if not outright negligible for the first half of the 20th century. As late as January 1950, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson famously excluded Korea from the US defense perimeter in Asia, which emboldened North Korea to invade the South. Only months later, in reaction to the invasion, the United States found itself deeply committed militarily, politically and economically in Korea. While

² This was an agreement between the US Secretary of State at the time William Howard Taft (later President) and Japanese Foreign Minister Katsura, in which the United States approved Japan's domination of Korea in exchange for assurances that Tokyo would not challenge US colonial domination of the Philippines. Later that same year, Japan's paramount political, military, and economic interests in Korea were codified in the Treaty of Portsmouth, in which President Theodore Roosevelt played peacemaker between Japan and Russia, and for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. With no opposition from other Great Powers in the region, Japan occupied Korea in 1905 and formally annexed it in 1910, beginning several decades of harsh colonial rule.

open military conflict ended decades ago, Korea remains an important concern for the United States.

For the United States, the alliance with the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) following the Korean War was a product of the regional and global context of the Cold War and its geo-strategic rationale of containment and deterrence. The bilateral Mutual Defense Treaty was a pointed effort at reversing Acheson's miscalculation by declaring to both the region and the world that the United States was committed to the defense of South Korea, and intended to play an active role in East Asia. Since then, the US–ROK alliance has played an important role in buttressing the US–Japan alliance by dispersing the US force presence beyond Japan, as well as lightening the burden on Japan of managing instability on the Korean Peninsula. The alliance has also helped mitigate hostilities between the ROK and Japan, served to counter China's growing regional influence, and dissuaded China from any precipitate action on the Peninsula. Finally, the US–Japan–ROK trilateral relationship has served as the anchor for US commitment and presence in East Asia for the last half of a century.

The United States has similar objectives for its alliances with Japan and South Korea. The two alliances also share three key goals: to meet direct threats to the Korean Peninsula and Japan respectively, to provide a framework for cooperation and increased regional stability, and to provide a framework that will contribute to global security. Within the rigid context of the Cold War environment, these broad shared objectives and interests were enough to impose a certain discipline over other bilateral issues and problems deemed less relevant to imminent security threats. However, as the global Cold War structure crumbled with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the North Korean threat increased as its nuclear ambitions became known, adding an entirely new dimension to the traditional conventional threats. In addition, the unexpected death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 and the resulting uncertainty about regime succession increased anxiety about instability in North Korea and the potential for its sudden collapse, an outcome that Washington had decided was not desirable at the time. As such, the mid-1990s witnessed a flurry of diplomatic efforts by the Clinton administration to persuade Pyongyang to end its nuclear and missile programs. The result was a number of historic meetings and agreements, including the 1994 Agreed Framework³ as well as serious discussions about establishing diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea and the potential for US–DPRK negotiation for a permanent peace treaty. Because the effort to freeze North Korea's nuclear program was a bilateral arrangement between the United States and the DPRK, the damage to US alliance relationships with Japan and ROK was substantial.

³ The Agreed Framework, sometimes referred to as the Geneva Framework, was concluded between the United States and North Korea in 1994. It addressed the threat posed by the North's nuclear program, and was meant to defuse tensions on the Peninsula. The United States agreed to help North Korea acquire two light-water nuclear power reactors and interim supplies of heavy fuel oil in exchange for the North's freeze on its existing nuclear weapons facilities, and promise to eventually dismantle the facilities and comply with its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The Framework specifies that over time the United States and North Korea will work towards full normalization of their political and economic relations and peace and security on the Peninsula.

Post 9/11 Strategic Environment

It was in this context that President George W. Bush, entering office in January 2001, inherited an uncertain situation on the Korean Peninsula. The euphoria following the historic June 2000 summit between South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il had already begun to fade, as had Pyongyang's hopes for a last-minute visit by outgoing President William J. Clinton. Despite symbolic efforts to improve relations between the two Koreas, the North had yet to provide concrete evidence to support its professed willingness to reconcile with the South and reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula. President Bush was skeptical of North Korean promises, and saw the DPRK as a totalitarian regime posing significant conventional military and possible nuclear threats to the United States and its allies, South Korea and Japan.

In March 2001, President Bush decided to suspend outstanding negotiations with North Korea until his administration had conducted a full review of US policy toward the DPRK. This cautious step was criticized for delaying inter-Korean negotiations since the Review was not completed until June 6, but many assumed that the US would pick up a "hard-line" position on North Korea, given the well-known views of Bush and many of his top advisors.

In fact, the Review revealed a far more pragmatic approach than had been expected, but the nuance was lost on many, especially in South Korea. The Review actually reaffirmed the importance of supporting South Korea's Sunshine Policy of engagement, the basic principles of the 1994 Agreed Framework, and the carrot-and-stick approach of the Perry Initiative⁴, which called for "verifiable assurances" and "verifiable cessation" of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs as assured in the Agreed Framework.

The Bush Review concluded, however, that the Clinton administration had not devised an effective policy mechanism for penalizing North Korea when it failed to meet its commitments. Instead, the Review criticized that the Clinton administration continued to provide "carrots" to the North, such as face-to-face meetings with high-level US officials, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and President Bill Clinton. The Review claimed that this approach effectively rewarded Pyongyang for its threatening behavior. As a result, the Review observed, the Clinton administration's approach frequently deteriorated from negotiation into crisis management.

Therefore, the Bush Review recommended supporting the basic principles of the 1994 Agreed Framework as necessary but insufficient for addressing North Korean threats, and called for improved implementation through verification and reciprocity. Under the new policy, the pattern of rewarding the North's negative or threatening behavior was considered reversible. For example, the Clinton administration often employed food aid as a diplomatic tool to secure North Korean agreements to meet with US officials, such as North Korean participation in the so-called Four-Party Talks over a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War. Under the Bush administration, the United States would pursue engagement with North Korean officials on a broad agenda, but the Review recommended reducing

⁴ This initiative, also known as the "Perry Process" was officially unveiled in October 1999 by former Secretary of Defense William Perry, who had been tasked by the US Congress to provide an objective and thorough review of North Korea policy. The Clinton administration had already begun to implement some of the initiative in early 1999.

the level of contact whenever Pyongyang attempted to “extort” more concessions from the United States. Furthermore, humanitarian aid was no longer used as a political inducement.

Perhaps the most significant shift recommended by the Review was a new emphasis on reducing North Korea’s threatening military posture. Despite perceptions of improved relations with the South, analysts in the United States believed that the threat from the North had increased. Kim Jong-II had continued his “military first” policy, allocating funding and resources to the military at the expense of the civil sector, which continued on its downward spiral into economic disaster.

Thus, despite expectations to the contrary, the Bush Administration’s initial policy on North Korea began not with a complete departure from Clinton administration policy, but rather a shift in emphasis towards verification and reciprocity. The policy also increased consideration of security concerns beyond traditional nuclear and missile threats, including conventional forces vis-à-vis North Korea. This shift in emphasis might have seen significant results if the events of 9/11 had not forced a dramatic shift in US foreign policy. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 made it impossible for the White House to *not* prioritize weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially nuclear materials, or their delivery mechanisms: missiles. Moreover, as a “rogue” state, North Korea—whose clients included state sponsors of terrorism if not terrorist organizations themselves—was particularly high on the dangerous enemies list post-9/11.

The shift towards a “hard-line” North Korea policy became dramatically evident in President Bush’s State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, when he identified North Korea as part of an “Axis of Evil” along with Iran and Iraq. The subsequent invasion of Iraq on the thinly based premise that it had developed nuclear weapons was more than enough for Pyongyang to conclude that its relationship with the Bush administration would be one based on confrontation, not cooperation. Indeed, Pyongyang’s risky decision to pursue a nuclear program was revealed in October 2002 during a tense visit to North Korea by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James E. Kelly, setting in motion a standoff between the United States and North Korea. This standoff has essentially continued to the present day.

From Cooperation to Divergence: The Shift in Allied Positions

Despite Japan’s historically significant role in determining the fate of Korea in the first half of the 20th century, Japanese influence on the Korean Peninsula has been notably negligible since the Korean War, particularly in the post-Cold War period. Indeed, despite the critically important economic role that Japan has played in the region and its support of South Korea’s rapid industrialization during the 1960s and 1970s, Tokyo has had little direct influence on Seoul’s policies towards Pyongyang, and vice versa. While both Koreas have consistently prioritized strategic calculations of the external environment in their policies towards each other, ultimately Japan has had little independent effect beyond its position as a great power close to the Korean Peninsula. In part, this is a natural reflection of Japan’s peculiar position in the international order as an economic powerhouse but not a “normal” political actor; the Constitution prohibits it to possess military power, let alone leverage it to pursue its national interests. It also reflects Japan’s functional role as America’s junior

partner in a rigid alliance system that was designed in part to limit the breadth and depth of Japan's foreign policy ambitions in post-World War II East Asia.

Throughout the post-World War II period, therefore, Japan's interests on the Korean Peninsula have been dominated by two overarching principles: preventing a war on the Korean Peninsula and supporting the ROK as the only lawful government of the Peninsula. Firm adherence to these principles has severely limited Japanese influence on the Korean Peninsula because Japan is unable to project military capabilities beyond its borders. In addition, the rigid Cold War structure that is based on bilateral alliances, as well as bitter and unresolved historical issues between Tokyo and Seoul, complicate bilateral relations⁵.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the initiation of Nordpolitik ("Northern Policy") by the ROK in the early 1990s, Tokyo was finally able to initiate tentative efforts to keep both official and unofficial channels open for talks with Pyongyang. Tokyo's diplomatic efforts, however, including the botched 1990 trip to North Korea by Shin Kanemaru⁶, made little progress because of increasing alarm inside Japan about North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and missile programs. The asymmetrical rise in Japanese concerns coupled with a decreasing ability to influence developments on the Korean Peninsula is a powerful theme that would resonate profoundly during the second nuclear crisis and have lasting impact on US–Japan relations.

Given the Korean sensitivity to Japanese interference on the peninsula, Tokyo has generally deferred to Seoul's insistence that matters related to a reduction of tensions or a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula must be resolved through inter-Korean means. Tokyo's deference to Seoul on inter-Korean issues was also based on Tokyo's gradual recognition that it had little choice but to coordinate its policy closely with South Korea and therefore should refrain from attempting initiatives towards the North without prior consultations with the South. This position was confirmed by the Shin Kanemaru debacle, Tokyo's failed attempt in 1990 to normalize relations with Pyongyang.

Japan's deference also precluded Tokyo from pursuing independent policies towards Pyongyang. However, two developments in the aftermath of the 1994 nuclear crisis offered tantalizing possibilities to alter this pattern. The first was the establishment in April 1999 of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) through the Perry Process. In fact, one of the strongest achievements of the Perry Process was institutionalizing US–Japan–ROK trilateral policy coordination through the creation of TCOG. Its aim was to

⁵ For a much more detailed analysis, see: Balbina Y. Hwang, "Seoul's Policy Towards Pyongyang: Strategic Culture and the Negligibility of Japan," Linus Hagstrom and Marie Soderberg, eds., *North Korea Policy: Japan and the Great Powers* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁶ In September 1990, Shin Kanemaru, considered to be the most powerful figure in Japanese politics at the time, led a Japanese Diet delegation to Pyongyang, including leaders of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as well as those of the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ), over the objections of the Foreign Ministry. After a marathon negotiation session with North Koreans from which accompanying Foreign Ministry representatives were excluded, a three-Party (LDP, SDPJ, and North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea (WPK)) joint statement declared, among other things, that Japan should "fully and formally apologize and compensate the DPRK" for the Japanese occupation. This created a furor not only in Tokyo, but Seoul, because it was issued without coordination with South Korea and because it went well beyond the 1965 Tokyo-Seoul normalization agreement. [Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1997) pp. 221–222.]

narrow the differences in North Korea policy among the United States, South Korea and Japan. During South Korean President Kim Dae Jung’s historic visit to Tokyo in October 1998, the two governments agreed to increase defense consultations and to establish regular bilateral cabinet meetings. In 1999, Japan and the ROK conducted their first joint naval exercises, which were focused on humanitarian search-and-rescue operations. This process gradually moved a step further with discussions of a trilateral joint defense framework.

The benefits of this trilateral solidarity were clearly evident in the coordinated response to North Korea’s plan to launch a Taepodong-2, which had been expected on or around September 9, 1999, the 51st anniversary of the North Korean communist government. Because preparations for the launch were detected in mid-June and North Korea confirmed the plan in early July, the three countries deepened their coordination and issued strong warnings against another missile launch, which ultimately never occurred. Trilateral coordination culminated in a summit meeting between Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, President Bill Clinton, and President Kim Dae Jung during a meeting of Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on September 12, 1999, where they reiterated their determination to penalize North Korea if it proceeded with the planned missile launch.

This unity also greatly facilitated the Berlin Agreement on September 13, 1999, in which North Korea agreed to halt testing of long-range ballistic missiles in exchange for a commitment from the United States and Japan to move forward with economic assistance for the Pyongyang regime. After the agreement, Japan lifted the sanctions it had imposed on North Korea after the August 1998 missile launch. Indeed, through the TCOG, Japan joined the United States and South Korea in sending North Korea the message that it could gain more through cooperation than confrontation and that the three countries were united in their determination to counter any North Korean aggression.

Changes in Regional and Global Dynamics

The positive momentum towards greater allied coordination and cooperation on North Korea policy came to a dramatic halt as sweeping changes in the political landscapes of all three capitals took effect in 2000 and 2001. By 2000 the South Korean economy had at last begun to recover from the financial crisis of 1997, and this generated growing confidence that boosted President Kim Dae Jung’s credibility enough to engineer a historic inter-Korean summit with Kim Jong Il. In the United States, momentum for a breakthrough in US–DPRK relations lost steam with the election of President Bush, as discussed earlier. In Tokyo, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi staged a political revolution of sorts after taking office. Although a member of the ruling LDP, he campaigned and governed as a “maverick” and presented a new style of leadership that was unique by Japanese standards.

Indeed, when Koizumi came into office in 2001, hopes were high particularly in Washington that he would launch a new era not only in Japanese politics and economic policy, but in relations with the Korean Peninsula. Notably, these expectations for positive developments—not just with South Korea but also with the North—stood in stark contrast to the tough stance expected of the newly inaugurated Bush administration. Had Koizumi been successful in both endeavors, it would have helped Japan overcome its diplomatic passivity during this period of rapid change in the political environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula. However, the reemergence of North Korea’s nuclear weapons issue—

particularly in the post-9/11 environment—and public demand for a tougher stance towards North Korea, especially in the aftermath of Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in September 2002, did not allow Koizumi much flexibility in his approach to North Korea. Instead, it only pushed his government to adopt a position closer to the Bush administration's new tough policy. This created a gap with South Korea, which continued to pursue resolution of the nuclear crisis through continued engagement and dialogue. The sudden rift between Seoul on the one hand and Washington and Tokyo on the other marked the beginning of long period of difficult and tense diplomatic relations among the three countries that extended through 2008 and the ROK administration of President Roh Moo Hyun.

Koizumi's embrace of Washington was not just a function of deteriorating relations with North and South Korea. In fact, this shift seemed typical of Japan, which tended to anxiously seek reassurance of the strength of its alliance with the United States in the face of insecurity. However, many in Washington interpreted the new security risks posed by North Korea as a unique opportunity for Koizumi to strengthen long-standing bilateral military ties with the United States as part of an effort to shore up Japan's independent defense capabilities. Confronted by a new and unexpected global environment, Koizumi's initiatives to strengthen Japan's alliance with the United States, including his September 2001 decision to send the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) vessels to the Indian Ocean to support Operation Enduring Freedom, were welcomed by the Bush administration. While this interpretation of Koizumi's objectives is not shared by many in Japan, it supported the White House's hopes, if not the reality in Tokyo.

Indeed, in the past, Japan had been reluctant to increase security cooperation with the United States for fear of "entrapment." Given the imminent threats posed by the new security environment, however, the Japanese government began to quietly discuss with their American counterparts the benefits of a closer military alignment with the United States, even in the case of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. Ironically, Japan's closer cooperation with the United States and its movement away from ambiguity in defining the threats posed by North Korea may have actually diminished Japan's ability to take action in response to these concerns.

Tokyo's decision in 2004 to dispatch the SDF to Iraq in support of US-led coalition military operations helped to sustain the view in Washington that North Korea was just one of several opportunities for Japan to test the limits of its independence within the parameters of its alliance with the United States. Many in Washington believed that Japan's international and diplomatic presence had not been commensurate with its position as the world's second largest economy. Japan's bitter experience with "checkbook diplomacy" after the 1991 Gulf War—Japan contributed \$13 billion but no troops, and thus received little recognition for its efforts—was a critical factor in its decision to pursue proactive involvement in Iraq. Such an approach in Tokyo was highly effective with Bush administration officials. They were eager to separate themselves from the behavior of the Clinton administration, which had been blamed for elevating Washington's relations with China at the expense of its ties with Japan. The controversial decision to support the US mission in Iraq also scored political good will in Washington, particularly given South Korea's open reluctance to meet increasing demands by the United States that its allies fulfill alliance commitments.

For the US–Japan alliance, closer bilateral coordination ostensibly enhanced deterrence of North Korea’s adventurous provocations while promoting stability on the Korean Peninsula, but the region as a whole has regarded this development with far greater skepticism. It came at a time when Koizumi also insisted on continued visits to Yasukuni Shrine (a memorial to Japan’s war veterans but an affront to many Asians because it also enshrines several World War II Class A War Criminals) and the publication of several primary school textbooks that featured distorted interpretations of Japanese behavior in the years leading up to and during World War II. Therefore, Tokyo’s increased military collaboration with the United States provoked suspicion among Japan’s neighbors about its true ambitions. Combined with flare-ups with China and South Korea over lingering territorial disputes, Japan’s seeming reluctance to confront its history once again became the focal point of tension, drawing energy away from the coordination of policies to address North Korea’s growing nuclear ambitions. Clearly, South Korean and Chinese disagreements with Japan have had the effect of boosting Pyongyang’s ability to maintain a hard-line stance towards Tokyo.

Two other areas of Japanese cooperation with the United States during this period provoked negative reactions from Japan’s neighbors: ballistic missile defense (BMD) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). With its decision in December 2003, Japan became the first country to officially begin joint development with the United States on a missile defense system, despite predictably negative reactions from China, North Korea and Russia. More surprising was South Korea’s criticism, which labeled the BMD an unnecessary provocation of North Korea. Many in South Korea argued that building a defense system that would effectively make North Korean missiles obsolete would only spur Pyongyang to aggressively pursue other deterrence capabilities, including a nuclear weapons program.

The other area of US–Japan cooperation that produced consternation in the region was Japan’s support of the PSI from early on in the form of an ad hoc multilateral arrangement that was launched on May 31, 2003 in response to proliferation of weapons and illicit materials in the aftermath of September 11. It aimed to interdict illicit transfers of WMD to and from “states and non-state actors of proliferation concern” by incorporating cooperative actions and coordinated training exercises.⁷ The Roh Moo Hyun administration in South Korea staunchly resisted US pressure to join, citing concerns about the adverse reaction from North Korea. It even went so far as to publicly express skepticism about the true motives of the PSI, arguing that its intent was to force a regime change in Pyongyang, a prospect that many South Koreans considered dangerous and destabilizing.⁸ Such deep divisions between Japan and South Korea raised serious doubts about the ability to create regional consensus in responding to North Korean threats.

⁷ For details, see: Arms Control Association, “The Proliferation Security Initiative” <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/PSI>

⁸ Norimitsu Onishi, “South Korea Won’t Intercept Cargo Ships From the North,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2006; For an in-depth discussion on conflicting South Korean views on North Korea, see: Shin Gi Wook and Kristen C. Burke, “North Korea and Contending South Korean Identities: Analysis of the South Korean Media; Policy Implications For The United States,” *Korea Economic Institute: Academic Paper Series*, Vol. 1 (Washington: KEI, 2008).

The Six-Party Talks

The Six-Party Talks were launched in 2003, in part to address the previously mentioned coordination concerns, and to bring together the even more disparate interests of China, Russia, and North Korea, all with the aim of permanently denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. At the time, this six-party format was seen as the only effective way to focus regional attention and efforts on eliminating North Korea's nuclear arsenal while relegating bilateral issues with North Korea to separate discussions. Ironically, the Six-Party Talks were in some ways so successful at isolating the North's nuclear program that they impeded the ability of the other parties—particularly the United States, Japan, and South Korea—to achieve their independent goals and objectives vis-à-vis North Korea. This had the paradoxical effect of stalling any real progress in the Six-Party Talks because of heightened domestic political opposition within the countries involved.

In Japan, Koizumi, who successfully fostered a close relationship between Tokyo and Washington by exercising strong leadership, also attempted a breakthrough in bilateral relations with the DPRK. His attempt culminated in a stunning visit to Pyongyang in September 2002. This gamble might have succeeded on a grand scale had it not been for an equally stunning confession and apology by Kim Jong Il for North Korea's abduction of thirteen Japanese citizens in the 1960s and 1970s. The abduction issue had long forestalled the improvement of Japan-North Korea relations. Both Koizumi and Kim Jong Il clearly underestimated the political backlash from a meeting that was supposed to bring final closure to the issue. The ensuing public outrage at North Korea has since then essentially dominated the Japanese debate over North Korea policy. It has also undermined Tokyo's ability to be flexible or responsive to changing circumstances on the Korean Peninsula. Ironically, Japan's focus on the abduction issue rather than North Korea's nuclear or missile programs came just as the Bush administration began to consider human rights concerns—a hallmark of the Bush administration's foreign policy ideology—subordinate to US national security interests. Diverging priorities began to cause tension and friction between the two allies, further weakening the overall position of both countries regarding North Korea.⁹

Ideological Hardlines

While the DPRK may be one of the most infamous examples of a state dominated by the iron fist of ideology, ideology-based politics in capitals other than Pyongyang contributed in great part to the nuclear standoff with North Korea. Because the Six-Party Talks were the product of an uneasy compromise among the participating governments, they were from their inception doomed to a perpetual state of intermittent talks and periodic suspensions. The issue of ideological blinders was clearest in Washington, where the Bush administration's unswerving dedication to foreign policy principles based on ideology rather than pragmatism severely limited its policy options on North Korea. The so-called "neo-cons" (neo-conservatives) scattered throughout key bureaucratic institutions in charge of American foreign policy were united in their belief that "rogue" regimes such as North Korea were morally bankrupt and could never be engaged effectively. Such beliefs, which

⁹ For a detailed account, see Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

informed the neo-cons' working assumptions about North Korean behavior and motives, became such a powerful narrative that the policies during the Clinton administration were dismissed as utter failures. They also provided a very narrow path for future policy options.

Thus, although President Bush's Review of North Korea policy, as discussed earlier in this chapter, had outlined a pragmatic approach of continued engagement with some adjustments, the ideological passion for the so-called "ABC ('Anything But Clinton') principle" quickly destroyed any possibility of US pragmatic engagement with North Korea. This became painfully evident very early on in the Bush administration when newly appointed Secretary of State Colin Powell was excoriated for publicly endorsing US support of South Korea's Sunshine Policy during South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's visit to Washington.¹⁰

Many point to Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly's fateful trip to Pyongyang in October 2002 as the catalyst for a renewed nuclear crisis with North Korea. In reality, it was Kim Dae Jung's visit to Washington and his first meeting with President George W. Bush in March 2001 that exacerbated the differences between the diverging ideologies of the United States and both Koreas, and set the stage for political confrontation with Pyongyang, leaving Japan caught in the middle.

When George W. Bush became president in January 2001, many expected radical changes in foreign policy, particularly in Asia. During the campaign, Bush and his close advisors had made it clear that they disapproved of the Agreed Framework as well as Clinton's approach to North Korea. Indeed, controversy over Clinton's purported interest in making a presidential visit to Pyongyang in the waning days of his administration deflated hopes that had been building on the Korean Peninsula that a new era in US–DPRK relations could be achieved. Thus the *perception* that the era of US "appeasement" towards North Korea had ended, and the expectations of a "hard-line" attitude in Washington, became firmly entrenched once President Bush entered the White House. As discussed previously, these perceptions exceeded the reality of a more pragmatic approach reflected in the officially sanctioned North Korea Policy Review. As Robert Jervis observes, misperception is often a far more powerful dynamic in the conduct of international relations than reality itself, and can lead foreign policies astray. For example, cognitive biases based on faulty assumptions or wrong initial impressions contribute to an actor's behavior, thus leading to changes in the intentions of others.¹¹

The issue of false perception seems to have impacted ROK President Kim Dae Jung's first official meeting with the newly elected President George W. Bush. By early 2001, Kim faced a growing sense of urgency about achieving a permanent breakthrough in relations with North Korea. Fresh from several stunning accomplishments, including a historic summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in June 2000, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and even significantly improving ties with Japan symbolized by the co-hosting of the

¹⁰ Steven Mufson, "Bush to Pick Up Clinton Talks on North Korean Missiles," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2001; Jane Perlez, "Bush Team's Counsel is Divided on Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, March 27, 2001.

¹¹ See: Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

2002 World Cup Soccer games¹², Kim was feeling confident but worried about a dramatic shift in Washington's attitude towards Pyongyang. With limited time left in office—his five-year presidential term would expire in February 2003—and strong political opposition to his Sunshine Policy despite public euphoria supporting reconciliation with the North, Kim became convinced that the Bush administration would adopt a hard-line North Korea policy, upsetting the progress he had achieved.¹³

Thus, even before George W. Bush was inaugurated as president in January 2001, Kim was pressing for a presidential summit, despite strong reluctance from the United States. At that time, Washington was both unprepared (the Policy Review for North Korea would not be conducted for an unforeseen period) and ill-equipped (key foreign policy personnel in the administration would not yet be appointed, much less in place) for a high level policymaking summit. Kim also made his concerns both clear and public, stating in an interview with the *Washington Post* that his message for Bush would be, "Don't change course, support continued dialogue, and don't push Kim Jong Il back into a corner."¹⁴ Perhaps Kim's recent accomplishments and his stature on the world stage contributed to his confidence and determination "to go teach the young and inexperienced Texan cowboy something about Korea."¹⁵ The urgency of Kim's mission was exacerbated by rumors that then Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori had plans to visit Washington and would likely be the first foreign leader to visit the White House, testing South Korea's sense of national pride vis-à-vis Japan and fueling even more persistent attempts to secure a US–ROK summit sooner rather than later.

Unfortunately, Kim made a serious diplomatic miscalculation shortly prior to his departure for Washington: he issued a Joint Communiqué with visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin affirming mutual support for the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Their declaration that the ABM Treaty should be maintained as a "cornerstone of strategic stability and an important foundation of international efforts on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation"¹⁶ was seen as a deliberate affront to Bush and his prioritization of a national missile defense system.¹⁷ While the President-elect and his key advisors had not yet mapped out a specific North Korea policy, pursuit of a missile defense system formed one of the key national

¹² On October 8, 1998, Kim Dae Jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi signed a historic ROK–Japan Joint Declaration, which would pave the way for extraordinary changes between the two countries, including the lifting of a Korean ban on Japanese pop culture which resulted in dramatic increase in exchanges. Despite these achievements, diplomatic relations between the two countries would quickly sour beginning in April 2001 over a dispute over history textbooks, notably a month after Kim's disastrous trip to Washington.

¹³ Mike Chinoy recounts an interview with Kim Dae-Jung in which the President stated: "I wanted Mr. Gore to be the next president because if Mr. Bush becomes the next president, I thought, he will go through many disruptions about the North Korean policy from the Clinton Administration. That's why I was very concerned." (Chinoy, *Meltdown*, p. 50.) See also: Don Kirk, "Kim to Seek Bush's Support in Talks Next Week: Seoul's 'Sunshine' Policy Faces Tough Test in US," *New York Times*, March 3, 2001.

¹⁴ David Ignatius, "Seoul Hopes for continued Dialogue With the North," *New York Times*, January 8, 2001.

¹⁵ This is a former Blue House official's paraphrased account of Kim's description of Bush during internal deliberations in preparation for the ROK President's visit to Washington. (Private meeting with a former Blue House official, held in Seoul, October 2004).

¹⁶ For details, see: "Missile Defense and the ABM Treaty," <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/BMD/ABM.htm>

¹⁷ Patrick E. Tyler, "South Korea Takes Russia's Side in Dispute Over American Plan for Missile Defense," *New York Times*, February 28, 2001.

security strategies for the new administration. In declaring that a national missile defense system would violate the ABM Treaty, Kim openly rebuked a new US President and one of his key strategic priorities.¹⁸ That the criticism came from one of America's traditionally strongest allies only exacerbated the negative impact. Thus, the Korean leader, although unintentionally, established a tense and negative environment for his first meeting with Bush.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the resulting summit in Washington was a diplomatic disaster that set the stage for a contentious relationship between the United States and South Korea. While Kim Dae Jung may have fallen victim to biases about the Bush administration's intentions vis-à-vis North Korea, the Bush administration certainly contributed to the tense relationship by indiscriminately labeling the Sunshine Policy and engagement as morally equivalent to "appeasement" and the detested Clinton policies on North Korea and thereby preemptively dismissed the ROK's position. Kim's attitude of lecturing to the inexperienced Bush about North Korea only reinforced Bush's perception of Kim as a naïve and foolish defender of a morally repugnant regime.²⁰

The uneasy relationship established between the two leaders also reflected the split in ideological perspectives beginning to emerge within the new Bush administration. This divide was clearly evidenced by sharply conflicting public statements on North Korea policy made by senior officials such as Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.²¹ Unfortunately, contradictory public statements by high-level government officials were only the beginning of a long and destructive pattern of conflicts

¹⁸ To make matters even worse for the Bush administration, while Russia had been actively campaigning to oppose an American-led missile defense system, it had also developed a closer relationship with North Korea in recent years, culminating in Putin's visit to Pyongyang in July 2000, where they issued a Joint Statement affirming: observance of the ABM; opposition to a missile defense system; North Korea's insistence on the withdrawal of US troops in South Korea, and support for North Korea's missile development on the basis of peaceful purposes. Thus, Kim Dae Jung's Joint Communiqué with Putin not only sided with Russia, but de facto seemed to side with North Korea. (Yong-Chool Ha and Beom-Shik Shin, "Russian Non-Proliferation Policy and the Korean Peninsula," Strategic Studies Institute, December 2006 (Carlisle, PA); <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>)

¹⁹ That Kim Dae Jung had not necessarily intended to rebuke President Bush's missile defense plan became clear when within 24 hours of the Joint Communiqué, the Blue House made a swift retreat from what appeared to be support for Russia's position. The ROK government made painstaking efforts to try to differentiate between affirming the ABM Treaty and opposition to a missile defense system, but clearly the damage had already been done. (Don Kirk, "South Korea Now Pulls Back from Russia on Missile Shield," *New York Times*, March 2, 2001.)

²⁰ David E. Sanger, "South Korean President and Bush at Odds on North Korea," *New York Times*, March 7, 2001; and Steven Mufson, "Seoul's Kim Presses for US Role; 'Seize the Opportunity' to Negotiate With North, Leader Urges," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2001.

²¹ Remarks by Secretary of State Colin Powell, March 7, 2001 (White House, Office of the Press Secretary); Steven Mufson, "Bush to Pick Up Clinton Talks on North Korean Missiles," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2001; David Sanger, "South Korean President and Bush at Odds on North Korea," *New York Times*, March 7, 2001 and "Bush Tells Seoul Talks with North Won't Resume Now," March 8, 2001; For an in-depth discussion, see C. Kenneth Quinones, "Dualism in the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2003, pp. 197-224; and Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

between the two ideological camps within the Bush administration.²² The entrenched ideological positions of certain administration officials not only informed key decisions on North Korea policy, but prevented flexibility, often producing suboptimal results. Worse, the US position vis-à-vis North Korea, its allies, and critical regional players China and Russia, was weakened by battles over foreign policy within the US government.

These internecine battles within the US government affected many policy areas, but none more than North Korea. The DPRK has posed problems for every US president since Truman, but during the Bush administration period a confluence of factors that were initially independent of North Korea propelled the DPRK into the eye of the policy maelstrom. The most significant of these factors, of course, were the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which inexorably altered all strategic calculations. As discussed earlier, in the post-9/11 environment the more pragmatic approaches recommended by the North Korea Policy Review were readily abandoned in favor of more ideologically driven policies that left little room for compromise or flexibility. Considering that Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage delivered a letter from President Bush to President Kim pledging that the United States would “strongly support the South’s engagement policy on the North,” and made further assurances that Washington would resume its dialogue with North Korea upon completion of its Policy Review in his visit to South Korea in May 2001, Washington’s shift to ideologically driven policy is evident in the policy decisions by the Bush administration that followed.²³

September 11th also dramatically altered Washington’s perception of its alliances. In short, it ended Washington’s view of its role in the post-War War II era as the benevolent benefactor of security and assistance around the world, and brought about the perception of a new international order in which Washington solicited cooperation and began to seek repayment for its past sacrifices. While perhaps understandable in an environment of increased threat, American demands for unequivocal allied cooperation in the widening “Global War on Terrorism” only reinforced and exacerbated the already-tense relationship between the United States and the ROK.

Ironically, the sudden shift in the global strategic environment had the opposite effect on relations between the United States and Japan, its other Asian ally. Indeed, the very inverse of the administration’s perceptions about South Korea and its leader seemed to hold true in relations with Japan: unlike the mistrust between President Bush and President Kim (and later President Roh Moo Hyun), Bush established a deep and personal connection with Prime Minister Koizumi, an uncharacteristic achievement for any Japanese leader in Japan’s postwar history. Whereas Seoul’s support for Washington often seemed lukewarm, uncertain and sometimes even openly critical, Tokyo’s assurances were unequivocal. Such a stance from Tokyo was seen as extraordinary in Washington, in large part because it extended well beyond the cautious and tepid responses that were historically characteristic of Japanese foreign policy pronouncements and actions, particularly in the global security arena.

²² These ideological battles within the Bush administration are well documented in a number of sources: Chinoy, *Meltdown*; Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, Woodward, *Bush at War*, and Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), among others.

²³ Don Kirk, “US Informs South Korea of Plans to Resume Talks with North,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2001.

Further contributing to the Bush administration's embrace of Koizumi was the perception in Washington that he was an ideological ally, in stark contrast to Kim. A conservative member of the ruling establishment, Koizumi's pledge to make sweeping reforms to the Japanese economy based on deregulation and encouragement for competition, including plans to privatize the postal system, were greatly supported by the Bush administration. Koizumi's calls for reinterpretation of the constitution in order to enhance Japan's national security structure were also enthusiastically embraced in Washington after 9/11, although the plans unnerved Asian neighbors, particularly China and Korea. Japan under Koizumi was thus perceived as a close ideological ally of the United States, in contrast to the prickly ROK.

Cracks in the Bilateral Relationship

In reality, the perceived closeness between the United States and Japan during the early years of the first Bush administration was not as impermeable as it seemed, particularly on North Korea policy. In fact, fractures during this time presaged the deep cracks that would emerge between the two allies in later years. Even as Prime Minister Koizumi pledged unflinching support for the Bush administration's War on Terrorism, he pursued an independent policy towards North Korea with hopes of eventual Japan–North Korea normalization, as discussed earlier. The unforeseen sequence of events following Koizumi's meetings with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in September 2002 not only failed to produce the hope for reconciliation between Japan and North Korea but also created a domestic political backlash over the abduction issue within Japan that hardened Tokyo's policy toward North Korea from that point on.

In the ensuing months and years, Tokyo's stance seemed to be closely aligned and coordinated with Washington's focus on ending North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In reality, however, the two governments were not as like-minded as they appeared in public. In part, the sense of unity between the United States and Japan stemmed from even greater conflict between the United States and the ROK. Newly elected South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun engendered even greater mistrust and antagonism with the Bush administration than Kim Dae Jung, and the public airing of these tensions easily overshadowed the underlying differences between the United States and Japan. Ironically, the concerns voiced by the leadership in Seoul about the strength and reliability of the US–ROK alliance were in fact very similar to sentiments held by some in Tokyo regarding the US–Japan alliance; the difference was that the South Koreans broadcast their views openly and publicly, while the Japanese were far more discreet with their misgivings.

Before Prime Minister Koizumi's historic trip to Pyongyang, Tokyo went to great lengths to keep the mission secret from Washington, fearing that the Bush administration would disapprove and perhaps even try to dissuade Tokyo from pursuing reconciliation with Pyongyang.²⁴ In addition, many of Washington's other actions were greeted with skepticism by Japanese officials, who were uncertain about the reliability of US intelligence and questioned American motives. For example, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly's trip to Pyongyang in October 2002—during which he confronted North Korea with US intelligence about a secret highly enriched uranium (HEU) program—produced surprising

²⁴ Funabashi's *The Peninsula Question* provides an exceptionally detailed account of this period; in particular, see Chapters 2 and 3.

doubts among US allies. While it is not surprising that the progressive ROK government would express doubts over the US charges against Pyongyang, Tokyo too had grave misgivings. They were certainly in part a function of the highly controversial American intelligence on Iraq's WMD programs, but for Tokyo the political implications of North Korea's illicit nuclear activities were far more profound and brought into focus differences over the "desirable shape of their bilateral alliance" itself.²⁵ Washington's hesitation over sharing intelligence was interpreted by Tokyo as a disturbing lack of trust and a sign that the alliance was not as strong as public rhetoric claimed. In turn, some in the Bush administration began to have misgivings about Tokyo's continued pursuit of normalization with North Korea, despite the clear dangers posed by the DPRK's HEU program.

Nevertheless, the growing discrepancy in views over North Korea was largely kept behind the scenes, even as Washington faced increased criticism from China, Russia and South Korea for raising tensions with North Korea. As tensions with the DPRK continued to increase in the following months—punctuated by Pyongyang's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in December 2002—with the Bush administration remaining firm in its refusal to "reward" North Korea by conducting bilateral negotiations, regional dynamics propelled the creation of a multilateral format, the Six-Party Talks, as a potentially viable means to address the nuclear issue. Here, too, Tokyo and Washington's positions at the Six-Party Talks were not as closely aligned as they seemed in public. Prime Minister Koizumi made clear that Japan was as concerned with inclusion in any resolution process as promoting a successful outcome; thus, after the lackluster meeting between the United States and North Korean officials mediated by China in 2003, Koizumi insisted that not only Japan but Russia and South Korea should be included in any future talks with North Korea.²⁶

Ultimately, shared concern in the region about American policy was to varying degrees based on a fundamental lack of trust in the Bush administration's motives vis-à-vis North Korea. While official statements emanating from Washington were carefully calibrated assertions that the US government would not attack or invade North Korea, the more aggressive personal sentiments of a number of high-ranking officials became well-known, publicly revealing the ideological divide within the administration. Given the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as President Bush's targeting of North Korea in his "Axis of Evil" speech, the region remained uncertain of US intentions throughout the remaining years of the Bush administration. Thus, participation in the Six-Party Talks by Japan, South Korea, Russia, and China was widely considered critical to ensuring that the US would not act unilaterally against North Korea.

For Japan, Russia, and South Korea—the three non-signatories to the Armistice suspending the Korean War, each of whom had been shunned at various times as North Korea attempted to engage China and the United States directly—the imperative of inclusion in a multilateral diplomatic process was clear. Each was concerned about the burden of implementing a deal that was negotiated without their input, as had occurred with the 1994 Agreed Framework. Paradoxically, their direct participation in a regional process also raised the possibility

²⁵ Ibid, p. 89

²⁶ John Tagliabue, "Summit Leaders Express Unity on Iraq, but Strains Show," *New York Times*, June 4, 2003.

that they could end up “entrapped” by US–led aggressive action towards North Korea if efforts to rein in North Korea’s nuclear ambitions failed. Thus, the Six-Party Talks became as much an institutionalized mechanism for the four powers to negotiate with the United States as a forum for negotiations over the North Korean nuclear program.

Indeed, after Christopher Hill assumed the position of Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs in 2004, the focus of his activities was not on negotiating with North Korea but rather divided along two other fronts: China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia abroad and the competing bureaucracies within the US government. Hill was a polarizing figure who became a scapegoat for leaders in both the United States and foreign governments in their growing dissatisfaction with the Six-Party Talks.²⁷ Ironically, by the end of the Bush administration, it seemed that Hill’s North Korean counterparts were the only ones with whom he had established a modicum of trust, and his efforts to make progress on a nuclear deal were aimed at convincing his own government and those of the other four parties to trust the process. The Bush administration failed to achieve further progress on the North Korean nuclear problem, and left the incoming Obama administration with the burden of repairing the fissures in America’s alliance relationships created in large part by the Six-Party process.

Conclusion

Any examination of US–Japan cooperation on North Korea policy and the impact of the North Korean nuclear issue on the alliance requires an understanding of the critical role that *South* Korea has played in relations between the United States and Japan. The Six-Party Talks, the multilateral process initially devised to address the North Korean problem, was ultimately unsuccessful not only because of the intractable nature of the problem itself, but because of the complex interplay of concurrent and opposing interests in the region. These include: conflicting national interests, overlapping strategic interests, and a rigid structure of formal alliances that often obstructed regional resolution to a shared security threat. While these conditions predated the nuclear crisis that resurfaced in 2002, the challenges produced by this complex dynamic were exacerbated by the unfortunate confluence of two exogenous factors: the September 11th terrorist attacks, and a rigid ideology that commandeered the Bush administration’s foreign policy.

Under such circumstances, the Six-Party Talks became a method of “last resort” in attempting to address the North Korean nuclear problem without actually confronting the problem itself. While the Six-Party Talks were designed to overcome coordination and cooperation problems among the five regional parties in order to address a shared concern, the talks ended up creating even greater challenges in cooperation and coordination among the United States and its two Asian allies. Perhaps now that the ideological blinders have been removed from policy formation in Washington, the Six-Party process will have greater potential to make some progress. However, although without the ideological conviction, the Obama administration has continued to pursue much of the North Korea policy initiated during the Bush administration. This includes an insistence on verification and reciprocity, as well as implementation of tough sanctions to rein in dangerous North Korean behavior.

²⁷ The bureaucratic battles that occurred during the Six-Party Talks are extensively detailed in accounts by: Funabashi, Chinoy, Pritchard and Woodward, as previously cited.

Furthermore, Washington now finds the strength of its alliance relationships reversed: alliance cooperation with South Korea has dramatically improved since the inauguration of President Lee Myung Bak in 2008, while the fissures with Japan, particularly since the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came into power in September 2009, have now widened into a yawning gap. Although the alliance relationship between Washington and Tokyo turned somewhat positive after Naoto Kan took the office in June 2010, the two countries continue their struggle to recover from the damages that were done to the relationship during the Hatoyama administration. The signs of a greater will in not only Washington but also in Seoul and Tokyo for stronger trilateral cooperation vis-à-vis North Korea following the March 2010 *Cheonan* Incident are encouraging since it is unlikely that the Six-Party Talks can be revived without strong US alliance relationships with *both* Japan and the ROK.

Chapter Two

“North Korea Problems” and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan

Yasuhiro Izumikawa

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, Japan has taken measures to strengthen its commitment to the US–Japan alliance. In April 1996 the Japanese government and its counterpart in Washington announced the US–Japan Security Joint Declaration, designed to renew mutual commitment to the alliance post-Cold War. In September 1997, Japan and the United States revised the Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation which clarified Japan’s role and missions in case of military contingencies in Japan and adjacent areas. In November 2001, the Japanese government dispatched the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) to the Indian Ocean to support US-led coalition military operations in Afghanistan. In December 2003, Japan also sent the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) to Iraq, showing its willingness to “put boots on the ground.”¹ Japan’s actions during the last decade and a half have led some experts to argue that Japan is re-militarizing and abandoning its post-World War antimilitarism, or even that Japan is poised to become “the Britain of the Far East.”²

One of the important (arguably the most important) drivers for Japan’s renewed commitment to the US–Japan alliance has been the emergence of North Korea as a major security concern for Tokyo. When the first North Korean nuclear crisis began in 1993 with North Korea’s abrupt declaration of its intent to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Japanese government was caught off-guard, finding itself poorly prepared for a possible contingency on the Korean Peninsula. This crisis also helped Tokyo reappraise the continued value of the US security guarantee provided under the US–Japan alliance.³ When North Korea’s Taepo-dong 2 missile flew over Japan in 1998, the Japanese public was so shocked it hardly resisted the government’s decision to develop

¹ Although this mission was for the civilian reconstruction of the southern Iraqi city of Samawah, the Japanese government’s willingness to demonstrate its military commitments to the US–Japan alliance should not be underestimated; it had explored several ways to send its troops that would support US military missions more directly. Shigeru Handa, *Senchi Haken* [Dispatched to the War Zone] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), pp. 67–68.

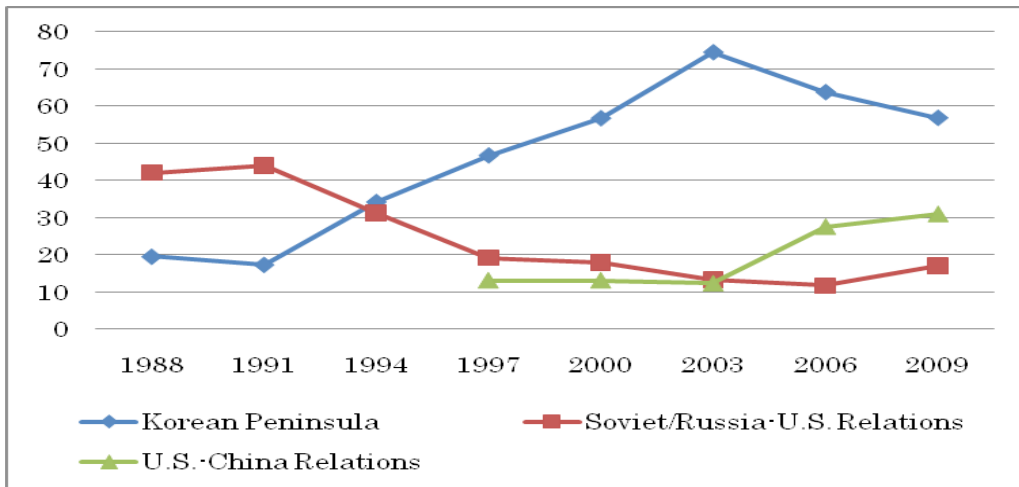
² For antimilitarism, see Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For arguments on Japan’s remilitarization, see Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan’s Remilitarization* (London: Routledge, 2009); Institute for National Strategic Studies, “The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership,” *INSS Special Report*, October 2000.

³ Masahiro Akiyama, *Nichibei no Senryakutaiwa ga Hajimatta* [US–Japan Strategic Dialogue has Begun] (Tokyo: Aki Shobo, 2002).

its indigenous reconnaissance satellite system, or participate in the joint development of a missile defense system with the United States.

The impact of North Korean belligerence on the Japanese perception of national security and the role of the US–Japan alliance is evident in public opinion polls. A March 2009 survey by the Cabinet Office of Japan showed that a majority of respondents (56.8%) believed the situation on the Korean Peninsula to be the most important security problem for Japan, a perception that has been growing since the mid-1990s.⁴ (Figure 1)

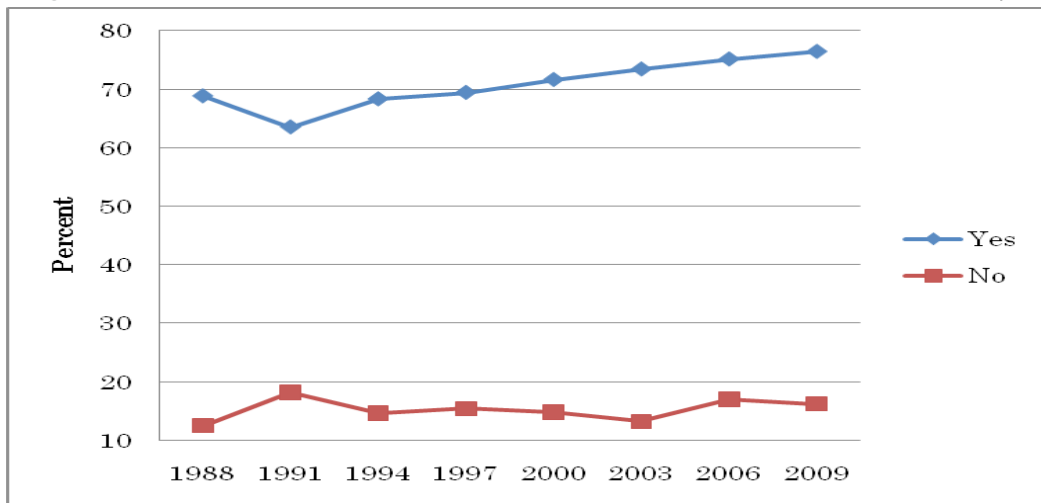
Figure 1: Security Issues Concerning Japanese People



Source: The Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, *Boei-Jieitai nikansuru Yoronchosa* [Public Opinion Survey on Defense and the Self-Defense Forces], available at <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index2.html>

The same survey also showed that the percentage of Japanese people who feel the US–Japan alliance contributes to Japan’s security has increased steadily since the mid-1990s. (Figure 2) Judging from this data, it is clear that threats from North Korea have contributed to the strengthening of the US–Japan alliance.

⁴ The Cabinet Office of Japan, *Boei-Jieitai nikansuru Yoronchosa* [Public Opinion Survey on Defense and the Self-Defense Forces], at <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h20/h20-bouei/index.html> (accessed on March 20, 2010)

Figure 2: Does the US–Japan Alliance Contribute to Japan’s Security?

Source: The Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, *Boei-Jieitai nikansuru Yoronchosa* [Public Opinion Survey on Defense and the Self-Defense Forces], available at <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index2.html>

However, the relationship between North Korean belligerence and US–Japan relations remains far from simple. While North Korean problems, particularly nuclear and missile threats, have helped strengthen the alliance, they also created diplomatic tension between Washington and Tokyo. In particular, a solid US–Japan alliance may complicate the implementation of US and Japanese respective policies toward Pyongyang. This is inevitable: Japan and the United States, as sovereign states, naturally have both diverging and overlapping interests and priorities vis-à-vis North Korea. As a result, North Korean problems have both positively and negatively impacted the cohesion of the US–Japan alliance.

This chapter examines the place of North Korean issues in Japan’s foreign policy agenda, how Tokyo has addressed the problems, and why it has done so. The chapter begins by articulating Japan’s strategic and political interests on the Korean Peninsula and in North Korea, and the means available for Japan to promote its interests. Then, it traces Japanese attempts to address North Korean problems since the beginning of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s administration in 2001. The chapter concludes by discussing the lessons learned in Japan’s policy toward North Korea and possible implications for the US–Japan alliance.

Japan’s Goals Vis-à-Vis North Korea

In December 1890, almost a century before North Korea’s nuclear weapons program began to attract worldwide attention, former Japanese Prime Minister Aritomo Yamagata made a speech in the Imperial Diet, famously arguing that the Korean Peninsula was within Japan’s “*rieki-sen*,” the geographical line defining areas that significantly affect Japanese national security. Although Yamagata’s logic was later abused to justify Japan’s attempt to expand its sphere of influence farther into Northeast Asia, Yamagata genuinely considered a stable Korean Peninsula free from the influence of anti-Japanese powers a crucial component for Japan’s external security.

The geopolitical logic that Yamagata applied to the Korean Peninsula in 1890 remains relevant today. One of the vital elements of Japan’s national security is a stable Korean Peninsula. Japanese interests in the Korean Peninsula can be broken down into three main principles. First, Japan has an interest in maintaining the Korean Peninsula free from dominance by a hostile state, either indigenous or external; the emergence of a unified Korea hostile to Japan or the extension of Chinese influence onto the peninsula, for instance, would not be desirable for Japan. Second, Japan is interested in the portion of the Korean Peninsula that is free from sources of threats, such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) including nuclear weapons, which could be targeted at or used against Japan. Finally, Japan has an interest in a politically stable Korean Peninsula. Turmoil on the peninsula would likely trigger an outflow of refugees and/or create a power vacuum, either of which could lead to regional instability.

Given Japan’s aforementioned security interests on the Korean Peninsula, what does Japan want to achieve in its North Korea policy? First and foremost, eliminating North Korea’s nuclear weapons is extremely important for Japan. It needs to be noted that the Japanese government and security experts put an emphasis on “elimination”—simply managing a nuclear-armed North Korea does not alleviate Japan’s security concern. Second, Tokyo wants to contain North Korea’s missile capabilities because Pyongyang already has the ability to launch missile strikes almost anywhere in Japan. Third, to the extent possible, Japan wants to prevent regime collapse or military aggression by Pyongyang for the sake of regional security.⁵

In understanding Japan’s policy toward North Korea, two additional and equally important factors must be considered. The first is the historical significance of North Korea as the only country with which Japan has not normalized diplomatic relations following World War II. Although North Korea hardly inspires trust or respect from Japanese people, the lack of diplomatic relations with North Korea symbolizes Japan’s continuing struggles with its own past. (This is not to suggest, of course, that Japan has “resolved” its past problems with other states like South Korea and China.) Japan’s desire to move beyond its past legacy by resolving outstanding issues with North Korea must be understood in this context; this goal at least partially explains why various Japanese prime ministers, including Noboru Takeshita, Keizo Obuchi and Yoshiro Mori, seriously explored normalizing diplomatic relations with Pyongyang.

Second, the political significance of *rachi mondai*, the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea, must not be underestimated. Although rumors of North Korean agents kidnapping Japanese citizens were reported sporadically during the period between the late 1970s to the 1980s, the issue did not attract significant media and social attention in Japan until the late 1990s. In February 1997, a few Japanese popular journals reported the story of a Japanese girl believed to have been kidnapped in 1977 by North Korean agents. Soon afterwards, it was revealed that the kidnapped Japanese girl was likely Megumi Yokota, who was a middle school student at the time of her alleged abduction. Even an exiled

⁵ Yukio Ito, *Yamagata Aritomo* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjusha, 2009), pp. 233, 254–55. For a brief but effective review of the geopolitical significance of the Korean Peninsula for Japan throughout Japanese history, see Hisahiko Okazaki, *Senryakuteki Shiko toha Nanika* [What is Strategic Thinking?] (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1983), pp. 16–26.

North Korean agent admitted to the Japanese media that he had seen her in North Korea.⁶ In the late 1990s, various grass-root organizations were established to rescue the abducted Japanese citizens, and these organizations actively lobbied the Japanese government to take the issue seriously. Although the issue was gradually increasing in political salience, Kim Jong Il’s admission of the abduction during then Prime Minister Koizumi’s first visit to Pyongyang in September 2002 shocked the Japanese public and provoked strong anti-North Korean sentiment. Kim’s admission also made the abduction issue more politically important among Japanese than the North Korean nuclear weapons problem. Consequently, it forced the Japanese government, its hardliners in particular, to take a tough attitude toward North Korea, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Finally, to fully understand Japanese interests in relation to North Korea, three additional questions need to be taken into consideration. The first concerns Japan’s position on the issue of “regime change” in Pyongyang. There are those in Japan who, like their ideological counterparts in the United States, believe that North Korea’s aggressive behavior will not end without regime change in Pyongyang. However, most political leaders in Japan, including many conservatives, are not keen on pushing regime change. They are concerned that an attempt to force regime change may prompt Pyongyang to take desperate measures, including the use of its WMD, or lead to internal chaos in North Korea, neither of which is in Japan’s interest.

Second is the degree to which Tokyo takes seriously threats of proliferation of WMD *by* North Korea—an issue that is of vital importance to the United States. While Japan actively participates in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Tokyo focuses on preventing WMD transfer *to* North Korea rather than *from* it.⁷ This suggests that while Japan is aware of the threat posed by a nuclear Iran and other nations seeking to develop nuclear weapons programs, Tokyo predominantly focuses on North Korea’s nuclear capacity.⁸

Finally, there is a question of how Japan views Korean reunification. In contrast to the widely-held view that Tokyo opposes (or is at least lukewarm to) Korean reunification, Japan’s position is more nuanced. In short, Tokyo’s view of this issue depends upon what kind of state is likely to emerge in the unified Korean Peninsula. That is, Japan remains open to a unified Korea if it is likely to be stable and not dominated by entities hostile to Japan, but it will maintain its reservations under other circumstances.

Tokyo’s Limited Options and the Place of the Six-Party Talks in it’s North Korea Policy

Despite Japan’s serious stake on the Korean Peninsula, its ability to pursue its interests on the peninsula is very limited. Military options are restrained both by Japan’s lack of the

⁶ Soji Takasaki, *Kensho Nicho Kosho* [Examination: Japanese-North Korean Negotiations] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2004), pp. 116–17.

⁷ This does not mean that Japan is not interested in North Korea’s WMD proliferation activities at all; it is interested in containing North Korea’s sales of WMD-related materials and other weapons as a means to reduce Pyongyang’s ability to gain foreign currency.

⁸ For Japan’s reluctance to impose sanctions on Iran, see, for instance, Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 153–155.

hardware necessary for such operations and by legal constraints.⁹ Tokyo’s ability to punish Pyongyang economically through unilateral economic sanctions is also marginal because economic transactions between the two nations are already severely limited (it still did not stop Tokyo from applying economic pressure on Pyongyang as a means of showing its strong resolve and retaining future bargaining power, as I will discuss later). This makes Japanese economic sanctions symbolic rather than substantive.¹⁰

Japan’s only meaningful leverage vis-à-vis North Korea is its ability to provide enormous economic incentives. When North Korea and Japan normalize diplomatic relations, Japan is expected to pay financial compensation for its pre-World War II colonial rule. This would significantly contribute to the North Korean economy, likely prolonging the regime’s survival.¹¹ Normalizing diplomatic relations with Tokyo would also benefit Pyongyang politically, especially if it happens before US–North Korea diplomatic normalization, or the establishment of a “peace regime” on the Korean Peninsula to increase ties between the North and South.

Japan’s financial leverage alone is not sufficient to achieve its goals vis-à-vis North Korea. North Korea views its nuclear and missile capabilities as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Washington, so it is highly unlikely that Pyongyang will make compromises on these issues in its bilateral dealings with Tokyo. Tokyo is also constrained by concerns about Pyongyang’s empty promises¹² and pressure from Seoul and Washington not to provide economic rewards for Pyongyang before resolving outstanding issues. Furthermore, if Tokyo unilaterally uses economic incentives to induce Pyongyang to cooperate without sufficiently coordinating with Washington, it would seriously damage relations with the United States, whose cooperation is vital in addressing Japan’s Korea-related concerns in the long run.

Another challenge confronting Tokyo is its lack of influence over the creation of a “peace regime” on the Korean Peninsula, as well as possible future Korean reunification. Not being a signatory to the Korean War Armistice Agreement in 1953, Tokyo cannot demand that it be included in forums for discussing the future of the Korean Peninsula. However, Tokyo has bitter experience with exclusion from the processes affecting the situation on the Korean Peninsula. When the Agreed Framework was reached in bilateral negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington in October 1994, Tokyo was asked to pay a significant sum of money for providing North Korea with two light-water reactors through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), and the Japanese government had no choice but to agree. Japan was also excluded from the Four-Party Talks, which were conducted from

⁹ Currently, however, there is debate within Japanese political circles about whether or not Japan should acquire capabilities to conduct surgical air strikes in the event that external attacks are imminent. Tokyo Foundation, *Atarashii Nihon no Anzenhosho Seisaku* [Japan’s New Security Strategy] October 2008.

¹⁰ David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Heigo Sato, “A Japanese Perspective on North Korea: Troubled Bilateral Relations in a Complex Multilateral Framework,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2009), pp. 54–92.

¹¹ It is often estimated that as much as US\$ 10 billion may be paid to North Korea by Japan in the event of diplomatic normalization. North Korea’s estimated GDP in 2009 was US\$ 28.2 billion, based on official exchange rate. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html> (accessed on May 8, 2010)

¹² John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 5–49.

1996 to 1999 among the two Koreas, the United States, and China to discuss the permanent peace treaty replacing the 1953 Korean Armistice Treaty. Although these discussions turned out to be utterly unsuccessful, the experience reminded Tokyo of the danger of being excluded from a process that might map out the future of the Korean Peninsula.

The Six-Party Talks and Japan's strategy for dealing with challenges concerning the Korean Peninsula must be considered in this context. For Japan, the Six-Party Talks are the preferred multilateral option. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), for instance, is less beneficial because Japan, as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, cannot be guaranteed the role on the council it feels it deserves. Three-party (US–DPRK–China), four-party (US–China–ROK–DPRK), or bilateral talks between the Koreas are even less desirable, because they all minimize Japan's role in the process. In short, Japan has the best chance to express its interests and concerns on the issues related to the future of the Korean Peninsula in the Six-Party Talks. For these reasons, the Japanese government first proposed the creation of a six-party multilateral formula in 1998 under the leadership of Prime Minister Obuchi, well before the second North Korean nuclear crisis surfaced in 2002.¹³

The Six-Party Talks were expected to be most efficient in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue as well. First and foremost, the Six-Party Talks include the United States and China, whose presence is necessary for resolving the North Korean nuclear problem. Through a multilateral approach, Japan could also magnify the effects of positive or negative sanctions toward North Korea.¹⁴ On the other hand, Japan does not lose much by pursuing a multilateral approach because it must coordinate its policy with the United States and other players anyway.

However, even with the Six-Party Talks, Japan must address several remaining challenges. First, the Six-Party Talks cannot completely preclude other influential states, the United States in particular, from cutting bilateral deals with North Korea and presenting them as *faits accomplis*. Second, it is possible that the Six-Party Talks will become solely focused on the North Korean nuclear problem and ignore other significant issues for Tokyo, such as North Korea's missile threat and the abduction issue. This risk would pose particular problems if North Korea cooperates in resolving its nuclear standoff in order to decrease Japanese influence in the Six-Party Talks.

How can Japan deal with these challenges? The best, although imperfect, answer for Tokyo is to maintain close bilateral coordination with the United States. In order to gain maximum US support, Japan should back US positions as much as possible, with the expectation that the United States will reciprocate or at least consider Japan's interests in any deal it makes with North Korea. In this sense, Japan's use at the Six-Party Talks of a term similar to the George W. Bush-coined CVID—complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement [of North Korea's nuclear programs]—was partly a tactic to show Tokyo's allegiance to the

¹³ Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2006), p. 106. [English trans., *The Peninsula Question* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2007)] It is also now known that Tokyo proposed to create one in August 2002 in its secret meeting with North Korea. Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko* [The Man who Transformed Diplomacy into a Fight] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2006), p. 85.

¹⁴ A positive sanction is a promised or actual use of rewards toward a target actor to induce the latter's cooperative behavior. David A. Baldwin, "The Power of Positive Sanctions," *World Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (October 1971), pp. 19–38.

United States. Japan also emphasized the abduction issue in bilateral dealings with the United States not only to increase pressure on North Korea but also to prevent the United States from neglecting it.

In sum, Japan’s ability to achieve its goals vis-à-vis North Korea is very limited despite its significant interests on the Korean Peninsula. The Six-Party Talks, if utilized effectively, would allow Tokyo to compensate for its limited unilateral impact. Still, Tokyo is ultimately highly dependent upon the United States to manage the Six-Party process in its favor.

Japan’s Attempts to Deal With the North Korean Problem Since 2001

Before Junichiro Koizumi became Japanese Prime Minister in April 2001, his immediate predecessors, Keizo Obuchi and Yoshiro Mori, sought to resolve outstanding issues with Pyongyang and to pave the way towards Japan–North Korea normalization. In January 2001, former Cabinet Chief Secretary Hidenao Nakagawa and North Korea’s First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok Chu met in Singapore and discussed a possible visit to Pyongyang by then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori.¹⁵ Although these discussions did not lead to a breakthrough, both sides continued the dialogue through secret diplomatic channels even after Koizumi’s rise to power. While it remains unclear how seriously Koizumi had considered normalizing relations with North Korea before April 2001, the effort became one of the most significant legacies of Koizumi’s diplomacy.

Stage One: The Rise and Fall of Prospects for Reconciliation: Koizumi’s First Pyongyang Visit

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Pyongyang and met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il for the first time on September 17, 2002. Koizumi’s visit culminated in the announcement of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration (often called the Pyongyang Declaration), which mapped out a path for diplomatic normalization between the two countries. The declaration stipulated that Japan would provide economic aid for North Korea when bilateral relations were normalized, while North Korea pledged to extend its self-imposed moratorium on missile tests.¹⁶

This surprise visit was prepared under a veil of secrecy: until the announcement of his visit in early September 2002, Koizumi directed that the ongoing negotiations between Pyongyang and Tokyo remain an absolute secret. Only a handful of government officials, including Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Teijiro Furukawa, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Yoshiji Nogami, and the Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Hitoshi Tanaka, knew about the discussions.¹⁷ The officials who handled the secret negotiations were pragmatists, who believed that Japan could only solve the outstanding issues between Tokyo and Pyongyang by engaging in diplomatic normalization talks. The hardliners

¹⁵ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 13.

¹⁶ For the English version of the declaration, see http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html (accessed on April 1, 2010)

¹⁷ Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, pp. 17–18; Haruki Wada, *Dojidai Hihyo: Niccho Kankei to Rachi Mondai* [Commentary on Current Events: Japanese-North Korean Relations and the Abduction Issue] (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2005), pp. 84–85.

on North Korea, including Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, were excluded from the negotiations. Tokyo also kept its counterparts in Washington largely in the dark, which later sparked criticism within Japan that the lack of coordination could have caused significant problems between Tokyo and Washington.¹⁸

There were political as well as policy reasons why Koizumi was interested in a diplomatic breakthrough with Pyongyang in 2002. Since the forced resignation of Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka, a populist politician whose support for Koizumi in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership election was vital for his victory, Koizumi's approval rating had plummeted significantly, to the extent that his political survival became public speculation. Koizumi, who did not have a strong support base within the LDP, needed a tangible policy achievement to boost his public standing. Although political opportunism was not the sole motivation behind Koizumi's decision to visit Pyongyang, the visit was hardly undertaken for purely altruistic reasons.

It is now known that Prime Minister Koizumi hoped to achieve the ultimate goal of establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea when he decided to visit Pyongyang. Journalist Yoichi Funabashi argued that before the September 17 Pyongyang visit, Koizumi and Tanaka envisioned normalizing relations with Pyongyang within a month after the visit to avoid expected opposition from domestic critics and the United States.¹⁹ Even after domestic anti-North Korean sentiment increased, Koizumi remained interested in diplomatic normalization with North Korea. For instance, when announcing his support for US military actions in Iraq in March 2003, Koizumi only indirectly referred to threats from North Korea to justify Japan's position.²⁰ If Koizumi had abandoned the goal of diplomatic normalization with Pyongyang, he would likely have emphasized North Korean issues more fully, as the LDP and its coalition partners did during that period.²¹

Koizumi's first Pyongyang visit in September 2002 produced mixed results for Koizumi and other pragmatists in the Japanese government. First, the public overwhelmingly supported Koizumi's visit; according to an *Asahi Newspaper* poll conducted right after the visit, as many as 81 percent of respondents approved. In addition, the approval rating for the Koizumi cabinet jumped to 61 percent, a 10 point jump from the previous poll conducted about two weeks before his visit.²² On the other hand, the public was evidently shocked by Kim Jong Il's admission that North Korea had previously abducted Japanese citizens. In particular, the Japanese public was angered by North Korea's revelation that as many as eight of the abducted Japanese were dead, while only five remained alive.

¹⁸ Toshimitsu Shigemura, *Gaiko Haiboku* [Diplomatic Defeat] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2006). The Japanese government had been updating US officials about the existence of the secret channel with Pyongyang, but not about the possibility of Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang. Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, pp. 27–28; Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, pp. 116–123, 137–140. It is possible that Koizumi's unambiguous support for President George W. Bush after the September 11th attacks mitigated an otherwise strong US reaction to Koizumi's decision to visit Pyongyang without adequately coordinating with Washington. Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 4, 2003.

²¹ Marukusu Kyoichi, "Koizumi Seiken no Taiogaiko," in Sakurada Taizo and Ito Go, eds., *Hikaku Gaiko Seisaku* [Comparative Foreign Policy] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2004), pp. 52, 57, 61; Tomohito Shinoda, *Kantei Gaiko* (Prime Minister's Diplomacy) (Asahi Shimbun-sha, 2004.) pp. 73, 103–104.

²² *Asahi Shimbun*, September 20, 2002.

The *Asahi Shimbun* poll showed that 76 percent of respondents were not satisfied with North Korea’s handling of the abduction issue.²³ Furthermore, a *Yomiuri Newspaper* poll showed that 83.7 percent felt that Japan should be cautious in exploring diplomatic normalization with Pyongyang, and that as much as 90.6 percent of the public believed that the complete resolution of the abduction issue should be a pre-condition for normalizing relations with Pyongyang.²⁴ As these responses show, Koizumi regained public support for his administration, but made it more difficult for the Japanese government to take steps toward diplomatic normalization without first resolving the abduction issue. Also during this period, the United States revealed North Korea’s attempts to develop a nuclear weapon by producing highly enriched uranium (HEU), a clear violation of the Agreed Framework,²⁵ and the Bush administration further toughened its already hard attitude toward North Korea. Because of alliance obligations, this shift on the part of the Bush administration forced Japan to prioritize the North Korean nuclear problem in negotiations over diplomatic normalization between Tokyo and Pyongyang.

For this reason, the Japanese government supported the US-favored multilateral approach in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue; however, Japan had to ensure its own participation in the multilateral forum. When US Secretary of State Colin Powell met Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi in Tokyo on February 22, 2003, to discuss a multilateral approach to North Korea’s nuclear program, Kawaguchi proposed setting up a forum consisting of the United States, China, Russia, the two Koreas, and Japan. At that point, Kawaguchi asked Powell to make the proposal to China, predicting that Beijing and Pyongyang might be reluctant to go along with a plan proposed by Japan.²⁶ When Powell presented Beijing’s counter-proposal of a US–North Korea–China trilateral meeting, Tokyo relented, but demanded that it be included in subsequent multilateral meetings. Accordingly, the US government persuaded the Chinese government to include other concerned parties, including Japan, at the next session.²⁷

The first round of the Six-Party Talks was held from August 27 to 29, 2003. At the session, Japan conveyed demands similar to the CVID position held by the United States. Japan also expressed a willingness to provide economic assistance for North Korea, but clarified that it would do so after diplomatic normalization, which would be possible only with the resolution of other outstanding issues, including North Korea’s missile development

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 20, 2002.

²⁵ For more details, see Scott Snyder, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the US and Japan” in Yuki Tatsumi, ed., *North Korea: Challenge for the US-Japan Alliance* (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2011).

²⁶ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, pp. 436–438; *Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, p. 85.

²⁷ It is possible that Japan could exert more influence over Washington than otherwise around this time, when the United States was seeking international support for its prospective war against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The Japanese government had begun to consider how it could support the United States around the fall of 2002. Hideo Otake, *Koizumi Junichiro Popyurizumu no Kenkyu* [Research on Junichiro Koizumi’s Populism] (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai, 2006), pp. 182–183; *Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, Gaiko wo Kenkanishita Otoko*, pp. 155–157.

and the abduction issue.²⁸ At the same time, Japan seemed to maintain an attitude flexible enough to make the Six-Party Talks successful; when a Chinese representative at the Talks proposed to his Japanese counterpart that Tokyo and Beijing should work to influence Washington and Pyongyang respectively, the Japanese representative agreed that Tokyo would try to persuade Washington to effectively engage Pyongyang in the multilateral process.²⁹ Japan maintained this position at the second round of the Six-Party Talks in February 2004.

Stage Two: Hardening Domestic Audience and the Rise of Hardliners

Following Koizumi's first visit to Pyongyang in 2002, hardliners began to exert more influence over Japanese policy toward North Korea. They increased their clout by taking full advantage of a growing anti-North Korean domestic audience following the revelation of North Korean abductions. They harshly criticized pragmatists at the MOFA, Hitoshi Tanaka in particular, for what they described as a naïve approach to North Korea. The Japanese media, which was generally sympathetic toward the abductees and their families, also took a critical view of the MOFA for its earlier reluctance to take up the abduction issue. These circumstances allowed hardliners to exert their influence over policy toward North Korea.

The debate within the Japanese government over the five abductees returned to Japan proved a turning point in the power struggle between hardliners and pragmatists. After Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang, the five Japanese abductees whom North Korea acknowledged were still alive returned to Japan to visit their families on October 15, 2002. Although an agreement between Tokyo and Pyongyang mandated that the abductees return to North Korea after their short stay in Japan, debate over honoring the agreement sparked conflict within the Koizumi cabinet. In a meeting on October 24, 2003, Hitoshi Tanaka argued that Japan should honor the agreement, or it would risk betraying North Korea and making resolution of the abduction issue extremely difficult. Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe and Special Advisor to the Cabinet on the Abduction Issue Kyoko Nakayama disagreed, arguing that North Korea would not allow the abductees to return to Japan after going back to North Korea. They advocated allowing the abductees to remain in Japan and wait for families still in North Korea. Especially because all five abductees wished to remain in Japan, Koizumi decided to back the hardliner position. One insider commented that Koizumi's decision was inevitable, given that he would be forced to resign if the abductees had gone back to North Korea and never been able to return to Japan.³⁰

As the issue became politicized, the balance of power began to shift toward the hardliners. They also began initiatives outside the cabinet to pressure North Korea. In December 2002, Ichita Yamamoto (Member, House of Councillors), Taro Kono (Member, House of Representatives), and other LDP members began to discuss introducing a bill to amend the Foreign Exchange and Trade Act (FETA) to enable the Japanese government to unilaterally halt financial transactions with a designated foreign entity. They hoped that

²⁸ Yoshinori Kaseda, "Japan and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis," in Seung Ho Joo and Tae Hwan Kwak, eds., *North Korea's Second Nuclear Crisis and Northeast Asian Security* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p. 114; Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, p. 87.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–45.

such a measure would pressure North Korea to be more accommodating in negotiations with Japan. Although this initiative was sidelined for the first half of 2003 as the Diet focused on issues related to the war in Iraq, the prospect of its enactment became more promising when Shinzo Abe was appointed LDP Secretary-General in September 2003. Abe publicly emphasized the need to pressure North Korea on the abduction issue, and made it a campaign issue during the October 2003 general election. Other political parties followed the LDP line in order to avoid appearing soft on North Korea.³¹ Eventually, the amendment to FETA was approved in February 2004. By then, the abduction scandal had provoked so much anti-North Korea sentiment among the Japanese public that appearing soft on North Korea carried significant political risks.³²

Negotiations over Koizumi’s second visit to Pyongyang on May 22, 2004, demonstrated the extent to which pragmatists had been marginalized. Because the Japanese government had decided not to return the five abductees to North Korea, MOFA’s Tanaka and other pragmatists faced difficulties in reopening a dialogue with North Korea about bringing the abductees’ families in North Korea to Japan. Without informing the pragmatists, Koizumi opened another channel for negotiations with North Korea by letting his Chief Secretary Isao Iijima contact the *Chosen Soren* (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), an association virtually under Pyongyang’s control.³³ Through this channel, Koizumi learned that North Korea would allow the families of the abductees to come to Japan if he visited Pyongyang again, and ordered Tanaka to confirm this officially. Tanaka and Fukuda, who had repeatedly asked Koizumi if he had had alternate channels of communication with North Korea, felt betrayed, but had no choice except to follow Koizumi’s orders. Koizumi’s second visit was scheduled for May 22, 2004. Soon after making plans for the visit, Fukuda resigned from the Chief Cabinet Secretary position. Although the official reason given for his resignation was his failure to pay past pension contributions, a hot topic in media and among the public at that time, his decision was clearly influenced at least in part by the bitterness he felt about Koizumi’s handling of negotiations with North Korea.³⁴

In the first half of 2004, Koizumi still seemed interested in pursuing diplomatic normalization with North Korea. During his second visit to Pyongyang, he expressed to Kim Jong Il his desire to make the visit a turning point in Japan–North Korea diplomatic normalization talks, and insisted that North Korea abandon its nuclear weapons program. He also assured Kim Jong Il that Japan would not impose economic sanctions, which had become legally possible as the result of the FETA amendments.³⁵ In addition, Japan slightly softened its approach at the third round of the Six-Party Talks, which began on June 23, 2004. Japan maintained its position on nuclear and other issues, but expressed its willingness to take part in energy assistance to North Korea if Pyongyang agreed to abandon its nuclear programs.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 48–50.

³² According to a *Yomiuri Newspaper* poll, 78 percent approved the passage of the amended FETA. In addition, 74.6 percent was dissatisfied with the handling of the abduction issue by the Japanese government, which was deemed reluctant to use economic sanctions against North Korea. *Yomiuri Newspaper*, February 26, 2004.

³³ Again, he had political reasons to seek the resolution of the abduction issue; the Upper House election was expected in July 2004, and Iijima clearly had in mind that the government needed some achievements. *Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, p. 60.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 56–64.

³⁵ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 97.

Koizumi also suggested to President Bush that the United States show its commitment to address North Korean concerns by negotiating with North Korea. Charles (Jack) Pritchard, a former special envoy for negotiations with North Korea during the Bush administration, commented that Koizumi’s influence on Bush led to a softening of the US approach at the third round of the Six-Party Talks.³⁶

Stage Three: Hardliners Prevail

By the end of 2004, however, North Korea’s response to the abduction issue made the prospect of improvement in Japan–North Korea relations even dimmer than before Koizumi’s second visit. Although North Korea and Japan began bilateral talks to resolve their outstanding issues in August 2004, no progress was made on the abduction issue. In the third round of bilateral talks in November 2004, North Korea handed over the remains of two of the abductees whom North Korea claimed had died. However, DNA testing conducted in Japan revealed that the remains did not match any of the abductees, showing North Korea’s insincerity. This revelation caused uproar among the Japanese public and media, and the pressure to impose economic sanctions on North Korea became intense. The Koizumi cabinet was criticized for its reluctance to use economic “sticks” against Pyongyang.³⁷

Given the political context, it is remarkable that important progress was achieved at the Six-Party Talks. At the fourth round of Six-Party Talks held in September 2005, the six parties reached the “Agreed Statement of Principles” concerning the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. The statement was issued on September 19. This was significant for the Japanese government not just because of the agreement itself but also because of its policy implications for Japan. The joint statement stipulated that North Korea, as well as Japan, should “take steps to normalize [bilateral] relations in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, on the basis of the settlement of unfortunate past and the outstanding issue of concern.”³⁸ This meant that North Korea’s duties under the Pyongyang Declaration, including the obligation to resolve the abduction issue (“the outstanding issue of concern” in the joint statement), were “multilateralized.” At the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks from November 9 to 11, 2005, Japan proposed the creation of two working groups, one on the nuclear problem and the other on energy and economic assistance. However, because of US unilateral financial sanctions imposed on Banco Delta Asia (BDA), which was accused of money laundering for North Korea, North Korea refused to return to the Six-Party Talks, and negotiations were stalled.

Without significant progress on either the nuclear or the abduction issue, the Japanese government had no choice but to start increasing economic pressure on North Korea. Around February 2006, Japan began to consider implementing its own version of financial sanctions. The LDP also began to consider enacting a Japanese version of the North Korea Human Rights Act around the same time, so that Japan could impose additional economic sanctions (the bill was ultimately enacted in June 2006). At the same time, the Japanese government tried to get stronger US commitment on the abduction issue. In April 2006, Shigeru and Sakie Yokota, the parents of Megumi Yokota, who is among one of the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 96–97, 100; Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Gaiko wo Kenka nishita Otoko*, pp. 91–101.

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), *Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks*. September 19, 2005. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/6party/joint0509.html

abductees identified by North Korea as dead, met President George W. Bush at the White House and directly asked him to continue pressuring North Korea by keeping it on the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism. By soliciting US support, Japan hoped to increase pressure on North Korea and, although it was never stated explicitly, to reduce the risk of US unilateral compromise with North Korea.³⁹ The rise of Shinzo Abe, who claimed national fame for his hardline view toward North Korea, as the Chief Cabinet Secretary in October 2005, was presumably an important factor behind these initiatives.

North Korea conducted missile tests on July 5, 2006, in this tense political climate. Infuriated by Pyongyang’s actions, the Japanese government unilaterally announced nine countermeasures, including banning the *Man Gyong Bong 92*, a North Korean vessel long suspected of carrying goods and money from Japan to North Korea, from entering Japanese ports. Furthermore, Japan presented a draft binding resolution, based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, to the closed unofficial UN Security Council meeting, requiring UN member states to impose additional economic sanctions on North Korea. When the UN resolution stopped short of implementing sanctions as harsh as those Japan had originally proposed, Japan imposed additional financial sanctions based on the revised FETA on September 19, 2006.⁴⁰

The Japanese government reacted even more strongly to North Korea’s first nuclear test, conducted on October 9, 2006. Under the leadership of Shinzo Abe, who succeeded Junichiro Koizumi as the prime minister in September 2006, Japan took an even tougher stance than the United States in condemning Pyongyang’s actions. Japan also submitted a proposal to the UNSC that would ban virtually all economic transactions between North Korea and UN member states.⁴¹ When the UNSC failed to adopt the proposed measures, Japan again implemented them unilaterally. Japan also began to intensify defense and military buildup in response to North Korea’s missile and nuclear tests. In July 2006, the Japanese government decided to accelerate the construction of its ballistic missile defense system. This acceleration continues today; the Ministry of Defense plans to complete the deployment of 16 units of PAC-3 missiles and the installment of SM-3 missiles for four Aegis fleets by 2011.⁴²

In addition, hardliners in the Japanese government argued that Japan should beef up its military posture to address North Korea’s missile and nuclear threats. Soon after the missile tests, both then Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe and then Foreign Minister Taro Aso publicly argued for acquiring military capabilities to conduct preemptive air strikes against missile facilities. After the October 2006 nuclear test, hardliner Shoichi Nakagawa, then Chairman of the Policy Research Council of the LDP, and Foreign Minister Aso publicly advocated beginning “discuss[ion]” of a nuclear Japan.⁴³

Japan’s aforementioned military buildup and hardliners’ arguments to radically expand military capabilities reflected the shock and anger felt by the Japanese public. North

³⁹ Mr. & Ms. Yokota also met Vice President Dick Cheney in Tokyo in February 2007.

⁴⁰ Kaseda, “Japan and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis,” pp. 123–124.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–126.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 125; Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan*, 2008 (Tokyo: Government of Japan), p. 140; Christopher W. Hughes, “‘Super-Sizing’ the DPRK Threat: Japan’s Evolving Military Posture and North Korea,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLIX, No. 2 (March/April 2009), p. 308.

⁴³ Kaseda, “Japan and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis,” p. 125.

Korean provocations also made it easier for Tokyo to enhance its military cooperation with the United States, which might have otherwise been politically difficult. Japan’s decision to accelerate the deployment of the ballistic missile defense system was a decision which promoted bilateral defense cooperation. In fact, those who desired closer US–Japan defense cooperation likely felt that the introduction of the ballistic missile defense system would push Japanese government action on the issue of collective self-defense. Under the Japanese government’s interpretation of Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution, Japan possesses the right of collective self-defense but cannot use force to defend an ally. This limitation clearly poses a problem for the US–Japan alliance, as Japan cannot militarily support the United States unless it is also attacked. Prime Minister Abe created an advisory group to review this issue in May 2006, and the group quickly concluded that the existing interpretation could be revised. Thanks in part to North Korea’s actions and the resulting anti-North Korean sentiments, the advisory group’s conclusion caused little domestic criticism. It is also important to note that Japan reached the aforementioned decision without directly referring to the threat of rising China, although many of Japan’s most recent defense policy decisions have been made with security concerns posed by China in mind.⁴⁴ In this sense, North Korea provided a convenient cover that enabled Tokyo to strengthen its military posture while making it difficult for Beijing to protest.

Stage Four: Left Alone—Japan’s Lone Wolf Position after US Policy Shift

To the dismay of Japanese hardliners, the United States began to soften its attitude toward North Korea just as Japan began to harden its position after North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006. US and North Korean diplomats met in Beijing on October 31, 2006, and agreed to discuss the US financial sanctions imposed against BDA. On January 17 and 18, 2007, US Representative at the Six-Party Talks Christopher Hill met his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye Gwan in Berlin, and they reached a basic agreement on the BDA issue and how to resume the Six-Party Talks.⁴⁵ At the third session of the fifth Six-Party Talks on February 13, 2007, the parties all agreed on initial actions for the implementation of the Agreement on Principles issued on September 19, 2005. According to the agreement, in exchange for shutting down and sealing the Yongbyong nuclear facility, North Korea would receive 50,000 tons of heavy oil provided by other parties. In addition, the United States promised to “begin the process of removing the designation of the DPRK as a state-sponsor of terrorism” and to take steps toward full diplomatic normalization.⁴⁶

Japan showed its uneasiness about the implementation of the agreement even before the compromise was completed. At the second session of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks, which began on December 18, 2006, the Japanese representative announced that the abduction issue was “the most important agenda” for the Abe cabinet and asked the other parties to understand its significance for Tokyo. To show its resolve, Japan refused to take part in the provision of heavy oil to North Korea despite the agreement of February 13,

⁴⁴ Hughes, “‘Super-Sizing’ the DPRK Threat,” pp. 303–305.

⁴⁵ Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), pp. 318–321.

⁴⁶ MOFA, *Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement*. February 13, 2007. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/6party/action0702.html (accessed on March 6, 2010.)

2007.⁴⁷ At the same time, Tokyo succeeded in establishing a working group on Japan–North Korea normalization talks within the Six-Party Talks, and thus embedding the bilateral normalization process in the multilateral Six-Party process. By so doing, Tokyo increased its leverage at the Six-Party process, ensuring that the other four parties would have a stake in the Japan–North Korea bilateral normalization. Because Japan insisted on the resolution of the abduction issue as a precondition for normalization, this development guaranteed that other nations would be unable to ignore the problem.⁴⁸

The United States government decided to remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism on October 11, 2008. In response, the Japanese government under Prime Minister Taro Aso issued a statement directly quoting President Bush’s assertion that he “maintained a strong sentiment on the abduction issue and understood Japanese people’s strong concerns and uneasiness” on the issue.⁴⁹ Dismay and anger toward the United States was evident among both hardliners and the Japanese public. Then Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa, for instance, said that Chris Hill “suffers from Stockholm Syndrome,” warning that the United States might be fooled by North Korea as it had been in the 1994 Agreed Framework.⁵⁰ Media and public opinion surveys also indicated that anti-US sentiment noticeably increased in Japan.⁵¹

Japan continued to opt out of the second phase of energy assistance for North Korea. In refusing to provide heavy oil, Japan tried to gain leverage vis-à-vis North Korea and the other four parties by increasing the cost for the other four nations. Furthermore, Tokyo’s hard-line attitude on the issue indicated that it would refuse to provide North Korea with any economic aid, one of the most important incentives for Pyongyang in the Six-Party process.⁵² While Tokyo expected its position to force the other four nations to cooperate in resolving the abduction issue, the United States feared that the Japanese position could cause Pyongyang to lose interest in the Six-Party process.

Despite the change of government in Tokyo, Japan’s position on North Korea remains unchanged as of this writing, while North Korea has refused to return to the Six-Party Talks. The Obama administration has emphasized its recognition of the abduction issue’s importance in Japan. It appears that the administration has put a priority on policy coordination with Tokyo and Seoul and refrained from making unilateral concessions to North Korea in an effort to revive the Six-Party process. In contrast, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government appears relieved that the Six-Party process has stalled, allowing it to avoid difficult policy decisions.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ A similar view is expressed by Sato, “A Japanese Perspective on North Korea,” p. 77.

⁴⁹ MOFA, *Nakasone Gaimu Daijin Danwa: Beikoku ni yoru Kitachosen Tero Shien Kokka Shitei Kaijo ni tsuite* [Statement by Foreign Minister Nakasone: Regarding US de-listing of North Korea as a State Sponsor of Terrorism] October 20, 2008. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/20/dnk_1012.html

⁵⁰ Quoted in Linus Hagstrom, “Normalizing Japan: Supporter, Nuisance, or Wielder of Power in the North Korean Nuclear Talks,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLIX, No. 5 (September/October 2009), p. 845.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 845. A *Yomiuri Newspaper* poll showed that 80 percent of those surveyed felt uncomfortable with the US intention to “de-list” North Korea from the list of state sponsor of terrorism. *Yomiuri Newspaper*, July 15, 2008. The poll was conducted after President Bush expressed to the US Congress his intent to de-list North Korea from the list of state sponsor of terrorism.

⁵² Hagstrom, “Normalizing Japan,” pp. 839–847.

Conclusion: Lessons learned

Reflecting on the evolution of Japan’s North Korea policy during the last decade, it is difficult not to point out the irony in Japan’s policy drift. When Koizumi visited Pyongyang in September 2002, he and fellow pragmatists aimed to normalize relations with North Korea. By offering the “carrot” of diplomatic normalization, they expected to resolve outstanding disputes such as the abduction issue. Even after the second North Korean nuclear crisis dramatically raised tensions between North Korea and Japan, Koizumi continued to pursue diplomatic normalization by seeking comprehensive resolution of nuclear and other issues by utilizing the Six-Party process. However, as the abduction issue became the primary focus of the Japanese public and media, addressing this issue became at least as significant as the nuclear issue in Japan. At this point, Japan’s means-ends calculation seems to have been completely reversed. That is, Japan–North Korea diplomatic normalization became a mere tool for Japan to resolve the abduction issue, and the Six-Party process has become the forum in which Japan hopes to wield its leverage over North Korea and the other four parties to resolve the abduction issue.

This situation begs the following two questions. The first question is how Japan views the Pyongyang Declaration now. Despite North Korea’s breach of the Pyongyang Declaration by conducting several missile and two nuclear tests, the Japanese government is still reluctant to see it nullified, as it provides the only mechanism to address the missile and abduction issues through negotiation on diplomatic normalization.⁵³

The second question is whether Japan still has a stake in the success of the Six-Party Talks. As long as the Six-Party process is stalled, Japanese political leaders will not have to face the difficult problem of reconciling Japan’s position on the abduction issue with the need to resolve North Korea’s nuclear problems. However, given that the Six-Party Talks allow Japan to exert the most influence compared to its position in any other forum, and that Japan cannot unilaterally resolve most of the issues it has with North Korea, Japan’s interests are well served by continuing the talks.⁵⁴ If the Six-Party Talks seem likely to collapse, especially if they are threatened by Japan’s persistence in the abduction issue, Tokyo will be forced to make a very tough political choice.

Several lessons can be drawn from the observation and analysis of Japan’s policy toward North Korea in this chapter. First, it is undeniable that North Korea served as a catalyst for strengthening the US–Japan alliance; North Korea posed serious threats to Japan, and Tokyo became more willing to reinforce its commitment to the alliance as a result. Threats from North Korea also served as a convenient justification, or political cover, for Tokyo to take the difficult political steps needed to strengthen US–Japan military ties. However, whether or not the North Korean threat will turn out to be beneficial for long-term US–

⁵³ For instance, Japan expressed in the North Korea–Japanese bilateral negotiations in September 2008, well after North Korea’s first nuclear test, its desire to resolve all the outstanding issues and to normalize relations in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration. MOFA, *Niccho Jitsumusha Kyogi no Naiyou* [Japan–DPRK Working Level Meeting] August, 2008. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/n_korea/abd/jitsumu0808_gai.html. (accessed on April 29, 2010).

⁵⁴ The prospect of the Six-Party Talks’ failure is all the more problematic because other parties can use other formulas; the United States can have bilateral negotiation with North Korea, and China and South Korea can expect to be included in the Four-Party formula to discuss peace regime in the Korean Peninsula.

Japan relations remains to be seen. North Korean problems allowed Japanese politicians to avoid educating the Japanese public about the implications of their decisions regarding Japan’s alliance with the United States. As a consequence, the perception gap between policy elites and the public about the US–Japan alliance and Japan’s responsibility to the partnership seems to have widened. While policy elites generally understand that decisions by the Japanese government on such issues as the deployment of ballistic missile defense system require closer military coordination between Tokyo and Washington, ordinary Japanese people remain generally uninformed even of the rationale for the presence of US troops in Japan.

Second, Japan’s policy dependence on the United States is striking. “Policy dependence” in this context refers not only to Japan’s overall security dependence on the United States but also to its dependence on the United States in resolving specific North Korean problems, including the abduction issue. As explained above, Japan is unable to achieve various goals for the future of North Korea on its own, and it must rely on other nations, the United States in particular, to satisfy its strategic and political interests. This weakness explains Japan’s preference for a multilateral approach and its close coordination with the United States. Regardless, precisely because of its policy dependence on the United States, Japanese leaders felt betrayed when the United States agreed during bilateral negotiations to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Since then, Japan has channeled its frustrations into appeals to the United States to pressure North Korea on the abduction issue. Ironically, this example is yet another testament to Japan’s policy dependence on the United States.

Finally, while North Korean problems motivated Japan to strengthen its relations with the United States, they have also reminded Japan of the necessity of seeking diplomatic initiatives independent of US influence. This trend began with Koizumi’s decision to pursue diplomatic normalization with North Korea, one of the few times Japan has attempted to launch its own diplomatic initiative. Also, Japan’s use of the Six-Party process to pressure North Korea on the abduction issue may have reminded Tokyo for the first time since World War II that it does not have to play nice to exert its influence. Indeed, the Japanese government has been surprisingly willing to take sometimes extreme measures that might have endangered the success of the Six-Party Talks in order to resolve the abduction issue. While Japan will continue to embrace the alliance with the United States as the cornerstone of its security policy, North Korean problems will likely serve as a new reference point for future Japanese decision makers who hope to increase Japan’s ability to act independently of the United States

Chapter Three

Japan–US Cooperation on North Korea: Regional Perspectives

Katsuhisa Furukawa

Introduction

As noted by James A. Kelly, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, the various interactions that took place within the context of the Six-Party Talks “offer many examples of the same observers coming away with wildly different assessments,” which is “one reason why the problem [of North Korea] is not solved after so many years.”¹

The Six-Party Talks are designed to achieve a multilateral agreement on the denuclearization of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea). Indeed, quite often during the course of the Six-Party process, there has not necessarily been a unitary/unilateral actor of “the United States,” or “Japan.” The nations involved in the Six-Party talks all have various players with differing goals within themselves, and these players, as well as their objectives, have changed over time. It has also become clear that the participating countries have shifted their national objectives and/or priorities during the course of the Six-Party Talks through interactions with others.

Japan–US cooperation has often been considered essential in addressing the challenges of North Korea’s nuclear weapon program. Indeed, the Japanese government regards the Japan–US relationship as the most important partnership among the various bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral relationships within the Six-Party Talks. This chapter will address the extent to which this claim can be validated.

Since the beginning of the Six-Party Talks, Japanese and American policymakers and negotiators have cooperated closely in order to achieve a multilateral consensus in policy toward North Korea. However, the influence of Japan–US cooperation in shaping major Six-Party agreements has been somewhat contested. Over the past several years, the impact of Japan–US cooperation seems to have varied depending upon the circumstances surrounding the Six-Party Talks. This chapter will evaluate the influence of the Japan–US relationship over the course of the Six-Party Talks. It will also examine how other participants in the Six-Party Talks view the Japan–US relationship. It will conclude with future prospects for this bilateral relationship in advancing regional cooperation for addressing North Korean challenges.

¹ James A. Kelly, “Six-Party Tales”, *The American Interest*, May–June 2008. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=433> (accessed on June 15, 2010)

Influence of the Japan-US Alliance in the Six-Party Process

Koizumi Administration: April 2001–September 2006

The Japan–US relationship reached a peak during the administration of Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. The perception of a strong Japan–US bilateral relationship was certainly important in persuading North Korea to join the Six-Party Talks. At that time, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il wanted to improve North Korea’s relationship with the United States and hoped that Japan, a strong US ally, might mediate negotiations.

The Japan–US bilateral cooperation in this period depended heavily upon the close personal relationship between Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and President George W. Bush. Therefore, once Koizumi left the office, bilateral cooperation within the framework of the Six-Party Talks became less effective. Instead, China has come to assume a leading role in the Six-Party process by leveraging its ability to directly communicate with North Korea as Japan–DPRK relations deteriorated after Pyongyang admitted to the abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s. The ability of the Japan–US alliance to advance the Six-Party Talks has also been affected by the personnel changes in key positions in both governments.

Between 2002 and 2003, Japan and North Korea enjoyed a relatively smooth bilateral relationship. This was possible due to several factors, including North Korea’s anxiety vis-à-vis the United States over the Second Gulf War in Iraq, and North Korea’s perception of the strengthening Japan–US alliance. According to then Japanese chief negotiator with North Korea Hitoshi Tanaka, it seemed that Kim Jong Il expected Japan to play the role of mediator between the DPRK and the United States,² suggesting that Kim thought that a strong Japan–US relationship could be instrumental in improving Pyongyang’s relationship with the United States.

The September 2002 Japan–DPRK Summit in Pyongyang contributed to paving the way for the Six-Party Talks. During this summit, Junichiro Koizumi persuaded Kim Jong Il to resume discussions with the United States and proposed the establishment of the Six-Party Talks.³ About half of the Summit meeting was devoted to a discussion of North Korea’s nuclear weapon program⁴ in order to alleviate the concerns expressed by the United States prior to Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang that Japan might pursue normalizing its relationship with the DPRK if the latter compromised on the issue of the Japanese abductees despite a lack of progress in the concerns over North Korea’s nuclear program.⁵ After the Japan–DPRK summit, Koizumi attempted to fulfill his role as mediator, persuading US President Bush to initiate talks with North Korea. President Bush responded by sending Assistant Secretary James A. Kelly to North Korea.⁶ Kelly’s visit, however, ended up worsening the US–DPRK relationship after North Korea admitted to developing a highly enriched uranium (HEU) program.

² Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2006), pp. 110–111.

³ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 54.

⁴ NHK Special, “*Hiroku Nicchou Koushou* (Classified Record of Japan-North Korea Negotiation)”, November 18, 2009. <http://www.nhk.or.jp/special/onair/091108.html> (accessed on February 23, 2010)

⁵ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 110.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Even at the height of the Japan–US relationship, however, Japan and the United States clashed on several occasions. For example, during a Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) meeting in November 2002, a few months after the Japan–DPRK Summit meeting, the negotiators from Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) questioned the validity of the US claim that North Korea had an HEU program.⁷ At that time, the Japanese negotiators sided with their South Korean counterparts in criticizing the United States, questioning the quality of US intelligence about North Korea’s HEU program.

Before the Six-Party Talks, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) worried that the initiation of the Six-Party Talks might undermine the Japan–ROK–US relationship and disrupt consultation in the TCOG.⁸ In fact, even prior to the Six-Party Talks, the Japanese and American participants felt that their South Korean counterparts were beginning to distance themselves from the trilateral relationship.⁹ This divide was likely caused by South Korean concerns over China’s unfavorable attitude towards Japan–ROK–US solidarity. Disagreements between Washington and Seoul grew over the intelligence assessments of North Korea’s HEU program, as well as the demand for North Korea’s comprehensive, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of its nuclear programs. The consultation within TCOG was essentially terminated in June 2003, and subsequently replaced by the Six-Party Talks. At the talks, the relative unity between Japan, the United States and South Korea dissolved, exactly as Japanese diplomats had worried.

Even after the TCOG dissolved, Japan consistently emphasized the importance of a strong US–ROK relationship. For example, during the period leading up to the third round of the Six-Party Talks in 2004, US negotiators consulted Misoji Yabunata, then Japanese chief negotiator in the Six-Party Talks, about drafting a US–ROK joint proposal for the upcoming Six-Party Talks out of concern that Japan might feel excluded. On the contrary, Yabunata wholeheartedly supported the proposal, explaining that, “Japan is grateful that the United States and South Korea work together... We are not worried about the US–ROK joint work (that it might leave out Japan).”¹⁰

At the outset of negotiations with North Korea, Japan viewed normalization with the DPRK as proof that the Japan had come to terms with its own history.¹¹ However, with the revelation that the DPRK had abducted Japanese citizens, Japan began to push North Korea to confront its own past as a precondition for normalization. Hence, the abduction issue has become a major roadblock to Japan–DPRK normalization talks. Lacking its own leverage, Japan came to rely on US support in pressing North Korea to disclose more information about the abductees. Henceforth, Japan’s focus on the abduction issue has on many occasions been viewed by other parties to the Six-Party Talks as an impediment to making progress with the North.

Moreover, as the United States faced significant difficulties in Iraq, North Korea became increasingly less concerned about military intervention by the United States. Thus, the perception of waning US power, as well as Japan’s persistent prioritization of the abduction

⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

⁸ Ibid., p. 666.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 668–669.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 575–576.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

issue, made the Japan–US alliance markedly less influential in the context of the Six-Party Talks. Furthermore, despite a friendship with Bush, Koizumi was unable to persuade the US to initiate high-level bilateral talks with the DPRK after Kelly’s visit to the DPRK. There was a clear limitation on what the personal relationship was able to achieve.

Post-Koizumi LDP administrations: October 2006–September 2009

After Koizumi’s retirement, his successors enjoyed far more distant relationships with Bush. The three Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) prime ministers following Koizumi—Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Taro Aso—all left office after less than a year, generating a sense of political instability. The weak political leadership in Tokyo undermined Japan’s bilateral relationship with the United States. With personal relationships between the top leaders no longer in place, tension between Japan and the United States over the approach to North Korea surfaced during President Bush’s second term.

In the United States, key conservative national security figures left the government after the Republican Party lost in the November 2006 congressional election. With retirees including the proponents of a hard-line approach vis-à-vis North Korea (such as US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) John Bolton), the power balance within the Bush administration shifted in favor of those who argued in support of negotiation with the DPRK.

In early 2007, the US government dramatically altered its strategy toward the North Korea and began to vigorously pursue an agreement to freeze Pyonyang’s plutonium program. While the United States continued to officially support Japan’s efforts to resolve the abduction issue, Japan’s emphasis on the abductions constrained the United States from offering an attractive “carrot” for North Korea in return for suspending its nuclear programs.

Worse yet, the chief US negotiator Christopher Hill kept Japan largely in the dark about the progress of the negotiations with North Korea. He quickly became notorious among Japanese diplomats, and was frequently criticized for being “too soft” on the DPRK (eventually, the frustration toward Hill intensified so much that he came to be referred to as “Kim Jong Hill” by some in Japan.) Japan was especially unhappy with the US decision to remove North Korea from the state sponsors of terrorism list, a move perceived by Japan as the United States making a compromise despite a lack of progress on the abduction issue. In addition, Hill’s “Machiavellian technique of the classic deal-maker” provoked frustration not only from Japan but from within the United States as well.¹² For instance, then US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer was frustrated by Hill’s decision not to inform the US Embassy in Tokyo about his communication with the DPRK.¹³

These frustrations lasted beyond Hill’s tenure. According to one senior official in the Obama administration, “The most important piece we inherited [from the Bush administration was] the very bad feelings from the Japanese and South Koreans, a kind of personal distrust and anger directed at Chris Hill that made it very difficult to move forward.”¹⁴ Another Obama advisor explained that “[Hill] first negotiated with North Korea, then talked to the Chinese,

¹² Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), p. 369.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

and only then consulted the allies. Obama felt it needed to be the other way around.”¹⁵ In short, the formerly intimate relationship between the top leaders of Japan and the United States was replaced by personal distrust and anger at a lower level. This experience clearly demonstrates the significant influence of the personalities in key positions over the entire bilateral relationship.

To be sure, the positions of both Japan and the United States were reflected to a significant extent in almost all the agreements and/or statements that came out of the Six-Party Talks. Christopher Hill strove to incorporate the Japanese positions into these statements. Even so, the Japan–US relationship during this period was characterized by the *general perception* that relations between Tokyo and Washington were deteriorating. This perception was especially emphasized by the conservative voices in both countries pushing for a more punitive posture vis-à-vis North Korea.

Overall, throughout the Six-Party Talks, Japan pursued tough positions toward the North but became rather marginalized in the end. On many occasions, Japan’s claims for attention toward the abduction issue received only reluctant support (or even objections) from the United States, China, or South Korea during the course of the Six-Party Talks.

Similarly, Japan–US agreements on tough sanction measures against North Korea were often offset by subsequent US–China consultations. For example, after North Korea conducted a ballistic missile test in July 2006, Japan and the United States agreed to pursue strict sanctions vis-à-vis North Korea by issuing a binding UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter. According to then Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, when Japan initially argued for creating a tough-worded UNSCR, the United States seemed suspicious that Japan might compromise when pressured by China and South Korea.¹⁶ After Japan convinced the United States of its commitment to a tough resolution, the two governments jointly submitted a draft resolution. China and Russia, on the other hand, were adamantly opposed to any mention of Chapter Seven as well as to the sweeping sanctions in the submitted draft. In the end, the United States agreed with the Chinese and Russian positions and references to Chapter Seven and to sweeping sanctions were dropped in what was eventually adopted as UNSCR 1695.¹⁷ Reportedly, the United States prioritized bringing the DPRK to the negotiating table and was not enthusiastic about supporting Japan’s tough position, creating a posture gap between the two governments.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 374–375.

¹⁶ Official website of Taro Aso, “Taepodong”, August 2006. http://www.aso-taro.jp/lecture/kama/2006_8.html (accessed on August 11, 2010)

¹⁷ Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp. 282–287. Additionally, according to Chinoy, the original draft proposed by China and Russia stated that the UNSC “calls upon” North Korea to halt its missile activities and “urges” member states to prevent the transfer of technology or material that would help the DPRK WMD programs. Eventually, China and Russia agreed to tougher language on the specific sanctions using the much stronger terms “demands” and “requires.” Instead, however, the reference to Chapter Seven was dropped, and sanctions were not obliged upon the member states. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also agreed to drop the original Japan-US backed reference that (the UN Security Council demands) that the DPRK suspend “development, testing, deployment and proliferation of ballistic missiles,” using instead the milder language of “all activities related to its ballistic missile program.”

¹⁸ For example, see, “*Kitachousen Anpori Ketsugian, Kawasareta Souki Saitaku* (A Swift Adoption of A Draft UN Security Council Resolution was Turned Aside),” *Asahi Shimbun* (web), July 12, 2006. <http://www2.asahi.com/special/060705/TKY200607120077.html> (accessed on August 11, 2010)

Similarly, after North Korea conducted another ballistic missile test in April 2009, Japan and the United States again agreed to pursue a new UNSCR to condemn North Korea, which China and Russia opposed. After bilateral US consultation with China and Russia, the United States decided to consult Japan and South Korea in order to come up with a compromise in the form of a new UN Security Council Chairman’s Statement instead of adopting a resolution. Eventually, the idea of a new UNSCR was dropped. Japan’s tough position was not taken into consideration.

These events were widely seen in Japan as validation of the widespread perception that the Japan–US relationship was deteriorating relative to the improvement of the US–China relationship. Although the Japanese government emphasized that they were sufficient to achieve Japan’s objectives even though these outcomes were not perfect, the Japanese public saw the resulting agreements as a failure of Japanese diplomacy.

In reality, Japan–US interactions accounted for only a fraction of the bilateral and multilateral talks that took place within the Six-Party Talks. At times, the five parties became unified and jointly pressed North Korea to honor its commitment to denuclearization as previously agreed upon in prior Six-Party Talks.¹⁹ From time to time, Japan also chose to coordinate on various issues with China and South Korea rather than with the United States in order to find ways to reach a multilateral agreement. According to one Chinese diplomat, the Six-Party Talks revealed cultural conflict between the United States on one side and Japan, China, and South Korea on the other; while the Asian nations tried to resolve problems by leaving some ambiguity in the agreements when necessary, the United States tried to spell out every legal detail.²⁰

Japan–US bilateral coordination was also necessary in order to seek a way to deal with hard-line views in each country when shaping a multilateral agreement. All in all, the multilateral interplay among the nations in the Six-Party Talks is more complex in reality than what has been generally assumed.

Administrations of the Democratic Party of Japan (September 2009–present)

In September 2009, a new administration led by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was inaugurated in Japan, ending the LDP’s five decade-long dominance. The Hatoyama administration adopted the principle of “*seiji shudo*” (politicians’ leadership), which meant that political leaders would tell the bureaucrats to follow their guidance, as opposed to the traditional governance style where the political leaders respected the proposals and advice from the bureaucrats. For this reason, many bureaucrats became cautious about making new proposals or advising political leadership without requests from political authorities. This situation created a discontinuity in institutional memory within the Japanese government since political leaders began to make decision without seeking information about the background of existing policy.

This problem is perhaps clearest in the Hatoyama administration’s mishandling of the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma. Hatoyama, who has advocated

¹⁹ Chinoy, *Meltdown*, p. 324.

²⁰ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 587.

“*churyu naki anpo*” (Japan–US security system without basing), made a promise during the election campaign in the summer of 2009 that the relocation of MCAS Futenma would be “at least outside Okinawa.” Even after he assumed office, he did not heed the advice of bureaucrats involved in the original Japan–US agreement on the relocation of MCAS Futenma, and continued to argue for the relocation of the Futenma base outside Okinawa without sufficiently understanding the deterrence function performed by US Marines.²¹ The tension his mishandling of this issue brought to the Japan–US alliance showcased Hatoyama’s incompetence in governance, lost him public trust, and forced Hatoyama to resign after being in the office for a mere nine months. The relocation of MCAS Futenma remains one of the most significant alliance management issues in the Japan–US alliance to this day. The current DPJ administration led by Prime Minister Naoto Kan has demonstrated a more pragmatic approach in its conduct of foreign and national security policy than that led by Hatoyama. However, since the DPJ lost in the national Upper House election in July 2010, public support for the Kan administration has continued to decrease, leaving him with little room to tackle challenging foreign policy issues.

In general, Japanese prime ministers in post-Koizumi Japan have been weak. Politics have become highly volatile, making it almost impossible for any Japanese leader to craft new initiatives toward North Korea. For instance, similar to the previous LDP administrations, both the Hatoyama and Kan administrations have continued to emphasize the importance of the abduction issue in Japan–DPRK relations. Hiroshi Nakai, Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission and coordinator for governmental efforts on the abduction issue under Hatoyama, is known to have a hard-line view on North Korea. Under Prime Minister Kan, the Japanese government tightened controls on sending money to North Korea in May 2010.²² Japan has also enacted legislation that would enable the Japan Coast Guard to inspect North Korean cargo ships in international waters to enforce the UNSCR 1874. Unsurprisingly, the DPRK is unhappy with Japan’s continued hard-line position, and has repeatedly demanded that Japan be excluded from the Six-Party Talks.

North Korea has also escalated its actions beyond mere rhetoric and initiated a string of provocative acts last year. They included a torpedo attack on the South Korean warship *Cheonan* in the West Sea that killed 46 South Korean servicemen in March 2010, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010. With each incident, Japan and the United States have solidified their support for South Korea. Such efforts were demonstrated by coordinated Japan–US efforts to persuade China and Russia to support the ROK position at the UN Security Council to condemn the *Cheonan* attack, as well as the Japan–US–ROK foreign ministers meeting in December 2010 in the aftermath of the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island.

²¹ Remarks by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama during his visit to Okinawa on May 4, 2010. See, “*Shushou Houchuu: Hatoyama Shushou Burasagari Intabyu* [Prime Minister’s Visit to Okinawa: Standing Interview with Hatoyama],” *Sankei Shimbun*, May 4, 2010.

²² The cap on undeclared transfers has been lowered to 3 million yen from 10 million yen, and the cap on undeclared cash that can be carried to North Korea has been lowered to 100,000 yen from 300,000 yen. See, Takashi Hirokawa and Sachiko Sakamaki, “Japan Tightens Controls on Sending Cash to North Korea,” *Bloomberg*, May 28, 2010. <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-05-28/japan-tightens-control-on-sending-cash-to-north-korea-update3-.html> (accessed on August 11, 2010); “*Seifu, Tai Kita Tsuika Seisai wo Kettei, Kamotsu Kensa Tokusohou mo Seiritsu* [Government Decided on Additional Sanctions toward North Korea; The Special Legislation to Inspect North Korean Cargos Has Also Been Enacted],” *Sankei News*, May 28, 2010.

The DPJ administrations have made efforts to improve Japan’s relationship with the ROK, stressing the importance of Japan–ROK partnership with a view toward constructing the East Asia Community.²³ Meanwhile, the Obama administration views Asia as the primary engine of the global economy but also as a major source of security challenges and thus, highly values its close relationships with US allies in this region. At the same time, the ROK administration has also adopted a pragmatic approach that respects common values and prioritizes enhancing Seoul’s economic and political power in cooperation with Japan and the United States. In the meantime, the escalation of North Korea’s provocations ironically laid the foundation for the resumption of trilateral cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea. The uncertain direction of the rise of China is another major factor that has contributed to the reemergence of trilateral solidarity. North Korea is obviously not satisfied with this.

In sum, despite the deteriorating Japan–US alliance relations under DPJ administrations, bilateral policy cooperation toward North Korea has remained relatively unaffected, largely thanks to the lack of progress in the Six-Party Talks. Moreover, as the perceived threat of the DPRK increases, the prospect for renewed trilateral solidarity among Japan, the United States and South Korea improves. On the other hand, as China’s national power grows, the ability of the Japan–US relationship to influence Chinese policy toward the DPRK becomes increasingly uncertain. Japan and the United States must continue to enhance their bilateral policy coordination as well as that with South Korea in order to effectively engage China on North Korean issues.

Japan–US Cooperation for Pressure on and Deterrence against North Korea

From the Japanese perspective, negotiations in the Six-Party Talks were conducted in line with Tokyo’s “dialogue and pressure” approach vis-à-vis North Korea. On balance, Japan–US cooperation has advanced far more smoothly in coordinating on the “pressure” component in this approach, given the relative lack of domestic opposition. However, the bilateral efforts to put pressure on the DPRK were often opposed by other members of the Six-Party Talks.

Japan–US cooperation to pressure North Korea includes enhanced cooperation on missile defense, cooperation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the Illegal Activities Initiative (IAI), and export control against Pyongyang. In-depth bilateral consultation took place among the authorities in law enforcement, intelligence, and defense.

The lack of coordination between the “pressure” component and the “dialogue” component, however, created problems in the Six-Party Talks. Law enforcement, intelligence, and defense authorities generally supported stronger pressure on North Korea, causing disagreements with diplomats who were looking for chances with reach an agreement. As a result, strengthened Japan–US cooperation in areas of “pressure” invited counter-reactions from other countries. The perspectives of the other Six-Party countries regarding the Japan-US relationship will be explained in the next section.

²³ Statement by Prime Minister Naoto Kan, August 10, 2010. http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/kan/statement/201008/10danwa_e.html (accessed on August 10, 2010) This statement was issued in the hundredth year after the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was concluded in 1910.

The Perspectives of China, Russia, South Korea and North Korea

This section provides a brief overview of the objectives of China, Russia, South Korea and North Korea in the Six-Party Talks. The section also explains how, based on their objectives, they have viewed Japan–US cooperation within the framework of the Six-Party process, and how they have tried to influence that bilateral cooperation.²⁴ Additionally, it provides a brief description of how Japan and the United States can influence each of these countries’ policies toward the Korean Peninsula in a way that benefits both Tokyo and Washington.

Russia

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has demonstrated a growing interest in Asia. Russia–DPRK relations improved in the early years of the Putin administration, as evidenced by the signing of the Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborly Relations and Cooperation in 2000.

Russia and the DPRK share common security concerns, including the possible expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) into Asia and US ballistic missile defense in Northeast Asia.²⁵ In addition, both Russia and the DPRK would benefit from lowered US influence in Asia.

Russia has persistently insisted on the resolution of problems with North Korea through diplomatic means. The use of force to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis is simply unacceptable.²⁶ It would create a situation in which three of the world’s major nuclear weapon states (the United States, Russia and China) together with the DPRK with its limited nuclear capability place their forces on high alert. Russia is concerned that an accident under such circumstances could lead to catastrophic consequences. In fact, in August 2009, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, announced that Russia had deployed an advanced missile system as a preventative measure against a faulty launch of North Korean missiles.²⁷ After North Korea’s nuclear test in 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev clearly stated: “Obviously, we are concerned by this. We are in close territorial proximity to that country”.²⁸

The flow of North Korean refugees into Russia in the case of a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula is another concern for Russia. A military conflict could also increase the possibility of an outflow of Russian citizens from its Far East to the west, which would dramatically alter the country’s demographic balance.²⁹ In addition, partly motivated by

²⁴ There is already a rich body of existing literature that provides in-depth analysis of the objectives of the participating countries to the Six-Party Talks with respect to the expected outcome and difference in the priorities of each country’s objectives. See, for example, John S. Park, “Inside Multilateralism: The Six-Party Talks,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2005, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 75–91; Chinoy, *Meltdown*.

²⁵ Alexander Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations: Challenges and Achievements*, Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, the Brookings Institution, February 2007, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

²⁷ Chris Green, “Russia and North Korea’s Uneasy Relationship”, *The Daily NK*, August 27, 2009.

²⁸ Anton Khlopkov, “The North Korean nuclear test: the Russian reaction”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July 7, 2009.

²⁹ Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations*, pp. 2–3.

Chinese action,³⁰ Russia has committed to large-scale, long-term multilateral infrastructure projects. Some of these projects involve the Korean Peninsula, including oil and gas pipelines and Trans-Siberian railroads, which could be jeopardized by any instability on the Korean Peninsula.

Furthermore, Russia is concerned that a unified Korea's military and strategic priorities would trigger "a region-wide strategic re-evaluation and militarization".³¹ Russia generally has believed that heightened tension or conflict on the Korean Peninsula could bring a more assertive Japan and the United States into Northeast Asia, and therefore a cautious approach and close collaboration with China is in Russia's best interest.³²

With these stakes in mind, Putin notably improved Russia's relationship with the DPRK by the early 2000s. Kim Jong Il responded positively to these advances by insisting in July 2003 that Russia be included in the Six-Party Talks, a proposition with which the other Six-Party nations agreed.³³ It seemed that Kim Jong Il expected Russia to counterbalance the influence of the United States and China in the Six-Party Talks. As the talks played out, Russia has in fact attempted to play the role of the "honest broker" in the Six-Party Talks, which has often meant Moscow opposes the adoption of punitive posture vis-à-vis North Korea.³⁴

Russian experts have expressed their expectation that the Six-Party process be the first step toward creating a framework to discuss the terms of Korean unification.³⁵ In this context, Russia tries to neutralize the long-term influence of both the United States and China on the Korean Peninsula. A senior Russian diplomat even stated that the Six-Party Talks would provide a forum to discuss the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean Peninsula.³⁶

Russia's primary objective in the Six-Party Talks is risk management, not a complete elimination of risk. In other words, it prioritizes sustaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula over preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or promoting human rights.³⁷ As Georgy Toloraya of the Russian Academy of Science argued, "a nuclear North Korea is less appalling than that of a destroyed North Korea."³⁸ Russia also has expressed interest in providing a nuclear power plant to North Korea within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. For instance, Alexander Rumyantsev, head of Russian Federal Agency on Atomic Energy (2001–2005), once stated clearly that Russia should cooperate on the development of a light-water reactor in the DPRK.³⁹

Russia has generally been viewed as the least effective participant in the Six-Party Talks. Because the DPRK has received "neither the unalloyed political support nor the economic

³⁰ International Crisis Group, *North Korea–Russia Relations: A Strained Friendship*, December 4, 2007, p. 12.

³¹ Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations*, pp. 2–3.

³² Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Reset under Medvedev: Zapad-Politik and Vostok 2010", *Comparative Connections*, July 2010.

³³ International Crisis Group, *North Korea-Russia Relations*, p. 8.

³⁴ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, pp. 290–295.

³⁵ Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations*, p. 19.

³⁶ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 302.

³⁷ Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations*, p. 19.

³⁸ Toloraya, "Russia and the North Korean Knot," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* April 19, 2010.

³⁹ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 280.

backing it has sought,” Russia has only limited influence over North Korea.⁴⁰ Initially, the DPRK expected Russia to balance China’s growing influence, but over the past several years, the DPRK appears to have recognized that Russia has been unable to provide financial support equivalent to Cold War levels. This has ensured that Russia’s influence on Japan–US cooperation in the Six-Party Talks has been rather marginal.

While Russia may continue making policy choices to constrain US influence in Northeast Asia, the future might present new opportunities for Japan and the United States to influence Russia’s tactical thinking about the costs and benefits associated with its efforts to sustain the status quo on the Korean Peninsula. Japan and the United States will be well served by continuing to engage Russia in such discussions.

South Korea

South Korea’s policy toward North Korea has shifted along with its administrations. As such, its views toward Japan’s role in the Six-Party Talks as well as Japan–US cooperation in the Six-Party Talks have also changed. Before the inauguration of the Kim Dae Jung administration, the ROK regarded Japan’s attempt to normalize its relationship with the DPRK as an act to benefit an adversary. From the Japanese perspective, therefore, the 2002 Japan–DPRK Summit was made possible by the Sunshine Policy that South Korea promoted under Kim Dae Jung.

The Kim Dae Jung administration held the belief that North Korea would not abandon its nuclear program or its other weapons of mass destruction until it achieved normalized relations with the United States.⁴¹ Based on this assessment, the Kim administration questioned the effectiveness of long-term international pressure on the DPRK; that is to say, it was concerned that this strategy might simply give the DPRK time to develop its nuclear weapon program as the international community waited in vain for the pressure to take effect.⁴² Based on this belief, President Kim urged President Bush to resume direct talks with the DPRK in their meeting in March 2001. In discussions with Christopher Hill in 2005, Im Dong-won, special advisor to President Kim, also urged that the United States should engage the DPRK directly through New York channels and should establish bilateral meetings with North Korea within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. Later, Christopher Hill followed through with similar arrangements.⁴³

Policy toward North Korea under President Roh Moo Hyun was significantly different from that of his predecessor. The Roh administration crafted a policy colored by a strong orientation toward Korean nationalism, an antagonistic view of Japan, quasi-anti-US sentiment, and a deep uneasiness toward the rising power China. The Sunshine Policy of President Kim was dependent on the ROK’s good diplomatic relationships with Japan, the United States, China, and Russia.⁴⁴ Although President Roh declared Korea would continue the same Sunshine Policy, his administration significantly undermined the ROK’s relationships with these countries, especially Japan and the United States. Many senior

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, *North Korea–Russia Relations* p. 1.

⁴¹ Im Dong Won, *Peace Maker* (Japanese version) (Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo: 2008), pp. 354–355.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁴⁴ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, pp. 734–735.

officials in the Roh administration optimistically viewed the DPRK as the Korean brother, driven by strong Korean nationalism and antagonism toward Japan and the US as well as anxiety over China.⁴⁵

Viewing South Korea as a “balancer” in East Asia,⁴⁶ the Roh administration initially expected the Six-Party Talks to serve as a vehicle for North-South dialogue and confidence-building on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁷ Even after North Korea’s nuclear test in 2006, South Korea continued to place higher priority on engaging North Korea. For instance, in his meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, President Roh Moo Hyun said that his government had no intention of terminating either the Mt. Kumgang project by the Hyundai Asan or the Kaesong economic zone, both of which served as major sources of income for the DPRK.⁴⁸ According to a South Korean diplomat, “We are closer to the source of the threat, and that makes us more averse to risk-taking.”⁴⁹

Both North and South Korea hoped to replace the Six-Party Talks with a forum that excluded Japan in order to negotiate a replacement for the existing Armistice.⁵⁰ The ROK frequently argued in favor of convening Four-Party Talks involving the United States, China, and North Korea in order to craft a new peace treaty for the Korean Peninsula based on the “2+2+UN” formula.⁵¹ South Korea under the Roh administration also attempted to lead multilateral negotiations with the DPRK, but was often ignored by the North. South Korean ambitions also agitated Japan and the United States, who felt that South Korea’s increasing commercial activities with North Korea would undermine the effectiveness of multilateral sanctions against the DPRK.

The ROK’s foreign policy changed considerably when Lee Myung Bak assumed office in February 2008. From the very beginning, the Lee administration has engaged in robust efforts to strengthen its alliance with the United States, as well as to develop more pragmatic relationships with Japan and China. Under the Lee administration, South Korea has shifted its foreign policy focus away from nationalism and toward pragmatism. For example, after North Korea’s second nuclear test in 2009, South Korea decided to join the PSI in order to support international efforts on nonproliferation. During the Hatoyama administration in Japan, the ROK government even grew concerned about the deterioration of Japan–US alliance relations, with the appreciation that the US military in Okinawa constitutes an important force when responding to any contingency on the Korean Peninsula.⁵²

Especially after the *Cheonan* incident in March 2010, Japan, the ROK, and the United States have been increasing collaboration through coordinated efforts to solidify international support for South Korea in condemning the DPRK for the attack. The Blue House has made

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 411.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 670.

⁴⁸ Chinoy, *Meltdown*, p. 301.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 634.

⁵¹ Im, *Peace Maker*, pp. 442–443.

⁵² “Futenma Kichi Isetsu Mondai, Kankoku de Kenen Hirogaru” [Concern over the Issues of the Moving of Futenma Military Base Spread in South Korea], *Sankei News*, December 20, 2009.

it clear that the Six-Party Talks will not resume until the *Cheonan* incident is resolved.⁵³ The Japan–US–ROK trilateral policy coordination accelerated further following North Korea’s shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010.

It is unclear whether the Lee administration’s pragmatism in diplomacy will be continued by future ROK administrations. Therefore, continued prudence is required in observing South Korea’s long-term objectives in Northeast Asia, as its relationship with the Japan–US alliance may change if South Korean priorities shift. Both Japan and the United States should engage the ROK consistently by reaching out to a broad range of stakeholders, including politicians of both ruling and opposition parties and officials of various governmental institutions, as well as those in non-governmental sectors, such as academia and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The three countries may best be served by actively pursuing “Track II” diplomacy in tandem with official efforts.

China

Of all the nations involved in the Six-Party Talks, China has the greatest economic leverage over the DPRK, demonstrated by strengthened economic ties and an increasing number of joint industrial projects between China’s northeastern provinces and North Korea’s northern border region.⁵⁴ This fact, combined with growing Chinese national power and the increasing importance of China’s role as the chairman of the Six-Party Talks, makes US–China cooperation more important than ever.

China originally decided to join the Six-Party Talks largely because of worries about possible US military intervention in East Asia, provoked by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁵⁵ Given the interventionist attitude of the Bush administration, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin was convinced in late 2002 and early 2003 that the United States might launch a military attack against North Korea.⁵⁶ This fear stimulated China’s enthusiasm for engaging the DPRK through the Six-Party Talks.

China’s position in the Six-Party Talks is likely influenced by competing interests. These include: China’s image in the world; US–China relations; Japan–China relations; discussion inside Japan about its nuclear option; US influence in East Asia; the future of the Korean Peninsula (including a possible collapse of the North Korean regime); and the perceived rise of nationalism in East Asia.⁵⁷ China has certainly been particularly concerned about the prospect of nuclear-armed neighbors (especially Japan) and the possibility of North Korean cross-border activities spinning out of control, creating instability at the China–North Korea border. For China, maintaining the status quo on the Korean Peninsula is linked to stabilized US–China relations.

Originally, Chinese analysts expected that the Six-Party Talks would eventually replace the Japan–US and ROK–US alliance systems and therefore transform the existing hub-

⁵³ Scott Snyder, “China–Korea Relations: The Cheonan and China’s ‘Double Play’,” *Comparative Connections*, July 2010.

⁵⁴ Emma Chanlett-Avery and Mi Ae Taylor, “North Korea: US Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation,” *CRS Report for Congress*, May 26, 2010, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 436.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 435–436.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

and-spokes system of US alliance networks into a new regional security structure. The weakening of the US military presence in East Asia was one of China’s primary motivations behind pushing the Six-Party Talks.⁵⁸ In addition, at the beginning of the Six-Party Talks, China and South Korea seemed to share the objective of weakening Japanese influence on the Korean Peninsula as well.⁵⁹

Moreover, the Korean Peninsula represents a great deal of historical trauma for China, as the first Sino–Japanese war (1894–1895) for control of the Peninsula resulted in the separation of China and Taiwan. China also lost an opportunity to reintegrate Taiwan when it fought against the US in the Korean War (1950–1953). According to a senior Chinese diplomat, China believes that the foundation for a stable security environment on the Korean Peninsula will contribute to a resolution of the Taiwan problem in the future.⁶⁰

As Chinese national power increases, China seems more confident about its influence in Asia. As an extension of that influence, China has frequently worked to constrain Japan–US cooperation on North Korea. For example, while drafting the UN Security Council Resolution in response to North Korea’s nuclear test in October 2006, China (together with Russia) forced Japan and the United States to drop several of the resolution’s strictest sanctions. These included banning North Korean aircraft from taking off or landing in other countries, as well as granting the national authorities of the UN member states to freeze assets from illicit activities, such as counterfeiting, money laundering, and narcotics.⁶¹ In fact, China has made it clear that they would not interdict vessels going to or from the DPRK.

Even in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* incident in March 2010, China adamantly refused to introduce a new UNSCR to condemn North Korea or to designate the DPRK as a perpetrator of this apparent attack in the UNSC Presidential Statement despite strong pressure from Japan, the ROK, and the United States. China also strongly opposed a US–South Korea joint naval exercise on the grounds that it would provoke an even stronger response from the DPRK. South Korean media criticized China, claiming it interfered with the ROK’s national sovereignty.⁶²

However, it is necessary to remember that the Chinese leadership has been undermined by North Korea’s continuously provocative behavior. Although China has sought to demonstrate leadership on the North Korean issue, the DPRK has highlighted China’s inability to rein in its actions.⁶³ In response, China has shifted its policy and seems to be pursuing both the “carrot” and “stick” approach in order to persuade North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks, implementing the 2005 Agreed Statement of Principles. After North Korea’s nuclear test in October 2006, China agreed with the UNSCR 1718 that explicitly mentioned Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, to which China was strongly opposed just six months earlier. Additionally, China quietly took measures to pressure the DPRK, including temporarily cutting off the supply of military spare parts and curbing money transfers from

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 492.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 634.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 500.

⁶¹ Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp. 297–298.

⁶² Katsuhiko Kuroda, “*Taikita Gunji Atsuryoku ga Hyouryu, Chugoku no Hantai de Beikan Enshu Henko* [Pressure toward the DPRK Drifting: the United States and ROK Changed Joint Exercise Due to China’s Opposition]”, *Sankei News* (web), July 13, 2010.

⁶³ Snyder, “China–Korea Relations”.

Chinese banks.⁶⁴ A report by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) observes: “China’s periodic willingness to go along with sanctions efforts in the UN Security Council and the fluctuations in Chinese assistance to the DPRK undoubtedly have made North Korea wary of becoming overly dependent on China or any other outside power.”⁶⁵

Even just after the North’s second nuclear test in May 2009, when Chang Song Taek, a key member of the DPRK National Defense Commission and a brother-in-law of Kim Jong Il, visited China, the CCP demanded that North Korea abandon its nuclear weapons. It also expressed opposition to familial inheritance of power and requested that the DPRK reform its economy.⁶⁶ It is exceptional that the CCP made such intrusive requests to the DPRK. The strategy pursued jointly by Japan and the United States to enlist China’s cooperation in pressuring the DPRK seems to have generated at least periodic Chinese collaboration with the two countries.

In recent months, China’s priorities in its North Korean policy seem to be the following, in order of importance: reduction of tensions on the Korean Peninsula; resumption of the denuclearization process; and gradual opening and reforming of North Korea.⁶⁷ China’s interest in preserving the DPRK’s stability generally has trumped other considerations.⁶⁸

China has also continuously tried to deepen its economic cooperation with the DPRK. Since November 2009, China has been planning the development of the Tonghua–Dandong Economic Zone, a major new zone aimed at increasing trade along the North Korean border.⁶⁹ During Kim Jong Il’s visit to China in May 2010, Chinese Premier Hu Jintao presented five proposals for strengthening China–DPRK relationships, including maintenance of high-level contacts, reinforcement of strategic coordination, deepening economic and trade cooperation, increasing personnel exchanges, and strengthening coordination in international and regional affairs.⁷⁰ Even though the Chinese presented these proposals as a reinforcement of strategic coordination with the DPRK, they still contradict China’s basic foreign policy principle of non-interference in North Korea’s internal affairs.⁷¹ It will be important to watch any Chinese attempts to influence the political and economic situation in the DPRK.

The China–DPRK economic relationship has been accompanied by continued party-to-party and intergovernmental contacts.⁷² As John Park of the US Institute of Peace observes, cooperation between the Communist Party of China and the Workers’ Party of Korea increased substantially, specifically in economic development projects near the DPRK–

⁶⁴ Chinoy, *Meltdown*, p. 302.

⁶⁵ Dick K. Nanto, Mark E. Manyin, and Kerry Dumbaugh, “China–North Korea Relations”, *CRS Report for Congress*, January 22, 2010, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Kenji Minemura, “*Seshu Hantai, Kaku Houki...Kaku Jikkengo, Chuugoku, Kitachousen ni Atsuryoku* [Opposed to Family Heredity, and Demanded to Abandon Nuclear Weapons: China Pressured North Korea after the Nuclear Test],” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 23, 2010.

⁶⁷ Bin, “China–Russia Relations”.

⁶⁸ Nanto, Manyin, and Dumbaugh, “China–North Korea Relations,” p. 3.

⁶⁹ Chanlett-Avery and Taylor, “North Korea: US Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation,” p. 10.

⁷⁰ Snyder, “China–Korea Relations”.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

China border.⁷³ Japan and the United States should analyze how such party-to-party contacts might influence the course of the Six-Party Talks.

On balance, however, strategists in both Japan and the United States recognize that their engagement policy toward China has produced results far below their expectations. In their view, China has yet to become a responsible stakeholder that takes into consideration regional and global interests extending beyond its own parochial national interests. In fact, even on key global issues such as climate change and the international economy, China has chosen to challenge the positions of developed countries, including Japan and the United States, and to side with Russia, Brazil, India, and South Africa to solidify an opposition group of developing countries.

Even so, given China’s expanding power both economically and politically, Japan and the United States must recognize that future negotiations with China may have to take the form of “collaboration” rather than “engagement,” however frustrated Japan and the United States may be. In 2009, James B. Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of State, proposed the use of the term “strategic reassurance” when talking about relations with China.⁷⁴ While it is unclear to what extent this new concept has been transformed into official US policy, its intent seems to be to convey a conceptual change in the American approach to US–China relations. As Chinese economic, political, and military power increases, the status quo may quickly become unsustainable.

Given China’s growing influence in the Asia–Pacific region, several questions deserve continued analysis in the coming years:

- Will the United States actually change its approach toward China? If so, how?
- How will the US approach to China affect US–Japan relations?
- Can a change in the strategic approaches of Japan and the US influence China’s thinking about the Japan–US alliance?
- Can a change in the strategic approach of the US–Japan alliance modify China’s long-term objectives for the Korean Peninsula and East Asia?

These questions are of the utmost significance when assessing the future course of Chinese policy toward the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea

In the past several decades, North Korea’s provocative actions, including nuclear weapons testing and firing of ballistic missiles, have resulted in a steadily solidifying alliance between Japan and the United States. This trend is likely to continue in the years ahead. At the same time, North Korean actions have also posed various diplomatic challenges. Relations between the DPRK and other members of the Six-Party Talks seem to have deteriorated substantially since the beginning of the talks.

⁷³ See Chapter Four in this volume written by John Park, pp. 72–73.

⁷⁴ James B. Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of State, “Administration’s Vision of the US–China Relationship”, Keynote Address at the Center for a New American Security, Washington, DC, September 24, 2009; Ken Jimbo, “Obama Seiken to Ajia no Chiiki Anzenhoshou” [The Obama Administration and Asian Regional Security], *Kaigai Jijou*, Takushoku University, January 2010, pp. 95–110.

In the past, Pyongyang's willingness to negotiate was driven by internal crises. Therefore, food shortages or economic desperation motivated North Korea to engage in talks, usually to extract more aid from China and/or South Korea.⁷⁵ Now, however, the prospects for a diplomatic agreement with North Korea seem gloomy, especially since North Korea's second nuclear test in 2009. While participants in the Six-Party Talks were initially optimistic that North Korea might agree to abandon its nuclear weapons program, it now seems unlikely that the DPRK will give away its nuclear deterrent.

On the other hand, there are some signs that the DPRK may be interested in diplomatic negotiation, although not necessarily in the form of the Six-Party Talks. North Korea participated in the Hanoi meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 2010, indicating its ongoing interest in interacting with the United States and other Asian countries.

Some argue that North Korea played the same game to engage in a coercive attempt to reconcile with the United States.⁷⁶ Even if that were the case, it is difficult to judge whether North Korea will be willing to consider denuclearization as a component of diplomatic negotiations. Given that since around 1998 North Korea's "military first" policy has replaced *juche* as the crucial ideology by which Kim Jong Il rules, James Kelly argued that Kim Jong Il would not likely negotiate away the military's nuclear weapons (the ultimate weapon for the military!) program without first changing the "military first" policy.⁷⁷ As Kelly observed, changing the "military first" policy remains a practical necessity for the implementation of the February 2007 agreement, but there is no sign that North Korea is actually moving in that direction.⁷⁸

The fundamental objectives of North Korea are more complicated than they are often portrayed. The ideal outcomes of the negotiation from Pyongyang's perspective include "an agreement in which North Korea accepts safeguards and monitoring under the International Atomic Energy Agency but is also assured of a civilian nuclear energy program. Most important, Pyongyang would want to keep part of its nuclear program beyond the reach of international inspectors, serving, in the North's eyes, as a nuclear deterrent."⁷⁹ Furthermore, given North Korea's disinterest in the negative security assurance, Kim Jong Il is focused on a guarantee for the regime survival.

If these assessments and information about North Korean objectives are valid, diplomatic negotiations are not likely to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapon programs in the short term. Even so, continued diplomatic efforts may still serve the best interests of the concerned countries in Northeast Asia. It will be essential for Japan and the United States to solidify domestic support for a continued diplomatic approach toward North Korea, in tandem with a strengthened posture to prepare for any contingencies on the Korean Peninsula.

⁷⁵ Chanlett-Avery and Taylor, "North Korea: US Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation," p. 3.

⁷⁶ Narushige Michishita, "Playing the Same Game: North Korea's Coercive Attempt at US Reconciliation", *The Washington Quarterly*, October 2009, pp. 139–152.

⁷⁷ Kelly, "Six-Party Tales".

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Victor Cha, "Up Close and Personal, Here's What I Learned," *The Washington Post*, Sunday, June 14, 2009.

Conclusion

In the past, the Six-Party Talks provided a forum for various formal and informal consultations and negotiations. However, this multilateral cooperation has yet to persuade North Korea of the strategic value of abandoning its nuclear weapons program. While the Six-Party Talks have failed to influence North Korean strategic decisions so far, in reality there is no preferable alternative. There is the possibility that the Six-Party Talks may not be able to provide the solution to North Korean problems even in the future, but it may still offer time and ways to avoid the worst case scenario. In the meantime, Japan and the United States should strenuously drive multilateral cooperation to prepare for any contingency on the Korean Peninsula, while making every effort to ensure that the Six-Party Talks not reach their “expiration.”

As noted, prudence is required when positively evaluating the utility of Japan–US cooperation in influencing the DPRK’s strategic decision. Even under the unlikely scenario of perfectly smooth coordination between Japan and the United States, it is unclear whether the two governments could be any more successful in halting the development of North Korea’s nuclear program. The Japan–US relationship may not necessarily be the most important component in the framework of the Six-Party process. Still, it remains an essential element in maintaining and shaping this framework.

The Japan–US relationship must not be affected by domestic political transition within the two countries. The two governments must closely coordinate with each other continuously, with the aim of institutionalizing various collaborative networks within the alliance framework. Also, Japan and the United States should strengthen cooperation with South Korea in order to build up “election proof” trilateral solidarity. The trilateral solidarity, complimented by the bilateral alliances, is essential for engaging China, Russia, and North Korea more than ever before.

Chapter Four

Regional Factors: China–North Korea Relationship¹

John S. Park

The Impact of US–Japan Interaction on Other Parties in the Six-Party Talks

Since the Six-Party Talks began in August 2003, they have become the primary venue in which the United States and Japan attempt to coordinate their policies toward North Korea. The divergence in their approaches that has surfaced, however, has caused diplomatic tension between the two countries. It also has affected how the other participants of Six-Party Talks—China, Russia, South Korea and North Korea—view the impact of US–Japan policy coordination on the Six-Party Talks.

This chapter opens by explaining that the United States and Japan, in their attempt to coordinate their policies toward North Korea, have often focused solely on the abduction issue. It then focuses on the relations between China and North Korea, particularly the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), as an increasingly relevant yet underdiscussed dynamic in North Korean problems. After considering the impact of enhanced US–South Korea relations on the efficacy of US–Japan policy coordination, the chapter closes by identifying the challenges for the United States and Japan as they continue their efforts to coordinate policy toward North Korea.

Rightly or not, US–Japan interaction in the Six-Party Talks has been consumed by exploring ways to address the abduction issue. While sympathetic to this issue, the other parties in the Six-Party Talks have insisted that the forum’s main objective is DPRK denuclearization. The common message has been that the abduction issue is a bilateral dispute between the DPRK and Japan; as such, it should be resolved by these two countries in a bilateral context, not in the main Six-Party Talks plenary sessions. To this end, one of the five Six-Party Talks working groups—the DPRK–Japan normalization working group—is tasked with dealing with the abduction issue.

The United States continues to support Japan’s efforts to resolve the abduction issue, and frequently makes public statements to this effect during high-level meetings with Japanese officials. During the second half of the second Bush administration (approximately 2005–2008), both the United States and Japan viewed bilateral interactions on the abduction issue as highly problematic. For the United States, the Japanese government’s refusal to supply its agreed portion of heavy fuel oil to North Korea before making progress on the abduction issue created additional diplomatic hurdles in an already challenging environment. For Japan, the Bush administration’s removal of North Korea from the State

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They do not reflect views of the US Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

Sponsors of Terrorism List—despite strong Japanese government opposition—heightened tensions between the two governments.

Aside from this episode, the Bush administration adopted a general policy of publicly supporting Japanese efforts on the abduction issue and privately raising this issue in US–DPRK meetings in order to emphasize solidarity between the United States and Japan. The North Koreans were fully aware that in practice the United States prioritized denuclearization negotiations after the abduction issue was sidelined during the latter part of the second Bush administration.² Given the Obama administration’s similar approach to the abduction issue, North Korea’s stance is unlikely to change. Should there be movement on the abduction issue, the catalyst would probably be renewed talks between Japan and North Korea.

On the issue of nuclear deterrence, the Obama administration’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review reaffirmed the inclusion of US allies under the US nuclear umbrella (i.e., a positive security assurance).³ While this policy was intended to be defensive, and therefore is intended to signal that a non-nuclear North Korea would have nothing to fear from US nuclear strike policy, North Korea seems far from reassured. In fact, North Korea has cited US policy as further justification for its own nuclear deterrent. The United States and North Korean nuclear stances have added another layer of challenges to the already stalled Six-Party Talks.

The Impact of Regional Cooperation on the US–Japan Relationship: Power Dynamics Among Other Six-Party Talks Participants

In the past several years, North Korea has increased bilateral commercial interactions with China and Russia. This strengthening Sino–DPRK commercial relationship has coincided with an incremental increase in previously stalled Russian–DPRK commercial activities. However, these interactions are not linked to progress with DPRK denuclearization.

In the inter-Korean context, commercial activities at the shared Kaesong Industrial Complex continue despite tensions between the two Koreas. Although sudden disruptions of operations at the Complex are not uncommon, it is important to note that Kaesong is still functioning and its activities are not directly linked to progress toward denuclearization. In early April 2010, however, North Korea announced that it would freeze South Korean assets in the Kumgang tourism project in response to South Korea’s suspension of operations after the shooting of an ROK tourist. This decision by Pyongyang is interesting because even after North Korea sank the South Korean warship *Cheonan* on March 26, 2010, Kaesong was not included on the list of inter-Korean trade closures announced by the South Korean government.

The United States and Japan have among the lowest levels of commercial interactions with the DPRK. As a result, bilateral commercial ties between East Asian nations and the

² The Six-Party Talks’ DPRK–Japan working group did convene during the second half of 2008, but there were no substantive outcomes.

³ The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review report identifies five key objectives of US nuclear weapons policies and posture. The fourth objective is “strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring US allies and partners.” *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, US Department of Defense, April 2010, p. iii.

DPRK have created a unique power dynamic in which the United States and Japan are outliers. In a multilateral sense, South Korea is aligned with the United States and Japan in insisting on progress towards denuclearization before granting any of the diplomatic and economic concessions to North Korea laid out in Six-Party Talks agreements. However, Seoul has sought to keep the Kaesong Industrial Complex operating because it serves a useful purpose as a channel for inter-Korean interaction.

Increasing bilateral cooperation between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK)—specifically in regional border area economic development projects—may have the largest impact on power dynamics among the Six-Party Talks participants. High-level CCP International Department visits to Pyongyang, as well as DPRK actions such as the March 2010 establishment of the National Development Bank (which is directly linked to the DPRK's National Defense Commission) highlight significant ties between Beijing and Pyongyang. These CCP-initiated bilateral overtures and initiatives appear to have a counterproductive effect on the Six-Party Talks process in a manner the Chinese likely did not intend. In the period leading up to Kim Jong Il's May 2010 meeting with Hu Jintao in Beijing, media reports focused on Beijing's possible role in restarting the long-stalled talks. The more important question of agreements made between the CCP and the WPK during the Kim–Hu meeting was overlooked. Rather than waiting for the North Korean regime to collapse or weaken further, the senior CCP leadership appears to be leveraging its growing economic strength to bolster the WPK, thereby effectively addressing a major potential cause of instability in Northeast Asia.

Because this party-to-party collaboration is not directly linked to DPRK denuclearization, China may actually be working against its own interests. Herein lies China's dilemma: greater progress in the party-to-party relationship may result in the DPRK's return to the Six-Party Talks, but not a resumption of substantive denuclearization activities. Rather, the DPRK's return will have more to do with deals and understandings reached in the CCP–WPK setting than a real desire for multilateral negotiation. These circumstances are not unlikely, as Beijing has a strong interest in keeping the Six-Party Talks alive.

If bilateral CCP–WPK economic development-focused activities expand, the Six-Party Talks will move from a DPRK denuclearization-centered multilateral process to a crisis management mechanism.⁴ Should this transformation continue, a protracted Six-Party Talks process, in practice, would cocoon North Korea's nuclear weapons program as CCP–WPK economic interactions deepened.

If the Six-Party Talks and CCP–WPK institution-building in the economic development arena begin to support the status quo in North Korea, the United States and Japan will have serious cause for concern. Unlike North Korean aggression, which galvanizes US–Japan cooperation in missile defense and other areas, the phenomenon outlined above allows a nuclear North Korea to improve key elements of its decrepit economy. In contrast to North Korea's use of brinkmanship to initiate negotiations for concessions, the CCP–WPK advancements do not provide the dramatic display of North Korean military capabilities that has traditionally sparked US–Japan defense cooperation. As North Korea retains or discreetly expands its nuclear weapons program while enjoying the benefits of CCP–WPK

⁴ Scott Snyder, Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “Wither the Six-Party Talks?” *USIP Peace Brief*, May 2006.

economic cooperation, the US–Japan alliance may not be able to act in response to these developments due to the absence of a more clear and present threat, and thus may be unable to halt further entrenchment of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal.

The Influence of Other Parties in the Region on US-Japan Policy Coordination

Currently, the strongest proponents of immediate DPRK denuclearization are the United States and Japan. Both countries insist that the DPRK carry out nuclear rollback *before* any concessions are granted. This hardline position has led the other parties—specifically, China and Russia—to use their influence in an attempt to persuade the United States and Japan to soften their stance.

Since early 2009, US–Japan policy coordination has been most visible in the UN Security Council. Leading up to North Korea’s April 2009 Taepodong-2 missile test, the United States and Japan closely coordinated an international effort to pressure North Korea not to conduct what it referred to as a “peaceful DPRK satellite launch.” China and Russia initially supported North Korea’s claim that it was preparing a satellite launch, leading the United States, Japan and South Korea to warn that North Korea would face dire consequences if it went ahead with the long-range missile test.

China and Russia’s repeated efforts to justify North Korea’s satellite launch further reinforced determination in the United States and Japan to hold North Korea accountable for its actions. Following the April 2009 missile launch, the United States and Japan led international efforts condemning the test. While China and Russia’s objections prevented the passage of a UN Security Council resolution, US and Japanese pressure resulted in the adoption of a strongly-worded UN Security Council Presidential Statement that censured North Korea.

On the question of North Korean economic development, the United States, Japan, and South Korea have also met opposition from Russia and China. Because UN Security Council resolutions 1718 and 1874 do not prohibit economic development activities with the DPRK, both China and Russia are expanding such activities in the North Korean border region. The specific areas of development are transportation infrastructure and natural resources. As mentioned in the prior section, it is difficult to see how the United States and Japan can meaningfully coordinate policy in response to a nuclear-capable North Korea with continually expanding economic development and political ties to China.

The rising regional prominence of the US–ROK alliance, which has grown stronger since the inauguration of the conservative Lee Myung Bak government in 2008, also significantly impacts the US–Japan alliance. This is particularly important in the wake of diplomatic friction between the United States and Japan. During most of 2009, the US–Japan alliance was rocked by a protracted disagreement between Tokyo and Washington over the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. Not only did this episode sap mutual confidence in the US–Japan security relationship, it led to the downfall of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who resigned after nine months of dwindling credibility in Tokyo, Okinawa, and Washington, DC.

The sinking of the *Cheonan* in March 2010 also strengthened the relationship between South Korea and the United States. Even before the North Korean attack, US–ROK ties were expanding as rising difficulties with China and growing Futenma-related friction with Japan cast South Korea as a dependable ally for the United States. After the *Cheonan* incident, the US–ROK security relationship strengthened through the “Invincible Spirit” naval exercises held in late July. Intended to deter North Korea from carrying out future attacks, the joint naval exercise sparked strong condemnation from China, despite its relocation from the Yellow Sea to the Sea of Japan/East Sea. While it was a positive development to have four officers from Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force aboard the supercarrier USS George Washington as observers in order to demonstrate the solidarity among the United States, Japan, and the ROK on this matter, “Invincible Spirit” demonstrated that the US–ROK alliance was more dynamic and useful than the US–Japan alliance in bolstering the United States’ position in East Asia.

Due in large part to these developments, the United States has gradually shifted its focal point for bilateral cooperation in Asia from Tokyo to Seoul. This shift was formally acknowledged by President Barack Obama in a bilateral meeting with President Lee Myung Bak on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Toronto, when he stated that “...this alliance is the lynchpin of not only security for the Republic of Korea and the United States but also for the Pacific as a whole.”⁵ Soon after President Obama’s remarks, senior officials in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reportedly asked if “lynchpin” could be used in a plural context.

Implications for US–Japan Coordination: Crafting a Future Vision for the Regional Context of Handling the “North Korea Problem”

As the chair of regional efforts to address the “North Korea problem” and move the Six-Party Talks process forward again, China is currently seeking a softened stance on North Korea from all the countries involved—the United States in particular. Warning that the window of opportunity to engage North Korea—created largely through Premier Wen Jiabao’s landmark meeting with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang in October 2009—is closing, China is particularly looking for concessions from the United States and Japan.

In pushing for flexibility and leniency, Beijing is implicitly signaling that US–Japan coordination is a major impediment to North Korean denuclearization. In turn, it will be important for the United States and Japan to respond that North Korea is a signatory to Six-Party Talks agreements and must carry out its commitments. The diplomatic, economic, and security concessions that North Korea would receive in return for denuclearization are laid out in these agreements—primarily, the September 2005 Agreed Statement on Principles from the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks.

The United States and Japan, along with South Korea, need to find a way to effectively coordinate their policies with China on this matter. Otherwise, it is likely that the “North Korea problem” will frustrate any efforts toward substantive denuclearization work even if

⁵ The White House. Remarks by President Obama and President Lee Myung Bak of the Republic of Korea After Bilateral Meeting, June 26, 2010. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-lee-myung-bak-republic-korea-after-bilateral-> (accessed February 21, 2011)

the DPRK returns to the Six-Party Talks, because the CCP–WPK economic development partnership will continue to stabilize key parts of a nuclear North Korea’s fragmented and decrepit economy.

The United States and Japan will have to decide when they will lead efforts—in close partnership with South Korea—to pressure China to adhere to Six-Party Talks agreements. Most importantly, these countries will need to secure full Chinese cooperation in substantively supporting the formula of gradual economic, diplomatic and security concessions to North Korea in return for its abandonment of “all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs.”⁶ While Chinese policies aimed at accelerating the growth of Sino–DPRK border trade significantly aid domestic economic development goals in its northeastern border provinces, such policies provide economic benefits to North Korea that are *not* linked to denuclearization activities. A major incentive highlighted in Six-Party Talks negotiations with Pyongyang is thereby eroded.

In terms of a key future-oriented approach to the North Korean issue, the 2005 Agreed Statement of Principles clearly outlines all parties’ support for a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.⁷ While the “directly related parties” stipulation essentially relegates Japan to the sidelines, US–Japan policy coordination can play an important *secondary* role in supporting this effort. The last period of official discussions on a peace regime took place in October 2007 during ROK President Roh Moo Hyun’s inter-Korean summit meeting with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang.

Since early 2010, North Korea has increased its calls for the United States to engage in direct bilateral peace treaty negotiations. Viewing this largely as a North Korean ploy to marginalize South Korea, the United States has insisted that North Korea return to previously agreed Six-Party Talks denuclearization activities. The creation of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula remains a necessary and challenging component of comprehensively addressing the North Korean problem.

An added challenge to US–Japan coordination in dealing with North Korea is the accelerated leadership succession process in Pyongyang. Against the backdrop of stalled Six-Party Talks, the WPK convened its party conference in Pyongyang on September 28, 2010. The highlights of the party conference were the reappointment of Kim Jong Il as the General-Secretary of the WPK, the appointment of his third son, Kim Jong Un, as a Vice Chairman of the WPK’s Central Military Commission and his promotion to the rank of four-star general. Kim Jong Un’s appointment and promotion comprise a major component of launching the “rising generation” of the WPK. By launching this new group, Kim Jong Il has, in practice, created a mirror image of the CCP’s leadership structure.

Prior to the party conference, the CCP had been in the early stages of implementing a number of economic development deals with the WPK—deals that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao had signed during his October 2009 visit to Pyongyang. In the aftermath of the party conference, the WPK’s “rising generation” will have more opportunities to work

⁶ US Department of State. Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing, 19 September 2005. <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm> (accessed February 21, 2011)

⁷ Point #4 states: “The six parties committed to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.” Ibid.

directly with their CCP counterparts in institution- and capacity-building activities in North Korea. However, as Kim Jong Un’s elevation marks the beginning rather than the completion of his grooming process, the designated successor will need to develop his leadership capabilities on an accelerated timetable before assuming more senior leadership roles. Should his father die before the completion of this grooming process, Kim Jong Un may become a trigger for instability if powerful North Korean figures see an opportunity to assume greater control of a regime led by a weak leader.

Leadership instability in a country with nuclear weapons programs and chronic humanitarian issues poses a serious threat to peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Such concerns are compounded by North Korean provocations like the November 23 artillery attack on South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island. The consensus view among North Korea watchers is that these provocations reflect the need for Kim Jong Un to develop his military and security credentials as he is groomed for leadership roles. More than ever, the US and Japan—working closely with South Korea—will require enhanced capabilities to bolster coordination in developing and pursuing a robust future vision for handling the “North Korea problem” in a regional context.

Chapter Five

North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination between the United States and Japan

Scott A. Snyder

Introduction

North Korea has been exceptionally skilled at exploiting wedge issues between alliance partners. This strategy characterized North Korea's decades-long maneuvering between its primary Cold War patrons, China and the Soviet Union. North Korea has also used this tactic to separate the United States from South Korea, as well as to evade international pressure from the nations in the Six-Party Talks. However, while North Korea has exploited differences among partners in opposing coalitions, its provocations have also strengthened international coordination in the face of heightened perceptions of tension on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, North Korea's provocative acts have been an inadvertent catalyst for Northeast Asian regionalism for over two decades,¹ and have served as a basis for strengthening alliance coordination between the United States and Japan.

North Korean aggression spurred the development of the US alliance system in Northeast Asia following the Korean War and provided an immediate rationale for a strong US–Japan alliance. This partnership began during the war when Japan served as a base for logistical support for operations in Korea and allowed the construction of UN-flagged bases for the war effort. These developments, as well as the establishment of a US–Japan partnership dedicated to preserving security in East Asia, all represent contributions by North Korea to the development of the US–Japan alliance. This alliance has served as the cornerstone of US strategy in the Asia–Pacific region, with North Korea serving as a primary preoccupation, justification, and challenge that has influenced its development.

Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea and its actions have garnered even more attention as an emerging challenge that could have direct implications for Japan's security. Unlike the abstract challenge of strategic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, North Korea emerged from the Cold War as a tangible regional security issue which was decoupled from global strategic stability. It carried with it a possibly growing and potentially direct impact on the security of Japan. Both the prospect of North Korean instability and North Korea's expanding threat capacity brought Japan within its direct striking range for the first time, while the US commitment to defend Japan seemed less certain than during the Cold War in the eyes of Japanese. This new challenge galvanized deeper political and military coordination between the United States and Japan, but also raised doubts in some quarters about the credibility of the US commitment to defend Japan

¹ Scott Snyder, "The Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian Stability," in David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda, eds., *International Relations of Asia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), pp. 270–271.

against North Korean aggression. Although the “relevance” of the alliance has increased, failure to resolve this new challenge may constrain the future of the relationship.² As a result, North Korea has emerged as a potential wedge issue in the US–Japan alliance, and its security threat provides a very practical litmus test through which to judge the fundamental US commitment to the defense of Japan.

The emergence of North Korea’s nuclear development efforts as a focus of international concern in the early 1990s sensitized the Japanese public to the dangers posed by the North. The first North Korean nuclear crisis also prompted a reevaluation of US and Japanese military readiness. Renewed tensions catalyzed a review of Japan’s ability to provide logistical support for US military units, and made clear the necessity of unprecedented trilateral meetings on defense and security issues among American, Japanese, and South Korean military officials. These meetings were arguably the first step toward more intensive security exchanges and cooperation between the Japanese and South Korean defense establishments, a remarkable development given the history of conflict between Japan and South Korea.

This chapter will analyze the past fifteen years of North Korea’s provocations, and introduce five turning points that have significantly influenced US–Japan alliance coordination. It will also examine North Korea’s pursuit of asymmetric military capabilities to further its diplomatic and political aims, and increased US–Japan alliance coordination as a response to these threats. This enhanced coordination has five main components:

- 1 Coordination on North Korean missiles, including development of ballistic missile defense (BMD);
- 2 Strengthened US–Japan bilateral strategic coordination;
- 3 Establishment of the US–Japan–ROK Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG);
- 4 Increased US–Japan consultations regarding the Six-Party Talks; and
- 5 Development of US–Japan coordinated response plans for potential North Korean instability.

The chapter will conclude with some modest recommendations for the US–Japan alliance to deal with the next phase of the North Korean challenge.

North Korean Provocations: Impact on the US–Japan Alliance

In a little over a decade, the challenge of coordinating policy toward North Korea has been complicated by a series of North Korean provocations and rising US–DPRK tensions. This chapter assesses the state and evolution of US–Japan alliance coordination by analyzing the response of the alliance to each of these provocations. By doing so, the chapter intends to assess the extent to which North Korea has pushed the allies together or exploited wedge issues to foment discord within the US–Japan alliance.

² Yasuyo Sakata, “Korea and the Japan-United States Alliance: A Japanese Perspective,” unpublished paper for Alliance Constrained project, John G. Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi, eds.

The Emerging DPRK Threat as a Major Driver for Improved Policy Coordination: The 1998 Taepodong Test

The August 1998 launch of North Korea's Taepodong missile, a multi-stage rocket topped with an artificial satellite that flew over Japanese territory, came as a major shock to the Japanese public. The idea that a regime as secretive and seemingly irrational as North Korea's could reach out and "touch" Japan was especially unsettling because Japan had been largely insulated from direct threats during the Cold War. Suddenly, North Korean missiles made an attack on the Japanese mainland a realistic possibility.

The Taepodong launch revealed major rifts in US–Japan alliance coordination. The launch came at a sensitive moment in US–DPRK negotiations over inspections of a suspected nuclear site that might have revealed North Korea to be flouting the Agreed Framework negotiated only four years earlier. After numerous delays, financing for the project to build proliferation-resistant light-water reactors under the auspices of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was finally settled in October 1998. However, the United States needed Japanese Diet support for up to one billion dollars in appropriations based on Japan's pledge to play a "significant" role in KEDO. During his visit to Seoul in December 1998, Japanese State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Keizo Takemi stressed that it would be "very difficult" for the Japanese government to move ahead with the KEDO process given the challenge of securing Diet support following North Korea's missile test.³ After a delay of several weeks, the Japanese Diet finally yielded to pressure from the United States and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) to fund KEDO, despite public concerns about providing support for North Korea.⁴ In the aftermath of the Taepodong test, the United States negotiated a bilateral missile moratorium with North Korea in which Pyongyang pledged not to launch more missiles as long as negotiations continued.

An October 1998 Pentagon assessment of the North Korean launch determined that North Korea had tried to launch an artificial satellite based on the track of the Taepodong rocket. While the launch failed, the report found that North Korea had used the opportunity to test its long-range missile capability. The Japanese Defense Agency (JDA), using the same data, came to the conclusion that North Korea had conducted a missile launch.

The Taepodong test also spurred controversy among Japanese lawmakers, who were incensed by the perception that the United States had not notified Japan of an impending missile launch. In reality, a small number of senior Japanese defense officials had known about the Taepodong launch in advance but chose not to share the information with lawmakers, fearing that leaks might jeopardize their access to valuable intelligence. The Diet uproar fed doubts in Japan about the US alliance commitment to defend Japan. In addition, Japanese attention turned to the performance of Japanese Aegis destroyers tasked with monitoring North Korea's missile launch. The failure of Japanese Aegis's command and control system to efficiently inform Japanese political leaders about the launch and prepare effective counter-measures became the main subject of criticism.

³ Jun Kwan Woo, "N. Korean missile would jeopardize KEDO project, says Japanese official," *The Korea Herald*, December 23, 1998.

⁴ "Discord Noted Between MOFA, MOF over KEDO Funding," *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, October 26, 1998, p. 2 (FTS19981029000906), and "Tokyo Searching Timing to Lift Freeze on KEDO Cooperation," *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, September 11, 1998, p. 2 (FTS19980914000044).

The Taepodong test also catalyzed Japanese domestic efforts to build and launch intelligence satellites and pressured Japan to commit to joint efforts with the United States to develop what was then known as theater missile defense (TMD). After debating for a long time over the question of whether to join the United States in researching missile defense capabilities, Japan committed to a multi-billion dollar research program on missile defense four months after the Taepodong launch.

By revealing the inadequacies of Japan’s intelligence collection, communications, and analysis capabilities, the Taepodong launch catalyzed efforts to reform the structure of communications within the JDA and Prime Minister’s office, with Japan announcing plans to develop an indigenous surveillance satellite system in November 1998. The reforms that flowed from this shock, including the establishment of imagery intelligence analytical units within the Cabinet Information Office and Defense Intelligence Headquarters, enhanced Japan’s readiness to face similar threats in the future.⁵ The 1998 missile launch also increased Japan’s willingness to confront North Korea when its vessels entered Japanese territorial waters. This was seen most clearly in March 1999 when the Japanese coast guard fired on an intruding vessel and eventually sank a North Korean ship in Japanese territorial waters for the first time.⁶

The Taepodong test caused the first real post-Cold War crack in Japanese confidence regarding the US commitment to defend Japan in the event of conflict with North Korea. The gap between American and Japanese assessments of the Taepodong launch revealed a potential discord between the allies in interpreting North Korean actions given the US failure to notify Japan on the launch. It also signaled the possibility of differences over how to respond to future North Korean missile launches, especially if they were to land on Japanese soil. If this disagreement were left unaddressed, many worried that it could fester and damage Japan’s confidence in the alliance. However, the Clinton administration did little to alleviate concerns about a rift between the two countries. The United States pursued a missile deal focused solely on long-range missiles, which left Japan potentially vulnerable to the intermediate-range Rodong/Nodong missiles already deployed in North Korea. The gap between the Japanese public perception of vulnerability and US efforts to keep negotiations with North Korea going marked the first evidence of a “North Korea perception gap” in the US–Japan alliance.

Revelations of North Korea’s Covert Uranium Enrichment: A Test for Koizumi and Bush

The discovery that North Korea had begun developing a uranium-based nuclear weapons program presented a challenge for the George W. Bush administration, as well as another test for the US–Japan alliance. Unfortunately, this revelation came at an awkward time in the US–Japan relationship. Despite the establishment of a warm personal rapport between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the heads of state were going in opposite directions on policy toward North Korea by 2002. While the Bush administration resisted direct engagement with North Korea (despite pressure from South

⁵ Sung Jae Choi, “The North Korean Factor in the Improvement of Japanese Intelligence Capability,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2005, pp. 369–397.

⁶ David Fouse, “Japan’s Post-Cold War North Korea Policy: Hedging toward Autonomy?” Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies Occasional Paper Series, February 2004.

Korea under Kim Dae Jung), the Koizumi administration held a series of secret talks with the North Korean leadership. These negotiations culminated in a one-day visit by Koizumi to Pyongyang for a face-to-face meeting with Kim Jong Il on September 17, 2002. With the US intelligence community reaching a clear consensus that the North Koreans were pursuing a covert uranium enrichment program in order to develop nuclear weapons, the timing of Koizumi's trip would have become even more awkward for the two allies had the US already confronted North Korea about these activities at the time of the Koizumi visit. Instead, the United States planned to raise the issue in the first high-level US direct contact with North Korea during the Bush administration, a visit to Pyongyang by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific James A. Kelly in early October 2002.

Advance consultations with the US government regarding Koizumi's plan to visit Pyongyang had not been well executed. During a visit to Japan in the summer of 2002, Japanese government officials briefed Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in elliptical terms on Japan's contacts with North Korea, but the announcement of Koizumi's visit for the most part caught American officials off-guard. This made the inclusion of US concerns in the agenda for the Koizumi visit even more sensitive. While the visit to Pyongyang was managed in a sober, low-key fashion, it yielded a number of surprises; the most dramatic of which was Kim Jong Il's admission of North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the subsequent return of five abductees to Japan. The issue captured Japanese media attention and became a public obsession in the weeks following the visit, especially because the original understanding on the part of the North Korean side was that the release of these five abductees was temporary. However, it quickly became clear that the abductees wanted to remain in Japan. Ultimately, the Japanese government allowed the abductees to remain in Japan, thereby breaching the understanding with North Korea.

The primary diplomatic result of Koizumi's visit, the Pyongyang Declaration, was carefully written to ensure that Japan remained flexible on the nuclear issue, possibly in anticipation of renewed difficulties over nuclear issues between the United States and North Korea.⁷ The declaration's wording allowed Japan to remain consistent with the US position on the North Korean nuclear issue. In fact, Koizumi's decision to allow the Japanese abductees to remain in Japan complicated prospects for further progress in Japan–DPRK relations, bringing Japan even closer to the United States as the second North Korean nuclear crisis began to unfold. Ironically, though, Japan's almost exclusive focus on the abduction issue and insistence on addressing the issue as part of the Six-Party Talks became an obstacle to more effective US–Japan coordination on denuclearization.

The 2006 Missile Test and US–Japan Coordination at the United Nations

North Korea's ballistic missile test on July 4, 2006, which occurred near the end of the Koizumi administration, also challenged the dynamics in alliance coordination. At the time, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, a hardliner within the Koizumi administration who had worked closely with Japanese abductee families, capitalized on the crisis by calling for a decisive public response to North Korea's missile test. Although the long-range Taepodong test was a clear failure, exploding less than a minute following the launch,

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). *Japan–DPRK Pyongyang Declaration*, Pyongyang, September 17, 2002. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html (accessed December 10, 2010).

Abe utilized the test to push hard for a strong UN resolution condemning North Korea’s missile tests. Japan’s role as Chair of the UN Security Council also enabled a strong show of leadership in pushing for a tough resolution.

The Security Council’s position in condemning the missile launch was reinforced by North Korean recklessness. Before the launch, North Korea made no effort to disguise it as a satellite test or to issue established warnings to the international community designed to ensure the safety of air and shipping traffic in areas that might be affected by fallout from the launch. As a result, the task of condemning North Korea for testing long-range missiles became relatively straightforward as the issue came to the Security Council for consideration.

During negotiations over the text of the Security Council resolution, Japan attempted to stiffen the language while China tried to water it down. This situation forced the United States to assume the role of mediator between China and Japan: the United States had to persuade China to cooperate while attempting to moderate the Japanese position and maintain close coordination in the context of the Security Council negotiations. Speed was also an important consideration because if negotiations dragged on too long, the eventual Security Council resolution would be perceived as a weak response to North Korea’s missile launch.

The Bush administration ultimately insisted that Japan stop pushing for a stronger resolution in order to secure the adoption of a more moderate statement by the UN Security Council. This situation contrasted with its efforts to restrain Japanese engagement with North Korea in the run-up to the Koizumi visit to Pyongyang, and provided initial indications of growing friction in the US–Japan relationship over engagement with North Korea.

North Korea’s 2006 Nuclear Test and the Six-Party Talks

North Korea’s nuclear test on October 9, 2006, revived UN Security Council deliberations over sanctions against North Korea, but in this case the time necessary to achieve a consensus was relatively short. Within five days, the Security Council agreed on a resolution condemning North Korea, which was quickly followed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s trips to Tokyo and Seoul on October 17–19 to affirm US commitment to its extended deterrence against North Korean nuclear weapons. Although it was important for the United States to affirm its commitment to Tokyo and Seoul, North Korea’s nuclear test also prompted debate within Japan over developing its own nuclear weapons program or enhancing preemptive capabilities as part of its national security. Over time, this debate spurred doubt about the US commitment to both conventional and extended deterrence. This debate emphasized the deepening anxiety and unease in Japan over US commitments to its defense, and over the widening gap between Japanese expectations and US response in the event of North Korean provocative actions against Japan.

At the end of October 2006, North Korea announced that it would return to the Six-Party Talks. This announcement eliminated the momentum in the international community for implementing UN sanctions under UNSC Resolution 1718 that condemned North Korea’s nuclear test. Specifically, efforts to produce a list of items defined as “luxury goods” that nations would no longer export to North Korea were sidelined, and overall momentum in favor of implementing sanctions stalled. In contrast, Japan unilaterally strengthened its

own sanctions against North Korea, going well beyond the standard that had been imposed under the UN Security Council resolution.

When the Six-Party Talks resumed in mid-December 2006, little progress was made and the round appeared to end in failure. However, an exchange between American and North Korean diplomats following the talks led to the establishment of bilateral talks between US special envoy Christopher Hill and his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye Gwan, which began in Berlin in mid-January 2007. Despite meeting with senior officials from Tokyo prior to his departure for Berlin, Hill failed to inform Japanese officials of the meeting with the North Koreans. This failure unnecessarily increased mistrust between Washington and Tokyo and hampered American efforts to keep Japan constructively engaged in the Six-Party process. Although Hill's meeting in Berlin laid the foundation for the February 13, 2007, agreement on specific action plans for the implementation of the September 2005 Agreed Statement on Principles,⁸ the Government of Japan refused to abide by the negotiated agreement. Specifically, Japan balked at providing heavy fuel oil in exchange for North Korea's pledge to disable the Yongbyon reactor, despite agreement from the other four parties to share the obligation. Even worse, Hill's active efforts to make progress with North Korea became a source of friction with Japanese officials, and as the relationship between Hill and his counterparts in the Government of Japan deteriorated, this friction negatively impacted other aspects of the US–Japan relationship.

Another aspect of the February 2007 agreement, the US promise to remove North Korea from its state sponsors of terrorism list in return for a “complete and correct” declaration of its nuclear facilities, proved even more damaging to US–Japan relations. Because of a 2003 pledge by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Japanese abductee families that the United States would raise the abduction issue in all negotiations with North Korea, Japan regarded the abductee question as having some bearing on the US decision to remove North Korea from the terrorism list.⁹ This impression was reinforced by President Bush's strong show of support for Japan's abductee families, including a personal meeting with abductee Megumi Yokota's mother at the White House in 2006. As a result, Japanese officials saw a resolution of the abductee issue as directly and necessarily linked to any US decision to take North Korea off the terrorism list.¹⁰ When the United States finally removed North Korea from the terrorism list in response to North Korean cooperation in October 2008, Japanese leaders regarded the move as a betrayal. The removal of North Korea from the terrorism list had become a wedge issue by which North Korea had sown distrust and distance between the United States and Japan.

2009 Missile/Nuclear Tests and Japan's Political Transition: Implications for US–Japan Coordination

While the Obama administration continued many of the Bush administration's policy initiatives in Asia and toward North Korea, it made several policy changes based on perceived Bush administration failures. One such “correction” was the adoption of a new

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. *Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement*, February 13, 2007. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t297463.htm>

⁹ “Armitage says US will raise abductee issue,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, March 7, 2003.

¹⁰ “US removal of NKorea from terror list “extremely regrettable” – Japan FM,” *Kyodo News Service*, October 11, 2008.

“ABC” policy—not the “Anything But Clinton” approach of the Bush administration, but rather the “Anything But Chris [Hill]” approach to dealing with North Korea. This strategy included a renewed emphasis on alliance reassurance as a major policy priority in Northeast Asia. This approach granted Japan the privilege of hosting Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on her first foreign destination trip, as well as allowing Prime Minister Aso to be President Obama’s first foreign White House visitor. Such confidence-building efforts were designed to ensure that the US alliances with Japan and South Korea provided a strong foothold in East Asia as a step towards dealing with North Korea.

Although President Obama declared in his inaugural address that he would offer “an outstretched hand to those who would unclench their fists,”¹¹ North Korea apparently believed that it could achieve more by provocation than accommodation. North Korea’s January 2009 Foreign Ministry statements implied that denuclearization would be an option only if the United States ended its “hostile policy” towards the DPRK, rather than as part of the “action for action” formula that formed the basis for implementing the September 2005 Agreed Statement of Principles.¹² Having decided to undertake a second satellite test, the North Koreans rebuffed the possibility of an early visit to North Korea by Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth. North Korea’s missile launch on April 5, 2009, sparked a cycle of escalating tension, including a Presidential Statement¹³ from the United Nations Security Council, followed by North Korea’s pledge to break off from the Six-Party Talks and to conduct another nuclear test, which it did on May 25, 2009.¹⁴ The UN Security Council responded with Resolution 1874 that tightened sanctions on North Korean individuals and entities suspected of being involved with the transfer of North Korean fissile materials, widened the ban on weapons exports and luxury goods already in place under UNSC Resolution 1718, and called on member states to “inspect and destroy all banned cargo to and from that country”.¹⁵ In addition, the United States led efforts to implement the resolution by pursuing active implementation of sanctions on any shipments to or from North Korea, including cargo that could be used in North Korean nuclear or missile programs. Meanwhile, the Obama administration conducted diplomatic coordination discussions with other members of the Six-Party Talks, including South Korea and Japan.

Japan’s Domestic Politics: A New Challenge for US–Japan Alliance Coordination Toward North Korea

Historic governmental change in Japan and the advent of a Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)–led government has thus far had little impact on Japan’s policies toward North Korea, although the overall political environment has been characterized by paralysis and

¹¹ The White House. *President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address*, January 20, 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>

¹² “DPRK Foreign Ministry’s Spokesman Dismisses US Wrong Assertion,” *Korean Central News Agency*, January 13, 2009.

¹³ United Nations Security Council Presidential Statement, April 13, 2009. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9634.doc.htm> (accessed October 1, 2010)

¹⁴ “DPRK Foreign Ministry Vehemently Refutes UNSC’s “Presidential Statement”,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 14, 2009.

¹⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, June 12, 2009. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9679.doc.htm> (accessed October 2, 2010)

indecision. In the last year, officials on both sides of the US–Japan alliance have been focused on contentious plans to build a Futenma Replacement Facility at Camp Schwab near Henoko in Okinawa. This issue has distracted attention from other pressing problems, including policy coordination toward North Korea. Obama administration officials routinely meet with their Japanese foreign ministry counterparts to coordinate on North Korea-related issues, but the impact of such meetings remains limited in part because of the limited impact of the Japanese foreign ministry on the decision-making of top DPJ leaders. Some US officials have described a difficult and slow working-level negotiation process with Japanese counterparts, citing a Japanese bureaucratic structure that is resistant to change and sensitive to potential public responses.¹⁶ Given the stalemate over North Korea’s return to the Six-Party Talks, the broader paralysis in the US–Japan alliance has not had a significant impact on policy coordination toward North Korea. Although the DPJ government so far has not suggested that it will considerably shift Japan’s policy toward North Korea, it is unclear whether the DPJ will maintain the current policy in the future.

Key Issues for US–Japan Coordination and Their Significance for the Alliance

North Korean provocations have clearly influenced the agenda for policy coordination through the US–Japan alliance in at least five aspects. Each of these areas has had a direct impact on the mechanics of alliance coordination, although these influences were often contradictory. In some areas, the United States and Japan are coordinating more closely with each other than ever before; in others, limited coordination reveals discrepancies that, if left unmanaged, could lead to future difficulties for the alliance. Coordination on the following issues has been most directly influenced by efforts to work together to deal with the North Korean nuclear challenge.

Missiles/Missile Defense

North Korean missile development has had a double-edged impact on the US–Japan alliance. On the one hand, the North Korean Taepodong test in 1998 was a major catalyst in Japan’s decision to work more closely with the United States on missile defense. North Korea has provided a convenient pretext for enhanced US–Japan cooperation on missile defense and serves as a proxy for concerns about Chinese military buildup. North Korea’s 2009 satellite launch also provided an opportunity to test progress in the capacities of Japan and the United States to monitor and, if necessary, utilize missile defense systems to shoot down a North Korean missile targeting Japan. Joint work on missile defense has also required Japan and the United States to implement much closer coordination and decision-making on rules for responding to potential missile strikes at an operational level. This coordination is especially pressing given that the US and Japan would likely have minutes, if not seconds, to respond to a missile attack, with little time for deliberation about how to respond in such a crisis.

On the other hand, the missile issue is a potential source of serious division between the United States and Japan, given the differences in their military capability and vulnerability

¹⁶ Emma Chanlett-Avery and Weston S. Konishi, “The Changing US–Japan Alliance: Implications for US Interests,” *Congressional Research Service Report*, July 23, 2009. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/128832.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2010).

to a potential North Korean missile strike. Tensions caused by these differences became clear as early as 2000, when the United States focused on rolling back North Korea's long-range missile program while initially ignoring North Korea's deployments of mid-range Rodong missiles capable of striking Japan. Japan's relative vulnerability to a North Korean missile strike virtually guarantees that Japan will respond to such issues with a higher degree of sensitivity—and demand more concessions from North Korea—than the United States might. That being said, it is incumbent upon the United States to take actions to reassure the Japanese that the United States is both capable and willing to honor alliance commitments and defend Japan from North Korea and other regional threats. The possibility that North Korean action might prompt Japanese demands for military action while falling short of the US threshold for intervention is a vulnerability that must be acknowledged. Given its history, North Korea may try to exploit this weakness as a means of undermining the US–Japan alliance.

US–Japan Strategic Coordination

The first North Korean nuclear crisis revealed weaknesses in US–Japan alliance coordination, prompting clarification of roles and missions for US and Japanese military forces in the event of rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula or DPRK military action. As a result, Japan has strengthened its capacity to support US forces in the event of a strike against Japan. However, there are still worries that the current level of coordination may be insufficient to respond to new threats, as well as suggestions that Japanese military capabilities should be strengthened further in order to fully participate in national defense.

Likewise, there is the perennial challenge of ensuring effective bilateral political coordination in response to North Korean provocations. The Obama administration has done well thus far in engaging Japan as an active partner in coordinating policies toward North Korea. However, ensuring continued cooperation on North Korean issues will be more difficult if there are renewed prospects for diplomatic progress in US–DPRK relations. This problem is perfectly illustrated by Chris Hill's emphasis on US–DPRK bilateral relations at the expense of effective alliance coordination during the Bush administration. In short, US–Japan alliance coordination faces greater stresses when North Korea is engaged in bilateral diplomatic negotiations with the United States, while North Korean provocations tend to unite the United States and Japan in a common response.

US–Japan–ROK Trilateral Coordination Oversight Group (TCOG)

The establishment of a trilateral US–Japan–ROK coordination mechanism in the late 1990s to deal with North Korea was one of former defense secretary William Perry's notable achievements in his role as special coordinator for North Korea policy during the Clinton administration. Unfortunately, trilateral coordination under TCOG broke down during the transition from the Clinton administration to the Bush administration. This breakdown came about in part on behalf of differences between the Kim Dae Jung administration and the Bush/Koizumi administrations over their preferred policies toward North Korea, but was also affected by rising Japan–ROK tensions over territorial and history issues.

Although the TCOG presented a mechanism for the three parties to manage policy differences on North Korea, it also demonstrated how policy changes in the respective

countries can broadly undermine trilateral coordination efforts.¹⁷ Coordination between Japan and South Korea was destabilized by conflicts stemming from the content of Japanese history textbooks and clashes over the territorial claims over the disputed island of Tokdo/Takeshima, located almost equidistant between Korea and Japan in the Sea of Japan/East Sea. The loss of a trilateral framework for coordinating policy toward North Korea made policy formation and implementation more difficult.

Trilateral coordination between the United States, Japan, and South Korea presents an inherent challenge; one party is always the “odd man out.” Japan found itself excluded in the late 1990s and early 2000s as Presidents Clinton and Kim Dae Jung pursued active engagement with North Korea. South Korea was left out when Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun sought engagement, while President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi took a more hard-line approach to North Korea.

On the other hand, strengthening trilateral coordination might help to prioritize international cooperation over domestic political challenges in implementing consistent policy toward North Korea. To the extent that the three countries forge a common approach to North Korea based on consensus, trilateral coordination should also provide reassurance to the public of each nation that collective action in response to North Korea is likely to be more effective than a unilateral approach. With the US–Japan alliance preoccupied by the Futenma issue, a formalized trilateral structure of cooperation might help maintain a separate channel in which to focus on other concerns.

Six-Party Talks

The Six-Party framework has become a source of frustration for US–Japan relations, especially in those cases where the United States perceives Japan to be focused solely on pushing its own issues with North Korea via the Six-Party process. At the same time, the Six-Party Joint Statement emphasizes the necessity of an improved Japan–DPRK relationship (along with improved US–DPRK relations) as a prerequisite for progress toward denuclearization. Japan has clearly been frustrated with the failure of the Six-Party process to make the abduction issue a clearly-stated priority. Still, by emphasizing improved Japan–DPRK relations as a step towards denuclearization, the Six-Party joint statement promotes a process whereby, as a practical matter, the abductees issue will have to be resolved. Japan’s failure to participate in energy provision to North Korea under the February 13, 2007, Implementing Agreement has been disappointing, but Japan’s stance is an understandable reflection of domestic political realities. Although North Korea periodically calls for Japan to be removed from the talks, none of the other parties will honor such a demand. The United States has also insisted on Japan–DPRK bilateral talks, despite North Korean resistance, and has actively promoted coordination with Japan as a central component of the Six-Party process.

North Korean Instability

Instability in North Korea would have clear implications for the US–Japan alliance. While the United States and Japan have coordinated military plans for dealing with North Korea

¹⁷ James L. Schoff, “First Interim Report: The Evolution of the TCOG As A Diplomatic Tool,” The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, November 2004. <http://www.ifpa.org/pdf/updateTCOG.pdf>

in the case of a crisis, Japan needs to be more effectively involved in military contingency plans developed primarily between US Forces Korea and the ROK Ministry of National Defense. Japan’s historical role as a base of logistical support for military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula will likely mean that North Korean instability has implications for US–Japan coordination, so effective regional coordination is essential.

Longer-term, the United States and South Korea agreed in the June 2009 US–ROK Joint Vision Statement that they seek “a durable peace on the peninsula... leading to peaceful reunification on the principles of free democracy and a market economy.”¹⁸ US commitment to this specific objective raises important questions about how US–Japan alliance coordination can be utilized in support of the mission. To the extent that the government of Japan views Korean reunification on these terms as in Japan’s national interest, it may be necessary to identify specific roles for Japan in bilateral agreements with South Korea, through the US–Japan alliance, or as part of a trilateral US–Japan–ROK coordinating framework. These issues must be addressed in US–Japan policy conversations now so that Japanese interests can be recognized and Japan can contribute to common goals.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the influence of North Korean provocative actions on the US–Japan alliance over the past fifteen years. It has also considered specific aspects of North Korea policy implementation that require Japan’s active involvement, and therefore necessitate coordination via the US–Japan alliance and/or with close reference to US–ROK policy coordination. Although North Korean provocations have often been intended to sow dissent between the United States, South Korea, and Japan, this paper concludes that in most cases North Korea’s provocative actions have strengthened US policy coordination with its allies.

Still, further work is required to strengthen US–Japan–ROK trilateral policy coordination. While both the US–ROK and US–Japan alliances have undergone significant transformation in recent years and seek to expand their scope of cooperation, the three countries have yet to establish a new joint rationale for trilateral cooperation on common security challenges. Enhanced US–Japan–ROK coordination would strengthen regional coordination on North Korean nuclear and broader issues, including management of China’s rise. Such coordination appears to support the interests of both the United States and Japan, and should be enhanced through mechanisms that strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the US–Japan alliance.

¹⁸ The White House. *Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea*, Washington DC, June 16, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-vision-for-the-alliance-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-the-Republic-of-Korea/ (accessed March 10, 2010)

Chapter Six

The North Korea Challenge and Resonance with Regional Security Arrangements

Ryo Sahashi

Introduction

The challenge from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is multidimensional, even though we tend to look exclusively at North Korea's nuclear and missile development program and the stalled negotiation process.

First of all, warfare with the DPRK is too costly for any nation; nevertheless, the DPRK's lack of transparency could provoke an escalation of minor conflicts, regardless of the cost, due to miscalculations. Hence, a strong multilateral commitment to deterring DPRK aggression is essential in order to avoid situations in which the DPRK can exploit misunderstandings and divide allies. Second, the DPRK might be an important link in worldwide weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile technology proliferation. North Korea has made use of both official and unofficial routes to facilitate these transactions, and such routes may have included states in South and Southeast Asia. There is a clear need to stem the tide. Third, if natural disasters or domestic turmoil in North Korea lead to a massive outpouring of refugees to neighboring countries, nations throughout East Asia will need to both rescue North Korean citizens and simultaneously assure the security of the DPRK's nuclear facilities, materials and warheads. Fourth, the current human rights situation in North Korea is terrible, and must be addressed. Finally, the DPRK has not achieved normalized relations with Japan and the United States.¹

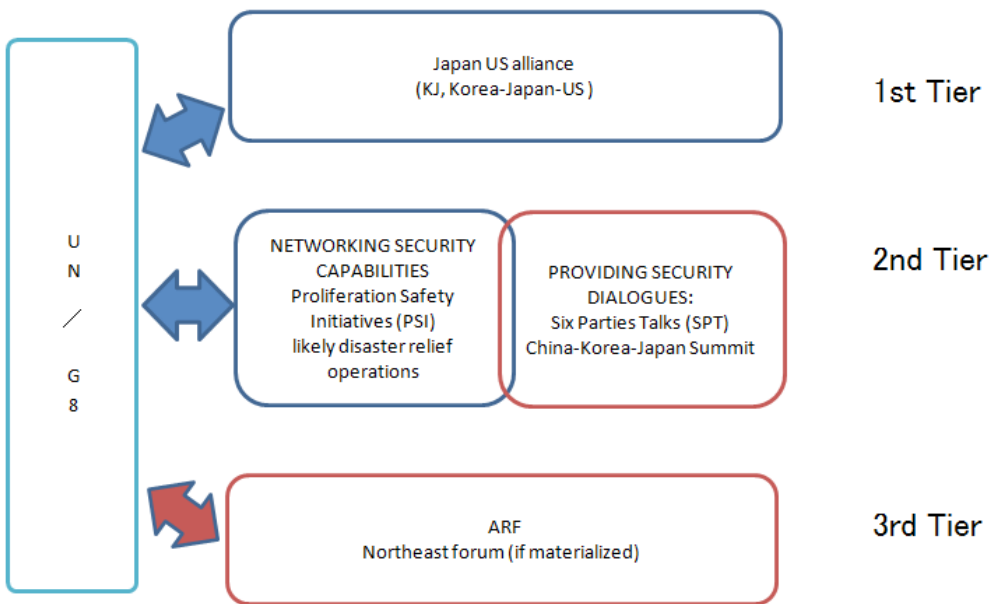
Rapprochement between Japan, the United States and the DPRK is crucial for a stable peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, regional actors have to collaborate in areas including deterrence, counter-proliferation, and humanitarian aid operations to facilitate a peaceful resolution on the peninsula. Bilateral and multilateral negotiations with North Korea help to slow nuclear development and reduce missile launches, but the recent *Cheonan* incident reinforces the necessity of deterrence. Also, to stop proliferation and create incentives for North Korea to accept a peaceful solution, international and regional regulations must be more closely coordinated.

¹ For reference, the recent Task Force report by the Council of Foreign Relations describes the objectives for the Obama administration as follows. "The Task Force finds that the Obama administration should deal with North Korea's policy challenges in the following order: prevent nuclear exports to others (horizontal proliferation), stop further development of North Korea nuclear capability (vertical proliferation), roll back Korea's nuclear program, plan for potential North Korean instability, integrate North Korea into the international community, and help the people of North Korea." Charles L. Pritchard, John H. Tilelli Jr., and Scott A. Snyder, *U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula*, Independent Task Force Report No. 64, (Washington: Council of Foreign Relations, 2010).

The US–Japan alliance is vital to addressing the various problems posed by North Korea. As shown in the previous chapters, however, it is equally important for both Japan and the United States to coordinate with and support regional actors, including the Republic of Korea (ROK), China, Russia, Southeast Asian states, and the rest of the international community. Clearly, Washington and Tokyo have relied upon regional and global partners and institutions to address North Korean challenges. For example, the Six-Party Talks and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have played important roles in responding to North Korean aggression. Why do Japan and the United States rely on such arrangements? How were these security arrangements utilized during the second nuclear crisis?

This chapter will introduce a “three-tier approach” to analyze such security arrangements. It divides security arrangements in the Asia–Pacific region into three ‘tiers,’ an approach recently developed by the author:² strategic relationships in the region based on US bilateral alliances (first tier), functional regional security arrangements (second tier), and regional cooperation frameworks that build on the existing multinational mechanisms (third tier).

Chart 1. Three-tier approach at a glance



First-Tier: Bilateral Strategic Security Relations

The first tier of US bilateral alliances with Asian nations has been a key component of East Asian security since the Cold War. Bilateral alliances are necessary to prepare for wartime contingencies and deter potential aggressors during peacetime. However, today’s security challenges often make it difficult to clearly differentiate between peacetime and wartime efforts. Examples of these security challenges include stemming the proliferation

² Ryo Sahashi, *Conceptualizing Three-Tier Approach to Analyze Security Arrangements in Asia-Pacific*, Security and Defense Studies Center Working Paper, no.415, (Canberra: Australian National University, December 2009).

of WMD and terrorism by enforcing established domestic and international law, preventing and responding to pandemics, and protecting human dignity in the case of contingencies. Effective military and law enforcement capabilities are necessary, and policy coordination between states, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations is essential. Cooperation between allied governments is generally sufficient for effective bilateral coordination due to the lower transaction costs than those between non-allied governments.³

The US–Japan alliance has been Japan’s vehicle for addressing North Korean challenges at the first-tier level. During the second nuclear crisis that began in 2002, however, the US–Japan alliance experienced both periods of enhanced cooperation and times of weakened relations. This may puzzle observers, given that both countries perceived the common threat of North Korean nuclear development and in fact strengthened their military interoperability during this period. Tensions between the two countries were mainly a response to political and diplomatic friction. In particular, US ability to make unilateral compromises with North Korea as necessary caused concern in Japan that its interests would be forgotten or ignored. This crisis also showed the limits of the hub-and-spokes system, with the US at the center of a series of bilateral alliances in the Asia–Pacific region. The lack of solidarity among regional allies, especially between Japan and South Korea, might have hindered the ability of the Six-Party Talks to conduct effective negotiations.

When the second North Korean nuclear crisis broke out in 2002, the US–Japan alliance was militarily reinforced in four main ways. As Scott Snyder argues in earlier in this volume, North Korea was the main catalyst for a strengthened US–Japan alliance.⁴ First, the two nations began to collaborate on a missile defense system in the early 2000s. On the Japanese side, the desire for missile defense stemmed in large part from North Korea’s two previous missile launches. North Korea’s missile tests over Japanese territory in July 2006 and July 2009 spurred further support for more advanced defense capabilities. Taking advantage of the momentum created by the past missile tests by Pyongyang, both governments have succeeded in enhancing their interoperability and information sharing for missile defense.

Second, in response to the 2006 and 2009 missile launches, the United States and Japan worked closely together to push for UNSC resolutions condemning North Korea’s actions. This enhanced cooperation between the United States and Japan surely contributed to popular support for the alliance among the Japanese public.

Third, the threat from North Korea provided both governments with the opportunity to reaffirm their regional and global roles and missions and share their common security objectives. This process of alliance transformation from 2004 to 2006 eventually brought Tokyo and Washington closer both diplomatically and militarily. Unlike South Korea, whose global posture review revealed deep divides between US and Korean strategic interests, the US–Japan relationship was united on common goals.

Finally, Japan’s decision to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) “out-of-area” in order to support the United States was significant for building alliance trust. After September

³ Sugio Takahashi, “Asia-Pacific Security Architecture and the Role of the Alliance,” in Ken Jimbo, ed., *Regional Security Architecture in Asia-Pacific: Multilayer Structure of Regional Security* (Tokyo: Tokyo Foundation, 2010), pp. 51–66.

⁴ See Chapter Five “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan” by Scott Snyder in this volume.

2001, the SDF joined Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in the Indian Ocean to participate in the reconstruction process in postwar Iraq. A senior American official commented that the alliance was finally functioning. This comment implies that the military commitment imbalance and the resulting asymmetrical nature of the alliance might have begun to shift.

While taking steps to strengthen bilateral defense ties, Japan worried about the US military overstretching, particularly in the Middle East during this period. The decision by the Koizumi administration to dispatch the SDF to East Timor, the Indian Ocean and Iraq was designed to assure the US commitment to Northeast Asia.

Japan continues to face two challenges. One is Tokyo’s fear of abandonment by the United States. Despite the alliance’s shared military priorities, this became evident particularly during the last two years of the Bush administration when the diplomatic relationship between Japan and the United States experienced serious tension over their respective policies toward North Korea. As Hwang argues in Chapter One, the divergent outcomes in security cooperation and diplomatic relations are related to the fundamental structure of the alliance:

“Tokyo’s ability to forge an independent and proactive policy towards North Korea has been hampered, while frustration in Washington over the inability to forge a unified consensus with Tokyo on North Korea policies has strained the alliance relationship. Thus, rather than serving as a useful mechanism to bridge differences and produce a unified policy, the alliance itself, rather than common objectives on the Korean Peninsula, became the focal point of US–Japan relations. As such, conventional wisdom tends to blame key leaders and bureaucrats working in the Six-Party process for the growth in mistrust and suspicion in Tokyo and Washington during this period. However, recent tensions are the symptoms and not the cause of misaligned strategic objectives in the region and a security structure too rigid to adjust to shifting regional and global dynamics.”⁵

Washington and Tokyo have different objectives coming into bilateral and multilateral negotiations on the DPRK’s nuclear program. Japanese administrations have had to deal with the abduction issue and a lack of public support for engaging in negotiations with the DPRK. In contrast, the American approach has emphasized the importance of negotiations and prioritized anti-proliferation efforts focused on WMD and missile technology. Negotiations might have meant a give-and-take process on the US side, but the Japanese public regarded negotiations as an unnecessary compromise given Pyongyang’s illegitimate behavior. These different interpretations of negotiation were rooted in the populist diplomacy common in Japan since the Koizumi administration. At this juncture, the relationship between Tokyo and Washington suffered from differing expectations of the role of negotiations as well as Japan’s public fear of diplomatic abandonment. This gap has encouraged suspicions within Japan about the reliability of the United States as a chief negotiator. Japanese negotiators worry that the United States will accept a small number of DPRK-controlled nuclear warheads, and that it would pursue normalized diplomatic relations before solving the abduction issue. These perceptions may be mistaken, but they have certainly influenced Japan’s North Korea policy to some extent.

Japan’s dilemma is clear: it does not have sufficient resources to resolve the DPRK nuclear challenge on its own. While Japan retains some leverage in the form of economic assistance

⁵ Balbina Y. Hwang, “America’s “North Korea Problem” and US–Japan Relations,” in this volume, p. 15.

to North Korea linked to normalized relations, this incentive has done little to influence North Korean behavior in the past.⁶ Thus, Japan has no effective means of its own in bargaining with the DPRK. Japan also finds itself isolated from the negotiation process whenever Washington engages in bilateral discussions with Pyongyang, as in the 2007 talks in Berlin. As Snyder suggests, “Hill failed to inform Japanese officials of the meeting with the North Koreans. This failure unnecessarily increased mistrust between Washington and Tokyo and hampered American efforts to keep Japan constructively engaged in the Six-Party process.”⁷

The second challenge that Japan faces is its insufficient security relations with other US allies and friends in the region. In particular, the bilateral relationship between Japan and the ROK appears to be a weak link in the chain of regional alliances. The United States, Japan, and Korea clearly have shared concerns over the security threat of North Korean nuclear and missile development over the last two decades. After the 1994 Agreed Framework succeeded in cooling down the first North Korean nuclear crisis, the three nations began ad hoc high-level meetings to discuss collaboration on the North Korea issue. The trilateral meetings initially encountered difficulties over conflicting national priorities and policy towards North Korea. However, “the Taepodong missile launch subsequently helped launch the so-called Perry Process, which in turn led to the establishment of the TCOG (Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group)”⁸ since the nations all felt it necessary to show unity vis-à-vis Pyongyang. TCOG was officially established in 1999, but more or less had ceased to function by the beginning of the Bush administration in 2001. Thus, in the second nuclear crisis TCOG was unable to coordinate an effective trilateral response to North Korean behavior.

During the Six-Party Talks, policy makers in Tokyo and Washington seriously feared that multilateral negotiations would undermine trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and the ROK. As they had predicted, in the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks the three nations split over the question of national posture towards the DPRK.⁹ Of course, political tensions between Japan and Korea were due in part to friction between President Roh Moo Hyun and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, both of whom insisted on an aggressively nationalistic attitude even in diplomatic affairs.

President Lee Myung Bak’s rise to power was expected to change the atmosphere in the Japan–ROK relationship for the better. In fact, a sign of better Japan–ROK collaboration can be seen in former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama’s strong support for South Korea following the *Cheonan* incident, as well as Hatoyama’s emphasis on building a comprehensive relationship with South Korea through a more robust economic partnership. The shelling at Yeonpyong Island reminded us of the deep-rooted and most risky instability lying in the peninsula. Both cases created the momentum for bilateral and trilateral cooperation among South Korea, Japan and the United States. In July 2010, officers from the SDF observed a US–South Korean military exercise, and South Korean military officers observed a

⁶ Izumikawa, “North Korea Problems” and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan in this volume, p. 38.

⁷ Snyder, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan” in this volume, p. 84

⁸ James L. Schoff, *Tools for Trilateralism: Improving US–Japan–Korea Cooperation to Manage Complex Contingencies* (Boston: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2005), p. 8.

⁹ Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 2006), pp. 666–667.

US–Japan exercise in December 2010. In addition, the three countries' foreign ministers gathered in Washington, DC, in early December 2010. At the trilateral foreign ministers' meeting they showed a common stance against the challenges from North Korea. The South Korean and Japanese defense ministers confirmed their willingness to upgrade their security cooperation in January 2011, and the Japanese Prime Minister's address on the first day of the Diet also showed interest in reinforcing trilateral cooperation. Robert F. Willard, Commander of US Pacific Command, also showed interest in future trilateral joint military exercises in late January 2011.

Still, the mistrust between Tokyo and Seoul remains, which can be reinforced by nationalistic tendencies on both sides. Fundamental differences in policy towards North Korea, due in part to the ethnic bond between the Koreans and reluctance on the part of the Korean people to have a security partnership with Japan, may continue to keep some distance between South Korea and Japan.

Both Japan and South Korea are threatened by the DPRK's aggressive actions. In the case of escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, therefore, the two nations are likely to find more common ground. However, the lack of effective means of communication between the two may present a challenge. This problem was clear in the wake of North Korea's missile launch on July 5, 2006. Seoul's response was noticeably later than those of Washington or Tokyo, revealing the fractures in trilateral coordination.¹⁰ The lack of coordination was problematic from the perspective of deterrence as well, because the three countries failed to show a unitary commitment to retaliate.

Furthermore, the event might also have created a credibility problem for Seoul since it was not immediately notified by its ally and partner regarding this vital security incident. Similar problems are possible if the United States and/or South Korea chooses not to share information with Japan immediately after incidents with the North Korea. To maximize effective coordination it is also preferable for Japan and the ROK to be linked deeply and directly. Scott Snyder insists, "Japan needs to be more effectively involved in military contingency plans developed primarily between US Forces Korea and the ROK Ministry of National Defense."¹¹

The trilateral Korea–Japan–US framework could work as a bridge to a Japan–ROK partnership. For example, the US can take the lead in organizing contingency planning and joint naval exercises among the three countries. As Snyder argues in this project, "[t]o the extent that the three countries forge a common approach to North Korea based on consensus, trilateral coordination should also provide reassurance to the public of each nation that collective action in response to North Korea is likely to be more effective than a unilateral approach."¹² Also, to deter the North Koreans, the solidarity of the three countries is crucial.

Given the recent momentum for Japan–ROK Acquisition and Cross-Serving Agreement (ACSA) negotiation, the security partnership between Tokyo and Seoul may begin the

¹⁰ Nikkei Shimbun, *North Korean Crisis* (Tokyo: Nikkei, 2006).

¹¹ Snyder, "North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan," in this volume, p. 89.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 87

process of institutionalization in the near future. Even if non-regional, non-traditional concerns are the first to be addressed in the security partnership, stronger bilateral security links between Tokyo and Seoul would pave the way for trust building and greater trilateral cooperation on North Korean challenges.

Second-Tier: Needs-Based Functional Mechanism

In general, due to the lack of progress in strategic relations and in region-wide cooperation mechanisms, the last decade has witnessed the birth of numerous needs-based multilateral cooperative mechanisms. These cooperative mechanisms cover issues from capacity building in the coast guard and rapid reaction to military threats to infectious disease and natural disasters.

On the North Korea issue, the Six-Party Talks are the main functional mechanism. The talks aim to provide a security dialogue for progress on peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The Six-Party Talks do not rely on existing formal alliances, and have not been institutionalized in the sense of international law. Still, despite its ad hoc nature, common security interests make this mechanism valuable.

The Six-Party Talks are a quite unique security arrangement. They are not a formal alliance; rather, they function as an informal coalition or alignment. North Korea, the source of the problem, is a participant in this arrangement. Second, the Six-Party Talks are not an arrangement by the other five parties to encircle and pressure North Korea. This function might have been expected by some of the members, but in reality China and Russia have been reluctant to exert too much pressure on the DPRK. North Korea's nuclear and missile development has not substantially changed the balance of power in the region. It is unlikely that China and Russia will ally themselves with the other Six-Party Talks members against North Korea.

One may then wonder why the members of the Six-Party Talks agreed to participate in the talks at all. Each party has very different objectives, and they often disagree on basic security interests. For instance, the Sino-US relationship was important to paving the way for the Six-Party Talks. For decades the Chinese government had refused to take the lead in addressing issues on the Korean Peninsula, but in 2003 China finally agreed to host trilateral meetings with the DPRK and the United States and to host the Six-Party Talks in Beijing. However, as evident in the response to the *Cheonan* incident in March 2010, China has continued its traditional support for Pyongyang, and Sino-American negotiations have achieved little progress on the issue of North Korea. This might explain why one influential report, released in June 2010, calls for “the establishment of a dialogue with China about the future of the Korean peninsula,” and “for bilateral talks with North Korea regarding missile development, and for the continuation of close consultations with allies South Korea and Japan.”¹³

The Japanese government initially favored the Six-Party Talks to other mechanisms which might exclude Japan from negotiations.¹⁴ The Six-Party Talks may also help to solve Japan's

¹³ Pritchard et al, *US Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Izumikawa, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination Between the United States and Japan,” in this volume, p. 39.

dilemma over normalization with the DPRK. Yoichi Funabashi of Asahi Shimbun argues: “The tension between Washington and Pyongyang created the momentum toward the normalization process between Tokyo and Pyongyang. However, unless Washington and Pyongyang turned their relationship toward normalization, it is unlikely that Japan–DPRK (can) finalize (normalization).”¹⁵ Putting it another way, the stalemate between North Korea and the United States provided Japan with the momentum for a bilateral bargaining process with Pyongyang. On the other hand, as a US ally, it was difficult for Japan to take unilateral steps towards normalization with North Korea. Japan has been caught in this dilemma since the Koizumi administration. Therefore, if the Six-Party Talks succeed in creating a lasting solution for peace on the peninsula, Japan will have established a place in further negotiations, will reap the benefits of sub-regional peace and stability, and will be able to move closer towards normalized relations with the DPRK.

In addition, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) has become another important multinational functional mechanism to address North Korea’s challenge. In 2002, the *So San*, a Cambodian ship from North Korea, was interdicted by Spanish authorities who found it carrying Scud missiles. Unfortunately, the ship was eventually released without confiscation due to the lack of legal authority to do so. This event stimulated deliberation by Bush administration officials about how future cases could be better handled.¹⁶ President George W. Bush announced the beginning of the PSI in May 2003 as international action on interdiction of WMD-related illegal and suspicious transportation. PSI has grown significantly in recent years and now includes ninety-five nations. It does not merely target WMD and missile-related proliferation to and from North Korea, but is expected to enforce the international mandates on counter-proliferation of UNSCR 1540 (2004), UNSCR 1718 (2006) and UNSCR 1874 (2009). The PSI is another example of needs-based functional cooperation to increase security capabilities.

Furthermore, natural disaster relief and infectious disease response are increasingly important elements of non-traditional security arrangements. In Asia, it is unlikely that Pyongyang would accept a massive flow of military and non-military operation teams in the event of a natural disaster. However, such a contingency has the potential to disrupt governance of North Korea. Under those circumstances, international operations would be coordinated by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as well as by US-led coalitions such as those that responded to the tsunami disaster in December 2004. Seamless civil-military collaboration is necessary for a case like North Korea. Japanese civil society has prepared for such events on the Korean Peninsula and is able to address contingency scenarios through a cross-sectional approach involving business as well as central and municipal governments. Japanese expertise includes preemptive coordination and training, post-disaster rapid investigation, logistics, and needs-based care. In short, Japanese civil society has the means to respond to a humanitarian crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

These examples demonstrate that such needs-based functional mechanisms will remain useful as a supplement to the first tier of strategic security relationships in addressing North

¹⁵ Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 112.

¹⁶ Emma Belcher, *A Tighter Net: Strengthening the Proliferation Security Initiative* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009), p.4.

Korean challenges. By providing venues for security dialogues and means to enhance networking security capabilities, second-tier arrangements help to alleviate risks. One has to be reminded that these mechanisms are established by major powers because regionally-based organizations are insufficient to address current security threats. The success of the PSI and natural disaster relief operations show the ability of second-tier mechanisms to ably serve both state and non-state actors.

Small group mechanisms of functional cooperation could offer other opportunities for Japan. The China–Korea–Japan trilateral summit provides an opportunity for top-level meetings on North Korea. In fact, in its Beijing meeting in 2009, China shared the results of the Premier’s visit to Pyongyang, which had taken place just before the summit. The Joint Statement that was issued following the October 2009 trilateral summit affirmed this possibility, saying “[w]e will step up high-level contacts and strategic dialogues, strengthen mutual understanding, expand common ground and build solid strategic mutual trust.”¹⁷ If China, Korea, and Japan can forge stronger ties, it would likely influence the Six-Party Talks in a more favorable way for Japan and the United States. With the proposal of a cyber secretariat, collaboration between the three nations is likely to become increasingly important in Northeast Asia, and might help with confidence building between China, Korea, and Japan.

Third-Tier: Region-Wide Mechanism

To date, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)—the most inclusive regional cooperative mechanism in the Asia–Pacific region—has been insufficient in tackling North Korean challenges. Its goals of confidence building and preventive diplomacy are largely irrelevant in the ongoing crisis because Pyongyang’s behavior is intentional and has already moved beyond the stage in which preventive diplomacy can be effective.

Furthermore, the ARF has failed to show solidarity on the issue of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Its meeting in July 2010 did directly impeach North Korea with respect to the *Cheonan* incident. In terms of effectiveness, the second-tier approach is seemingly preferred at the moment by Tokyo and Washington, particularly in areas such as counter-proliferation.

Still, the establishment of a strong region-wide security mechanism remains a legitimate goal for all parties of Pacific Asia. In December 2009, thanks to UNSC action, North Korean weapons were seized at Don Mueang Airport in Thailand. That success clarifies the importance of establishing a common approach by the whole region to combat arms proliferation. The recent ASEAN decision to invite the United States and Russia to the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus and the East Asian Summit could potentially intensify the role of the ASEAN mechanism in tackling North Korean challenges.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), *Joint Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of Trilateral Cooperation among the People’s Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea*, Beijing, China, October 10, 2009. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/jck/meet0910/joint-1.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2010).

Conclusion: Implications for Japan

North Korea challenges the stability of Northeast Asia and international society through nuclear and missile development, proliferation of weapons technology, narcotic exports, regime instability, and human rights violations. To cope with these multidimensional threats, Japan and the United States have reaffirmed their bilateral alliance commitments and also utilized multilateral, regional, and global schemes. Traditional bilateral alliance cooperation (first tier) is no less important in policy considerations, but the Six-Party Talks, Proliferation Security Initiative (second tier: needs-based functional mechanism), and UNSC Resolutions have played roles that are far greater than mere supplemental tools of formal alliances in addressing North Korean challenges. Traditionally, bilateral alliances formed the core approach to security, and regional and global cooperation was regarded as an ad hoc and a la carte tool. Security arrangements during the second North Korean crisis have been quite different: security-oriented organizations in the second and third tiers so far have also worked together to meet current security needs.

Clearly, each tier has its own problems. In the first layer, the strategic security relationship between Tokyo and Seoul is weakened by a lack of communication. The Six-Party Talks have assuaged the Japanese fear of diplomatic abandonment by the United States by including Japan in a larger forum. It also shows that the involvement and cooperation with non-allied, regional actors, especially China, is significant. However, the Six-Party Talks also allow Japan to test US reliability, and create credibility concerns about collective action on North Korea. The PSI, another crucial second-tier framework, currently lacks the participation of the countries that are critical in counter-proliferation efforts, including China, Malaysia and Indonesia. Comprehensive regional institutions (third tier) still today lack the ability to address these transnational issues.

What lessons should we learn from the challenge presented by North Korea, which continues to pursue a nuclear program and create instability in the Asia–Pacific region? First, the Six-Party Talks have been the imperfect but preferable framework for making progress with Pyongyang. The Six-Party Talks face the difficulty of finding common ground for all parties. This issue holds true even for the allied United States and Japan, which are split on North Korean policy by the abduction issue and other priority gaps. The United States needs to assure Japan that it will keep Japanese interests in mind as it pursues normalization, or in any forms of negotiation with the DPRK. If there is a new round of Six-Party Talks or a new framework, such as three bilateral talks between Pyongyang and the three capitals, communication among allies would be the key to success.

Second, coping effectively with North Korean challenges will require enhanced cooperation between Japan, the ROK, and the United States. This means that new security arrangements must move beyond the current hub-and-spokes alliance system. The three nations should capitalize on the momentum from the *Cheonan* incident and the Yeonpyeong Island shelling and begin a discussion on civil-military projection under instability scenarios. Hitoshi Tanaka, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, proposes that trilateral cooperation should “include the formulation of full-fledged contingency planning for the defense of

South Korea in the event of North Korean aggression.” He also points out the importance of contingency planning for “nonmilitary aspects such as coping with refugee flows.”¹⁸

The Yeonpyong Island shelling shows deterrence did not work to the extent of preventing North Korea from taking low-intensity military action. This is a really new situation. Without a stronger framework of deterrence, another action by the North might not be stopped. US–ROK and US–Japan joint exercises with observers contributed to a symbolic, deterring effect, but we still need to develop more. In addition, the three countries should establish a trustworthy intelligence mechanism to keep the credibility of the alliance with the United States. In 2011, President Lee Myung Bak will visit Tokyo for a summit in which it is expected that both countries will agree on the future course for Japan–ROK relations. The Japanese Prime Minister (Naoto Kan is the incumbent as of the publication of this volume, March 2011) will also likely visit the United States in the first half of 2011. At that time, it is anticipated that the two leaders will jointly declare new directions of the alliance. These series of high-level visits will contribute to maintaining the current positive momentum that exists among the United States, Japan and the ROK.

Third, Japan should begin serious discussions with China on the future of North Korea. A trilateral summit between China, Japan, and the ROK could persuade China to join various second- and third-tier institutions, and Japan and the United States should work together in courting Chinese participation. If five members of the Six-Party Talks reach a consensus on North Korea and display a willingness to act collaboratively, Pyongyang will be far more likely to return to a new round of Six-Party Talks or a new form of dialogue.

The linkage between alliance coordination and China’s next steps must be considered carefully. Needless to say, Beijing’s tie with Pyongyang is still considered influential even though we are starting to wonder to what degree. Inducing China into collaboration with the three countries and UNSC resolutions is significant. Trilateral solidarity could work to pressure China since it never wants to see the US alliance network formally enhanced, preserving US influence in the region. However, isolating Beijing is never a good idea. To avoid such a result, we first need to design trilateral cooperation solely for North Korean challenges, not for challenging the rise of China. The issues that China is sensitive to—human rights and democracy, for instance—therefore cannot be on the trilateral agenda.

Fourth, the development of China–Japan–ROK trilateral cooperation and bilateral talks between China and others should proceed at the same time, in order not to preclude Chinese participation. However, it would be overly pessimistic to worry that upgrading alliance coordination among Seoul, Tokyo and Washington would end up enhancing Beijing–Pyongyang ties. For China, enhancing its relationship with Pyongyang, symbolically and substantially, should no longer be to its benefit. This point should be reconfirmed through continuous dialogues with other stakeholders. The goal is, through utilizing many channels, to have all parties who want the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula agree upon a thorough, consensual approach.

Finally, by analyzing multilayered cooperation on North Korean security challenges, we reaffirm the significance of the Japan–US alliance. This alliance provides the key military presence in Northeast Asia to deter and respond to North Korean aggressive behavior, as well

¹⁸ Hitoshi Tanaka, “Rethinking Our Approach to the Korean Crisis,” *East Asia Insights*, January 2011.

as the public goods for regionally-tailored functional cooperation against challenges such as proliferation and money laundering. Moreover, we can expect Tokyo and Washington to collaborate more in the future both in the contexts of ROK–Japan–US trilateral and ASEAN-based security mechanisms. To improve the confidence and robustness of this alliance, it will be essential for Washington and Tokyo to make sure that the maintenance of a strong US–Japan alliance will remain a high policy priority for both governments.

Chapter Seven

Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance

L. Gordon Flake

The founding of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)—September 9, 1948—predates the signing of the US–Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. While the alliance developed in the broader context of the Cold War, the integral role of Japan as a base for US forces during the Korean War and for subsequent Korean contingencies has meant that the North Korean threat has always been a primary factor in alliance policy coordination. However, it is only in recent decades, with the development of a direct threat to Japan from North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs and the emergence of North Korea as a major domestic political issue in Japan that there has been much of an independent Japanese policy line and thus the need for significant policy coordination between Tokyo and Washington. If the past two decades are any indication, such coordination has deep implications for the US–Japan alliance.

In order to understand these implications, it is important to first understand the role that North Korea has played in the public justification of the alliance, in advancing controversial alliance-related public policy measures, and in domestic politics, particularly in Japan.

Assessing the Influence the North Korea Issue Has Had on the US–Japan Alliance

Given Japan’s colonial legacy on the Korean Peninsula and the presence of a sizable Korean minority in Japan, the majority of which at one time self-identified with North Korea and held North Korean citizenship, North Korea was an important factor in Japanese foreign policy from the start. Likewise, even though the Korean War is considered the “forgotten war” in the United States, in recent decades North Korea has received a disproportionate amount of attention from US foreign policy makers. For the purpose of this assessment, however, the key question is the role and impact the North Korea issue has had upon the US–Japan alliance itself as opposed to broader US or Japanese foreign policy.

Transitioning to a Post-Cold War era: North Korea as a visible public justification for the US–Japan alliance and for the presence of US troops in Japan

As the Soviet Union dissolved and the most prominent vestiges of the Cold War came to an end in the early 1990s, there was a broad, global reevaluation of Cold War postures, expectation of peace dividends, and a growing assumption that we had reached the “end

of history.”¹ Such an environment led to a gradual reassessment of the US–Japan alliance and the role of US troops in Japan and Asia more broadly. In fact, much of the concern voiced by Japanese political leaders during the early 1990s related to the number of US troops in Asia as a symbol of US commitment to the region. At the same time, just as the Soviet threat declined, the specter of a nuclear North Korea was on the rise with the 1993 and 1994 crisis surrounding Pyongyang’s rejection of special International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. Japan, still smarting over the lack of international appreciation for its “checkbook” diplomacy in the Gulf War, was once again asked to bankroll a significant portion of the activities of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) which emerged from the October 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework negotiated between the United States and North Korea—a negotiation in which Japan had no immediate role.

Even though the North Korean nuclear crisis of the 1990s was arguably more important to Japanese national security, the event which served to bring the North Korean threat home to the average Japanese and then to galvanize public policy was the August 1998 launch of a three-stage Taepodong rocket from North Korea, passing over Japan. Perhaps more importantly, the test shocked the security establishment in Japan and greatly eased the way for negotiations between the United States and Japan on everything from the status of forces agreements to the revision of defense guidelines to discussions about the deployment of a theater missile defense. Over the past decade North Korea has continued to be the source of understandable fascination for the broader Japanese population as well as the focus of the sensitive political issue surrounding the Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. The continued testing of North Korean missiles and, perhaps most importantly, the further development of a North Korean nuclear program and eventual testing of nuclear weapons has assured that the North Korean threat remains foremost in the minds of Japanese politicians, security planners and the broader public alike. Given the deep-seated pacifism of post-war Japanese society and the constitutional restrictions placed upon the Japanese military, it has arguably been the North Korean threat that enabled Japan to move forward so rapidly with the United States in areas of security cooperation.

Likewise, North Korea and North Korea-related contingencies have long been a primary public justification for the US–Japan alliance and, in particular, for the basing of US troops in Japan. One telling indicator of this justification can be found in statements by US Ambassadors to Japan related to North Korea. When then Ambassador to Japan and former Vice President Walter Mondale was asked why US troops were needed in Japan in a post-Cold War period, he responded that “first of all, if you look at North Korea, they have a million military personnel on the border of South Korea as we talk tonight. We hope that they will never use those forces, but a little over a year ago, we were very concerned that they might do something foolish there. If that were to occur, we would need our forces in Japan, our forces in South Korea, and perhaps other forces to deal with what could be a very serious risk.”² Ambassador Thomas Schieffer, who played a key role in reassuring Japan during a difficult period in US-Japan policy coordination on North Korea when

¹ This notion was most prominently espoused by Francis Fukuyama in his 1993 book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

² Transcript of PBS Newshour interview with Walter Mondale, January 10, 1996. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/mondale_interview_1-10.html (accessed May 3, 2010).

North Korea was calling for Japan to be excluded from the Six-Party Talks, was equally clear about the importance of US-Japan cooperation on North Korea policy: “And the notion that North Korea is somehow going to belittle Japan or is going to say to the United States that Japan is not going to be a part of the solution - that’s ridiculous. This alliance has existed for more than 50 years, and the North Koreans are not going to divide the United States and Japan, particularly on an issue of whether they should be allowed to have nuclear weapons. We are together, and the fact that we are together makes [us] stronger.”³ A cursory review would reveal numerous statements by Ambassador Howard Baker and Ambassador Thomas Foley likewise spanning administrations and political parties while reaffirming the focus of the US-Japan alliance on the North Korea threat.

North Korea as a stalking horse, allowing the United States and Japan to respond to the rise of China in a less confrontational manner

On January 19, 2010, the United States and Japan celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. In official statements, both sides recognized the need for an American presence in East Asia. Tellingly, the statement by then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama did not mention China, yet singled out the North Korean threat:

“Over the last half-century, the global security environment has changed dramatically, as exemplified by the end of the Cold War and the Sept. 11 attacks. Nonetheless, the security environment surrounding Japan remains difficult, as can be seen by the nuclear and missile testing by North Korea.

Under such circumstances, for Japan, which has declared that it will not acquire nuclear weapons or become a military power, the deterrence provided by the US Forces based on the US–Japan security arrangements, together with Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF), serves, and will continue to serve, an essential role in the foreseeable future to maintain Japan’s peace and security.

The US–Japan security arrangements continue to be indispensable not only for the defense of Japan alone, but also for the peace and prosperity of the entire Asia–Pacific region. Under a security environment in which there still exist uncertainty and unpredictability, the presence of the US forces based on the treaty will continue to function as a public good by creating a strong sense of security to the countries in the region.”⁴

Following the September 2010 incident between a Chinese fishing trawler and the Japanese Coast Guard ships near the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, it is difficult to imagine a similar assessment of the Japanese regional security environment not at least referencing China. A standing presumption for much of the past decade has been that Japanese long-range security planners were far more concerned about growing Chinese military and economic

³ Remarks made in response to a question following a speech Ambassador Schieffer made before the US-Japan Business Council in Tokyo on November 13, 2006. <http://tokyo.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20061113-74.html> (accessed June 1, 2010).

⁴ *Official Statement by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security of Japan and the United States of America*, January 19, 2010 http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/hatoyama/statement/201001/19danwa_e.html (accessed May 15, 2010)

influence in the region than they were about a North Korean threat. However, given the economic and political mandate within Japan for good relations with China, such concerns were seldom expressed openly. While it is true that North Korea has often been a fig leaf of sorts for Japanese planning related to China, there is also no doubt about the actual threat that North Korea itself holds for Japanese national security.

The North Korean nuclear challenge as a focal point of US–Japan cooperation

During the period of 1998 through 2006, Japanese policy makers and security planners were presumed to place greater priority on the threat posed by North Korea’s missile program than on North Korea’s nuclear problem. To play off the concept of “same bed, different dreams,” at times during this period the United States and its allies in Northeast Asia were presumed to have different “nightmare” scenarios and thus different policy priorities. The United States was reputed to place its highest priority on non-proliferation, Japan on missiles, and South Korea on avoiding a conventional conflict on the peninsula. While such differences may have been exaggerated in terms of actual policy, there were certainly noticeable variances in emphasis and public articulation between Tokyo, Washington and Seoul. For Japan, however, that changed in October 2006 with the first North Korean nuclear test and the second test in May 2009. Not only did Japan play a leading role in coordinating a response in the United Nations Security Council, but the nuclear issue was increasingly referenced as a key area of cooperation for the US–Japan alliance.

In November 2009, President Obama and Prime Minister Hatoyama held a bilateral meeting in Tokyo, issuing the “Joint Statement toward a World without Nuclear Weapons,” in the context of which the United States and Japan pledged to continue to work towards the common goal in multilateral settings. On this occasion as well, North Korea was the primary focus:

“The GOJ and the USG declare that it remains vital for North Korea and Iran to uphold and adhere to their respective international obligations. As demonstrated by its recent missile launches and nuclear test, North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons remains a major threat to peace and stability in Northeast Asia and the entire international community. The GOJ and the USG reaffirm their commitment to the irreversible and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to the goals of the September 25 Joint Statement. They stress that the Six Party Talks remain the most effective framework to achieve these goals and they urge North Korea to return immediately to the Six Party Talks without precondition. Both governments agree to fully implement UNSC Resolutions 1718 and 1874 and urge all UN member states to do the same.”⁵

Similarly, when Japan participated in the April 12 to 13, 2010, Washington Nuclear Security Summit, North Korea’s nuclear threat was clearly placed in the broader context of US–Japan cooperation in support of international nonproliferation regimes.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), *Japan–US Joint Statement toward a World without Nuclear Weapons*, November 2009, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/pv0911/nuclear.pdf> (accessed January 5, 2010)

(President Obama) “We have continued to say that our goal is a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. That’s vital for the security of East Asia. The United States and Japan, with the other members of the Six-Party Talks, will continue to work to show North Korea that there is a pathway, a door, for them to rejoin the international community that would serve their people well and I believe enhance their security over the long term. They have to walk through that door. In the meantime, we will continue to implement the sanctions that have already been put in place, and we will continue to coordinate closely with Japan and the other Six Party members in helping to shape a strategy that meets our security needs and convinces Pyongyang to move in a better direction.”⁶

The statements above may seem prosaic and representative of basic common sense. However, coming as they do from heads of state, in the context of a mutual focus on nuclear security, and as expression of shared strategy, these remarks are evidence of the influence which the North Korean nuclear crisis has had upon US–Japan Alliance relations.

The sinking of the *Cheonan* as a further illustration of the need for the US–Japan alliance

The March 2010 *Cheonan* incident, which claimed the lives of 46 South Koreans in the aftermath of a surprise attack by the North, provided a very tangible rationale for Japanese officials seeking to make the case for the necessity of America’s security guarantees. The *Cheonan* attack also provided a political fig leaf for the Hatoyama administration, which condemned the attacks while regarding the crisis as an opportunity to justify its policy reversal. The Hatoyama administration shifted from evicting the American air base in Okinawa to upholding the former agreement with US officials. The American military presence was needed, it was argued, to contain the threat posed by North Korea as made evident through North Korea’s sinking of a war vessel. Sensing the reversal, the United States capitalized on the moment to restore traditional relations between the two countries.

In a joint press conference in May 2010 with Secretary Clinton and then Foreign Minister Okada, both the United States and Japan emphasized the link between the *Cheonan* incident and the US–Japan alliance.

(Clinton) We appreciate Japan’s support of South Korea and this investigation, because we recognize the threat that North Korea’s aggression poses is also to the people of Japan. Last year I met with families of the abducted, and expressed my personal sympathy and concern. The United States and Japan continue to work side by side to meet the challenges posed by North Korea. We agree that North Korea must stop its provocative behavior, halt its policy of threats and belligerence toward its neighbors, and take irreversible steps to fulfill its denuclearization commitments, and comply with international law...

(Okada) At the same time, to the Japanese people, we would like to have their understanding that in the current security environment the presence of US forces is indispensable for the security and stability of Japan. But not only just that, but the region’s stability.⁷

⁶ Q&A Following Opening Statements by President Obama and Prime Minister Hatoyama, November 13, 2009. http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/hatoyama/statement/200911/13usa_kaiken_e.html (accessed January 30 2010)

⁷ US Department of State, *Joint Press Availability with Japanese Foreign Minister Okada* May 21, 2010. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/05/142079.htm> (accessed July 1, 2010)

Even in the course of his resignation, Prime Minister Hatoyama used North Korea as primary justification for the US–Japan alliance.

“I hope you understand my pained grief that we must sustain trust between Japan and the United States,” he said, noting that the March sinking of a South Korean warship, apparently by North Korea, shows that “security has not been secured in Northeast Asia.”

At some point in the distant future, Hatoyama also said, Japan will not need the security umbrella provided by the United States, nor will it have to accommodate the “burden” of hosting tens of thousands of Americans troops. But he said that “is not possible in my era” to secure regional peace without Japan’s partnership with the United States.⁸

The sinking of the *Cheonan* and the more recent November 2010 North Korean artillery barrage on South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island have served to highlight the immediate threat from North Korea and thus moved the rationale for the US–Japan alliance from the conceptual and theoretical to the more tangible. This transition was clearly evident in late November and early December 2010, when the United States and the ROK and the United States and Japan held back-to-back large-scale naval exercises in the region.

Understanding Domestic Political Constraints in Washington and Tokyo

When South Koreans are asked to identify the individual Korean who is most famous in the United States, answers generally range from sports stars and actors to the odd politician. The correct answer, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, inevitably comes as somewhat of a shock since the scope of their focus seldom includes denizens of the North. While largely an object of derision, Kim Jong Il’s image with his signature sunglasses, leisure suit, and bouffant hairdo is frequently seen on the covers of American newsmagazines, in political cartoons, on the Internet, and even in movies such as “Team America.” Kim’s visibility in the United States, however, cannot begin to hold a candle to the attention paid in Japan to all things North Korean. The combination of the highly sensitive issue of Japanese abductees, coupled with North Korea’s missile and nuclear issue and the presence of a still significant pro-North ethnic Korean population in Japan has resulted in a near obsession with North Korea in the Japanese media. Over the past decade book covers in Japan have featured Kim Jong Il riding a missile like Dr. Strangelove, the tragic story of Megumi Yokota became almost universally known, and the movement of the North Korean Ferry “Mangyongbong” was covered with the fervor of the OJ Simpson car chase.

Such prominence means that North Korea policy also influences and is influenced by domestic politics in both the United States and Japan. Since these domestic factors also impact efforts in the United States and Japan to effectively coordinate policy approaches to North Korea, they merit closer examination.

⁸ Blaine Harden, “Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama resigns,” *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/02/AR2010060200199.html> (accessed June 14, 2010)

North Korea and Japanese Domestic Politics

North Korea has always been a sensitive area in Japanese politics due in part to the presence of a large Korean minority in Japan, more than half of which lined up behind North Korea during and after the Korean War. For decades, this community played a little understood and somewhat shadowy role in Japanese politics. However, it wasn't until the emergence of the abductees issue and the August 1998 missile test, which traveled over Japan, that North Korea became the third rail of Japanese politics.

Due in large part to the unflagging determination and political mobilization of an organization of families whose kin had been abducted by North Korea, and the deep public dissatisfaction and distrust by the general public in regards to the way the Japanese government handled the issue, the question of abductees became, for a time, a major driver in Japanese domestic politics. Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo essentially rode the abductees issue to the premiership and even his predecessors' efforts to make progress only served to heighten its relative priority within Japan. Despite the fact that the September 17, 2002, Japan–DPRK Pyongyang Declaration resulted in a North Korean commitment to “comply with all related international agreements” relevant to its nuclear program and to “maintain the moratorium on missile launching” - both landmark accomplishments - the Japanese public focus was largely placed on the abductees issue. “With respect to the outstanding issues of concern related to the lives and security of Japanese nationals, the DPRK side confirmed that it would take appropriate measures so that these regrettable incidents, that took place under the abnormal bilateral relationship, would never happen in the future.”⁹ Contrary to the apparent expectations of the negotiators, Pyongyang's subsequent status report on the initial list of abductees did not put the abductees issue behind. Instead, the report, which was followed by the dramatic release of a select number of abductees and family members, only served to raise expectations. In so doing, the report further raised the prominence of the abductees issue in Japanese policy toward North Korea.

North Korea and US Domestic Politics

While US domestic opinion on North Korea may lack the intensity of that in Japan, it nonetheless does limit policy options for US administrations. Put bluntly, North Korea is a pariah state which lacks any significant advocates or constituency in the United States. This is particularly true in the US Congress, the branch of government which must inevitably authorize and appropriate any expenditures related to North Korea.

Even during the most historically favorable period of US–DPRK relations during the mid 1990s, the Clinton administration had to struggle mightily to secure congressional approval for the minor amounts of funds required to support the KEDO. Opposition to the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework and skepticism about North Korean intentions may have been strongest among conservative Republicans, but as an equal opportunity offender, North Korea provided ample justification for opposition from both sides of the aisle. Put simply, for US policymakers there is little incentive to advocate on behalf of a state best known as a human rights-abusing, drug trafficking, counterfeiting, missile launching, nuclear pariah.

⁹ MOFA, *Japan–DPRK Pyongyang Declaration*, September 17, 2002. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html (accessed March 1, 2010)

There is little political gain and more than a fair share of risk to be garnered from forging a difficult compromise with the regime in Pyongyang.

Lessons Learned: North Korea as a Double-Edged Sword

The deep unpopularity of North Korea in Japan has meant that the pursuit of tougher sanctions and other restrictions on North Korea are politically expedient. As such, when the United States has itself sought to exert pressure upon North Korea, US–Japan policy coordination has been relatively easy.

During the first term of the George W. Bush administration, when US policy toward North Korea appeared to be most influenced by Vice President Cheney’s maxim that “We don’t negotiate with evil, we defeat it,” not only were US–Japan relations very strong, but so was policy coordination on North Korea.

For more than 40 years US policy toward North Korea was characterized only by deterrence. Contacts between Washington and Pyongyang were limited to relatively hostile exchanges through the Military Armistice Commission in the demilitarized zone (DMZ). While Japan’s contacts with North Korea during this period of time were more varied, and while Japanese politicians at times courted the resources of the Korean residents of Japan, in a Cold War context such contacts were limited to commercial and personal exchanges and never rose to the level of national policy.

It was not until the appropriately named “modest initiative” during the first Bush Administration that there was a meaningful diplomatic proposal, and even that did not present sufficient variance in US policy enough so as to require any real coordination with Japan.

This initiative was overtaken by growing concerns about North Korea’s nuclear program, in particular its research reactor at Yongbyon and construction on two larger reactors, leading to a crisis with the IAEA that came to a head in the spring of 1994 when North Korea refueled its reactor in Yongbyon without IAEA inspectors present and gave notice of its intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

While Japan was not directly involved in the negotiations easing the crisis and resulting in the October 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework, the United States and Japan did consult closely on the process and in the end Japan agreed to play a major role in the KEDO, which was established to implement key elements of the Agreed Framework. Despite some understandable concern over the amount of financial support Japan was asked to give to the project, there was little real divide between the United States and Japan during this period.

The real challenge to US–Japan policy coordination followed North Korea’s August 1998 test of a long-range missile over Japan after which Japan decided to suspend its participation in KEDO. At the time, the Clinton administration was seeking to keep the Agreed Framework and KEDO moving forward and was dealing with the new Kim Dae Jung administration in Seoul, which was deeply committed to engagement with North Korea. In a relatively short period of time, Japan found itself out of sync with Washington in its approach to North Korea and was the recipient of significant pressure from the United States, South Korea, and even the European Union to resume its support for KEDO.

This pattern was repeated in the second Bush term when Japan, having been in close alignment with the United States during the first term of the Bush Administration, once again found itself out of sync with the United States as Washington altered strategies and began to proactively engage North Korea. One key factor affecting this second dynamic was the political constraints of the abduction issue. Shifts in public opinion provided great support to sanctions and UNSC resolutions, but hobbled Japanese diplomats when the dynamic shifted.

Feelings of betrayal and concerts of obstructionism

Following the 1998 launch of a North Korean long-range missile over the Japanese islands, Japan refused for a time to participate in the KEDO, a core part of US diplomatic strategy. The emergence of the important and highly sensitive political issue of the abductees and the failure of the Japanese government to come clean with the Japanese people on this issue has effectively meant that the Japanese government has been unable to participate in any policy towards North Korea that is perceived as soft or providing assistance to North Korea. Partially because of the domestic political mandate driven by the abductees issue, Japan has been very effective in implementing domestic and international sanctions on North Korea and has in fact played a leadership role in the United Nations in seeking and implementing UNSCsanctions against North Korea. To date, Japan arguably maintains the most effective sanctions regime on the DPRK.

While, as noted earlier, this stance was a boon to US–Japan coordination during the “We don’t negotiate with evil, we defeat it” phase of US policy during the first term of the Bush administration, during the final years of the Bush administration’s second term, when North Korea policy was under the leadership of Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, US–Japan relations became particularly strained. Japanese political leaders increasingly worried that Japan’s national interests were not being taken into full account as the United States aggressively pursued a diplomatic solution with North Korea through relatively secretive negotiations led by Ambassador Hill. The August 2008 decision by the United States government to delist North Korea as a state sponsor of terror was met with particular dismay in Japan. The Japanese government believed that it had previously received a clear assurance from President Bush that the North Korea’s status as a state sponsor of terror would be linked to resolution of the abductees issue, which the Japanese government regarded as an act of terror. The US decision to proceed with the delisting over official Japanese government objections despite a flurry of last minute phone calls was widely regarded by Japanese officials and scholars as somewhat of a betrayal. This should not be underestimated as a factor in current Japanese perceptions of the alliance even within the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Concerns about the policy of the Obama administration

For the first two years of the Obama administration, the media and analysts have focused much attention on tensions in US–Japan relations resulting from political transition in Japan and renewed uncertainties surrounding the disposition on US military bases on Okinawa. In the process, however, insufficient focus has been placed on a dramatic improvement in US–Japan policy coordination related to North Korea.

It is important to remember that the election of President Obama was met in Japan with considerably anxiety. Many in foreign policy circles in Japan felt that Japan had insufficient

ties with and few advocates within the incoming administration or among its advisors. Such concerns were particularly acute on the sensitive issue of policy toward North Korea. President Obama’s campaign pledge to meet with dictators such as Kim Jong Il “unconditionally” fanned fears that the Obama administration might ignore Japanese concerns on abductees and that in the pursuit of diplomacy, President Obama himself might leapfrog over Japan, visit Pyongyang and seek a political settlement with Kim Jong Il. As ridiculous as such concerns may seem in the current climate, they represented genuine concern on the part of Japanese officials and opinion leaders in early 2009.

In this circumstance, one important accomplishment of the Obama administration after two years can be measured in the total absence of any complaints or anxiety in Japan about the US policy toward North Korea. To be fair, some credit for this goes to North Korea which, with early belligerence including a missile test in April 2009 and a second nuclear test later that spring, ensured that there was little opportunity for a diplomatic initiative to take root. However, the Obama administration was clear from the start about the priority it placed on prior consultation and cooperation with its allies, particularly Japan and South Korea. This priority was in no small part a reaction to the perceived excesses of US North Korea policy in the waning days of the Bush administration. One possible result of this is that US–Japan policy coordination on this issue has been possibly closer than ever before. Perhaps the Obama administration learned from the excesses of both the first-term Bush administration’s rejection of diplomacy as a tool and the equal excesses of the second-term Bush administration’s failure to prioritize coordination with US allies.

This is not to say, however, that coordinating policy toward North Korea will not resurface as a challenge for the United States and Japan. There remain deep-seated concerns within Japan about what are perceived to be differing priorities between the United States and Japan. For example, our failure to convince North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks has led some to believe that the United States’ real priority in regards to the North Korean nuclear program is nonproliferation and making sure that the North Korean nuclear problem does not spill over to areas of more immediate interest to the United States such as the Middle East. As such, the Japanese worry is that the United States might somehow be willing to live with a nuclear North Korea just as long as North Korea does not proliferate nuclear weapons technology or materials. This strategy would not eliminate the nuclear threat to Japan. Likewise, given the fact that North Korea has already developed, tested and deployed medium-range missiles currently of sufficient range to reach almost every part of the Japanese homeland, there is concern in Japan that US interests are limited to blocking North Korea’s longer-range missile program and diverge from Japanese interests in protecting Japan.

Misplaced though they may be, such anxieties only compound the continuing sensitivity of the abductees issue, meaning that despite current successes the issue must continue to be handled carefully.

Conclusion: A Return to Trilateralism: US–Japan–ROK Policy Coordination

Due in large part to political changes in South Korea, and in some ways despite political changes in Japan and Washington, the past two years have witnessed a resurgence of US–Japan–ROK trilateral coordination. While the formal Trilateral Coordination and Oversight

Group (TCOG) initiated by former Secretary of Defense and special envoy William Perry during the Clinton administration has not played a role, there have been frequent meetings at multiple levels over the past few years. In fact, a major characteristic of the “Six-Party Talks process” has been the prior coordination and consultation between Washington, Tokyo and Seoul, which continues despite the lack of a formal plenary meeting.

A further positive development in this regard has been the framing of historically difficult Korea–Japan relations in the context of their shared alliance with the United States. This was recently exemplified by the contents of a telephone conversation between Naoto Kan, Prime Minister of Japan, and Lee Myung Bak, President of the Republic of Korea that Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) released August 10, 2010:

“The two leaders shared the recognition that it is of great importance to deepen and thicken the bond between Japan and the ROK which share such common values as democracy, freedom, and market economy and are both allies of the United States. Prime Minister Kan mentioned that he supports the ROK people’s wish for the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula in the future. President Lee expressed gratitude for this remark.”¹⁰

Very recently the October 2010 Center for a New American Security Report “Renewal: Revitalizing the US–Japan Alliance” made a strong case for trilateral cooperation that goes above and beyond the current Six-Party Talks:

“The United States and Japan should continue to prepare for sudden change on the Korean Peninsula. This entails watching for indications of regime instability, determining what missions the alliance would undertake in contingencies ranging from external aggression by North Korea to civil war and collapse and, most important, considering how the United States and Japan could support South Korea over the medium to long term in the event of unification. Although originating within the framework of the US–Japan alliance, these discussions should include South Korea as much as possible. With trilateral participation, these discussions will lay the groundwork for a “soft landing” of North Korea should that become necessary.”¹¹

The recent Senkaku/Diaoyutai dispute has focused new attention on China’s growing military strength and the very real challenge this poses for the US–Japan alliance. As a result, North Korea may no longer play the role of a proxy in terms of Japanese security concerns and as public justification for US–Japan security cooperation. At the same time, however, the *Cheonan* incident has further focused longstanding concerns over North Korea’s missile and nuclear program and made it clear that, absent some form of fundamental change in North Korea, it will continue to be a very real and necessary focus of the US–Japan alliance.

¹⁰ MOFA, *Telephone Conversation between Mr. Naoto Kan, Prime Minister of Japan, and Mr. Lee Myung Bak, President of the Republic of Korea*, August 10, 2010. http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2010/8/0810_01.html (accessed September 15, 2010)

¹¹ Patrick, M. Cronin, Daniel M. Kilman and Abraham M. Denmark, *Renewal: Revitalizing the US–Japan Alliance*. Center for New American Security, October, 2010, p. 16. http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_Renewal_CroninKilmanDenmark.pdf (accessed November 1, 2010)

Conclusion: The Way Forward

Yuki Tatsumi

It is clear that the “North Korea problem” (*Kita Chosen Mondai*) will continue to be a high-priority issue for both the United States and Japan. In particular, as the key players in the Six-Party Talks—China, the ROK and the United States—intensify efforts towards possibly resuming the Six-Party Talks, how Japan and the United States can maintain close policy coordination remains a high political and diplomatic priority for Japan. In this project, seven contributors examined various aspects of the challenges North Korea presents for US–Japan relations. This conclusion highlights and elaborates on the key issues raised in the seven chapters, and considers them in the context of how the United States and Japan can successfully collaborate in addressing the North Korea challenge.

Key Factors

The seven chapters in this volume addressed various problems that the United States and Japan face in addressing the security and diplomatic challenges posed by North Korea. Some of the chapters focused on the larger strategic context in which the relevant issues played out, while others examined in detail the specific challenges that Tokyo and Washington experienced in coordinating their policies toward North Korea. Throughout these seven chapters, a few common elements emerged:

Policy coordination presents a serious challenge for the United States and Japan

In the last two decades, policy coordination between Tokyo and Washington toward North Korea has been a tremendous challenge. On the one hand, security threats posed by Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile capabilities have served as the primary driving force for Tokyo and Washington to deepen their defense cooperation since the 1990s. Following several decades of deterring DPRK conventional threats, the first North Korea nuclear crisis in 1992–1993 led to a greater sense of urgency among defense officials in Japan and the United States, prompting them to clarify their respective defense responsibilities in the case of regional contingencies by revising the Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation in 1997. Furthermore, had it not been for Pyongyang’s ballistic missile tests (first in 1998, followed by more tests in 2006 and 2009), Japan might not have embarked on acquiring its own reconnaissance satellite system. In addition, US–Japan cooperation on ballistic missile defense would have not advanced to the level of “one of the most advanced of its kind in the world.”¹

The military threat posed by North Korea also provided incentives for Japan to revise its own defense posture, moving away from the relatively static position it had maintained during the

¹ US Department of Defense, “(Secretary’s speech at) Keio University,” January 14, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1529> (accessed January 14, 2011)

Cold War. Under what was first called the National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) when adopted in 1995, and since then changed to National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG)—which has been revised twice, most recently in December 2010—Japan has focused on creating greater capabilities to detect and respond to missile threats (i.e., greater focus on intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities), and to respond to emergencies outside Japan (i.e., enhancement of transport capabilities). In short, as Scott Snyder and Gordon Flake argue in their chapters, security threats posed by North Korea provided a “public justification” for strengthening the US–Japan alliance, driving Washington and Tokyo to adopt closer and deeper cooperation in conventional military areas.²

On the other hand, the non-military aspects of the North Korea threat have caused diplomatic tensions between the United States and Tokyo, and coordination between the two countries in prioritizing their policy goals has turned out to be quite challenging. In particular, as elaborately discussed in Yasuhiro Izumikawa’s chapter, Japan’s overwhelming emphasis on the abductee issue and the Japanese government’s inability to manage domestic sentiment on the issue has hamstrung bilateral policy coordination efforts to address the North Korea problem.³ In fact, strong anti-North Korea sentiment among the Japanese public was triggered by the revelation in 2002 that North Korea had indeed abducted a number of Japanese citizens in the past, and that several of these people were now reportedly dead. This created a political environment in Japan that inhibited the Japanese government from adopting any policy position that might appear “soft” on North Korea. Although the primacy of the abductee issue has abated somewhat in the last year, such a political environment remains latent in Japan today, despite the shift in political leadership to the Democratic Party of Japan, which became the ruling party in September 2009.⁴

Bilateral policy coordination between Tokyo and Washington became especially challenging following a shift in US policy during the second term of the Bush administration from one of ideologically-driven confrontation to one of *de facto* engagement with North Korea. As detailed in Balbina Y. Hwang’s chapter, the ideological battles within and among the different bureaucracies in Washington during Bush’s first term essentially hijacked the administration’s ability to implement a coherent and effective North Korea policy. In turn, this had the negative effect of undermining coordination with Washington’s two key allies, Seoul and Tokyo, and sowing discontent and mistrust among their respective political establishments and diplomats.⁵

With the shift of emphasis in the second Bush term, Japanese policymakers expressed their strong anxiety over two issues in particular: (1) how committed the United States truly was to the goal of the Six-Party Talks—complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement

² L. Gordon Flake, “Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance”; Scott A. Snyder, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination between the United States and Japan”, both in this volume (Chapter Seven and Chapter Five, respectively).

³ Yasuhiro Izumikawa, ““North Korea Problems” and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan”, Chapter Two of this volume.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Balbina Y. Hwang, “American’s ‘North Korea Problem’ and US–Japan Relations”, Chapter One of this volume.

(CVID) of Pyongyang’s nuclear program;⁶ and (2) whether the United States would remove North Korea from the US State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism even in the absence of satisfactory resolution of the abductee issue. When Washington delisted North Korea from the state sponsors of terrorism in October 2008 despite not having made any progress on the abductee issue, the Japanese felt a sense of “betrayal” toward the United States. Its attitudes toward North Korea were hardened, driving Tokyo to continue its refusal to provide any economic assistance to North Korea, including the heavy fuel oil that Japan was expected to provide under the Six-Party Talks agreement concluded on February 13, 2007.⁷

Japan’s leverage vis-à-vis North Korea is very weak

Tokyo has three major security concerns regarding North Korea: elimination of nuclear capability; containment of missile capability; and maintenance of stability on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, Japan has a serious stake in the future of the Korean Peninsula including the potential process of Korean reunification and the nature of a reunified Korea. Furthermore, how to address the issue of abductees continues to be a difficult political and diplomatic challenge for Tokyo.

Despite the serious stake it has in North Korea and on the Korean Peninsula writ large, developments since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1992–1993 suggest that Japan actually has very little leverage vis-à-vis North Korea. As Izumikawa argues in his chapter, Tokyo’s only means of influencing North Korean behavior is its ability to provide enormous economic aid. Indeed, Japan in the past has attempted to use aid as its principal leverage to make progress on the normalization of its relationship with North Korea. It also imposed unilateral economic sanctions against North Korea following Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile tests in 2006 and 2009. However, the reality is that these measures have had very little impact on North Korean behavior.

A limitation of Tokyo’s options vis-à-vis Pyongyang is that Japan is highly dependent on other nations’ communication channels with North Korea in pursuing its policy goals. As Ryo Sahashi argues in his chapter, multilateral frameworks offer one alternative to offset Japan’s weak position. But without any effective regional mechanism to date, Tokyo’s close bilateral relationship with Washington and US–Japan policy coordination on North Korea, particularly over their respective approaches in the Six-Party Talks, has therefore been critical for Japan.⁸ However, as noted above, ever since Kim Jong Il’s admission to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in September 2002 that North Korean agents abducted Japanese citizens in the late 1970s, both in Japan and in third party countries, the abductee issue has handicapped Tokyo’s ability to coordinate its North Korea policy with the United

⁶ For instance, the Independent Task Force Report issued by the Council on Foreign Relations argued that “Obama administration’s actions to date suggest that the objective of North Korea’s nuclear program is halfhearted.” Council on Foreign Relations, *US Policy Toward Korean Peninsula*, Independent Task Force Report No. 64, June, 2010, p. 10.

⁷ Flake, “Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance” Chapter Seven of this volume.

⁸ Ryo Sahashi, “The North Korea Challenge and Resonance with Regional Security Arrangements,” Chapter Six of this volume.

States and others, resulting not only in Japan's self-marginalization in addressing the North Korean problem but also in Washington's frustration with Tokyo.

As Izumikawa argues in detail in his chapter, Tokyo's lack of diversified leverage in its relations with North Korea means that it continues to be dependent on the United States to ensure that Tokyo's concerns will be adequately addressed in the Six-Party Talks. Despite Japan's inability to play an effective role, the Six-Party Talks will remain Tokyo's preferred multinational framework to address the North Korea issue.⁹ Whether Japan can successfully utilize the Six-Party Talks in order to achieve its own goals vis-à-vis North Korea, however, depends on the Japanese government's ability to shape a new approach to the North Korean problem in which Japan can actively play a constructive role.

Trilateral US–Japan–ROK coordination is critical in moving forward

The ROK has a particularly important role in addressing security challenges posed by North Korea. Not only does South Korea have an obvious stake in developments on the peninsula that is qualitatively different from that of the other countries involved, but it has established means of communication with North Korea (Red Cross Talks, economic cooperation such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex, Kumgang Mountain tourism, North Korean defectors residing in South Korea, etc.) that put it in a unique position to provide information on developments inside the DPRK. As the country that will undoubtedly lead the eventual reunification process, the ROK also faces a unique challenge. On the one hand, Seoul is keenly interested in deterring North Korea from engaging in provocative military behavior, which requires a resolute and uncompromising position on defending South Korean territory and its citizens. On the other hand, Seoul will have to continue to its efforts to engage Pyongyang bilaterally given that the two Koreas remain committed to eventual reunification. Still, North Korea's sinking of the ROK naval ship *Cheonan* in March 2010, as well as its shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010, are both vivid reminders that the ROK technically remains at war with the North.

The chapters by Hwang, Snyder and Flake all argue very forcefully for a strong US–ROK alliance as one of the pillars upon which the United States should base its policy toward North Korea. Moreover, all three argue that closer policy coordination among the United States, Japan and the ROK will be critical to successfully addressing the nuclear and missile threats by North Korea. In this context, they all advocate much closer Japan–ROK relations, particularly in the area of security cooperation.¹⁰

Developments in trilateral coordination in recent years, reinforced in the aftermath of the Yeonpyeong Island shelling, have been encouraging. The largest contributing factors to a political environment that is much more conducive to closer US–Japan–ROK trilateral coordination, as well as closer Japan–ROK relations, have been leadership changes in both Tokyo and Seoul. In Tokyo, the political transition from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has lowered the risk that Japan–ROK relations will

⁹ Izumikawa, ““North Korea Problems” and US–Japan Relations: A View from Japan” in this volume.

¹⁰ Balbina Y. Hwang. “America’s “North Korea Problem” and US–Japan Relations”; Snyder, “North Korea: A Catalyst for Policy Coordination between the United States and Japan”; Flake, “Different Beds, Same Nightmare: US–Japan Policy Coordination on North Korea and Implications for the US–Japan Alliance” in this volume (Chapters One, Five and Seven, respectively).

be destabilized by controversial statements related to historical issues that have been often made by the conservative political leaders who have held senior government positions. In Seoul, the transition from President Roh Moo-hyun to Lee Myung-bak in 2008 meant that Seoul would place greater emphasis on its alliance with the United States, and seek to avoid unnecessary diplomatic tensions with Japan.

The effectiveness of the role played by China may be overstated, but no other country can replace it

The exact degree to which China has leverage vis-à-vis North Korea has been the subject of debate, but there is no doubt that Beijing's potential influence with Pyongyang is greater than anyone else's. Therefore, the indications in late 2010 and early 2011 that China would play a more active and constructive role in reining in North Korean behavior, including during President Hu Jintao's State Visit to the United States in February 2011, were welcome news.

China's primary interest in the North Korean issue is to reduce tensions on the peninsula while preserving the status quo (North–South division). It is also interested in resuming the denuclearization process, and encouraging North Korea to reform economically. However, from Beijing's perspective, these latter objectives can be sacrificed in order to maintain the stability of North Korea.

China's relationship with North Korea is a complex one. On the one hand, it has a strong interest in a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. China is nervous that if North Korea's nuclear program cannot be halted, it could drive Japan to consider acquiring its own nuclear capability, with potential domino effects elsewhere in the region. It also has an interest in solving the North Korea problem through the Six-Party Talks in which it serves as the chair and host. By doing so, China has hoped that the Six-Party Talks would develop into a multinational regional security framework in Northeast Asia and dilute the effectiveness of US alliances with Japan and the ROK.

On the other hand, however, China has taken policy positions that constrain the efforts taking place in the multilateral framework such as the Six-Party Talks and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to impose pressure on North Korea in response to its provocative behavior. For instance, China was opposed to the introduction of a new UNSC resolution to condemn North Korea in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* Incident, and has refused to endorse an independent international investigation that concluded North Korea was responsible for the attack. It also criticized subsequent US–ROK joint naval exercises, claiming that they would provoke North Korea. Even following the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island by North Korea in November, China was hesitant to criticize North Korea. Rather, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement following the latter incident that called on *both* the ROK and DPRK to exercise self-restraint. Finally, despite the fact that China has the greatest economic leverage over North Korea, its willingness to actually use that leverage to encourage North Korea to move toward denuclearization has often been questioned.

In his chapter, Katsuhisa Furukawa suggests that China's "leverage" vis-à-vis North Korea may be overrated, citing a series of provocative actions by North Korea that took place despite strong opposition from Beijing. In this connection, Furukawa points out that China's intention to play a leading role in resolving the North Korean problem has been often undermined by

Pyongyang's provocative behavior. This analysis raises questions about whether China is actually capable of influencing North Korea's behavior in a meaningful way.¹¹

Both Furukawa and John Park examine China's growing economic ties with North Korea as an indicator of China's real intention vis-à-vis North Korea. In recent years, China has attempted to improve its relations with North Korea. For instance, recent economic cooperation between China's northeastern provinces and North Korea's neighboring border area has been on the rise. Moreover, as Park argues in his chapter, the political relationship between China and North Korea, particularly between the Chinese Communist Party and the Workers Party of Korea (WPK), has served as the backbone of China's relationship with North Korea, making any substantive changes in policy extremely difficult.¹²

Nevertheless, China remains a critical participant in the efforts to address security concerns posed by North Korea. As already noted, whether China is indeed willing and able to use the economic leverage it has on North Korea to facilitate the resolution of North Korean problems is debatable; in fact, Beijing's responses to the *Cheonan* Incident and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island suggest that China is first and foremost interested in preserving the regime in North Korea. Still, in order to address the North Korean problem in multilateral settings, cooperation with China remains critical.

The Way Forward

With the key factors identified in the previous chapters, how should one think about the ways in which the United States and Japan can work together to respond to the challenges posed by North Korea? Three recommendations emerge:

Ensure that credibility and "trust" within the US–Japan alliance are maintained

Maintaining close policy coordination toward North Korea between the United States and Japan continues to be extremely important. In order to do so, however, there needs to be a sufficient level of confidence between Tokyo and Washington that they not only agree strategically on the policy goals, but also agree on the general prioritization of the various issues. While complete agreement does not have to exist, at a minimum if differences exist, there needs to be a mutual appreciation of why Tokyo and Washington prioritize policy goals differently, and an effort to minimize the impact of such differences.

To create an environment that facilitates confidence, the fundamentals of US–Japan security relations need to remain solid. For its part, the United States needs to be able to trust Japan's commitment to the alliance with the United States. For Washington, such trust can only be fostered by seeing Tokyo's serious efforts in addressing issues of bilateral alliance management, such as the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) in Futenma, Okinawa. Washington also needs to be certain that Japan is committed to sharing its due responsibility not only in its own defense, but also in case of contingencies in East Asia. In this context, the bilateral consultation on roles, missions and capabilities (RMC)—

¹¹ Katsuhisa Furukawa, "Japan–US Cooperation on North Korea: Regional Perspectives" in Chapter Three of this volume.

¹² John S. Park, "Regional Perspective: China–North Korea Relations" in Chapter Four of this volume.

including discussion regarding the divisions of roles between US military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF)—must make concrete progress.

Japan, first and foremost, needs to be certain of Washington’s commitment to the defense of Japan. The maintenance of the credibility of US extended deterrence is particularly important. In this context, it is critical for Tokyo to have confidence that, as Washington continues to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons as a means of global deterrence, it will ensure the future credibility of US extended deterrence by taking measures to make up for the reduced reliance on nuclear capabilities.

Under such circumstances, it is important that the United States and Japan deepen their dialogue on key issues such as: how the two countries can align their policy objectives toward North Korea; what Washington and Tokyo expect of one another in the Six-Party Talks; what they expect of one another in various contingency scenarios on the Korean Peninsula; and how the United States can reassure not only the Japanese government but also the public about its commitment to the defense of Japan, including maintaining a credible extended deterrence capability.

In early 2011, the two countries took an important step in this direction. When then Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara¹³ met with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on January 6, 2011, they announced that the two governments will begin discussions on how to establish new common strategic objectives, which are to be announced at the Security Consultative Committee meeting that is planned to be held later in 2011.¹⁴ Even as the United States and Japan discuss revisions of the Common Strategic Objectives that were agreed to in February 2005, North Korea looms large as a shared major security concern. The two governments should utilize this opportunity to better align their respective policy goals vis-à-vis North Korea, as well as their expectations of one another in the Six-Party Talks and any eventual Korean reunification.

The bilateral discussion should not stop there, however. A list of Common Strategic Objectives is merely another sheet of paper that creates positive atmospherics in US–Japan security relations, if it does not form the basis for implementing measures to achieve these objectives. It is therefore critical that following the adoption of the revised Common Strategic Objectives, the United States and Japan engage in serious discussion on the division of roles between US forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in various regional security contingencies. How to maintain credible US extended deterrence must be a part of such discussions. With the release of the revised National Defense Program Guidelines in December 2010, the time is ripe for such a discussion to take place.

¹³ Seiji Maehara resigned on March 7, 2011.

¹⁴ “*Nichi-bei Gaisho Kyotsuu Senryaku Mokuhyou Minaoshi ni Goui Chuugoku Taitou nado Nento*” [Japanese and US Foreign Ministers Agreed on Revising the Common Strategic Objectives: Among Others, Emergence of China in mind], *Asahi Shimbun*, January 7, 2011. <http://www.asahi.com/politics/update/0107/TKY201101070173.html> (accessed January 25, 2011)

Efforts must be made to enhance Tokyo's relations with Seoul, thereby improving the potential for a closer US–Japan–ROK policy coordination

In the US–ROK–Japan trilateral relationship, Japan–ROK relations are often called the “missing (or weakest) link.” A constructive Japan–ROK relationship, particularly in the area of security issues, will contribute to a much stronger US–Japan–ROK trilateral relationship that is critical in addressing North Korea in the Six-Party Talks. Such a stronger trilateral relationship is also important in ensuring that China and Russia play constructive roles in the Six-Party Talks.

Recent developments, particularly in the aftermath of the Yeonpyeong Island attack, have been encouraging in this regard. As noted, shortly after the Yeonpyeong incident, US, Japanese and ROK foreign ministers met in Washington, DC, confirming their common position vis-à-vis North Korea. On January 10 to 11 2011, Japanese Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa visited the ROK. In his meeting with ROK Defense Minister Kim Kwan Jin, they agreed to start the discussion of the Japan–ROK Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), thus taking the first step toward deepening Korean-Japanese defense relations beyond the existing defense exchange program.¹⁵ Then foreign minister Seiji Maehara also visited the ROK on January 15, 2011. In his meetings with ROK Foreign Minister Kim Sung Hwan, President Lee Myung Bak, and Unification Minister Hyun In Taek, Maehara reconfirmed Japan's commitment to maintain close US–Japan–ROK trilateral consultation on North Korean challenges.¹⁶

As noted earlier, the most important factor contributing to a politically conducive environment for closer US–Japan–ROK trilateral coordination, as well as closer Japan–ROK relations, has been the change in leadership in Tokyo and Seoul. As the presidency of Lee Myung Bak comes to a close at the end of 2012 and with the United States also facing presidential elections in November 2012, the challenge for Japan and the United States will be how to maintain the current positive momentum in the trilateral relationship beyond presidential succession in 2013. Sustaining robust US–Japan–ROK trilateral policy coordination on North Korea is critical as the three countries continue to urge China to persuade the North to return to serious denuclearization efforts under the Six-Party Talks, and to uphold its obligations under the September 2005 Agreement. With his plummeting public approval rating, the unclear political future of Japanese prime minister Naoto Kan only adds to the uncertainty in future Japan–ROK relations as well as US–Japan–ROK trilateral coordination.

Japan must chart a course for the “resolution” of the abductee issue

Since September 2002, the abductee issue has prevented Japan from having flexibility in its North Korea policy. Tokyo's “resolution of the abduction issue first” approach vis-à-vis North Korea and its decisions based on this approach—such as the refusal to provide

¹⁵ Ministry of Defense of Japan (MOD), “*Nikkan Boueishou Kaidan no Kekka Gaiyou*” [Overview of Japan–ROK Defense Ministerial Meeting], January 10, 2011. http://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/youjin/2011/01/10_gaiyou.html (accessed January 28, 2011).

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), “*Maehara Gaishou no Kankoku Houmon*” [Foreign Minister Maehara's Visit to the Republic of Korea], January 15, 2011. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/g_maehara/korea1101_ga.html (accessed January 28, 2011)

heavy oil and other humanitarian aid to North Korea—has resulted in Tokyo’s *de facto* marginalization in the Six-Party Talks.

The political sensitivity of the abductee issue is understandable. It is a deeply emotional issue for the families of the abductees who, after years of having their claims ignored by the Japanese government, demand convincing closure on the issue. The abductees’ families’ mistrust of the government runs deep. They demand that the resolution of the abduction issue should be Japan’s top policy priority vis-à-vis North Korea for fear that, once the issue is dropped as a priority, the Japanese government will stop addressing the issue altogether.

Another concern of the families is that the issue does not have the same political cachet among Japanese political leaders as it once did. In the past, various LDP leaders chose to take advantage of the abductee issue to boost their public support: Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi decided to visit North Korea in September 2002 despite causing considerable irritation in Washington, DC, because he wanted to leverage “progress in the abduction issue” to regain his popularity; Prime Minister Shinzo Abe initially gained popularity because of his role as a strong supporter for the families of the abductees. With the families of the abductees speaking up with an increasing voice on the one hand, and the political leaders using the abduction issue for their own political purposes on the other, the abduction issue became a matter of “political correctness” in Japan that brooked no dissent. But the abduction issue has not been in the spotlight for a while and current political leaders have not used it to enhance their popularity. Thus, even though the abductees’ family members are arguing for a new approach, the issue has simply lost a good measure of the salience it once had on the list of priorities in dealing with North Korea.

Moreover, as argued throughout this volume, Japanese political leaders have to face the reality that the lack of flexibility on this issue has essentially made Japan diplomatically irrelevant in the Six-Party Talks. If Tokyo is unwilling or incapable of using its sole instrument of leverage with North Korea, (i.e., aid) because of the lack of progress in the abduction issue, Japan will continue to fail in its efforts to be effective in the Six-Party Talks. In addition, even if the United States fully appreciates the tragic nature of the abduction issue, Japan’s self-marginalization would continue to frustrate the United States. As efforts to resume the Six-Party Talks intensify, Japanese needs to start thinking about an “exit strategy” on the abduction issue. In other words, the government in Tokyo should engage the abductees’ families to explore ways in which the families can feel confident that the Japanese government’s commitment to resolve the issue remains intact while Tokyo moves forward on other agenda items in the Six-Party Talks. It is a politically daunting task, but one that must be accomplished. Otherwise, Japan’s self-marginalization in the Six-Party Talks will persist, not only frustrating Japan but also complicating relations with the ROK and the United States.

Final Thoughts

The year 2010 ended on a note of rising tension on the Korean Peninsula. In mid-November, Pyongyang proudly displayed a uranium enrichment facility to visiting delegations of former US government officials and non-government researchers,¹⁷ and then, on November 23, it fired artillery shells at Yeonpyeong Island killing four South Korean citizens, including two civilians. The Republic of Korea's (ROK) President Lee Myung Bak announced his government's intention to respond with military force to any further provocations by North Korea, hardening its stance after a decade-long tendency to avoid direct retaliation against attacks from the North.¹⁸ The United States and ROK then conducted a four-day joint military exercise from November 28 to December 1, 2010, to which North Korea responded by enhancing the deployment of its missiles along the coast.¹⁹

In response to intensifying provocations by North Korea, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton invited her Japanese and South Korean counterparts—Seiji Maehara and Kim Sung Hwan—to Washington on December 6, 2010, for a trilateral meeting to confirm the importance of US–Japan–ROK trilateral cooperation. Following the meeting, Clinton condemned Pyongyang's November 23 attack as a violation of the 1953 Armistice Agreement. She further stated that Washington, Tokyo and Seoul agreed that North Korea's disclosure of a uranium enrichment program not only violated UN Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874, but also Pyongyang's commitments under the September 2005 Agreed Statement Principles of the Six-Party Talks. As such, in order to resume the Six-Party Talks, she stated that all three allies had agreed that North Korea should first take concrete steps to cease provocations and improve relations with South Korea. She also stated that North Korea should also abide by the terms of the 1953 Armistice as well as fulfill its prior commitments under the Six-Party Talks, and comply with all obligations under UN Security Council resolutions.²⁰

As 2011 begins, efforts to break the diplomatic impasse continue. US Special Envoy for North Korea Policy, Stephen W. Bosworth, visited Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing on January 3–7, 2011, to consult with counterparts on the prospects of resuming the Six-Party Talks. On January 5, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited Washington, DC. In the course of discussions to prepare for the upcoming State Visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to the United States, North Korea was an important topic between Clinton and Yang, and it

¹⁷ “Russia sees N. Korea's uranium enrichment program as violations of U.N. resolutions” *Yonhap News Agency* December 2, 2010. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/12/02/27/0301000000AEN20101202007900315F.HTML> (accessed January 6, 2011)

¹⁸ “South Korean president takes responsibility for failing to protect country, signals hardened” *Washington Post*, November 29, 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/28/AR2010112804537.html> (accessed January 6, 2011)

¹⁹ “U.S. South Korea begins military exercises, as China calls for emergency talks on North Korea” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2010 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/27/AR2010112703600.html?sid=ST2010112804549> (accessed January 6, 2011)

²⁰ US Department of State, *Remarks with Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara and South Korean Foreign Minister Kim SungHwan*, December 6, 2010. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/12/152443.htm> (accessed January 6, 2011)

was put on the Obama-Hu summit agenda.²¹ On January 6, 2011, then Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara visited Washington, DC, to begin preparatory work for a visit by Prime Minister Kan anticipated for the spring of 2011. At the end of the meeting, Clinton and Maehara reaffirmed that North Korea should end its provocative behavior and that the focus should once again be placed on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.²²

Much depends, however, on whether North Korea shows the willingness to return to the talks, and how the regime in Pyongyang can demonstrate its intentions. The developments so far have not been encouraging. After much anticipation, the ROK and North Korea held preliminary military consultations at Panmunjom between February 8–9, 2011, to discuss the *Cheonan* Incident and the Yeonpyeong Island attack, but the talks collapsed.²³ With no prospect of North–South dialogue to settle the two incidents that most recently heightened the tension on the Korean Peninsula, it is difficult to be optimistic about the resumption of the Six-Party Talks in the near future.

Since the Six-Party Talks deadlocked in 2008, the divergence between the United States and Japan in their approaches toward North Korea has not attracted much attention. This does not mean that the two countries resolved the misalignment of their policy priorities. In fact, unless the United States and Japan are able to better align their respective approaches to North Korea by the time the Six-Party Talks resume, differences over North Korea policy will likely resurface, putting diplomatic strains on the bilateral relationship. In addition, as discussed earlier, Tokyo, Seoul and Washington all face major national elections in a couple of years. The United States and the ROK both will hold presidential elections in 2012. Japan will hold the election for its House of Representatives by August 2013 if not sooner. It is uncertain how the anticipated political transitions will impact US–Japan cooperation, as well as US–Japan–ROK trilateral cooperation on North Korea. In addition, China, North Korea and Russia all expect official power transitions to occur in 2012: in China, Xi Jinping will likely emerge as its next leader; in Russia, Vladimir Putin will likely return to power, and in North Korea, power transition from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un is also expected to be completed. In other words, we are likely to see new leaders in many if not all of the Six-Party Talks participants by 2013. Maintaining momentum to achieve denuclearization of North Korea in such a politically fluid environment is itself a tremendous challenge. An even greater question is how the United States and Japan can navigate such changes together successfully during this challenging period.

²¹ US Department of State, *Daily Press Briefing*, January 5, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2011/01/154010.htm> (accessed January 6, 2011) In the joint statement issued after the Obama–Hu meetings, both sides expressed concern with the North’s announced uranium enrichment program—the first time China had done so—and President Obama told a joint press conference that he and President Hu agreed on the need to prevent further DPRK provocation. The White House, *Press Conference With President Obama and President Hu of the People’s Republic of China*, January 19, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/press-conference-president-obama-and-president-hu-peoples-republic-china> (accessed February 21, 2011)

²² US Department of State, *Remarks with Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Seiji Maehara After Their Meeting*, January 6, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/01/154069.htm> (accessed January 12, 2011)

²³ “N Korea refusing more military talks with S Korea” *Washington Post*, February 9, 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/09/AR2011020900825.html> (accessed February 13, 2011).

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The Stimson Center is a Washington DC-based non-profit, non-partisan institution devoted to enhancing international peace and security. Founded in 1989, its work focuses on reducing weapons of mass destruction and transnational threats, building regional security, and strengthening institutions. Stimson’s pragmatic approach seeks to understand and illuminate complex issues, develop new knowledge, and engage policymakers, policy implementers, and non-governmental institutions with recommendations that are actionable and effective.

“In the modern history of international politics in Northeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula has presented itself as the most important nexus affecting national strategies of major actors in the region. Perhaps this history has already begun to repeat itself. A critical difference today, however, is that Japan and the United States are bound by a robust alliance relationship, and South Korea has become an autonomous player working closely with the United States and Japan. This book is a timely reference source with which to confirm this basic structure of stability in dealing with the North Korean problem, and to ponder new approaches to security cooperation between Japan and the United States.”

— **Yoshihide Soeya, Professor, Keio University**

“In terms of possible military engagement of major powers, there is no more fraught situation in the world today than that involving North Korea. Preventing war, permanently eliminating the DPRK’s nuclear weapons program, and bringing the North into a more sustainable relationship with its neighbors are crucial goals shared by the United States and Japan. Yet, in recent years there have been numerous instances of tension and mistrust between these two close allies specifically over North Korea policy. This volume analyzes in clear and thought-provoking ways the factors behind this and offers insightful suggestions on how to prevent a recurrence.”

— **Alan D. Romberg, Distinguished Fellow and Director of the East Asia program, Stimson Center**

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