JAPAN'S ENGAGEMENT DILEMMAS WITH NORTH KOREA

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Since March 2000, a dizzying array of countries has embarked on a path of engagement with the reclusive Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). At the front of this list of countries, which started with Italy and now includes every European Union (EU) state except France, stand the U.S., the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Japan. Given the half-century of cold war conflict in which the three allies' relationships with North Korea were constructed, and the crises in 1994, 1998, and 1999 over nuclear weapons and intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) tests, the notion of engagement with the DPRK appears almost oxymoronic.

In part, this assertion derives from the nature of engagement as a diplomatic tool. Engagement differs from containment, which uses deterrence and threats of punishment (negative sanctions) to deal with the challenger, and everyday diplomacy in the sense that it is a strategy that employs positive incentives to achieve peaceful change when an existing power structure or hierarchy is confronted by challengers. The use of engagement, therefore, historically and theoretically presumes at least three things:

(1) Some confidence that interests and intentions between the "engager" and target state are somehow mutually compatible, i.e., not a game of deadlock but a coordination game where engagement plays important enabling functions, like transparency and communication.

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(2) Some confidence that the target state's intentions are indeed engageable, i.e., it seeks non-revisionist or non-revolutionary outcomes and a degree of opening; otherwise, engagement is ultimately a costly and futile exercise.

(3) If not (1) or (2), then some level of confidence that engagement can create the conditions for (1) or (2), i.e., the hope that the benefits accrued to the target state as a result of engagement can have a transforming effect on its underlying preferences and intentions.[1]

None of these conditions have been established in the DPRK case, yet engagement continues, largely led by the political successes in the North-South dyad created by the ROK's sunshine policy.

This article is not meant as an attack on the policy of engagement with the DPRK. As I have argued elsewhere, I see engagement as the necessary current strategy with North Korea even if one is a hawk. Engagement and certain instruments associated with the policy (most notably the Agreed Framework), absent conditions (1), (2), and (3) above, provide the best window on whether DPRK intentions are ultimately amenable to peaceful resolution of conflict on the Korean Peninsula. However, of the leading three states currently seeking engagement with the North, this essay argues that it is Japan's engagement with the DPRK that is the most contradictory and therefore the least likely to be successful.

As argued below, three reasons substantiate this claim. First, Japan has fewer opportunities than Seoul or Washington to distinguish DPRK tactical behavior from the intentions that underlie it. Second, if the South Korean case is any indication, historical reconciliation remains an almost immoveable obstacle (i.e., the modest advances in Japan-ROK interaction over history offer a positive example of what is absent in the DPRK case). And third, the strategic priorities that inform Seoul and Washington's engagement policy are not necessarily in tune with those that inform Japan's, and this, in turn, could isolate Japan even in a best-case scenario. In the article, I begin with a short empirical overview of Japan-DPRK normalization talks. I then offer the three reasons that make engagement most problematic for Japan and evidence in support of the argument. I conclude with observations about the future and the implications for trilateral coordination.

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1. For recent conceptual and applied studies of engagement strategies, see Randall Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory," in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross, eds., *Engaging China* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Victor Cha, "Democracy and Unification: The Dilemma of Engagement," in *The Two Koreas and the U.S.*, Wonmo Dong, ed., (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2000); Richard Haas and Meghan O'Sullivan, "Terms of Engagement: Alternatives to Punitive Policies," *Survival* 42:2 (Summer 2000); and George Shambaugh, *States, Firms, and Power: Successful Sanctions in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), chs. 1 and 6.

Empirical Overview

There have basically been four attempts by Japan at engagement with North Korea.[2] Efforts at improving relations took place during the détente years from 1971–74, when a train of Japanese officials went to Pyongyang, most notably Tokyo governor Minobe Ryokichi in 1971; the Japanese Diet established a League for Promotion of Friendship with North Korea; and memorandum trade agreements were signed. In the early 1980s, additional high-level initiatives were made through personal emissaries of Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro. Third, at the end of the cold war, a delegation led by then Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) strongman Kanemaru Shin returned from Pyongyang in 1990 with grand aspirations for normalization that led to talks in 1991–92.

The fourth and current period began with the resumption of preliminary normalization dialogue between Tokyo and Pyongyang in December 1999. In early November, Japan partially lifted sanctions on the DPRK, including the ban on charter flights and restrictions on unofficial contacts with DPRK authorities that were imposed after the August 1998 Taepo-dong launch. This was followed in early December by a suprapartisan Japanese delegation led by former prime minister Murayama Tomiichi to Pyongyang. The three-day visit was both exploratory and goodwill in nature, largely for the purpose as described by Japanese officials of cultivating an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of dialogue. The meetings took place without preconditions on either side, and the former premier carried a letter from Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo to DPRK leader Kim Jong-il expressing hope for improved relations. Japan subsequently lifted remaining sanctions, the most significant of which was on food aid, after the Murayama mission.

This mission was followed by two sets of talks in Beijing. The first set involved contacts between director-general level officials from the two foreign ministries. The second set convened by the Red Cross produced a "humanitarian cooperation agreement" in which the two sides agreed to resume home visits for Japanese spouses of DPRK citizens. The two delegations also agreed to advise their respective governments to address in prompt fashion each side's key humanitarian concern– the alleged abduction of citizens by the DPRK for Tokyo and the provision of food aid for Pyongyang.

Japan and the DPRK followed through on the December meetings in 2000 with the goal of holding formal normalization talks. In early March, Japan lifted a three-year suspension on food aid to the DPRK and committed to

2. Portions of the empirical overview are excerpted from "Japan-Korea Relations," *CSIS Comparative Connections*, January-March 2001, at <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/004Qjapan_skorea.html>. For a useful new study on Japan-DPRK relations, see B. C. Koh, *From Discord to Collaboration* (book manuscript, September 2000).

provide 100,000 tons of rice through the World Food Program. This met an important pre-condition for the North to start normalization talks. Pyongyang's reciprocal commitment to look into the issue of abducted and/or missing Japanese made it marginally easier domestically for the Obuchi government to start the talks, and the opening round began in early April. However, any hopes of success were quickly dashed once both sides laid out their terms of negotiation. Takano Kojiro, Japan's ambassador to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and chief negotiator to the talks, and Foreign Minister Kono Yohei emphasized the criticality of resolving the abduction issue. Their DPRK counterparts, on the other hand, firmly entrenched themselves in an immovable negotiating position demanding colonial apologies, $5–$10 billion in material compensation, and dismissal of Japanese counter-demands for addressing the ballistic missile threat and abduction issues. Another set of talks was scheduled for May but later became indefinitely postponed by Pyongyang, in spite of a goodwill gesture by Japan to deliver the first installment of the 100,000-ton commitment of humanitarian rice aid to the DPRK.

After a four-month hiatus, Japan offered token amounts of aid through international channels to help jump-start another round of normalization dialogue. The aid was offered after the normalization talks, but the pattern of what Bob Manning has termed in a U.S.-DPRK context as "food-for-meetings"[3]– either in advance or retroactively– was clearly set in the Japan-DPRK context. Talks resumed in August with some encouraging signs, producing agreements in principle on timelines for the return of cultural assets. Most important, it also appeared to produce an implicit DPRK acceptance of a formula on the difficult issue of compensation. Following the model of the 1965 pact with South Korea, Japan proposed to offer not historical compensation but "economic aid," with the North free to call it whatever it wanted to its domestic audience. The North did not outright reject this idea, which gave optimists the impression that Pyongyang might be amenable to the formula. In addition, optimists hoped that the aid package to come with normalization would then prompt the North to resolve the abductions issue in some political fashion.

Pursuant to the meetings, confidence in Japan was bolstered by a third round of homecomings for Japanese women married to North Koreans in September. This arguably represented a new bargaining chip for the North, given that the ability of these women to make such a visit was politically important for Japan but relatively costless for the DPRK. Premier Mori and Kim Yong-nam agreed to meet at the U.N. Millennium summit in New York

3. Council on Foreign Relations, *Korea Task Force Report* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, forthcoming [2001]).

(before the delegation from the North experienced its much publicized problems at Frankfurt airport). Japanese investors expressed interest in such Hyundai projects in North Korea as the Mt. Kumgang tourism complex and the Kaesong industrial park. And as a new turn in the path to normalization, pro-North Korean residents in Japan were allowed to visit relatives in the South for the first time, while resident associations in Japan representing the two Koreas began talks (the latter, while welcome, probably did more for North-South relations than for Japan-DPRK relations). However, just as momentum appeared to be building with a string of positive outcomes, another round of Japan-DPRK talks in late October brought the process to a screeching halt as the North rejected out of hand Japanese attempts to elaborate on the proposals made in August.

Japan's Engagement Dilemmas

The last round of normalization talks made explicit the material quid pro quos that were in play for the two sides. Tokyo wants satisfactory resolution of the abduction issue and some assurances on DPRK missiles that might come with the establishment of normal diplomatic relations. It is willing to provide occasional disbursements of food aid as goodwill gestures to bring the North to the table. For its part, Pyongyang seeks the large influx of funds to come with normalization settlement and is willing to grant temporary homeland visits for wives as goodwill gestures.

To an objective observer, these two positions may not appear irreconcilable, and indeed, there may be a narrowing of the gap in the near future. However, the problems for Tokyo with regard to engagement with Pyongyang run deeper than the stated issues. In short, these problems have to do with DPRK intentions, history, and subtle differences in the security concerns that inform Japanese investment in engagement vis-à-vis the ROK and U.S.

Tactical Behavior and "Baskets" of Transparency-Building Issues

The first deeper problem for Japanese engagement is the inability to distinguish clearly between DPRK tactics and intentions. As noted above, engagement strategies conceptually are likely to be successful if there is some sense on the part of the implementer that the target state's intentions are amenable to reform and opening. Engagement will not be successful if the target's intentions are revisionist or aggressive. The most dangerous and costly engagement policy is one in which the implementer goes forward despite uncertainty about the target's intentions, or simply assumes that engagement will transform those revisionist intentions (e.g., Chamberlain's Munich Pact).

In the case of the DPRK, the future greatly hinges on the extent to which DPRK intentions have changed fundamentally from revisionist and aggres-

sive ones to ones based on a more cooperative and moderated outlook. Both skeptics and optimists would agree that the recent spate of "smile" diplomacy conducted by Pyongyang reflects a change in tactics largely for the purpose of regime survival. The as-yet unanswered question is whether there is more behind the smile. In other words, all that the North has undertaken in terms of opening– the June summit, family reunions, normalization with some European countries, and Kim Jong Il's trip to Shanghai– is consonant with nothing more than tactical changes in behavior. One gets no sense in examining these actions that a fundamental change in underlying preferences is driving the new policies.[4]

Proponents of sunshine argue in response that encouraging tactical opening and spurring some economic growth in the North will in effect start a process of change that will have a moderating effect on DPRK intentions. Such a classical, liberal interdependence argument may be true. At the same time, the history of Pyongyang's responses offers little to make one confident about such lessons applying to North Korea: it is those points in time when the DPRK has been economically strong that have been exactly when its external behavior vis-à-vis the ROK was far from moderate.

The inability to distinguish between tactics and preferences is a problem faced by all three allies' engagement policies with the North. Indeed, all three have been willing to risk some opacity in Pyongyang's underlying preferences and pursue engagement as a window on these intentions. The dilemma for Japan, relative to the other allies, is that there are arguably fewer "baskets" of transparency-building issues on which to engage in order to get a better sense of DPRK intentions. For example, all three allies could gain a better insight into DPRK intentions through implementation of the Agreed Framework in either its original form or some revised version, or through tension reduction in the conventional military balance. In particular, whether the DPRK agrees or requests to amend its Nuclear Declaration will be an important test of whether intentions have changed. In addition to this, Seoul has a weighty basket of issues– including family reunions, infrastructure rejuvenation projects, ministerial meetings, and summits– on which to gauge further DPRK intentions. To a lesser extent than Seoul, Washington, too, has a basket of issues, including the remains of soldiers missing-in-action since

4. Any DPRK actions indicative of deeper changes in preferences over tactics would generally be found in the security arena. Unlike "smile diplomacy," which from a DPRK bargaining perspective is relatively costless yet appears to offer significant payoffs in terms of economic engagement by others, changes in the conventional military situation or missiles would be an important indicator of changes in preferences. Arguably, the recent set of agreements between the two militaries to enable connection of the railway link through the DMZ offers some positive signs in this vein.

the Korean War and terrorism, where DPRK concessions offer a window on whether intentions rather than tactics are changing.

For Japan, however, the basket of transparency-building issues is substantially lighter. Home visits for Japanese wives is a potential vehicle by which to communicate political goodwill, but even with DPRK concessions, there is little value-added in terms of understanding preferences. Similarly, the abduction issue has been a major impediment to normalization talks, but actions by Pyongyang to resolve it do not convey a sense of costliness on Pyongyang's part and create confidence that preferences or aggressive intentions vis-à-vis Japan are changing (missiles are dealt with below). The North arguably could communicate its good intentions by acknowledging that Japan is no longer a target of its nuclear deterrent. While there is no explicit statement of DPRK strategic doctrine, given the range of their operational missiles, circular probability errors, and interest in crude nuclear devices one could deduce that the North seeks an existential nuclear deterrent against the U.S. by holding Japan hostage with the threat of nuclear retaliation.[5] However, hypothesizing that the North would acknowledge no longer targeting Japan presumes that Pyongyang would admit that it had a strategic doctrine and possessed nuclear weapons in the first place, and neither admission seems likely to be forthcoming in the current situation.

Historical Animosity

One response to the above discussion might be to advocate that Japan expand the list of issues on which it could engage the DPRK. In other words, it could create new avenues by which to build transparency and confidence that the DPRK's recent opening is well intended. However, the problem is that historical animosity places inherent limits on the range of available issues.

As is well known, while historical animosity between the two Koreas and Japan dates back to the late 16th-century Hideyoshi invasions, the defining event in a modern context was Korea's colonial subjugation to Japan from 1910 to 1945. In the Japan-ROK case, the relationship, although plagued by history, does have elements of admiration that are completely absent in the DPRK case. Enmity stemming from the colonial period dominates, and has become deeply engrained in the Korean mind-set through a variety of formal and informal institutions. Antagonistic images are passed down generationally through family folklore, chauvinist histories taught in secondary schools (probably much more in the DPRK than in the ROK and Japan), and govern-

5. For these arguments, see Stephen Bradner, "North Korea's Strategy" in *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*, Henry Sokolski, ed. (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001); and Victor Cha, "Hypotheses on DPRK Strategic Doctrine" in *The North Korean System*, Samuel Kim, ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

ment propaganda-perpetuated stereotypes, as a result of which such negative stereotypes become a part of one's identity. North Korean self-identity becomes constructed in linear opposition to Japan.[6]

Moreover, North Korea's thaw in relations with the U.S. and ROK have counterintuitively increased history-based invectives against Japan. For example, in spite of the positive atmosphere after the June summit, which Japan supported wholeheartedly, one cannot help but think the Japanese were a bit uneasy with the emerging constellation of relations. Because DPRK rhetoric with regard to the U.S. and Seoul moderated after the summit, the result was that Japan became the target of intense propaganda.

The likelihood of this situation being rectified is low. First, one can assume that the DPRK is undergoing a significant internal adjustment, as the domestic images of Seoul and Washington are probably undergoing a process of rapid reconstruction. To effect a similar transformation with Japan would appear to be difficult, particularly if DPRK identity and national purpose needs to be constructed negatively, i.e., against an adversary.

Second, Japan's relations with the ROK offer a positive example of the missing elements to any form of Japan-DPRK historical reconciliation. Historical enmity has certainly not been eradicated from Seoul-Tokyo relations, but the relationship has progressed to the point where historical issues– the textbook row in early 2001 notwithstanding– do not persistently lead to diplomatic breakdowns and political crises as was the case in the 1950s through 1980s.[7] In part this process of reconciliation and closer relations was spurred on by basic security threats that have become apparent since the cold war– that is to say, those presented by the DPRK– but also critical to the process was a demonstrated willingness on the part of South Koreans to look forward and stop dwelling on the past. This was particularly evident at the summit between Kim Dae Jung and Japan's then-prime minister Obuchi Keizo in October 1998. What was impressive about the summit was not the colonial apology, the fishery zones agreement, the commitment to joint naval exercises, or the joint-action plan that were produced– all were unprecedented accomplishments.[8] But what was particularly telling was how Kim spoke of

6. Negatively constructed nationalisms and nationalist myths are not unique to Korea; however, the degree to which this identity is so viscerally framed against a past aggressor may marginally distinguish the Korean case. By contrast, July 4 is a patriotic institution in the U.S. but its construction is as a pro-American holiday more than an explicitly anti-British one.

7. The textbook controversy between Seoul and Tokyo in 2001 is a vivid illustration of this new dynamic. Although Japanese textbook revisions have been a source of friction, the issue has been compartmentalized by both foreign ministries with the distinct purpose of not allowing the entire relationship to suffer from it. Deliberations over the problem have been businesslike rather than emotional, a distinct change from past interaction over similar issues.

8. *Choson ilbo*, October 11, 1998; *Washington Post*, October 8, 1998; and *New York Times*, October 8, 1998.

Koreans as being equally responsible for putting the history issue to rest and moving forward. Kim called "infantile" the fixation on 50 years of negative Japan-ROK interaction at the expense of 1,500 years of exchanges and cooperation and praised Japan's peace Constitution and role as an Overseas Development Aid (ODA) provider.[9] These were extremely important signs of a willingness in the South to change the terms of the relationship in their own minds and move beyond demonized images of Japan as a former colonizer.

This ability to move on was directly linked to two trends– democracy and development. As the ROK embraced democracy and progressed toward economic prosperity, its enhanced international prestige– reflected in events such as the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the winning of membership in the U.N. in 1991 and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1996, and the forthcoming 2002 World Cup with Japan– fostered a growing self-confidence among South Koreans that reduced national insecurities and xenophobia and nurtured a less petty, less emotional attitude in dealings with Japan. As generations of Koreans continue to live under a democratic and developed society, they cultivate norms of compromise, nonviolence, and respect for opposing viewpoints that become externalized in their attitudes toward Japan. In addition, future Korean leaders, not having experienced Japan's occupation, are less apt to carry the historical and emotional baggage borne by their predecessors and more apt to engage in rational and logical dialogue.

Japan-ROK relations therefore offer one of the best examples of historical reconciliation in the region, certainly juxtaposed to such other examples as Japan-China relations. If the factors responsible in the ROK case are at all generalizable, this augurs extremely poorly for achieving similar results in the DPRK case. None of the factors in terms of democracy, development, or leadership are present in the North Korea case. This assessment does not deny that a normalization settlement may still occur between Tokyo and Pyongyang, but it does mean that historical reconciliation under current conditions will not necessarily accompany any material agreement. Hence, a normalization settlement would result in a situation similar to 1965, where such material incentives as security and economics pressed a settlement, but perceptions and attitudes remained highly antagonistic. From the Japanese perspective, this then begs two questions: why press for normalization if Japan will still remain demonized in DPRK rhetoric, and why press for normalization if residual historical enmity ensures that a settlement will provide little in terms of a window on DPRK intentions?

9. See "Address by President Kim Dae-jung of the Republic of Korea before the Japanese Diet," October 8, 1998, at <http://www.cwd.go.kr/cgi-bin/php/cgi-handler/viewelib.php3?f_item_num=274>

Misaligned Strategic Priorities

The third obstacle to Japanese engagement is perhaps the most problematic. This has to do with ensuring that Japanese security interests do not get obscured by the whirlwind of activity on the Peninsula. While Tokyo fully supports Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy, conservative circles in Japan are rightfully worried about being entrapped in a position where the thaw on the Peninsula gives rise to three negative dynamics: (1) greater DPRK obstinance in talks with Japan; (2) ROK aid that may bolster the North's missile threat; and (3) ROK requests for Japanese assistance to North Korea.

The third negative is problematic barring any movement on the missile issue, as Japan cannot simply dismiss ROK requests given the priority placed on maintaining trilateral policy coordination over the past two years. Moreover, meeting these requests from allies without any tangible improvements in normalization dialogue or moderation of the DPRK threat are not only domestically anathema but also could be self-defeating for the dialogue itself in that Pyongyang can get something for nothing.

Indeed, there appears to be an inverse correlation between positive developments in U.S.-DPRK and ROK-DPRK dialogue on the one hand versus negative developments in Japan-DPRK dialogue on the other. For example, in the summer and fall of 2000, the June inter-Korean summit, the Washington visit by General Jo Myong-nok, and the Pyongyang visit by Secretary Albright had a discernibly mollifying impact on DPRK propaganda toward Seoul and Washington. However, during this period, the propaganda machine worked overtime and focused intensely on Japan. Similarly, one of the primary reasons Japanese officials came away empty-handed from normalization dialogue at the end of that year (discussed below) was Pyongyang's decided disinterest as the possibility of a U.S. missile deal and a Clinton visit hung in the air. Thus, Japan faces a catch-22: it supports U.S. and South Korean engagement with the DPRK, but the very success of this engagement only undercuts Japan's own initiatives with the North. The complexity of these mixed motives was reflected in Japanese government reports on the DPRK in the middle of 2000, with the prime minister's office, foreign ministry, and defense agency each trying to reconcile competing imperatives of dialogue, deterrence, engagement, and support of trilateral policy coordination with the allies.

In the context of trilateral policy coordination, what is perhaps most worrisome as one looks down the road of Japan-DPRK dialogue is that even best-case scenarios appear somewhat unsettling from a Japanese security perspective. As noted above, the engagement dilemma for Tokyo is uncertainty over whether the DPRK's opening is tactical or if it represents a deeper transformation of preferences toward reform. Among the three allies, one imagines a spectrum of views on this issue: At one extreme, the Kim Dae Jung and the

ROK sunshine policy banks on a transformation of preferences; in the middle stands the U.S., which hopes for the same but the skepticism is palpable; and at the other end stands Japan. The latter statement may sound strange, given that Japan has remained in line with the Perry process of trilateral coordination and supports the engagement policy. But how much of this support stems from a belief in engagement per se and how much stems from Japan's dutifully being a good ally?

One could argue that Tokyo sits at the farthest end of this spectrum not because it is inherently more pessimistic than its allies, but because even in an *optimistic* extrapolation of the current situation, it may end up in the *worst-off* position. In other words, the critical fork in the road that will prove the current worth of these engagement initiatives is whether DPRK cooperation will move beyond the economic issues to the harder military and security issues. In a best-case scenario, one might imagine the North forgoing development and testing of the longer-range ballistic missile programs (i.e., Taepodong I and II, or TD-I and TD-II) because these have the highest value-added for Pyongyang. The North can expect asymmetric returns or compensation or both for giving up a potential program (TD-I) and a future one (TD-II). In a best-case scenario, the North might even agree to military hot lines, advanced notification and observation of troop movements and exercises, regular meetings of a military committee, and even some mutual conventional force reductions. These sorts of concessions (admittedly optimistic) by the North would satisfy South Korean, Japanese, and U.S. concerns regarding peninsular security and nonproliferation, but what they would not address are Japanese concerns about the North's IRBM arsenal.

With an estimated range of 1,000–1,300 kilometers and payloads of 700–1,000 kg, the No-dong is among the North's most developed missile programs after the Scud B and Scud C missiles. In 1999, it is estimated that the DPRK produced between 75 and 150 No-dongs of which one-third were sold to foreign countries. Unlike the TD programs, which are still in the development and testing stage, experts estimate that the No-dong became operational in 1994 and that the North has deployed between four missile battalions (about nine to 10 launchers per battalion) to as many as 100 missiles since 1998 at various sites inland and along the northern borders.[10] Arguably, these deployed capabilities are the most immediately threatening to Japanese security. At the same time, they also constitute the demonstrated operational security capabilities that Pyongyang is least likely to part with.

10. These include underground sites at Youngjeodong, Yanagang Province (20 km from the Chinese border), Shinori, Pyongbuk Province, and new bases at Yonglim, Jagang Province, and Sangnam, Hambuk Province. See Yoo Yong-won, "ROKG Official Cites U.S. Sources: NK Deploys 100 Rodong-1 Missiles" (in Korean), *Chosun ilbo,* March 2, 2001, <http://www.chosun.com/>

Japan may therefore be stuck between a rock and a hard place. The final bargain for the DPRK in the future may be to trade some conventional arms cuts and its potential long-range ballistic missile aspirations for money and the guarantee of regime survival. This may bring a moderation of non-proliferation and peninsular security threats for the U.S. and ROK, but it will not bring security to Japan because of the residual No-dong threat.

The uncompleted missile talks left at the end of the Clinton administration only amplify this last point. The general contours of the negotiations centered on DPRK commitments to ban all exports, production, testing and further deployment of missiles in excess of 500 kilometers in range in exchange for free civilian satellite launches outside the DPRK by third parties of about two per year and compensation "in-kind" for revenues gained through its missile sales in the form of food, economic, and humanitarian aid.[11] As is well-known, these talks broke down for a variety of reasons, most important of which were ambiguities with regard to verification measures for such agreements. However, in the context of Japan's dilemmas, the U.S.-DPRK talks were wholly unsuccessful at getting Pyongyang to address the 100 deployed No-dong missiles. While these talks did not reach conclusion, they are a clear indicator that, much to Japan's consternation, Pyongyang is least willing to give up its extant missile capabilities (much of which is most likely targeted at Japan).

Japan's engagement dilemmas are equally apparent with regard to the North's chemical and biological weapons threat (CBW). Next to the ballistic missile and nuclear weapons threats posed by the North, the CBW threat– estimated to be the third largest stockpile behind that of the U.S. and Russia– is of intense, but less publicly expressed, concern in Japan. However, neither U.S.-DPRK security bilaterals nor ROK-DPRK dialogue include this issue as an integral part of negotiations. The reasoning on the U.S. side is two-fold: (1) addressing the missile threat can by default address the CBW threat (i.e., by negating the primary means of delivery); and (2) because U.S. contingency-planning for war on the Peninsula includes potential CBW-use by the North, the CBW threats are seen in the context of conventional force negotiations (should these ever occur). While both rationales make sense, neither are comforting from a Japanese perspective. The former one in particular does not address the likelihood of unconventional means of delivering CBW, a fact not lost on the Japanese given memories of the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in a Tokyo subway. The upshot with regard to DPRK engagement among the three allies is the same: if the current portfolio of negotiations held by Seoul and Washington go well, they could easily bypass vital Japanese security concerns.

11. U.S. official, personal remarks to author, Washington, D.C., March 8, 2001.

Such hypotheticals about the future may be farther forward than people like to think. After all, there is enough uncertainty regarding North Korea in the present. Nevertheless, these are very real problems down the road and they will test the trilateral coordination process among the allies. Perhaps most problematic, it is a dilemma that arises for Japan if things with North Korea go the way Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo want them to. "Be careful what you wish for" must be in the minds of some far-sighted Japanese strategists as they adhere with trepidation to the trilateral process of engagement.

Dilemmas of Engagement

To sum up then, there is no denying that the Japan-DPRK normalization dialogue will continue, and indeed, there may even be a settlement in the future. But such progress only would mask what are some intractable dilemmas for Japan, listed below:

Dilemma 1: Engagement's value-added? The benefits of Japanese engagement with the DPRK are unclear. DPRK acts of cooperation and reciprocity based on the current set of quid pro quos in the normalization talks would not offer sufficiently convincing evidence that DPRK intentions have changed (versus merely tactical behavior).

Even if a normalization settlement were reached, such a settlement would be pragmatically driven and effect no real change in the level of animosity given residual historical issues. From Japan's perspective, that means the critical question of DPRK intentions still remains unanswered.

Dilemma 2: Defining engagement's successes? As noted above, this dilemma regarding engagement's success is counterintuitive. Even if U.S.-Japan-ROK engagement results in a missile deal with the U.S. and conventional force reductions on the Peninsula, there is the distinct possibility that such a deal will not address with equal expedience the deployed No-dong threat on the ground nor the CBW threat. It would therefore still leave uncertain DPRK intentions to Tokyo– while perhaps making them at the same time more positively transparent for the U.S. and Seoul.

Dilemma 3: Engagement's vicious circle? The more U.S.-ROK-Japan engagement is successful at achieving progress vis-à-vis U.S.-DPRK and DPRK-ROK, the less likely there will be parallel progress on the Japan-DPRK dyad.

Moreover, the more engagement succeeds in thawing relations with Seoul and Washington, the more likely that residual DPRK historical enmity will focus on Japan as the primary adversary. A vicious circle results where Japanese support of engagement could be conceivably self-defeating.

The Dead End at the End of 2000

A microcosm of these problems was evident at the end of 2000. Japan approached the October round of normalization talks with the determination to achieve a breakthrough. At the advice of Kim Dae Jung, Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro sent a personal letter revealed on October 6 to DPRK leader Kim Jong Il requesting summit talks. In advance of the late October talks, Tokyo announced a contribution of 500,000 tons of rice to the North, a fivefold increase over past contributions. Having greased the wheels, Japanese negotiators then brought with them the proposal for a purported $9 billion, 60% in grant aid and 40% in loans, as a quid pro quo for North Korean moderation of the missile threat and satisfactory resolution of the alleged abduction of Japanese nationals. Such moves would lay the groundwork for a move to political normalization of relations.

Despite Japanese hopes of ending 2000 with progress, Pyongyang's continued intransigence dashed all such aspirations. At issue was Japan's proposal of a normalization settlement formula similar to the 1965 pact with South Korea, which offered economic aid and loans in lieu of terming this explicitly as colonial compensation. While Japanese negotiators did not expect their counterparts to accept the proposal outright, there had been indications based on the last round of negotiations that Pyongyang would show a positive attitude. However, rather than even allowing the proposal to be tabled, the North declared unilaterally that such attempts to side-step an admission of colonial repentance was logically inconsistent with the notion of opening a new era of cooperation (which in no uncertain terms also criticized the South for selling out in 1965). As some observers noted, the North was also clearly abstaining from any commitments with Japan while the possibility of a U.S. presidential visit hung in the air. The disappointment among Japanese officials at this outcome was palpable and manifest in very frank public statements that talks would not restart until sometime in 2001 in part because, as one official put it, "we have exhausted what we have in our pockets."[12]

Conclusion: The New Algorithm in 2001?

The current constellation of forces suggests that despite all of these seemingly insurmountable problems, Japan-DPRK talks will be a likely focus of activity in 2001. In Japan, Tokyo probably took its best shot at reaching a breakthrough as a new government inherits mounting criticism from domestic circles at the Mori government's overly conciliatory efforts to woo Pyongyang.[13] In Seoul, what is certain to be more difficult economic times in the

12. Senior government official, author interview, Tokyo, February 14, 2000.

13. A February 2001 nationwide opinion poll registered public approval for the Mori Cabinet at a paltry 8.6% (down from 19.2% in January). See "Mori Cabinet's Support Rating Sinks to

new year will increasingly make it difficult for Kim Dae Jung to continue financing the sunshine policy with the North off the backs of the South Korean taxpayers. And in the U.S., Clinton's non-visit and the transition to a new Bush administration highly skeptical of Pyongyang's intentions means that Washington, at best, will move slowly with engagement with the North.

If one believes that the North pursues only one bilateral channel at a time (to maximize leverage by playing the others off the chosen channel), then this confluence of factors suggests a new algorithm in 2001. While 2000 saw activity on the North-South and U.S.-North Korean channels with the Japanese nervously trying to keep pace, lack of movement on the Seoul and Washington channels in early 2001 may incline Pyongyang to focus more on Tokyo. At the same time, the new Japanese government will need to appease domestic critics impatient with "soft policies" toward the North. Whether this new algorithm creates opportunities for progress in Japan-DPRK relations is, frankly, anyone's guess, but it is not an optimistic proposition given the deeper dilemmas that Japan faces with engagement.

8.6%" (in Japanese), *Yomiuri shinbun*, February 27, 2001. The government's lowest approval rating since formation of the cabinet in April 2000 is directly a function of scandals involving the LDP; however, they render virtually impossible any bold moves by the government on North Korea.