

The DPRK (North Korea) Regime's Pragmatic Policy for Survival

-Comments on the September 17th Koizumi-Kim summit meeting

In a report titled "Mori: N. Korea adopted pragmatic policy stance," Asahi Shimbun (September 13, 2002) reported: "Pyongyang showed rare flexibility." Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's predecessor Yoshiro Mori revealed to Asahi that "Pyongyang was even willing to drop its right to claim compensation for Japan's 35-year colonization of the Korean Peninsula."

The other precondition from Japan for a Japan-DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea) summit is DPRK's admission of abduction of Japanese. In addition, Japan has to enforce Washington's "concerns" regarding DPRK's missile firing, WMD (weapons of mass destruction), and nuclear development issues.[1]

These requirements constitute the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Statement toward establishing diplomatic relations, on September 17, 2002 in the Koizumi-Kim summit meeting.

Although the Japanese government (and the media in Japanese and English) placed the abduction issue involving only a dozen Japanese [2] as the priority (and the headline) for the meeting and further diplomatic negotiation, most Japanese clearly understand that, for half century, the core issue of Japan-DPRK relations has been the war reparations. In fact, in September 1990, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the largest opposition Socialist Party (JSP) sent a joint delegation, led by Kanemaru and Tanabe, to Pyongyang. They signed a joint statement with Korean Workers Party (DPRK's only party under Kim Jong Il's father) promising to compensate not only for Japan's 35-year colonization of the Korean Peninsula but also for Korean losses after the war. The 1990 statement is the genuine spirit for Japanese-Korean reconciliation and should be the base for normalization. The 2002 September statement is apparently a betrayal of the 1990 September statement.[3]

How could this happen? Pure and simple. The international environment changed sharply. In 1990, DPRK under Kim Jong Il's father, backed by the USSR and the PRC, could stand firm against the U.S. and Japan's subjugation attempts. Today, as cited from Japanese officials, they sense an "unusual softening" in Pyongyang's stance recently that shows the isolated regime may be ready to strike a deal with Tokyo. Hit by food shortages and struggling to revive a hobbled economy, Pyongyang is likely eager for monetary aid from Japan, regardless any principle. The DPRK regime is also increasingly worried about its tumultuous relationship with the United States after President Bush branded it part of an "axis of evil," along with Iraq and Iran in 2002 January. This statement is a result of the DPRK regime's pragmatic policy change for survival; at the meantime, this is a diplomatic success for Japan to finally conclude its war history.

As a consequence under current international politics condition, Japan-Korea (including South and North) relations have the similar result with another separated victim nation: China. People were betrayed. Japan's failure to face to Asian people by utilizing dictatorial regimes has brought further and deeper mistrust.[4]

The DPRK regime is not a legitimate representative of the Korean people in the north of Korean Peninsula (Japan knows this much well than any others), so that fact that it give up the right to claim compensation does not change the essence of Japan-Korean relations. However, even though this betrayal statement is not welcome, we have to accept it and deal with it. Nonetheless,

it opens the door wider for the people in the north Korean Peninsula and provides more opportunities for the outside world to understand and assist their struggles.[5] The first step, from Asian people's perspective, is: even if the national compensation issues were "settled," the individual rights for the war victims demanding compensation should be respected.[6]

The earlier Japan faces up to Asian people, the better future East Asia (especially Japan) has.

[NOTES]

[1]. In the Japan-DPRK joint statement, DPRK promised to continue a moratorium on missile firing through 2003 and to allow nuclear inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Mr. Bush's security advisor Rice praised Japan after receiving report from Japan's Foreign Minister Kawaguchi.

[2]. In an astonishing concession, and ending years of denials, Kim Jong Il admitted that Japanese citizens were kidnapped decades ago to teach language and culture to spies. Kim acknowledged the abductions were "regrettable and would never happen again," and promised that those responsible would be punished. The abduction issue per se is important, but it should not be utilized to hinder the normal process of establishing diplomatic ties. In fact, if Japan did not insist on this issue as a precondition, Japan could have established a normal relationship with the DPRK and also have resolved this issue much early.

[3]. This new statement, especially on the abduction issue, is a blow to the Social Democratic Party. Instead of complaining being betrayed by the DPRK regime, it should criticize itself relying too much on foreign "Socialist" regimes to maintain its bargaining power in domestic politics. Its dependence on the CCP almost buried itself during the 1989 Tiananmen Incident shock.

[4]. Since 1990, many Korean colonial victims have been demanding the Japanese government for the official apology and compensation, and they are widely supported by the international society. However, the Japanese government repeated that all compensation issues were settled by the 1956 Japan-ROK (South Korea) Treaty, thus rejected their demand and provided only lip service of "deep remorse and heartfelt apology" from prime ministers. This is the frame of the so-called Murayama Statement when Murayama was the Prime Minister in 1995. Nearly 40% of the aged victims who came to speak out have already passed away without any redress. The Japanese government, along with many Japanese companies, is waiting for the disappearing of the whole victim generations. They don't realize that these victims have descendents, who are backed by their whole nations, will continue requesting international justice.

[5]. The DPRK also gained more freedom as a "player" (small though), rather than a card manipulated by big powers surrounding it.

[6]. This actually has become China's stance on the war reparations issue. See, for example, Wang Xianyong: How we gave up the Sino-Japanese war reparations, Dangshi wenhui (The CCP History Collections), July 2002. Kim Yonghi <kimyonhi@pa2.so-net.ne.jp> also stated so in "Urgent appeal to the Secretary General Kim Jong-II and PM Koizumi on the Japan-North Korea summit meeting," September 13, 2002.

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