Reduction of Tension on the Korean Peninsula: A Japanese View

Yukio Satoh

With the world now entering the so-called post-Cold War era, implying mostly the cessation of East-West military confrontation in Europe, the reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability in the Asia and Pacific region require international attention. It is particularly important to reduce tension on the Korean peninsula, for it contains elements of military confrontation involving the United States. The suspected North Korean attempt to possess nuclear weapons adds to the urgency of the question.

European experiences cannot be applied to tension reduction in the Asia and Pacific region, where conditions are very different. International politics in Europe had long been preoccupied with reduction of military tension, shadowed by the danger of nuclear war, and the regional security conditions in Europe were dominated by the bipolar NATO-WPO confrontation.

In contrast, economic development is the prime concern for the nations in the Asia and Pacific region. Many countries in the region are inclined to avoid involvement in superpower rivalries, and the East-West relations have limited implications for the security conditions in this region. Politico-military conditions in the Asia and Pacific region are also different from those in Europe.

Though the two are often compared, the Korean situation is not analogous to that in Germany. The divided Koreans fought a war and their relations are still dominated by military confrontation. Perceptions they hold to each other remain conditioned by enmity and misgivings. Furthermore, the present positions in which North and South Koreans find themselves, both domestically and internationally, are different from those of the two German states. To improve the situation an effort must be made by both the divided Koreans and foreign
Initiatives to be taken by foreign countries have impact on the speed and scope of the improvement of the bilateral relations between Seoul and Pyongyang, but the moves by foreign countries must be oriented to support, rather than to run ahead of, efforts made by the Koreans. Moreover, given that South Korea has established diplomatic relations with Moscow and expanded economic relations with Beijing on top of her alliance with Washington and cooperative relations with Tokyo, Seoul is now in a position to take a leadership in coordinating such a two-track approach.

Japan can make some positive contributions to the process of reducing tension on the Korean Peninsula. First, Japan can act as a catalyst in building a policy consensus among nations with regard to priorities and processes to reduce tension in the Asia and Pacific region, of which the Korean Peninsula is a significant part. Second, Japan can use its economic and political resources to support South Korean initiatives with regard to the Korean question. Third, normalization of Japanese ties with North Korea can also contribute to the improvement of the situations on the peninsula.

Efforts are needed to further improve South Korea–Japan relations, however, especially cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo with regard to peace and stability in Northeast Asia and the region as a whole.
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I

The security of the Asia and Pacific region is a subject that requires a prime focus of international attention. The world has been preoccupied with the sequence of dramatic changes and crises, which have taken place outside the region. But the importance of this region, particularly the role its economic dynamism is expected to play for the world economy in the 1990s and beyond, urges all concerned to pay equally serious attention to this subject.

The changes and crises that took place outside the region have also underlined the need for a careful review of the regional security conditions. For example, the changing tone of post-Malta US-Soviet relations, which has emphasized the spirit of cooperation rather than superpower rivalry, has been expected to help reduce tension in this region; the dramatic changes in East-West relations in Europe and the termination of NATO-WPO military confrontation have aroused expectations among a broad spectrum of public opinions that similar changes should take place in this region; the fate of communist dictatorships in East European countries has alarmed the leadership of socialist regimes in Asia; ethnic rivalries in Eastern Europe and the

* This paper represents the author's personal views and must not be taken to represent the views of the Japanese Government.
Soviet Union have reminded the governments and peoples of this region of the existence of the common danger; and, in the most striking manner, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (on top of the Iran-Iraq war) has demonstrated the serious implications for world security of a regional conflict, which can break out outside the framework of East-West relations. The Gulf crisis has also reminded many countries in the Asia and Pacific region that only the United States has the military power to check an attempt by a local power to dominate its region, although now she needs more than ever political support, as well as military and financial cooperation from her allies.

In the Asia and Pacific region, too, a number of developments to reduce tension have begun to take place. Soviet military disengagements have begun in Southeast Asia, along the Sino-Soviet border and in Mongolia. President Gorbachev also announced on his visit to Beijing in May of 1989 plans to reduce forces in the Soviet Far East by the end of 1990. According to the plans, which were later modified by Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov (in his speech at the 28th Party Congress in July 1990) to be completed in 1991, ground forces are to be cut by twelve divisions, eleven air force regiments are to be disbanded and sixteen vessels are slated for removal from the Soviet Pacific Fleet. As of this writing, however, the deployment to this region of modern weapon systems in place of those of older generations as well as the increased stockpile to the east of the Urals of the weapons to be reduced in the European theater are more conspicuous than actions of disengagement. Nevertheless, further reduction of Soviet force levels in the Asia and Pacific region could take place in the coming years, should the Soviet Union continue to pursue the policy of allocating more resources to non-military sectors. Military assistance to North Korea, Vietnam and the Vietnam-backed government of Hun Sen in Cambodia could also be reduced.

The United States, too, is now engaged in a process of gradually reducing her military presence in the region. Also, Japan decided to reduce the scope and speed of modernization of her defense capability in the next five-year Midterm Defense Program which begins in FY1991.

Changes in diplomatic dimensions are more remarkable than the progress in force reduction and military disengagement. Sino-Soviet relations have been normalized. South Korea established diplomatic
relations with the Soviet Union and Mongolia and expanded economic relations with China. China restored diplomatic relations with Indonesia and Singapore, and Sino-Vietnam relations have begun to improve. Moreover, North Korea and Japan are now engaged in negotiations to normalize their relations, while Pyongyang and Washington are also gradually increasing their contacts. Tokyo and Moscow as well are now exploring the way to improve their relations, although, as of this writing, the Soviet attitude toward the Japanese claim over the Northern Territories remains little changed, and subsequently, the prospect for conclusion of a peace treaty between the two countries remains much unclear.

All these developments point to the maturing, albeit gradually, of such conditions that would make it possible for countries in the Asia and Pacific region to settle the ongoing conflicts and disputes, expand regional cooperation (political as well as economic) and stimulate further force reduction and arms control. More importantly, however, in the light of the elements of uncertainty and instability involved in the future direction of Soviet external posture (particularly a possible resurgence of conservative force), and also given the elements of broad vacillation indigenous to American foreign policy (particularly a possible rise of isolationism), it is important for countries in the region to take initiatives to engage themselves in such undertakings.

Needless to say, settlement of the ongoing conflicts and disputes must be given policy priorities by all countries concerned. In Europe, too, the post-war border issues had already been settled before the so-called Helsinki process started by the Final Act of 1975. And, of the ongoing three major conflicts and disputes in the region (Cambodia, the Korean peninsula and the Northern Territories), the question of the Korean peninsula demands the most urgent attention; for it still contains the danger of North-South military conflict involving, at least, the United States. Such an eventuality would inevitably affect the security interests of Japan, China and the Soviet Union. Concern over the suspected North Korean attempt to possess nuclear weapons adds to the urgency of this question.
With regard to approaches to the question of Asia-Pacific security, two different lines of thought are now in the air; one that advocates the convening of a conference modelled on CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) with participation of all countries in the Asia and Pacific region; and the other which emphasizes the importance of pursuing security within a narrower geo-political framework of sub-regions, such as Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

The Soviet Union has been taking a lead in suggesting the application of the CSCE process, together with so-called confidence-building measures (CBMs), to the Asia-Pacific region. The Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark and the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Gareth Evans individually floated proposals based on a similar line of thinking. Most recently, Soviet Foreign Minister (at the time) Eduard A. Shevardnadze proposed to have a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the region in Vladivostok in 1993.

The sub-regional approach has been advocated by some officials and experts of the United States and Japan. They argue that settlement of the ongoing conflicts and disputes and reduction of tension in the troubled areas must be given priority, and that separate approaches with different participants must be made to the questions of the Korean peninsula and Cambodia, not to mention the question of the Northern Territories, which must be solved between Tokyo and Moscow.

These two approaches appear to be compatible, but the Soviet proposal has the overtones of their own strategic interests. For example, the Soviets seem to be trying to attain a position of leadership in this region and also to engage the United States and her allies into a process of naval arms control. The Soviets' interests in naval arms control are underscored by their repeated emphasis on the need to exercise confidence-building measures in naval areas.

The Soviets might need to refer to the European process because they have no other experience. Their attempt to apply to the Asia and Pacific region the concepts and terminologies developed through the process of East-West negotiations in Europe, however, appears to
reflect their ignorance of the differences between European geopolitical conditions and those of the Asia and Pacific region.

It is without question that the Soviet Union can make significant contributions to both reduction of tension on the Korean peninsula and settlement of the Cambodian conflict, but it is also clear that the two issues should be addressed separately in their respective geo-political contexts, rather than through a CSCE type of process.

Neither is there any doubt that broader forums for regional cooperation are important for the Asia and Pacific region. Indeed, a number of such forums already exist. ASEAN functions as a venue for policy coordination among six Southeast Asian countries, and its so-called Post-Ministerial Conference provides opportunities for dialogue between ASEAN foreign ministers and their counterparts from the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and EC. The newly created Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process, which Australia initiated, also provides a forum for cooperation among countries of the Pacific basin. The Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC), a body composed of representatives of business and industries, government, and academic and other intellectual circles of countries and areas of this region, is now assisting the activities of APEC, while promoting, on its own, economic cooperation among countries in the region.

All these forums and processes were instituted with the aim of promoting regional economic cooperation. This reflects the interests and preoccupations of the peoples of the region. However, political issues are not outside their purview. ASEAN countries, for example, have become increasingly explicit on political issues, particularly through the mechanism of the Post-Ministerial Conference with industrialized nations. That the Malaysian foreign minister expressed his concern over the future direction of Japanese defense policy at the last Post-Ministerial Conference is a case in point.

Given all these, it is far more effective and pragmatic to use the existing forums and processes than to try to create a new process as countries in the region address themselves to the questions of reduction of tension, enhancement of political stability and arms control and security.
Another important point to stress as one considers the questions of arms control and security in the Asia and Pacific region is the distinction between this region and Europe in geo-political and strategic conditions. This is important, because Western debates on these questions have been hitherto framed by the policy priorities and preoccupations of the Atlantic Alliance, and because the American strategies and policy concepts designed to meet NATO requirements have prevailed in these debates.

This was inevitable under the Cold-War political conditions, but this does not make it tenable to argue that the concepts and processes designed to meet the European security requirements would meet the geo-political conditions of the Asia and Pacific region. On the contrary, the European concepts and processes would not satisfy the conditions of the Asia and Pacific region, because the geo-political conditions in these two regions are different on a number of important points.

First of all, in sharp contrast to post-war Europe where reduction of military tension involving a possibility of nuclear war was a major preoccupation of many countries, the primary concern of Asian and Pacific nations is economic development. Many countries in this region are economically still fragile, despite the rapid growth of their GNP during the last decade, and economic development is the key to their political stability. Regional cooperation in this region, therefore, as pointed out earlier, is primarily aimed at economic cooperation.

Second, implications of East-West relations for regional security are quite limited in the Asia and Pacific region. Most symbolically, China now stands outside East-West contests. Many countries in this region are inclined to avoid involvement in what they regard as superpower rivalries. These contrast sharply with the European conditions to date, which have been dominated by the bipolar confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Third, the military conditions of the Asia and Pacific region are very different from those of Europe. Threat perceptions held by countries in this region are diverse, and the structure of alliance is basically bilateral. Unlike Europe, the American and Soviet force postures in this region are asymmetric, with the American strategy of forward
deployment being heavily dependent upon naval forces and the Soviet defense posture land-based. American naval presence is also regarded as a stabilizing element in the region.

Fourth, as pointed earlier, there are a number of unresolved conflicts and disputes in the Asia and Pacific region, the settlements of which require prime attention.

Despite all these differences, European experiences provide useful precedents to similar efforts to be made by countries in the Asia and Pacific region. Besides, given certain elements of indivisibility between the security of the Asia and Pacific region and European security, it is important to take European experiences into account as countries in this region address themselves to the questions of arms control and security. What one must avoid is to ignore the differences between the two regions when referring to European experiences.

IV

Underscoring the differences between the Asia and Pacific region and Europe is particularly important as one considers the implications of European experiences for the Korean peninsula, for there is a tendency to make an analogy between Korea and Germany.

The two situations are not analogous. The already described differences between the Asia and Pacific region and Europe are relevant to consideration of the international environments that surround the Korean peninsula. Moreover, there are a number of specific features that must be underscored in order to identify the problems involved in the Korean question.

First of all, although the Korean people, like the post-War Germans, have been divided, the relations between North and South Korea are much different from those between the two German states. The Koreans fought a war and a military confrontation still dominates the relationship between them. Perceptions held by the divided Korean people with regard to each other remain conditioned by elements of enmity and skepticism. Contacts between North and South are very limited and inchoate.

Second, the modality of involvement by foreign countries varies widely between Korea and post-war Germany. Apart from the armistice which involves UN forces on one hand and North Korean
and Chinese forces on the other, there are no international arrangements similar to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin to bind the Koreans as they decide on their own future. The United States forces are the only foreign combat forces deployed on the peninsula.

American commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea (ROK) has many analogies to American commitment to European security. But the relationships which the Soviet Union and China have with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) are different from the Warsaw Pact arrangements. Neither the Soviet Union nor China deploys their forces in North Korea despite their respective treaty relationships with DPRK, which provides for mutual assistance for defense. Politically, as well, the degree of influence the two countries have on Pyongyang appears to be increasingly limited.

Third, the positions in which North and South Korea find themselves domestically as well as internationally are very different from those of the two German states. South Korea’s domestic conditions and international stature, despite the remarkable progress of her manufacturing industries, remain far short of what West Germany had attained before unification in such vital aspects of statehood as consolidation of democracy, expansion of economic capacity and enhancement of international influence.

To complicate the situation further, North Korea’s self-imposed isolationism has so far kept her people little informed of the developments in the outside world. This situation, together with the pressure of the authoritarian regime, has hitherto deprived the North Koreans of motivation and drive to demand changes. It contrasts markedly to the situations in East Germany, let alone those in other Central European countries under communist regime, in which the peoples’ pent-up frustration over the perceived disparity in living conditions existing between the communist bloc and the outside world gave rise to their revolt against the authoritarian regimes.

In light of the rather unique conditions of the Korean peninsula, a sort of double-track approach will be necessary to improve the situation: efforts to be made by the divided Koreans to improve relations between them, and those to be made by foreign countries
(the US, Japan, China and the USSR in particular) in order to facilitate a process of reconciliation between North and South Korea. Needless to say, initiatives to be taken by foreign countries must be balanced with the speed and scope of the improvement of the bilateral relationship between Seoul and Pyongyang. Also, with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Moscow and the expansion of trade and economic relations with Beijing (on top of the already assured support from Washington and Tokyo), Seoul is now in a position to assume leadership in coordinating the two-track approach toward the improvement of the Korean situation.

There is no doubt that the Korean people, no matter where they live, share a strong desire for unification. But given the differences of political and economic systems between North and South Korea as well as the gulf of enmity and misgivings dividing them, the Koreans have to make a step-by-step approach toward reconciliation, beginning with a task of promoting mutual understanding and enhancing the level of mutual confidence. Dialogues between the two governments as well as contacts and exchanges, including trade, between the divided people must be expanded for this purpose. That the prime minister-level dialogues have begun to take place and also that other contacts and exchanges have begun to expand are encouraging developments in this context.

Yet, encouragement and support by foreign countries are important for the success of the Koreans’ efforts to improve their relations. It is not because the divided Koreans cannot manage their relations by themselves. It is because certain foreign countries are deeply involved in the Korean situation. For example, the assessment of a North-South military balance cannot be complete without consideration of the American military presence on the peninsula as well as Soviet, and to a lesser degree, Chinese military assistance to North Korea.

Consequently, moves on the part of foreign countries can affect the speed and scope of the improvement of North-South relations. For example, the Soviet decision to normalize relations with South Korea (in response to the South Korean initiative to that end) prompted North Korea to seek diplomatic relations with Japan. In the same vein, the future reduction of Soviet military assistance to North Korea and the prospect for reduction of American force presence in South Korea could affect North and South Korean attitudes toward each other.
The role to be played by the United States is particularly important in this context. The country has been providing a vital deterrent for the security of South Korea against the militarily stronger North. South Korea’s military position vis-a-vis the North has been improving remarkably in recent years, but an American presence in South Korea remains vital for deterring North Korean aggression.

Another important point to note is a moderating influence of American presence on the peninsula. North-South military confrontation could have been more acute without American military presence. But this seems to have been little appreciated by North Korea. In order to avoid a mutually costly vicious circle of skepticism and military buildup between North and South, it is important to awaken the North Korean leadership to the stabilizing implications of American military presence on the peninsula. Expansion of US–North Korea dialogues are important to this end.

Equally helpful to the same end are Soviet and Chinese efforts to open the eyes of North Korean leaders to this important reality. It must be underlined in this context that the two countries now seem to find in the US-Japan alliance the merits of restraining Japanese military expansion.

Worrying elements also lie in US–South Korean relations. American congressional attitude to reduce the overseas deployment of US forces and anti-American sentiment increasingly explicit in South Korean public opinion, together, might send a false signal to North Korea that the longer she waits the weaker will become the alliance relations between Seoul and Washington. This adds to the importance of managing alliance politics between the two capitals. After all, solidarity between Seoul and Washington is the key to success of any attempt to reduce military tension on the Korean peninsula.

VI

In a short term perspective, reduction of political tension must be a primary target of dialogues and contacts to be conducted by the Koreans as well as diplomatic initiatives by foreign countries. The unification of the divided people is no doubt an ultimate goal for many Koreans. In light of the hitherto pronounced policy of North Korea which claims to be aimed at liberating the South Korean people from
American oppression, and also given the authoritarian nature of the regime in Pyongyang, however, it is realistic to assume that reduction of military tension and a process of reconciliation between the divided Koreans must make considerable progress before the question of unification will become a serious subject of North-South dialogues.

The possibility for the North Koreans to change their political orientation cannot be totally ruled out either. The East European type of citizens’ revolt against dictatorship seems to be a remote possibility in North Korea. Unlike the post-war communist regimes in East European countries, which had been established by Soviet hands and had later come to be regarded by the local peoples as surrogates for Soviet control over the countries, the regime of Kim Il Sung has a strong control over the country; the North Korean people, controlled by the system and isolated from the outside world, have no other alternative but to follow his leadership. The North Korean public will gradually become frustrated over a disparity between their living conditions and those of the outside world, South Korea in particular. Whether this frustration will be conducive to public demands for changes remains questionable, though, particularly in the absence of the people’s experience of the better days which prompted changes in Europe.

A process to reduce political tension on the Korean peninsula must begin with efforts designed to attain militarily modest but politically difficult objectives such as lowering the degree of enmity and misgivings held by North and South Korea against each other. At this stage, which one might call a process for political confidence building, exchanges of visits at various levels and dialogues on a broad range of subjects, from culture to politics, must be encouraged. It is particularly important to make available for the North Koreans the broadest possible opportunities to have the first-hand experience of life in South Korea and the way of thinking on the part of the South Korean people. Meeting of divided families is important in this context, too. Cultural exchanges and trade are vital to the same end. Visits by North Koreans to other countries are also useful for the purpose of exposing them to the reality of the outside world.

More concrete steps to reduce military tension can also be discussed during this process, but it is not plausible to assume that there will be any rapid progress in this area. Given that any
arrangement for reduction of tension has a direct bearing upon security, it is quite natural that South Korea should be cautious in approach toward the subject.

Nevertheless, to exchange views on security questions is critically important for furtherance of mutual understanding. Exchange of views for the purpose of promoting understanding of each other’s defense policy and military strategy are useful at this stage. It is also useful to discuss steps to lower the risk that a military conflict might break out by accident, to enhance the predictability of each other’s military movements and to increase the transparency of each other’s military capability. This kind of confidence-building measures in the military area, if carried out, would greatly improve the political atmosphere.

Introduction of more substantial steps for arms control and force reduction are necessary in order to give more stability to the military conditions of the Korean peninsula, but these steps will need a credible regime of verification. Also, such arrangements will become possible only after a process of political and military confidence building between the divided Koreans will have made some considerable progress.

Furthermore, a process of arms control and force reduction will not become possible so long as North Korea persists in demanding for a total American withdrawal, for any arms control arrangements aimed at ensuring a balanced force reduction on the peninsula will require the continued, albeit smaller, American force presence on the peninsula—at least in the foreseeable future. This, too, underscores the importance of changing North Korean perceptions regarding American force presence on the peninsula.

VII

As noted earlier, the suspected North Korean attempt to possess nuclear weapons has added urgency to the question of reducing tension on the Korean peninsula. Indeed, the North Korean refusal to accept full-scope safeguards over their nuclear facilities, by itself, poses a serious challenge to the international regime to prevent nuclear proliferation. More fundamentally, the prospect that North Korea might possess nuclear weapons has destabilizing implications not only for the security of Northeast Asia but for global security. To
preclude such a possibility is, therefore, a common policy objective among all the countries that commit themselves to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation.

Hopefully, a growing need on the part of North Korea for foreign economic assistance as well as reduction of tension on the Korean peninsula (and subsequent appropriate reductions in the American military profile) will dictate the North Korean leadership to accept the full-scope safeguard arrangements. Certainly, for North Korea to proceed with what many countries in the world suspect as a covert attempt to construct facilities that can produce nuclear weapons will not serve her interests. For example, it is clear that Japan will remain hesitant to provide economic assistance to Pyongyang so long as any suspicion remains that Japanese financial assistance might indirectly contribute to a North Korean plan to become a nuclear power. In the same context, there will be no drastic improvement in North Korea’s relations with Washington before she accepts the full scope of safeguard arrangements.

VIII

Japan has a variety of vested interests in the promotion of reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability on the Korean peninsula and indeed in a peaceful unification of the divided Koreans. Clearly, unification is a matter to be decided by the Koreans themselves. But it is a matter of great interest to Japan, too, for such a development will greatly improve the security environments for the country and broaden prospects for political and economic cooperation in Northeast Asia. It will also ease (and possibly dissolve) domestic problems deriving from the hitherto contesting relations between the two groups of the Koreans resident in Japan.

Japan has some political and economic resources that would help promote reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability on the peninsula. Needless to say, Japan is not a neutral bystander to contention and confrontation between the divided Koreas. Japan shares with South Korea the constitutional commitment to the creed of democracy and freedom. She has been developing increasingly closer political and economic ties with South Korea despite bitter memories held by the Koreans with regard to the history of Japanese
thirty-six year annexation of Korea. Japan-US security arrangements and Japanese support to facilitate the presence of US forces in the country have been contributing significantly to the maintenance of American deterrence vital for South Korean security.

For the purpose of further reducing tension and enhancing political stability on the Korean peninsula, it is essential for Japan to maintain a set of these policy directions. Moreover, Japan can make some positive contributions. First, Japan can take initiatives to create a consensus among countries interested in the security of the Asia and Pacific region with regard to policy priorities and processes to be pursued in the coming years. The Japanese government has already begun to expand a network of bilateral and multilateral policy dialogues for this purpose with such countries as the United States, the Soviet Union, China, ASEAN countries and Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and indeed with South Korea. These policy dialogues will hopefully work to develop a consensus among countries concerned on the approaches described earlier with regard to the question of reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability in the region. Such efforts will no doubt provide an important diplomatic backup for the process of reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

Second, more specifically on the question of the Korean peninsula, Japan can use its political and economic resources to support South Korean initiatives. Economically, Japanese cooperation in the form of investment (with technology transfer) and import is important, because it can help strengthen the South Korean economy and her political confidence. Given that economic capability becomes an increasingly important determinant in international politics as the currency of power changes in a global context, strengthening the South Korean economy has significant political implications for the improvement of the Korean situation.

Politically, Japan and South Korea can expand foreign policy cooperation aimed at promoting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. For this purpose, the two countries can strengthen a mechanism of policy coordination. US-Japan policy cooperation to the same end as well as Japanese policy dialogues with China and the Soviet Union for regional security can also be helpful in supporting South Korea's initiatives to improve the Korean situation.
Third, the process of normalizing Japan—North Korea relations itself can help improve North—South relations. As noted earlier, North Korea seemed to be prompted to seek diplomatic relations with Japan for the purpose of opening opportunities for introduction of Japanese financial assistance as well as saving the country from a predicament of diplomatic isolation. Japan is, therefore, in a better position to persuade the North Korean government to address itself seriously toward the questions of reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability on the peninsula. Increased contacts and dialogues between the two countries can also help make the North Koreans better informed of the outside world.

All in all, Japan can make significant contributions toward the betterment of the Korean situation. So much so, it is important for South Korea and Japan to further cooperation and deepen mutual confidence. Policy coordination between Tokyo and Seoul with regard to Japanese negotiations with North Korea is particularly important. It was with this consideration that Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu emphasized in a recent policy speech to the National Diet that Japan would proceed with talks with Pyongyang “in close contact with the ROK.”

Relations between Seoul and Tokyo have begun to enter into a new era of cooperation through the visits of President Roh Tae Woo to Tokyo and Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu to Seoul. But many more efforts by the Koreans and the Japanese are necessary in order to make South Korea—Japan relations more stable and mutually productive. Cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo on the question of reduction of tension and enhancement of political stability in Northeast Asia and, more broadly, in the Asia and Pacific region will no doubt be an important part of such efforts.