



A New Framework for a New Era by Yoichi Funabashi

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun told Japanese Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko on her recent trip to Seoul that he has “exceptional respect” for the political leadership Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro displayed through his visit to Pyongyang.

If the visit marks “a turning point” for the normalization of Japan-North Korea diplomatic relations, as the prime minister suggests, the Roh administration hopes that it will lead to the settlement of the North Korean nuclear problem and eventually serve as an opportunity for North Korea to advance economic reforms and open up.

However, officials who make up the mainstay of the South Korean administration are voicing a number of requests to Japan:

(1) From now on, Japan-North Korea bilateral talks concerning the abduction issue and six-party talks on the nuclear problem should be treated separately and be pursued through a “double-track” approach.

(2) North Korea’s abolition of nuclear weapons should commence with a freeze of its nuclear program. In advancing this process, North Korea should be allowed to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes. South Korea wants Japan to understand this point.

(3) As North Korea’s denuclearization process proceeds, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization can be used again as a framework to support North Korea’s energy supply. The South Korean officials urge Japan to agree.

The most significant point is the abolition of North Korea’s nuclear weapons. However, it would be difficult to move things forward with a hard-line policy like the one demonstrated by the United States. We need to formulate a better plan.

Take, for example, the “Libya model” that the United States is encouraging North Korea to adopt. During the Japan-North Korea summit, Prime Minister Koizumi also cited the example of Libya’s Col. Moammar Gadhafi, who secured his regime and got the United Nations to lift economic sanctions by dismantling Libya’s weapons of mass destruction. Koizumi suggested that North Korea follow suit.

Although the North Korean leader flatly rejected the idea, a member of the Roh administration’s foreign policy planning staff revealed that South Korea expects Japan to play a role similar to Britain, which artfully maneuvered behind the scenes to urge Libya to abandon its nuclear program.

It appears that South Korea is seriously worried about maintaining good relations with the U.S. According to a public opinion poll, 70 percent of South Koreans think the U.S.-

South Korea alliance is important. A different opinion poll showed that more than 60 percent of South Koreans think China is “more important” than the U.S. The results suggest that the way South Koreans regard security is becoming increasingly fluid and their views on the U.S. are growing more diverse.

Under such circumstances, the relocation of U.S. military bases and transformation of U.S. troops in South Korea are complicating the situation. South Korea was shaken when the U.S. revealed plans to transfer 12,000 troops, one-third of those currently stationed in South Korea, to Iraq.

Both Washington and Seoul agree that a reduction in force would not affect their deterrent against Pyongyang. However, a high-ranking South Korean government official with vast experience in U.S. relations, remarked: “The problem is not how many troops are cut. The greatest problem is that such an extremely important decision was made without adequate policy coordination between the U.S. and South Korea.”

Is this action really having no effect on the deterrent against North Korea? How does North Korea see the situation? How is China analyzing it? Would it not undermine the deterrent effect of U.S. forces in Japan? Japan, the United States, and South Korea need to get together and take a serious look at these questions.

For both Japan and South Korea, the main purpose of their alliance with the U.S. is shifting to regional stability and cooperation for world peace.

What are the new purposes of the Japan-U.S. and U.S.-South Korea alliances? What is the new mission and role of “post-transformation” U.S. forces stationed in Japan and South Korea and how should the makeup of troops be adjusted and integrated? Japan, the United States, and South Korea have yet to begin serious policy debate on these important issues.

Japan and the United States redefined their post-Cold War alliance eight years ago by signing the “Japan-U.S. joint declaration on security.” Under the circumstances, the three countries should now draft a “Japan-U.S.-South Korea joint declaration on security” to strengthen mutual cooperation.

When I suggested this to a senior South Korean government official, he expressed concern, remarking, “If the three countries strengthen cooperation, it could split the six-party talks into China-Russia-North Korea and Japan-U.S.-South Korea camps.”

South Korea is particularly worried about China’s reaction. But I don’t share the same concern. I believe the six-party talks will make it easier for Japan, the U.S., and South Korea to promote cooperation.

To begin with, cooperation between the three countries is not directed at countering China. But if China is concerned,

why not advance cooperation in unison with the six-party talks? Japan-China-South Korea policy debate should also be strengthened at the same time.

I think South Korea expects Japan to make up for what the United States fails to do and keep America in check when it goes too far. That is precisely the role Japan must assume.

Combining regional cooperation with the Japan-U.S. alliance and getting them to work in sync is the very frontier of Japan's foreign and security policy.

The key to maintaining and advancing an alliance is for the partners to clarify and recognize their respective and complementary roles.

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