

Mansfield Roundtable Discussion: Friday, May 6, 2005
**“An Eye on the North, A Hand towards Seoul: The Korean Peninsula
through Japanese Politics”**

Thank you very much for this opportunity and for spending your lunchtime with me today. This talk is bringing a close to my week here in Washington. It has been a busy, productive, and enlightening trip. I have met with government officials, researchers and congressmen and have benefited greatly from their opinions and suggestions. I hope this occasion will be a further source of frank exchange.

Before getting into my speech, permit me to thank Gordon Flake and his staff in arranging this roundtable discussion. As always, I am impressed with the dedication everyone at the Mansfield Foundation shows in strengthening the U.S.-Japan friendship. Thank you for being so committed. As a final thank you, I wanted to single out Weston Konishi and Teruo Iwai for their efforts in putting this together on such short notice.

My interest in Korean affairs goes back over 20 years. As a university student at Waseda, I formed friendships with South Korean students. In addition, I benefited from experience in the United States. It was as a researcher at SAIS that I focused on U.S. policy towards Northeast Asia, and of course, made many friends. Now, several of these friends are in positions in Korea as researchers, policymakers and politicians. They are named the 386 generation which is taking the leading role in Korean Society. I believe I might be the only Diet member who has developed an interest in understanding trilateral strategy based on my experiences and personal friendships.

As the title of my talk suggests, I will focus on the Korean Peninsula. Given what has taken place since I arrived in Washington, I certainly have no shortage of material.

- The Bush administration now appears to be taking a much harder line towards the North.
- Last week’s missile test by North Korea serves as a fresh reminder that Japan remains a target.
- The concern Congressman Henry Hyde has shown for the abduction issue. I understand he will introduce a resolution in Congress to press North Korea for closure to this source of immeasurable personal suffering. That is a gesture Japan appreciates.
- Finally, during the meetings that Abe held with Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld and Hadley all expressed their sympathy on the abduction issue. In addition all indicated an appreciation for the patience and commitment Japan has shown on getting the 6-Party talks back on track.

All of the above have made for a busy and interesting week.

Today, I first will explain what is going on in Japan regarding the North Korea issues. Second, I will share my views on the evolving relationship between South Korea and Japan. And third, I will offer my assessment of how Japan’s view of the Korean Peninsula is impacting the United States.

An Eye on the North

First, let me say a few words about the North Korea issues. As those familiar with the situation know, the issues are two-fold: 1) the North’s nuclear ambitions and 2) the abduction issues. As Prime Minister Koizumi stated earlier this year, normalization between North Korea and Japan shall be based on fulfilling the Pyongyang Declaration. In considering the present situation in Japan, I would add that we must place an equal emphasis on the settlement of the abduction issues and the nuclear issues. One cannot take precedence over or be sacrificed for the other.

Up until recently, the consciousness of citizens and their concern towards the nuclear issue was not as developed as that of the abduction issue. However, an Asahi poll from February shows that 67 percent think it is necessary to develop a missile defense system. The same poll

also showed that 58 percent now feel a great concern about North Korea's nuclear ambitions. The problem on the nuclear issue though is that we are not in this alone. We have to work within the framework of the 6-Party talks. Each member of the talks, the U.S., China, South Korea, Russia and Japan has different targets in settling the nuclear question. I will touch on this a bit later, but now would like to focus on the abduction issue.

Particularly over the past three years, the abduction issue has been the main focus of citizens groups, the media and politicians. The raw, emotional nature of the abductions has put politicians in a difficult situation. The pressure from the public opinion is very intense. It seems reaction cannot come fast enough to satisfy the citizenry.

Newspaper polls indicate that people have run out of patience with North Korea. They also indicate that economic sanctions are the only way North Korea will take the steps necessary to bring closure to the abductee issue.

To cite a few recent polls:

- A January Yomiuri poll found that 84 percent favored either immediate sanctions or a cut off date when negotiations should stop and sanctions begin.
- A Sankei poll in March showed that 66 percent Japan should unilaterally impose economic sanctions on North Korea.

Of course, politics should not be dictated by opinion polls. Honestly speaking though, they are hard to ignore in this situation. Many politicians within the LDP have called for immediate sanctions unilaterally. My stance on this issue is we must proceed rationally not emotionally.

In addition to the polls, citizens remain active and are aggressively stating their position through the presence of blue pins, rallies, and boycotts. Whenever I go out in my district of Kanagawa, I see individuals wearing these blue pins over their heart. The pins symbolize the abductees and serve as a visible reminder of the impact the issue has had throughout Japanese society.

Actually, Kanagawa is a key location for the activities of abductees support groups. Megumi Yokota's parents live in Kawasaki. Megumi was the youngest individual abducted by North Korea and is the "poster child" of the movement. Her parents have taken a leading role presenting the issue to the public and lobbying the government. Last December, a controversy erupted when Megumi's remains were returned to Japan. DNA tests challenged their authenticity. This alleged falsification has filled the general public with skepticism towards North Korean. I was told that even though the United States and North Korea have an M.I.A-P.O.W. treaty, similar contentious acts of deceit have happened here as well.

Such deceptive behavior only energizes citizens and provides them with more evidence that North Korea cannot and should not be trusted. Indeed, massive rallies continue to take place. On April 24th, over 6,000 rallied at Tokyo's Hibiya Park. This was the 7th rally co-sponsored by the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (*Kazoku Kai*) and the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (*Sukuukai*). These two groups have formed a powerful, grassroots lobbying association. They are linked directly to Diet members through the Parliamentary League to Rescue Japanese Nationals Abducted by North Korea.

One final example of citizen's impact on this issue can be seen in the import clams from North Korea in the first few months of this year. Clam (*asari*) imports have fallen by over 90% during the same period from one year ago. In February of 2004, 2600 tons of clams were imported. In February 2005, that number dropped to just over 230 tons. A number of factors have been cited, including tighter labeling control and regulations, reaction to implementation of the Law on Liability for Oil Pollution Damage on March 1, 2005, and the efforts by the *Sukuukai* in organizing a boycott of North Korean *asari*.

While I do not want to completely discount the boycott activities of the *Sukuukai*, I feel that the impending enactment of the liability law had a greater impact. The law bans foreign vessels weighing over 100 tons without proper insurance from entering Japanese ports. The law

is considered a type of economic sanction against North Korea even though it was not designed to be one. The Transportation Ministry has said that only 2.5 percent of North Korean ships over 100 tons are insured. We also know that as of March 1, that of the 100 ships that have attempted to enter Japanese ports, only 16 were insured. In addition, trade with North Korea is at its lowest since 1977 and North Korea has developed markets in China and South Korea. In short, calculations on the economic impact remain a mixed bag.

However, one thing we have found out is that even the threat of economic sanctions does produce a reaction from North Korea. This is a powerful tool for Diet members to use and shows that the government of North Korea remains concerned about tougher sanctions in the future. We just do not know how concerned they really are. However as politicians we continue to develop measures to apply pressure. I will give you a couple of examples from the LDP.

In December 2002, six young Diet members formed one group in LDP. I was a member of this group. Our group drafted the amendments of Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law which was passed in February 2004. If enacted the law would enable the government to unilaterally stop cash remittances as well as exports to and imports from North Korea. And in June, the legislation which would stop North Korean ships from entering Japanese port was passed in the Diet. Although we have the tools to push North Korea, Koizumi administration's stance on implementing those laws is unclear. Back in December 2004, Koizumi stressed the importance of normalizing diplomatic ties despite the abduction issue. Even now, the Prime Minister still prefers dialogue to sanctions.

For its part, our group is considering possible economic sanctions, as well as other measures, that could be drafted as legislation and applied as pressure on North Korea. Specifically, we have considered ways to integrate human rights into potential legislation and have studied the legislation the United States passed last November. In many ways, we are keeping more than an eye on North Korea. We are actively engaging and looking for ways to bring peace and stability to Northeast Asia. Fortunately, we are able to balance our concern over North Korea with our evolving friendship with South Korea.

A Hand towards Seoul

2005 has been proclaimed as Japan-South Korea Friendship Year. It is not only recognizing and celebrating 40 years of a normal state-to-state relationship, but is also helping to sustain these years of intense exchange and interest. Of course, we co-hosted the World Cup in 2002 that made another boom in Japan-Korea relations. And, thanks in part to an increase in grassroots cultural exchanges; our relations remain quite good at this time.

But as you may know, our relationship is at risk. The history textbooks, recognition of Japan's war responsibility, the growing dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima, Japan's UN Security Council bid, and the Prime Minister's visits to Yasukuni shrine have served as recent flash points. All are matters that deserve measured, rational responses. President Roh has capitalized on these issues with tough talk towards Japan. His approval ratings have increased by 20 percent as a result; however, I feel too much emotion has been injected into the situation. I hope in time we can sit down and productively discuss these issues.

Since I took office in 2001, I have visited South Korea quite often. I sometimes serve as on secret missions for Prime Ministers Koizumi and Mori. As such, it gives me plenty of opportunity to meet with members the Hannara and Uri parties, researchers, and government officials. I visited Seoul on April 8 when the anti-Japan movement was very intense. I met both party leaders Moon Hee Sang and Park Geun Hye and key Congress members in Japan-Korea relations. I discovered that no one in the Congress really wants to break down Korea-Japan relations. However, we will not hear any pro-Japan comments from Korean politicians. It is just too controversial and will certainly impact re-election chances. Recently, a well-known Korean television news personality wrote a pro-Japan book. He was severely criticized and is now out of work. I am sure the same would happen to any politician taking a pro-Japan stance.

Through my trips to Korea and communication with my counterparts in Korea, I have seen that changes are happening since Roh took the presidential office and the Uri Party became the majority. Specifically, I am talking about the emergence of a pro-North stance through Roh's "Sunshine Policy." Based on my observations, I feel the Uri Party does not take this stance alone. Many members in the Hannara hold a pro-North stance and embrace Roh's "Sunshine Policy." As such, nationalism in the form of DNA politics has really taken hold. The power of the feeling that North and South is one race has convinced many in the South that North Korea is rational enough not to engage in conflict.

In some way, I can understand this type of nationalism, this desire to rebuild or reconnect a nation. It is only natural that North and South should look towards each other; they have shared over 2000 years of history on the Korean Peninsula. This type of thinking can be understood in Japan as well. What if Japan had been divided after World War II? I believe Japanese would feel it necessary and natural to achieve a whole nation.

This shifting of the South to the North has produced concern in the United States. Quite honestly, I was a bit surprised that many who I met during this trip are becoming concerned that South Korea is drifting away. I am not sure that I share this interpretation completely, but I certainly am concerned about the perception and how it impacts U.S.-Japan-South Korea relations.

And members of the Hannara Party, a party that has traditionally held a more pro-U.S. line, are taking a deferent position from before. Hannara Party President, Park Geun Hye traveled to the States in March, and she commented on how worried many American specialists on Korea have become about the Korea-US relationship. She also indicated that South Korea is feeling isolated; they have become an outsider in the United States. In particular, she felt this way since Secretary of State Rice has come out in support of Japan's bid for a permanent UN Security Council Seat.

However, while I respect Park's observations, I believe President Roh's has contributed to this situation. I say this for two reasons. First, within Roh's key advisors there is neither a Japan specialist nor an American specialist. Members in Roh's own party have admitted to me that on U.S. and Japan foreign policy, Roh remains unapproachable. As such, the lack of trusted and knowledgeable advisors on these two countries is likely affecting his judgment and preferred course of the Tri-lateral relationship.

Second, Roh is quite committed to making a North-South Summit his enduring legacy. With his term expiring in 2008, there is not much time for this to occur. In addition, any North-South summit will most likely be mediated by China and/or Russia. Such a move will further distance South Korea from its relations with both the United States and Japan. Therefore, the key for both the United States and Japan is how to keep Roh's South Korea interested in maintaining and strengthening the Tri-lateral relationship?

Impact on the United States

Permit me to conclude my formal remarks by looking at how the North Korean Issues are affecting relations between Japan and the United States. I believe that the United States and Japan share some fundamental points and can cooperate and coordinate a strategy towards North Korea. First, we both agree that the U.S.-Japan alliance remains a key for stability in Northeast Asia. Second, we agree on getting North Korea to give up its nuclear program. Third, we remain committed to the 6-Party talks. And fourth, the United States has reached out to Japan on the abductee issue by making it a human rights issue. No country in Northeast Asia has done this.

However, there are some differences. The abduction issue is one of these. The United States can offer only so much sympathy and concern. The issue though is not officially on the table. So, Japan must consider options in its best interest. Getting tough and utilizing economic sanctions are viable options. However I myself doubt the impact of unilateral measures, we can only continue to ask for United States understanding and support in our approach.

This brings me to the next two differences: geographic location and tolerable nuclear capability. While the U.S. is right to be concerned about nuclear proliferation, it remains geographically distant from the North. Probably it can live with a North Korea that possesses nuclear weapons. However, due to the proximity of Japan to North Korea we cannot live with possession. This difference is important, but at the same time ties us together as the only two of the six parties who are openly concerned with the North's nuclear threat. China appears to overlook the issue in search of friendship. South Korea seeks to play the regional balancer and will not push the North on this. With such divergence, where can points of coordination be found?

First, commitment to the 6-Party talks is essential. I was glad that Representative Abe and Vice President Cheney agreed on this point. During the suspension of the 6-Party talks, doubt has surfaced in Japan that a positive results can be attained. A Tokyo newspaper poll from February showed that 67 percent felt the 6-Party talks would not be effective in resolving the nuclear issue. The 6-Party talks represent the potential for a regional forum; a framework that could be epoch-making in Northeast Asia. However, this will only happen if we can secure Chinese and Russian participation.

Second, we should seriously discuss the option of sending this case to the UN Security Council. This might provide a way to break the deadlock on the 6-Party talks. That President Bush is appearing to get tougher on North Korea is a welcome first step. However, in order for a truly regional settlement to occur, South Korea, China and Russia will also need to see a value in taking the North Korea Issue to the Security Council which shows how dangerous Kim Jong-Il is to the International society. China and Russia, as permanent members will be keys in assuring council involvement. However, I am not sure how they will react.

Third, Japan is sharing values with the United States. That's why we support US on the Iraq issues. But on the North Korea issue, the priorities are different. So we are now facing the challenge of how subjectively we can behave in the international affairs. If the United States' initiative works on getting North Korea to abandon their nuclear program and to show sincerity on the abduction issue that will be fine. But if not, Japan has to think about our own options. However practically speaking, what Japan can do is very limited.

This concludes my formal remarks, and I would like to open up the discussion by offering a couple questions. While much has happened during my trip, one thing has not changed. What is the U.S. priority towards North Korea? Is it regime change, nuclear CVID or non-proliferation? I really would like to know, and perhaps that's a good place to let our discussion begin. Thank you.