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Japan's Response to Nuclear North Korea

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When scholars and commentators discuss Japan's response to nuclear-armed North Korea, many jump to the conclusion that Japan will start thinking about arming itself with nuclear weapons while others contend that Japan will remain forever "pacifist." This polemic tendency in the discourse on Japan's security policy has created an unfortunate lack of understanding of Japanese policy. In fact, Tokyo has taken extensive non-nuclear military measures in order to cope with the North Korean threat while being less active in using diplomacy. This chapter sheds light on the military and diplomatic measures that Japan has taken and assesses how effective these measures are, based on the extent and the nature of the North Korean threat toward Japan.

ASSESSING NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AND MISSILE CAPABILITIES

Nuclear Capabilities

In order to determine North Korea's nuclear capabilities, attention must be paid to the amount of plutonium that the country has, the level of sophistication of its explosive device, and the extent to which miniaturization has been achieved. In 2007, the U.S. intelligence community estimated that North Korea had possessed up to 50 kilograms of plutonium, enough for at least six nuclear devices before the first nuclear test in October 2006.[1] Also, the Institute for Science and International Security assessed that while North Korea possessed zero to ten kilograms of separated plutonium enough for up to two nuclear bombs in 1994, the amount had increased to 33 to 55 kilograms enough for six to thirteen nuclear devices in 2006.[2] In addition, Siegfried S. Hecker, an American nuclear expert who has visited North Korean nuclear facilities multiple times, has assessed from the operations of the five-megawatt reactor in Nyongbyon (called Yongbyon in South Korea) that in the past North Korea had produced 36 to 54 kilograms of plutonium, enough for six to nine nuclear bombs.[3]

These estimates are more or less consistent with North Korea's declaration on its nuclear status. In June 2008, Pyongyang declared that it had produced 38.5 kilograms of plutonium, of which 31 kilograms had been extracted and 26 kilograms had been used to produce nuclear bombs. It also claimed that two kilograms had been used in the 2006 nuclear test and that 7.5 kilograms still remained in spent fuel rods.[4]

Two nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 proved that North Korea had successfully produced nuclear devices. In 2006, North Korea predicted explosion yield of four kilotons, but achieved less than one kiloton. So, it was "[s]uccessful, but not perfect."[5] However, North Korea achieved a much larger nuclear explosion in the range of a few kilotons in 2009.[6] Hecker estimated it to be in the two to four kiloton range.[7] These estimates are ominously consistent with North Korea's prediction in 2006.

The only remaining missing link in determining whether North Korea's nuclear weapons have become usable is in the issue of miniaturization. On this point, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed in March 2009 that North Korea

"may be able to successfully mate a nuclear warhead to a ballistic missile."[8] This latest estimate was not a definitive answer to the question, but certainly a scary suggestion. In 2011, the DIA declared that "North Korea may now have several plutonium-based nuclear warheads that it can deliver by ballistic missiles and aircraft as well as by unconventional means."[9]

Missile Capabilities

Although international attention has largely been focused on the launch of long-range Taepodong missiles, what really matters to the security of Japan is the medium-range Nodong missile capable of covering almost the entire territory of Japan. The Nodong's first flight test took place in May 1993. The missile flew about 500 kilometers and landed in the Sea of Japan; its flight path was in the direction of Tokyo. In July 2006, two or three Nodong missiles were successfully launched in the northeastern direction between the Russian Far East and Japan's Hokkaido area.[10] All of these Nodong missiles impacted in different areas, suggesting that some of them had achieved lofted launches.[11] In July 2009, two more Nodong missiles were launched successfully.[12]

The Japanese government has assessed that the Nodong has a range of 1,300 kilometers with a payload of 700 to 1,200 kilograms and circular error probable (CEP) of 2.5 kilometers. If aimed at the center of Tokyo, there is a 50% probability the missile would fall somewhere inside the circular Yamanote subway line. A Nodong would reach Japan within seven to ten minutes of its launch and would be flying at a speed of Mach 15 to 20 at the time of impact.[13]

By 2003, North Korea had deployed some 175-200 Nodong missiles, designed to accommodate conventional, nuclear, biological, and chemical warheads.[14] A more recent report stated that as many as 320 Nodong missiles had been deployed.[15] As it is difficult to spot Nodong missiles mounted on mobile launchers, of which North Korea reportedly possessed about thirty, destroying them before they are launched would be extremely difficult.[16] A positive aspect of this is that the Nodong might not be too destabilizing in a crisis situation since North Korea would not have to launch them prematurely for fear of preemption.

In late 1999, the Korean People's Army (KPA) established the Missile Training Guidance Bureau and all ballistic missile units were subsequently subordinated to this bureau. Since the 2001-02 training cycle when the KPA started to conduct ballistic missile exercises at battalion level instead of battery level, annual exercises with Scud and Nodong units have expanded and many ballistic missile units had been redeployed.[17]

As a result, North Korea is already capable of attacking Japan with ballistic missiles. Conventional, chemical, or biological weapons can be used although it might not be technically easy to use chemical or biological weapons effectively. Given the DIA's estimate of North Korea's ability to miniaturize the nuclear device, the assessment is that North Korea "may be able to" now use nuclear weapons against Japan.

SCENARIOS OF MISSILE USE AGAINST JAPAN

There are three scenarios in which North Korea might actually use missiles against Japan. First, there is a military-diplomatic scenario in which North Korea would launch missiles as a part of its effort to coerce Japan into diplomatic submission. Second, there is a wartime deterrence scenario in which North Korea would use or threaten to attack Japan in order to deter the United States and Japan from assisting South Korea in case of war on the Korean peninsula. Finally, there is a scenario in which desperate North Korean leaders launch all-out attacks against Japan. I am not contending here that the likelihood of these scenarios' occurrence is very high. Rather that if North Korea should attack Japan, these would be likely scenarios.

Scenario 1: Military-Diplomatic Use of Force

In this scenario, North Korea would launch a small number of missiles in or near Japan to scare Japanese leaders and citizens into diplomatic submission. North Korea would launch a large enough number of missiles to provoke fear, but limit their damage so that the situation would not escalate too much. North Korea's policy objective in this case would be to obtain concessions to achieve diplomatic normalization with Japan. North Korea could do this by taking the following actions.

North Korea launches one Nodong missile in the direction of Tokyo, but has it fall far short of the city and impact on international waters in the Sea of Japan. It then announces: (a) there would be no more missile tests; (b) the missile tests were necessary only because of Japan's aggressive policy and the steps it has been taking to possess offensive capabilities against the government of the DPRK; and (c) it would like to normalize relations with Japan.

> If Japan does not respond positively to the overture, North Korea could then launch a Nodong missile tipped with a conventional warhead toward Tokyo, but have it land in a rural, sparsely populated area on the Japanese mainland. It then announces: (a) the missile was launched only because Japan continued to take a "hostile policy" toward the DPRK and (b) the DPRK will take every necessary measure to prevent escalation of the situation and seek to normalize relations with Japan.

Given North Korea's past adventurism, this scenario is within the range of its rational choices.

Scenario 2: Wartime Deterrence

In this scenario, North Korea would use or threaten to attack Japan in order to prevent the United States and Japan from assisting South Korea in case of war on the Korean peninsula. As in the first scenario, North Korea would scare Japanese leaders and citizens into making a decision to limit Japan's commitment to the defense of South Korea. More importantly, it would seek to prevent Japan from allowing the United States to use military bases and facilities on its soil as part of the war effort in Korea. North Korea would threaten the use of nuclear weapons against Japan unless it accepts Pyongyang's demands. In order to make its coercion credible, North Korea would launch a relatively large number of missiles against U.S. bases and major cities in Japan. On the one hand,

if Japan chose to refuse the United States the right to use its bases, it would risk the end of the U.S.-Japan alliance after the war. On the other hand, if it chose to ignore North Korea's demand, it would risk the mass destruction of Tokyo.

At the same time, Pyongyang would demand that Washington choose between Seoul and Tokyo. In this variant of a Cold War nuclear scenario, Pyongyang would typically ask, "Would you be willing to sacrifice Tokyo for Seoul?"

Scenario 3: Suicidal Attacks

In this scenario, desperate North Korean leaders would launch an all-out attack against Japan. For example, if Kim Jong-un realized that his regime was collapsing and his days were numbered, he might decide to launch massive suicidal attacks against Japan to leave his legacy (though infamous) on Korean history. In this scenario, massive destruction of Japan itself would be the objective. All available forces would be used to attack Japan. For this purpose, North Korea would use some 320 Nodong missiles armed with conventional, or possibly chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. In the worst-case scenario, several nuclear bombs would be used.

THE JAPANESE RESPONSE

Military Response

Japan's military response to the North Korean threat has three pillars: ballistic missile defense (BMD), civil defense, and extended nuclear deterrence provided by the United States.

Ballistic Missile Defense

Japan's BMD program has come a long way. The government of Japan began preliminary consultations on BMD with the United States in 1993 after the first Nodong flight test took place earlier in the same year. It commenced a comprehensive study on the posture of the air defense system and a U.S.-Japan joint study on BMD in 1995. In 2003, the Japanese government made the decision to actually procure BMD systems. Based on this decision, deployment of BMD units in the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) began in 2007. The deployment is scheduled to be completed by April 2012.[18]

Two different systems are being introduced as key components of the Japanese BMD measures. One is the Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block IA, an upper-tier, mid-course defense system deployed on Aegis destroyers, capable of shooting down 1,500 kilometer-range ballistic missiles. Four Aegis destroyers will be equipped with the SM-3. The other system is Patriot Advanced Capabilities-3 (PAC-3), a ground-based, lower-tier, terminal-phase defense system. Four air and missile defense groups, with four fire units each equipped with PAC-3, will be deployed in the Tokyo metropolitan area, the central area, and northern Kyushu. Of these two systems, the Aegis-based SM-3 is more important than PAC-3 in the sense that the SM-3 has much wider area coverage, and two to three Aegis BMD destroyers will be enough to protect most Japanese territory. Each Aegis BMD destroyer has ninety vertical launch system (VLS) cells, and the SM-3 missiles will be deployed together with anti-aircraft SM-2 and anti-submarine missiles.[19]

With the introduction of BMD systems, the newly developed warning and control radar FPS-5, capable of dealing with both aircraft and ballistic missiles, will be deployed (eventually there will be four of them); and the ground-based early warning and control system—Base Air Defense Ground Environment (BADGE)—has been upgraded and renamed Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment (JADGE). The budget earmarked for BMD in FY2012 is going to be 63.3 billion yen, or some $510 million.[20] The total expenditure of procuring the entire system was expected to be between 800 billion and 1 trillion yen, or $8.7 billion and $10.9 billion. However, the cumulative expenditure on BMD had already reached 800 billion yen, or $8.7 billion by 2009.[21]

So far, four SM-3 interception tests have been conducted in December 2007, November 2008, October 2009, and October 2010 respectively in the sea off Hawaii's Kauai Island. In the first, third, and fourth tests, targets were successfully intercepted outside the atmosphere by a SM-3 missile fired from the Kongo, Myoko, and Kirishima Aegis destroyers. The second test was conducted with the Chokai Aegis destroyer, but failed due to the malfunctioning of thrusters.[22] PAC-3 has been tested successfully twice in September 2008 and September 2009.[23]

In April 2009, both sea-based and ground-based BMD systems were for the first time put into operation for actual contingencies in response to North Korea's Taepodong launch. Under the Self-Defense Forces Law revised in 2007, the Minister of Defense issued an advance order to the Self-Defense Forces units to prepare for the destruction of the rocket which might fall on Japanese territory.

In addition, a U.S.-Japan joint project for developing the next-generation sea-based BMD system is underway. After North Korea launched Taepodong 1 in 1998, Japan embarked on joint technological research with the United States on four major components—kinetic kill vehicles, infra-red seekers, rocket motors, and nose cones—for the next-generation advanced interceptor missile SM-3 Block IIA. In 2005, the Japanese government approved U.S.-Japan cooperative development of the advanced interceptor. The two countries are also working together to improve the capabilities of radar and combat command systems.[24]

Civil Defense

Civil defense measures had long been non-existent in Japan. However, given the new strategic environment of a North Korean threat, as well as the existence of low-intensity but high-probability threats such as terrorism, Japan has started to take steps to pave the way for providing better civil defense to its citizens. In this context, the Law concerning the Measures for Protection of the People in Armed Attack Situations, or Civil Protection Law, was enacted in 2004. It stipulated how the national and local governments should implement evacuation and relief operations and take necessary measures in response to armed attacks. In 2005, the Basic Guidelines for Protection of the People were adopted and the civil protection plans for administrative agencies were developed. In 2006, based on the guidelines, prefectural governments and designated public institutions in Japan completed the development of civil protection plans. Municipal governments and designated local public institutions are currently developing their own plans. The central government would issue warnings and

instruct prefectural governors to take evacuation measures and use multiple means of communication such as radio networks and satellite communication in case of emergency. In 2005, the Cabinet Secretariat prepared a new warning siren designed specifically for civil defense purposes.[25]

U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence

In addition to strengthening missile defense and civil defense capabilities, Japan has taken steps to maintain and possibly enhance the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. In February 2009, Japanese officials met with the members of the U.S. Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States and expressed their concerns and wishes regarding the future of the nuclear umbrella provided by the United States to Japan. They said: (a) low-yield nuclear devices with a capability to penetrate underground targets would strengthen the credibility of an extended nuclear deterrence; (b) if the U.S. government was to consider decommissioning the Tomahawk, nuclear-equipped, sea-launched cruise missile (TLAM-N), Japan wanted to be consulted beforehand; and (c) the Japanese government wanted to know more about U.S. nuclear posture and operation plans.[26]

Apparently as a result of such efforts, the Congressional Commission's final report released in 2009 addressed some of Japan's concerns. Regarding the Tomahawk decommissioning, the report wrote that extended deterrence in Asia relied heavily on the deployment of the nuclear Tomahawk and that "some U.S. allies in Asia" would be very concerned by its retirement.[27] It also called for a much more robust process of strategic dialogue, saying, ". . . now is the time to establish a much more extensive dialogue with Japan on nuclear issues, limited only by the desires of the Japanese government."[28]

The *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) published by the Department of Defense in April 2010 was, however, less attentive to Japan's requests made under LDP rule. The NPR did not mention low-yield nuclear earth penetrators, and announced that the TLAM-N served a "redundant purpose" in the U.S. nuclear stockpile and would be retired.[29] Some Japanese government officials felt betrayed by this since the TLAM-N had long been hailed as the centerpiece of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent provided to Japan.[30] On this point, the NPR contended that forward-deployment of bombers and dual-capable fighters with bombs or cruise missiles as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) would adequately substitute for the TLAM-N.[31]

On the positive side, the NPR offered assurance that no changes to U.S. extended deterrence capabilities would be made without continued close consultation with allies and partners and pledged that the United States would "[c]ontinue and, where appropriate, expand" discussions with its allies.[32] In addition, some Japanese policymakers and experts welcomed the U.S. decision not to provide "negative security assurance" to North Korea. They were also satisfied that while the United States would reduce the role of nuclear weapons, it has reserved its right to use them in order to deter and respond to non-nuclear attacks—conventional, biological, or chemical—by North Korea.[33]

In the meantime, the advent of the DPJ-led coalition government in Tokyo brought about a marked shift in Japan's attitude toward U.S. nuclear policy. In December 2009, Minister for Foreign Affairs Okada Katsuya sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gate addressing the new government's position on nuclear policy. Okada argued that the new government would neither request the United States to acquire low-yield nuclear earth penetrators nor oppose the retirement of TLAM-N. He requested, however, an explanation on the impact of TLAM-N retirement on U.S. extended deterrence and the ways to make up for the possible negative consequences.[34] Okada's letter seems to have made the issue of low-yield nuclear earth penetrators much less important and enabled the United States to retire TLAM-N without straining the alliance relationship.

Effectiveness

Japan has deployed BMD systems and taken civil defense measures for the purpose of enhancing deterrence, improving counter-coercion capabilities, and providing damage limitation capabilities. Enhanced resilience to North Korea's military-diplomatic coercion would be the most important asset for Japan in the first scenario. In the third suicidal attack scenario, damage limitation would be of utmost importance. The second scenario requires the mixture of capabilities needed to deal effectively with the first and the third scenarios.

BMD and civil defense are important in improving Japan's counter-coercion power by providing better denial and damage limitation means. With BMD systems in place, ballistic missiles are no longer an "absolute weapon," and the utility of ballistic missiles as a scare weapon would be undermined. On this point, the fact that nobody knows exactly how effective (or ineffective) the BMD systems are in shooting down North Korean missiles helps. The kill ratio would vary significantly depending on the availability of information on the location of enemy ballistic missile launchers and the disposition of friendly Aegis BMD destroyers. It would also depend on missile trajectory, vibration, and the existence of countermeasures. In a world without BMD, North Korean leaders could predict the consequences of a missile attack with confidence. In a world with BMD, they could not be sure what would happen if they actually launched missiles against Japan. They might or might not get shot down. They might or might not create large numbers of deaths and casualties. By complicating North Korea's strategic calculations, the BMD systems would enhance Japan's counter-coercion capabilities.

Japan deployed BMD systems and activated civil defense measures when it was revealed that North Korea's Taepodong 2 launch was imminent in late March 2009. Under the Self-Defense Forces Law amended in 2007, the Minister of Defense issued an advance order to the Self-Defense Forces units to prepare for the destruction of a rocket which might fall on Japanese territory. Two Aegis BMD destroyers were deployed in the Sea of Japan and one was deployed in the Pacific Ocean. PAC-3 units were deployed in the Tokyo area and the northern part of Honshu.[35] There were some hitches, such as the minor traffic accident caused by a PAC-3 unit on the way to its destination and false missile launch alarms. Though lamentable, these incidents inevitably happen in contingencies. In fact, Japan came out better with lessons learned from these experiences.

In the most extreme case in which nuclear weapons were used against Japan, shooting down the incoming missiles and taking necessary evacuation operations would make a huge difference. According to a study conducted by Michael Yoo and Dexter Ingram, if a 12-kiloton nuclear weapon is used in Tokyo, 420,000 deaths and 390,000 casualties would result.[36] BMD systems with a conservative 50% kill ratio could theoretically save hundreds of thousand of lives. In a more likely scenario of conventional attacks, BMD and civil defense might not make such a big difference, but they would certainly provide necessary protection to the Japanese citizens and help create a sense of security among them, which could be critical in avoiding escalation. It would also make it easier for Japan to find a way out of a crisis.

Moreover, if North Korea continues to increase the number of nuclear weapons, possible use of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons must be debated. Japan will have four BMD-equipped Aegis destroyers by 2012 and they will provide reasonably credible capability to take on a relatively small number of nuclear weapons. However, if the number reaches a certain threshold, BMD will no longer be enough. Given the fact that North Korea's Nodong missiles are operated on mobile launchers, tracking them down and destroying them before they are launched could be extremely difficult with conventional systems. In such a case, the Japanese government might decide to request the United States to think about developing and deploying tactical nuclear weapons including the low-yield earth penetrators.

Future Military Options

In order to cope with North Korea's nuclear and missile development, further military options are being discussed and developed. Among them, the most widely debated option is for Japan to possess limited strike capabilities to conduct counterforce operations against North Korean missiles and missile bases.

On this point, the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, an official advisory group for Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, has already discussed the issue of possible introduction of attack capabilities in its report in 2004. It stated:

> Regarding the question of whether it is appropriate, when there is no alternative, to possess offensive capabilities against enemy missile bases as a last resort, a decision should be made after thoroughly examining the credibility of deterrence provided by the United States, effectiveness of missile defense systems, cost-effectiveness of the offensive option, and the impact this will have on countries in the region.[37]

In the same vein, the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, organized by Prime Minister Aso Taro in 2009, suggested that to investigate the possibility of acquiring the capability to strike enemy missile bases, Japan should conduct studies of weapons systems, operational concepts, and cost-effectiveness while examining appropriate roles and mission sharing.[38] It seems that Japanese security specialists think that possessing independent attack capabilities could actually undermine the credibility of the U.S.-Japan alliance by giving the United

States an option of not taking responsibility for defending Japan and having Japan do the job on its own. As a result, they seem to argue, Japan's continued reliance on U.S. strike capabilities is consistent with Japan's national interest.

In contrast, the LDP has been more positive about possessing strike capabilities. The LDP produced a report entitled, "On the New National Defense Program Guidelines," in June 2009, which suggested that Japan possess counter-missile attack capabilities jointly with the United States by making use of intelligence-gathering and communications satellites, cruise missiles, and small solid-fuel rocket technologies.[39] It also suggested that the Aegis SM-3 BMD system be upgraded, real-fire exercises be conducted, and sea-based cruise missiles (namely Tomahawk missiles) be procured.[40] Though the LDP argues more favorably about possessing attack capabilities, it is noteworthy that it discussed acquiring attack capabilities within the framework of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Japan has already acquired rudimentary strike capabilities by procuring F-2 fighters, airborne refueling aircraft, and the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), a guidance kit that converts unguided gravity bombs into precision-guided munitions. However, in order for Japan to conduct militarily meaningful offensive anti-missile operations against North Korea, it would take much more robust strike capabilities and, even if Japan acquired such capabilities, U.S. support on intelligence gathering and targeting would be indispensable. Anti-missile operations are easier said than done.[41]

Finally, the Japanese government has addressed legal issues related to attacking enemy missiles and missile-related facilities. In 2003, the Minister of State for Defense Ishiba Shigeru stated that Japan could take military action only if the threatened attack was imminent, no other means would deflect it, and the action was proportionate. Then he contended that the threatened attack would become "imminent" when the enemy initiated the action to attack Japan. Based on this definition, Ishiba said that Japan could start attacking enemy missile forces if missiles were erected on the launcher and fueled, and the enemy's intention to attack Japan became evident. He explained that Japan's attack in such a case would not constitute preemption.[42]

Diplomatic Response

One of the basic assumptions in Japan's diplomatic approach to North Korea is that the country's most important policy objective is regime survival by way of defying military/diplomatic pressure from outside, normalizing relations with the United States and Japan, and obtaining economic assistance from the outside.

It was in this context that Japan offered normalization of bilateral relations and provision of significant economic assistance in the September 2002 Pyongyang Declaration on the condition that North Korea properly addressed nuclear as well as other issues of Japanese concern. Given the economic reform that North Korea had initiated in July 2002, sizable economic assistance from Japan seemed to have been quite attractive. The Pyongyang Declaration was exceptionally specific in stating what kind of aid packages Japan was willing to provide as a summit-level document: "grant aids, long-term loans with low interest rates and such assistances

as humanitarian assistance through international organizations . . . and . . . other loans and credits by such financial institutions as the Japan Bank for International Co-operation with a view to supporting private economic activities." The total amount was expected to be at least several billion dollars.

When North Korea informed Tokyo that many of the Japanese abductees had died and presented fake death certificates, however, the Japanese general public was outraged. Since then, the abduction issue has become a big political issue and the Japanese government has had no alternative but to take a tough position toward the North. Just after North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006, Japan imposed unilateral sanctions on North Korea, banning all North Korean vessels from entering Japanese ports and implementing a total ban on the import of goods from North Korea.[43] As a result, Japan refused to provide not only the economic assistance specified in the Pyongyang Declaration but also the 200,000-ton energy aid based on the Six-Party agreements in February and October 2007. Japan imposed additional sanctions after North Korea conducted the second test in 2009, banning all trade activities between the two countries.

Despite these negative developments, Japan and North Korea took steps to improve their relations in 2008. In June 2008, as a result of bilateral talks held in Beijing, the Japanese government expressed its willingness to partially lift sanctions on North Korea if it took concrete steps to resolve pending issues such as the abduction issue. To this end North Korea reversed its previous position that the abduction issue had been resolved and pledged that it would again investigate the issue.[44] Moreover, in another round of bilateral talks in August 2008, the North Korean side promised to conduct a comprehensive investigation on the abduction issue and complete it by the autumn. The Japanese side agreed to lift its ban on travel to and from North Korea as well as on chartered flights between the two countries when the investigation started.[45] However, when pro-Asia Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo resigned in September, North Korea unilaterally suspended the implementation of the agreements, announcing that it would wait to see what the next prime minister would do. The cautious diplomatic initiative of 2008 stalled.

CONCLUSION

Military, diplomatic, and economic policy tools are fairly well mixed, and both positive and negative incentives have been used in Japan's approach to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. Contrary to its "pacifist" outlook, Japan has taken significant military steps to cope with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. On the diplomatic front, the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration was a major strategic step forward to solve the nuclear issue and other bilateral issues in a package deal.

In contrast to the steady progress Japan has made on the military front, however, Japan-North Korea normalization talks have been stalled, and Japan's single-minded emphasis on the abduction issue has made it difficult to bring about the same level of progress on the diplomatic side. As a result, the most important question at the present time is whether Japan can reinvigorate its diplomatic effort and make significant progress on this front.

At least on the surface, the DPJ has been more willing to improve relations with North Korean than the LDP. When Hatoyama Yukio came into office in September 2009, he announced his intention to normalize relations with North Korea in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, conditioned on comprehensive resolution of abduction, nuclear, and missile issues.[46] To this, Song Il-ho, North Korean ambassador in charge of Japan-DPRK talks, remarked that North Korea would be willing to resume talks with Japan based on the Pyongyang Declaration, and insisted that two sides decide how to define "resolution" of the abduction issue. Song also said he had taken note of the DPJ emphasis on Asia in its foreign policy platform.[47] Japan's policy did not change before the arrival of Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko, who reiterated in his inaugural policy speech that while the Japanese government would do its utmost to bring all the abductees back as soon as possible, it would seek to "normalize its diplomatic relations with North Korea through the comprehensive resolution of the outstanding issues of concern, including the abduction, nuclear, and missile issues, and settling the unfortunate past" in cooperation with other countries and based on the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration.[48] He also told the abductees' family members that he would be willing to visit North Korea anytime if that leads to the resolution of various pending issues including the abduction issue.[49] On the abduction issue, Foreign Minister Genba Koichiro has noted that definition of what would constitute "resolution" of the abduction issue must be debated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[50]

If normalization comes about, Japan may provide grant aid, loans, and credits amounting to several billions of dollars to North Korea as part of its effort to reconstruct the country—potentially a game-changer for Korea and the region. However, North Korea is notorious for not repaying loans and is unlikely to dismantle its nuclear and missile arsenal before obtaining economic assistance from Japan. The best Japan can do is to demand that North Korea draw down its nuclear and missile forces in a step-by-step, action-for-action process with the aim of their eventual elimination.

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