

The Prospects for the NK-Japan Normalization Talks under the Hashimoto Cabinet

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Introduction

The possibility of establishing diplomatic ties between North Korea and Japan is growing, as can be seen in Japan's food aid to and the efforts to continue further talks with North Korea while the NK-US relationship improves. Talks on diplomatic ties between the two enemy countries were impossible during the Cold War. One of the fundamental principles of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) toward the Korean peninsula was to prevent the occurrence of war in this region, which could threaten Japan's security, while recognizing South Korea as the one and only legitimate government on the peninsula.¹

The recent NK-Japan talks for establishing diplomatic relations is an important factor affecting the subsystem of Northeast Asia in that it implies a shift in principle of the Japanese foreign policy toward the Korean peninsula. This article thus traces the development of NK-Japan talks to provide the future prospects of the relationship between the two countries. It focuses on the impact of US-Japan cooperation as one of the main factors and estimates the chances of successful NK-Japan talks.

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¹ The second main principle was to oppose the emergence of an anti-Japanese government in the Korean peninsula. A third was the maintenance or expansion of the Japan's influence on the peninsula. Dong-Jin Jeon, "Japan's Policy toward the Korean peninsula," Institute for National Unification, 1992; Dong-Jin Jeon, "Japan's Policy toward North Korea," Institute for National Unification, 1993.

Development of Japan's Relationship with NK: 1981. 3 - 1994. 10

The ruling LDP, which led the formulation of the Japanese foreign policy during Cold War era, was persistent in implementing a hostile policy toward North Korea. During the Cold War era Japan's policy toward North Korea was identical to that of the US toward North Korea. This suggests the validity of Snyder and Diesing's argument that the foreign policy of weak countries during the Cold War era was determined by the structural aspects of the international system.²

Japan began to contact North Korea in March 1981 when NK's Workers' Party and Japan's Socialist Party (SP) announced a joint communique for the creation of non-nuclear peace zone in Northeast Asia. From then on Japan continued to contact North Korea out of the need to check NK's development of weapons of massive destruction, while floating a trial balloon to improve its relationship with North Korea. The NK-Japan relationship, however, turned cold due to the assassination of Korean leaders in Burma in 1983 and the bombing of the passenger flight KAL 007 by North Korean terrorists.

It was only in 1991 that North Korea and Japan reopened the channels for dialogue when the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the blooming of post-Cold War era. The opportunity was given when Japan sent the parliamentary representatives of the LDP and the SP headed by Kanemaru Shin, former vice-president of LDP, to Pyongyang in September 1990 to seek an initiative in the foreign policy toward North Korea. North Korea was also showing a friendly attitude toward Japan due to the need to counterbalance South Korea's diplomatic success with the former Soviet Union and mainland China. The NK's Workers' Party and Japan's LDP and SP announced a joint communique in Pyongyang which enumerated

² Snyder and Diesing did not specifically mention Japanese foreign policy, but their arguments are useful to explain the characteristics of Japanese foreign policy. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.) Also, Waltz's structural realism can be used to explain the US-Japan relationship and limitation of Japanese foreign policy during the Cold War era. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, M. A.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

the current issues and tasks between the two countries. The core of the joint communique was Japan's acceptance of responsibility and compensation for the the disaster and pains of Korean people during the colonial era and for the damages inflicted on North Korea by Japan's hostile policy during the 45 years after World War Two. This joint communique was criticized by Japanese politicians as a diplomatic failure because it contained Japan's apology and the promise of compensation to North Korea. Moreover, it promised that the Japanese government would provide the compensation when diplomatic ties were established. Japan, however, successfully included the clause of the elimination of the nuclear threat in all the areas of the globe, reflecting deep concerns over the North's possible development of nuclear weapons. Thus, as can be noticed in this clause, the nuclear threat of North Korea was a major element behind Japan's approach toward North Korea.

North Korea and Japan began to negotiate for the establishment of diplomatic relations on January 30-31, 1991. Altogether, eight meetings were held over two years until they ended in November 1992. North Korea abruptly terminated the meetings when Japan took issue with the abduction of the Japanese woman Lee Eunhye and also North Korea's nuclear development at the 8th meeting during Nov. 5-6, 1992.

The unsettled issues at the meetings between North Korea and Japan could reemerge as resumption of the talks between North Korea and Japan are expected. First, North Korea demanded that Japan recognize North Korea as the one and only legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea, knowing that that demand was unacceptable to Japan, was recalcitrant on that point and the issue has become a hurdle for the continued progress of the negotiations. North Korea also made a great effort to link the issues of resettling Japan's colonial rule over Korea, including reparations and compensations after the surrender of Japan, with the establishment of a diplomatic relationship. The North Korean policy on that issue will not change because it has tried to link the talks for diplomatic relations with the guarantee of financial support. The Japanese position on this point has been that issues such as the North Korean anti-Japanese guerilla activities in Manchuria and the legitimacy of the

North Korean regime are outside the scope of the meeting. On the issue of reparation, Japan insisted that this was not a matter of reparation since the anti-Japanese guerilla activities did not constitute a formal war between the countries. Japan wanted to deal with the issue on the level of property claims. Against the North Korean claims on the past, Japan took the issue of Lee Eunhye as a prerequisite to the development of talks on diplomatic relations.

It was from this stage of the talks that NK's nuclear development emerged as the focal point of the negotiations. Japan made it clear that it was concerned over the production of an improved version of the Scud missile with a firing range of over 1,000km, together with the development of biochemical weapons.

After the unilateral termination of the talks in November 1992, North Korea's declaration of withdrawal from the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) in March 1993 led to the complete stop of NK-Japan talks for diplomatic ties. This was because Japan demanded a resolution of the disputes over the development of nuclear weapons as precondition for the normalization of NK-Japan ties.³ The hardline policy of Japan against North Korea in the 1993-94 period reflected the uncompromising mood of the day, when even an attack on North Korea's nuclear facilities was discussed on the part of US.⁴ At least Japan's attitude revealed that the development of nuclear weapons was the most crucial issue for Japan.⁵

By the middle of 1994, Japan's policy toward North Korea had entered into a finetuning period. After the collapse of the LDP gov-

³ Japan showed a strong reaction to the suspected development of NK's nuclear weapons. Watanabe Michio, Vice-Prime Minister cum Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasized that Japan would not set out to talk for the establishment of diplomatic ties until NK retracted its withdrawal from the NPT at the Budget Committee meeting of the Diet on March 23, 1993.

⁴ Japan was already conducting studies for effective cooperation with the US in case of war on the Korean peninsula. These include the study of joint operations with US conducted by Mitsuya in 1963 and similar study after the guide for the joint military defense with US. For a recent study which focuses on the Japan's role in case of war, see Japanese Strategic Study Center, "Emerging Global Security: a Guide to the 21st Century," 1994, pp. 97-121.

⁵ North Korea criticized Japan, in response to Japan's offensive on the suspected nuclear development, in that nuclear reprocessing facilities in Monzu and Rokashomura, and importing a lot of plutonium were intended for nuclear armaments. NK also argued that Japan's potential for nuclear armaments was more threatening than anything else and that Japan was picking on NK. NK asserted that it had no intention of developing nuclear weapons. NK denounced Japan's move to purchase high-tech weapons as being intended for the strengthening of its military armaments and portended a resurgence of the militarism and expansionism of the past.

ernment, political instability resulting from a series of reshapings of the ruling coalition posed the need to establish the basic principles necessary to conduct a consistent policy toward North Korea. As a result, the ruling coalition came to produce the policy agreement toward North Korea at the meeting of composing party's representatives on April 19, 1994. This agreement partially reflected the Socialist Party's NK policy. The crucial point of this agreement was that Japan would actively participate in the resolution of nuclear disputes through the UN or close cooperation with the US and South Korea. This was one step forward from the traditional approach to international disputes which sticks to the clause 9 of the peace constitution. It also reflected the softline policy of the Socialist Party in that it tried to resolve the disputes through dialogue with surrounding countries, rather than attempting to isolate North Korea. The conciliatory tone also corresponded with the position of the Japanese government.⁶

In particular, the Japanese government's conciliatory attitude toward North Korea reflected the dual nature of Japanese foreign policy resulting from a ruling coalition in which the Socialist Party shared power with the divided LDP.⁷

NK-Japan Talks after Resolution of Nuclear Dispute: from 1994.10 to Present

The hardline policy of the US toward North Korea began to have a more conciliatory tone as the possibility of a concerted resolution was in sight with former president Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang. Caution and dialogue emerged as the main policy line toward North Korea after the death of Kim Il-Sung due to the

⁶ Japan's dual strategy to maintain both a hard- and soft-line policy toward NK has mirrored Japan's need to prevent the adoption of hard-line policy toward NK from developing into regional crisis involving Japan, on the one hand, and a need to remove the possibility of NK, which is an unpredictable and closed country, from developing nuclear armaments and holding a missile whose range includes Japan, on the other hand. Japan was more conciliatory toward NK because it did not want a hardline policy that would not destroy international stability and expand the crisis.

⁷ The traditional Socialist Party policy toward NK was more friendly than toward South Korea. This is why some analysts argue that there exists a higher possibility of accomplishing diplomatic ties when the Socialist Party remains in the ruling coalition.

expected instability of the NK regime. The active engagement policy of the US and NK's acceptance led to a framework agreement on nuclear development being signed in Geneva in Oct. 1994. The US asked South Korea and Japan to pay for the construction of light-water reactors and processing of nuclear fuel rods. Japan resumed talks with North Korea, taking advantage of this opportunity.

The ruling coalition was active in resuming the talks with North Korea. It saw an early resolution of the North Korean nuclear dispute and inducing the opening of the NK system as one of the most urgent national interests of Japan. Japan was planning to send its representatives headed by Chairman Kubo of the Socialist Party to talks with North Korea in November 1994, right after the Geneva agreement. A more cautious approach was suggested by Secretary General Mori and the floor leaders of the LDP, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While Japanese leaders were discussing how to approach North Korea, North Korea's refusal to receive the Japanese representatives kept the planned visit on hold. The background to the cautious approach was the concern over the fact that three-party joint communique of 1990 was unfavourable to Japan. Some argued that the Lee Eunhye issue needed to be resolved before the meeting with North Korea began. Others pointed out that Japan's enthusiasm to establish a diplomatic relationship with North Korea could lead to Japan's heavy burden in paying for the construction of light-water reactors by KEDO.⁸

125

Other factors contributing to Japan's cautious approach to North Korea were the complaints of the South Korean government about the parliamentary diplomacy of Japan, which was manifested in the meeting between President Kim Young Sam of Korea and Minister Igarashi, the chief cabinet secretary of Japan. On the part of Japan, there is some limitation in expanding the contacts with North Korea without the prior understanding of South Korea. This need to accommodate the South Korean government's position is still restraining the Japanese government.

In 1995 the government officials of Japan such as Mr. Kono, Minister of Foreign Affairs, kept demanding the resumption of talks

⁸ *Sankei Shimbun*, Nov. 2, 9, 1994; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Nov. 7, 9, 1994.

with North Korea, which was accepted by North Korea in a meeting between Kim Yong Soon of North Korea and Michio Watanabe of Japan in March 1995. There remained disagreement, however, over the interpretation of the joint communique of the three parties, and Japan could not accomplish more than building up the mood for diplomatic ties. In 1996, Hashimoto cabinet is currently trying to lure North Korea into resuming the talks for diplomatic relations by using additional food aid as a bait. There are many constraints putting a hold on the talks for diplomatic ties. There is some possibility, however, for higher level contacts between the two countries if the NK regime faces a more serious crisis probably due to the food shortages, or if US-NK relations improve at an accelerated rate. The increasing incidents of defection by those who belong to the elite strata in North Korea would obviously deepen the sense of crisis among the current ruling groups of North Korea, though these desertions do not necessarily mean the beginning of the end for North Korea. This increasing sense of crisis would lead the NK regime to actively engage in the talks for diplomatic ties with Japan to overcome the economic crisis through economic aid from Japan, despite its negative impacts.

The Prospect of the Hashimoto Cabinet's Policies on the Normalization Talks with North Korea

As suggested by recent research results by comparative foreign policy analysts, foreign policy can be understood as the product of a dynamic process in which external factors (i.e., international systemic factors) and domestic factors interact. In that regard, a multi-level analysis is necessary to fully understand factors influencing Japan's North Korean policies at multiple levels.

First, at the individual level, we should look at the personal characteristics of main policy makers under the Hashimoto cabinet. Hashimoto was a member of the Sato faction within the Liberal Party, when the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party joined together in 1955. With the division of the Takeshita faction into the Obuchi faction and Ojawa-Hata faction, Hashimoto became a central member of the Obuchi faction, and a political rival of Ojawa, now

the leader of the opposition party. One thing to note is that Kanemaru, the person behind the Three-Party Joint Statement, was also a member of the Takeshita faction. With these political backgrounds, Hashimoto's ideological orientation developed into "incremental internationalism." Considering the Obuchi faction's minority position within the Liberal Democratic Party and Hashimoto's role as a coordinator among different factions and other parties, however, Hashimoto's personal policy orientation cannot be considered a decisive factor in Japan's North Korean policies.⁹

In contrast to Hashimoto's relative quietness on normalization with North Korea, the Foreign Minister Ikeda Yukihiko has been very actively involved in this issue. He is also known to be a close friend of the LDP's Secretary-General, Kato, who is a leading figure in the normalization issue.

As a central leader of the Miyazawa faction emphasizing close relationship with the US, Kato himself once studied at Harvard University. Kato worked at the Foreign Ministry before becoming a politician, and for that reason seems to have many close friends within the Ministry, which is another main participant in the making of North Korean policies. With his position as the Secretary-General of the LDP, he can influence the policy making process by exercising his enormous power in financial and personnel matters. As can be seen in the current confrontational structure of NHK (Nakasone-Hashimoto-Kajiyama) versus YKK (Yamazaki-Kato-Koizumi), Kato also has a close relationship with Yamazaki who is not only a new leader within the LDP, but also an expert on national defense. Both Kato and Ikeda, therefore, will be the Japanese channel for receiving the US requests regarding Japan's North Korean policies.

There is also a possibility that the Deputy Prime Minister Kubo

⁹ Hashimoto was born in 1937, and graduated from the Keiyo Law School. He entered politics in 1963, inheriting his father's district in Okayama. Serving the Diet for 11 terms, he took many important positions including Minister of Welfare, Finance, International Trade and Industry, and Secretary-General and President of the LDP. As an advocate of traditional nationalist forces, he became one of the new leaders (together with Kato, Mori, Ishihara, and Yamazaki) within the LDP. His conservative orientations and penchant for a powerful state were once again confirmed at the time of his run for the LDP Presidency, when he explicitly argued for "independent diplomacy," and entry into UN Security Council as a permanent member as the national objectives.

(Socialist Party), who served as the head of the Delegates for normalization talks with North Korea after the Geneva Accord in 1994, might take the initiative in the normalization efforts. With Diet elections scheduled later this year, changes in Japanese domestic politics are highly likely, but an examination of the cabinet members makes it clear that the possibility of retreating from the current aggressive approach to the normalization talks is rather slim.

Moving up to the next level of the Japanese domestic political process, there are several changes such as the Socialist Party's participation in the cabinet, generational replacement favoring the New Conservative forces, and the strengthening of the negative public opinion on corruption. As the New Conservative forces' foreign policy orientation is directed toward expansion of international contributions, independent efforts for normalizing relations with North Korea might be strengthened. By diplomatically resolving the North Korean nuclear threat, Japan could contribute to the stability of the international regime of nuclear non-proliferation, and thus heighten the country's stature in the world community. In reality, however, Japan's greater diplomatic influence, as it is pursued in line with the reinforcement of the US-Japan alliance, coincides with the international factor of the US's demand for cooperation.

Faced with the increasingly negative public opinion on politicians' corruption the LDP leaders might be tempted to divert the public's attention to a salient external event. In that case, the normalization talks with North Korea could be linked to the Japanese domestic political process. Prime Minister Hashimoto is now in a politically difficult position due to the problem of bad bonds of a housing financial company. The negative repercussions of the Japanese bubble economy and the problem of money politics, as the two major targets for the recent structural reform efforts, have become critical factors for a potential change in the Japanese domestic political process.

Looking back at the history of Japanese diplomacy, one can easily find many incidents of overcoming domestic political crises with diplomatic achievements.¹⁰ For a recent case, the birth of the Three-

¹⁰ Examples would be the argument for invading Korea as a means of dealing with the political crisis following the Meiji Reform, and the international expansionism (more specifically, the invasion of Manchuria) right after the Great Depression in 1929.

Party Joint Statement led by Kanemaru Shin was not irrelevant to the LDP's political crisis following the electoral success of the Socialist Party. This instability of the Japanese political and economic structure, although it may be an important domestic factor, cannot be a decisive factor for the normalization of NK-Japan relations. There is no logical reason why such a domestic incentive should necessarily lead to normalization.

Another possible analysis at the domestic political level is that the LDP may show greater interest in normalization with North Korea as a means of catering to the Socialist Party's traditional foreign policy objectives and thus preventing its exit from the coalition government. Unfortunately, this cannot be a decisive explanation either, considering the New Conservative forces' intention to build a new party system consisting of two conservative parties through the weakening of progressive forces. Rather, the utility of the Socialist Party for the LDP might be its past experiences in dealings with North Korea, and the use of these experienced politicians as brokers in the normalization efforts.

There is no doubt that Hashimoto's personal policy orientation and the domestic political process including the public's demand and party politics are important factors for Japan's policies toward North Korea. The effects of these domestic factors are relatively small, however, when compared to those of the international factor of the US-Japan cooperative system at the global level.

The Hashimoto cabinet's foreign policy orientation is directed toward the maintenance of a stable international political and economic order based on the principle of liberal capitalism. For this goal, Japan is prepared to fully assist the US in its endeavors to secure and maintain global peace. Foreign Minister Ikeda emphasized, in his address right after his inauguration, the importance of strengthening the US-Japan alliance and maintaining a stable global economic order.¹¹ This is in perfect line with Ozawa's argument that as a so-called peace-creating strategy, Japan's foreign policy in this post-Cold War era must be based upon the maintenance of a stable

¹¹ *Sankei Shimbun*, Jan 22, 1996.

¹² The former US president Bush declared the so-called "the Tokyo doctrine on the US-Japan global partnership" after meetings with Miyazawa in Tokyo in January 1992.

US-Japan alliance. Ozawa's argument is also shared by many conservative politicians including Nakasone, the founder of the New Conservatism, and coincides with the report of the Committee for National Defense established by the former Prime Minister Hosokawa.

As expressed in the coalition agreement, Japan pledges to give full support to the US in the efforts to prevent further proliferation of weapons of massive destruction such as nuclear weapons. In this vein, there is little disagreement among Japanese politicians regarding the basic principle of pursuing the normalization of relations with North Korea in full respect of the Geneva Accord between US-NK. In short, the foremost motive behind Japan's approach to North Korea is nothing but the execution of the US-Japan global partnership.¹²

Another international factor working in favor of the normalization is Japan's desire to remove the element of instability in the region, that is, the possibility of the Kim Jong-Il regime's collapse. Therefore, it wants to induce NK's efforts for economic reform and opening. The normalization of relations and subsequent economic aid could serve the dual purpose of monitoring North Korea's adherence to the Geneva Accord and simultaneously inducing North Korea's economic opening. This is also in line with the basic objective of Japan's post-Cold War foreign policy: support for the US efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation. In sum, the most influential factor in Japan's current dealings with North Korea for normalization is an international one—in particular, the external input of security cooperation with the US.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the prospects for the normalization of NK-Japan relations are becoming brighter despite the complaints from the South Korean government. The former Prime Minister Murayama already declared during the Osaka APEC meeting in 1995 that the principle of continuing to pursue normalization with North Korea remained unchanged. The new Prime Minister Hashimoto also declared his intention to follow the past North Korean policies.

Entering into 1996, as we observe many signs for the improvement of NK-US relations, the pace of NK-Japan contacts is getting faster. Japan's ruling coalition party is planning to send its delegates to North Korea once again, and is also attempting to expand North Korean channels by reinstating the Japan-NK League of Congressmen. In February 1996, the Japan Institute of International Affairs under the Foreign Ministry was reported to have contacted NK officials., and according to the *Tokyo Shimbun* (March 1, 1996) both sides agreed in principle to resume negotiations for normalization.

As pointed out before, the fundamental reason for Japan's aggressiveness in the normalization negotiations with North Korea was the possibility of North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons. One of the most salient concerns of the US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era has been the prevention of the proliferation of massive destructive weapons and their vehicles. From the US perspective, North Korea's development of nuclear weapons not only weakens the international regime of nuclear control, but also opens the possibility that nuclear weapons might flow into those volatile regions where religious and ethnic conflicts are present.

It is for that reason that the US is pursuing conciliatory policies toward North Korea. It is willing to pay considerable diplomatic costs for the critical interest of nuclear non-proliferation. In spite of recurring rifts with its old ally, South Korea, the US continues its approach to North Korea, and is also asking Japan's participation in the name of the US-Japan alliance. Accepting this request, Japan is adopting a conciliatory policy toward North Korea. It is in this context that Japan is showing such interest in the normalization of relations with North Korea. Under these international circumstances, the Hashimoto cabinet will closely follow the US lead in dealings with North Korea. More specifically, the cabinet is expected to continue its efforts toward the improvement of its relations with North Korea in 1996, while watching closely changes in the Kim Jong-Il regime's enthusiasm for the normalization of relations with Japan. ■■■