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Japan's North Korea policy:  
Trends, controversies and impact on  
Japan's overall defence and security policy

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## Executive Summary

Bilateral Japanese-North Korean negotiations aimed at creating the basis for the establishment of diplomatic relations remain suspended since 2008 and it can be excluded that Tokyo and Pyongyang will resume bilateral negotiations in any time soon. Pyongyang's recent missile and nuclear tests, its sinking of a South Korean corvette (March 2010) and the bombardment of South Korean territory (November 2010) confirmed Tokyo's policymakers that North Korea's economic and political engagement will remain at the very bottom of its North Korea policy agenda.

Unless there is a radical policy shift in Pyongyang, i.e. a resumption of the disablement and dismantlement of Pyongyang's nuclear program and a decision to re-investigate the so-called 'abduction issue' (as promised by Pyongyang in 2008), bilateral Japanese-North Korean exchanges of any kind can be as good as excluded in 2011 and possibly beyond that. To be sure, Tokyo's policymakers will continue to be held hostage by the country's (increasingly numerous) North Korea hardliners, parts of the media not to consider any form of political or economic engagement until Pyongyang demonstrates willingness to re-investigate the 'abduction issue'. Up to 35 Japanese citizens, Tokyo claims, were abducted to North Korea (from Japan and Europe) in the 1970s and 1980s and forced to work amongst others as Japanese language 'instructors' teaching Japanese language in North Korea to North Korean secret service agents. While Japan continues to request reliable (as opposed to bogus) information on what exactly happened to the Japanese abductees in North Korean captivity, Pyongyang continues to consider the issue to be settled after it officially apologized for the kidnappings back in 2002.

As will be shown below, North Korea has become Tokyo's what the literature refers to as 'catch-all' or 'proxy' threats serving to justify and implement the upgrade of Japanese defence and military capabilities over recent years. To be sure Japan's new defence guidelines, the December 2010 so-called 'National Defence Program Guideline' (NDPG) e.g. leave no doubt that the perceived threat posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear programs has motivated Japan's defence planners to upgrade the country's coast guard and missile defence capabilities and equipment. While critics inside and outside of Japan argue that Tokyo has exploited the perceived threat from North Korea to boost up Japan's defence capabilities beyond the level necessary to defend Japanese territory, Tokyo's defence

planners argue that the changes on Japan's defence and security policy agenda are above all a reaction to Pyongyang's military provocations and ambitions to become a 'fully-fledged' nuclear state by 2012.

As will be elaborated below, Tokyo's insistence to put the 'abduction issue' on the agenda of the 6-Party Talks had consequences: Pyongyang's attitude, rhetoric and policies towards Tokyo became increasingly antagonistic leading to accusations that Japan's insistence to deal with an issue not related to the envisioned (but failing) North Korean denuclearization contributed significantly to the suspension of the multilateral talks hosted by Beijing since 2003. Eventually Tokyo became a very marginal and indeed irrelevant actor in the framework of the 6-Party Talks and was increasingly perceived as such not only by North Korea but also the US, China and South Korea.

## Introduction

North Korea's November 2010 attack on the South Korean Yeonpyeong Island near the disputed South Korean-North Korean maritime border is yet another confirmation for Japan that economic and political engagement should be at the very bottom of its North Korea policy agenda. On November 23, North Korea's military armed fired roughly 170 shells into the island, located close to the border between South and North Korea on the peninsula's west coast. The island is mainly populated by fishermen and farmers who live near the bases where the South Korean marines were operating and the attack killed two South Korean soldiers and two civilians. The North Korean attack took place shortly after revelations that Pyongyang had built a new sophisticated facility to enrich uranium in the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

In late November 2010 then, a US scientist (Professor Siegfried Hecker) was shown a small-scale industrial uranium enrichment facility that he referred to as 'astonishingly modern, fitting into any modern American processing facility'. While Pyongyang referred to the facility and the 2.000 centrifuges as being designed to manufacture uranium for civilian nuclear power, the US scientist concluded that the centrifuges could be 'readily converted to produce highly enriched uranium bomb fuel'.<sup>1</sup> Bilateral Japanese-North Korean negotiations aimed at creating the basis for the establishment of diplomatic relations<sup>2</sup> remain suspended since 2008 and at the time of this writing (December 2010/January 2011) it can be excluded that Tokyo and Pyongyang will resume bilateral negotiations in any time soon. Instead, bilateral Japanese-North Korean ties will continue to be characterized by antagonism and friction and the findings by an international investigation at the end of May 2010 that a North Korean torpedo fired from a submarine sank a South Korean warship on March 26, killing 46 South Korean sailors confirmed policymakers in Tokyo that North Korea will have to be considered as a military threat to Japan's national security (BBC World Service May 20, 2010). On May 20, 2010 the Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama announced that his country would support South Korea in its decision to request the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution against North Korea. On May 23, 2010 the South Korean

government announced to refer the sinking of the vessel to the UN Security Council requesting the UNSC to consider adopting a resolution to expand sanctions imposed on North Korea. (The Guardian, May 23, 2010).

North Korea is already subject to UN economic sanctions imposed after Pyongyang's missile and nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 (The Korea Times May 28, 2010). On May 28, 2010, Tokyo announced to further tighten its already stern sanctions against North Korea when it decided to lower the amount of cash individuals are allowed to send to North Korea (without declaring it) from 10 million yen (roughly 88.000 Euro) to 3 million Yen (roughly 26.000 Euro). This restriction is aimed to further limit cash transfers flow from Japan to North Korea by ethnic North Korean living in Japan, organized in the so-called North Korean Residents Association of Japan (*Chosen Soren*, for details see below). Furthermore, Japan has over the course of the year 2010 further tightened travel restrictions to and from North Korea. On May 28, 2010 Japan's parliament passed a bill authorizing the Japanese coastguard to inspect vessels on the high seas suspected of carrying North Korean weapons or nuclear technology, in accordance with a 2009 UN Security Council resolution.

North Korea's alleged sinking of the South Korean warship last year has confirmed Japan's political leaders that their current policies towards North Korea, in essence Tokyo's position to continue to leave all attempts and initiatives to engage North Korea politically and economically suspended before Pyongyang resumes the dismantlement of its nuclear program, are the 'right' policies towards North Korea. North Korea, Japan scholar Christopher W. Hughes writes in *Asian Survey* in 2009, is Japan's 'catch-all threat' and the analysis below will amongst other seek to explain how and why that is the case. In this context it will be analyzed and evaluated how the recent changes on Japanese regional security and defence agenda and the upgrade and modernization of Japan's military equipment are (at least partly) influenced and accelerated by North Korea's missile and nuclear programs (Hughes 2009). This paper seeks to provide an overview and analysis of selected aspects and issues of Japan-North Korea relations: What has 'happened' on the Japanese-North Korean bilateral agenda in recent years and what does from a Japanese perspective stand in the way of Tokyo resuming a political and economic engagement course (envisioned to be accompanied by the establishment of diplomatic relations). This paper argues that Tokyo has in the past used the perceived (or as critics claim 'imaginary') military threat from North Korea and will

1 Scientist: N. Korea has 'stunning' new nuke facility," *Yahoo News Associated Press* November 21, 2010 [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101121/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/koreas\\_nuclear](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101121/ap_on_re_as/koreas_nuclear) (accessed January 4, 2011).

2 *Japan and North Korea do not maintain diplomatic relations since the Korean Peninsula was liberated from Japan in 1945.*

continue to do so in the future to justify an upgrade of its defence and military capabilities, including missile defence, the launch of reconnaissance satellites and significant investments into the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) since the early 2000s equipping e.g. the JCG with the means and capabilities to deal more effectively and rapidly with the intrusion of North Korean vessels into Japanese territorial waters.

## 1. Kidnapped Japanese

Not only North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, however, but also the so-called 'abduction issue', i.e. the abduction of Japanese citizens to North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, made sure that bilateral ties and exchanges were reduced to a very minimum (i.e. apart from very limited trade relations, sporadic and eventually unsuccessful bilateral negotiations on how to address and deal with the many problems on the bilateral agenda) over recent years. In fact, judging by the intensity of the reporting of and coverage on the 'abduction issue' in Japan over recent years, the 'abduction issue' is at least as important (if not at times even more important) on Japan's North Korea policy agenda than concerns about Pyongyang's progressing missile and nuclear programs.

Since the US, Japan, China, South Korea, Russia and North Korea started negotiating the terms and conditions of North Korea's envisioned denuclearization in the framework of the so-called 6-Party Talks<sup>3</sup> in 2003, Tokyo's willingness to provide Pyongyang with economic, humanitarian and financial assistance stood and fell with North Korea's willingness to address the 'abduction issue', i.e. explain to Tokyo what exactly happened to the Japanese abducted by North Korea's secret service decades ago (Okano-Heijmans 2008). Tokyo claims that up to 35 Japanese citizens were abducted to North Korea in the 1970s (from Japan and Europe) and 1980s and forced to work amongst others as Japanese language 'instructors' teaching Japanese language in North Korea to North Korean secret service agents.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The US, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea and North Korea are participating in the (currently suspended) forum.

<sup>4</sup> There is disagreement inside and outside of Japan on the exact number of abductees in Japan ranging from 17 to 100.

### 1.1 Bogus information

Back in 2002 during the first ever Japan-North Korea summit in Pyongyang, North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il admitted that North Korea's secret service had indeed kidnapped Japanese citizens and officially apologized referring to the kidnapping as an act committed by rogue agents. While Pyongyang considered the issue to be settled through this official apology back then, Tokyo saw its worst fears confirmed and (under intense pressure from the Japanese public and parts of the country's media and Japan's defence hawks who appeared frequently on television, in essence 'explaining' that North Korea is an 'evil' terrorist state not be trusted under any circumstances<sup>5</sup>) requested Pyongyang to follow up its official apology with information on what exactly happened to the kidnapped Japanese in North Korean captivity over the decades.

Initially (and until today) Pyongyang essentially limits itself to maintaining that those abductees who were not allowed to return to Japan in 2002 (what five of them did) have died a 'natural' death in North Korea. Tokyo's requests for more information on the fate of the abductees became even more frequent and assertive when Pyongyang in 2002 allowed five surviving abductees to return to Japan for what Pyongyang requested should be a 'holiday'. In October 2002 the five surviving abductees travelled to Japan for what was scheduled to be a two-week visit, but were not permitted to bring their children or spouses with them. The public outcry in Japan that these relatives were being held as 'hostages' in North Korea led the Japanese government back then headed by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi government to refuse to send the five abductees back to North Korea. Furthermore Tokyo demanded that their relatives were also allowed to move to Japan. Pyongyang's reaction to Tokyo not allowing the 'abductees' to return to North Korea back then was absurd but somehow predictable given its previous 'track record' of its dealing with the 'abduction issue': 'Tokyo kidnapped the abductees', Pyongyang complained when Tokyo decided not to let the kidnapped Japanese return to Pyongyang (as it was originally agreed between Tokyo and Pyongyang<sup>6</sup>). The kidnapped and then repatriated Japanese citizens

<sup>5</sup> The level of antagonistic and at times - at least to 'Western ears' - overly emotional rhetoric voiced by Japan's North Korea hardliners North Korean and the regime's alleged 'evilness' was and indeed until today remains high in Japan.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the abductees wanted to return which the Japanese government described as the effects of decade-long 'brainwashing' in North Korea.

have appeared numerous times on Japanese television over the last five years and have contributed to public seminars and conferences providing the Japanese public with emotional first-hand accounts of their captivity in North Korea. Together with the country's North Korea hardliners (nationalists, ultra-nationalists within the Liberal-Democratic Party) they are until the present day exerting tangible and audible pressure on Japan's government to make sure that the 'abduction issue' remains on top of Tokyo's North Korea policy agenda.

In May 2004, then Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi travelled to Pyongyang (his second trip to North Korea after the Japan-North Korea Summit in 2002) to negotiate the release of eight relatives of the five abductees who returned to Japan in 2002. This achieved he was also able to commit Pyongyang to provide Tokyo with information on 10 other abductees. Pyongyang, however, did not live up to its commitment to provide Tokyo with reliable and credible information on what happened to other abductees. In December 2004, Pyongyang provided Tokyo with the remains of what Pyongyang claimed were those of the abductee Megumi Yokota, kidnapped from Japan in 1977 at the age of 13. Japanese DNA tests (admittedly not free from controversy and back then criticized as 'amateurish'), however, proved that these were not the remains of Megumi Yokota, leading Tokyo to claim that Pyongyang was mocking Japanese requests for credible information on the fate of the abductees.<sup>7</sup> The false DNA probes further enraged the Japanese public providing Japan's North Korea hardliners with additional 'ammunition' that Pyongyang was taking advantage of Japan's goodwill to trust the North Korean authorities to address the 'abduction issue' in a serious manner.

When former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (who took over as Prime Minister from Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi who resigned in September 2006) sought to make the 'abduction issue' again the central issue on Tokyo's North Korea policy agenda (by e.g. putting the issue with success onto the G-8 agenda), he was accused by South Korea of 'hijacking' the agenda of the 6-Party Talks and jeopardizing multilateral efforts to denuclearize North Korea.<sup>8</sup> Shinzo Abe has over years

<sup>7</sup> *The Japanese DNA tests, however, were not free from controversy and subject to discussions on whether the tests were conducted accurately.*

<sup>8</sup> *This South Korean criticism was somehow remarkable as not only Japanese but also South Korean citizens had been abducted by North Korea's secret service in the past.*

made a name for himself as North Korea hardliner and his opposing position towards a political and economical engagement of Pyongyang, and he was portrayed as such in the North Korean media when he took office in 2006. In retrospect, the prospects of any progress whatsoever as regards the envisioned normalization of Japanese-North Korean ties with Abe as Japanese Prime Minister were always very limited at best.

## 1.2 Pressure from the inside

To be sure, Tokyo has until today never defined in a clear-cut way what 'sufficient progress' on the 'abduction issue' stands for, largely because there is no consensus amongst Japanese policymakers on the 'level' of detailed information on the fate of the abducted Japanese North Korea would be requested to provide Tokyo with (Japan Times April, 2007) in order e.g. to resume Japanese aid and humanitarian policies towards North Korea. Furthermore, in view of the emotionally charged debate and reporting in the Japanese media on the 'abduction issue', it cannot be excluded that the more details on the capture and fate of the abducted Japanese citizens were revealed, the more the Japanese public and the North Korea hardliners could become inclined to insist on North Korea's alleged 'evilness'.

Although Japan's official position indicated that 'progress' would constitute the resolution of 'unresolved questions' such as the 'whereabouts of some of the abductees' it is fair to conclude that it remains very difficult (if not impossible) to convince the Japanese government that Pyongyang had provided Tokyo with enough and sufficiently verifiable information for Tokyo to consider the 'abduction issue' as 'resolved'. This is not least due to hard-line positions towards North Korea within Japan's policymaking circles represented by e.g. Japanese policymakers such as politician Nakagawa Shoichi, former chairman of the so-called '*Parliamentarian League for Early Repatriation of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea*', probably Japan's most outspoken North Korea hardliner commanding a large group of followers and sympathizers within Japanese policymaking and lawmaking circles. Nakagawa has in the past e.g. requested that North Korea should not only allow all kidnapped Japanese to be repatriated to Japan but should officially apologize and compensate the abductees financially (Hagström 2009). More moderate policymakers or former Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials such as Tanaka Hitoshi, Japan's former North Korea chief negotiator, dismiss such requests as 'irrational' as in fact they are, as paying

damages to kidnapped Japanese does not - to put it bluntly - feature at all on the agenda of North Korea's political leadership.

Japanese pressure groups such as the 'Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea' (AFVKN or *Kazukukai* in Japanese) and the 'National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea' (NARKNN or *Sukukai* in Japanese) have over and over emphasized (fairly effectively through frequent appearance on Japanese television) that they are against policies and initiatives towards improving relations with North Korea before solving the 'abduction issue.' These groups have over recent years been exercising strong influence on Tokyo's policies towards North Korea and will continue to in the future as it is very unlikely that Pyongyang will change its current position to essentially ignore Tokyo's requests for more and above all more credible information on the fate of the kidnapped Japanese. Pyongyang of course made it fairly 'easy' for Tokyo to maintain its position on what it considered to be a 'resolution' of the 'abduction issue' before considering to provide North Korea with the promised energy aid agreed upon in the framework of the 2007 so-called *Nuclear Agreement* adopted in Beijing. Over recent years Pyongyang did not undertake any efforts whatsoever to address Tokyo's requests for information on the fate of the (possibly) surviving abductees. In fact, in retrospect it must be concluded that Pyongyang was never seriously considering to investigate (and in 2008, re-investigate) the case of kidnapped Japanese and Tokyo was probably well aware of this given Pyongyang's early on tactics to provide Tokyo with obvious bogus information on the fate of the abductees.

Should the 6-Party Talks be resumed in 2011 - for which there are (January/February 2011) some indications (but no certainties, not least due to US resistance to play by North Korean 'rules', i.e. agreeing to negotiate after North Korean military provocations such as missile and nuclear test and North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010) - Tokyo would without a doubt continue to link the possible provision of economic, financial aid to North Korea to Pyongyang's willingness to address the 'abduction issue.' However, given that Pyongyang in 2011 does arguably depend much less on Japanese or South Korean economic, financial and energy aid (with China providing the largest part of economic and energy assistance to North Korea, for details, see below) than in previous years, it seems indeed very unlikely that North Korea would agree to resume bilateral or indeed

multilateral discussions on the 'abduction issue', in the framework of the 6-Party Talks or indeed on a bilateral level with Japan. Furthermore, given the 6-Party Talks' foremost priority, i.e. the attempt to make Pyongyang resume the dismantlement of its nuclear programme and facilities, it also seems unlikely that the other parties of the 6-Party Talks (including the US) would accept a too 'prominent' role of the 'abduction issue' on the talks' agenda.

## 2. Temporary rapprochement

In 2006, Japan and North Korea agreed to resume bilateral negotiations, for the first time employing a three-track format with separate panels and working groups discussing diplomatic normalization, North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals and Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. However, this format plus numerous 'secret', i.e. non-public Japanese-North Korean negotiations in Pyongyang, did not produce any results on the 'abduction issue' whatsoever as Japan's former North Korea chief negotiator Hitoshi Tanaka told this author in an interview.<sup>9</sup>

Between 2006 and 2007 Japanese delegations led by Hitoshi Tanaka spent numerous weekends<sup>10</sup> in Pyongyang negotiating with their North Korean counterparts without virtually any results and progress on the three mentioned issues. In fact, the attempt to address the 'abduction issue', the normalization of diplomatic relations and North Korea's missile and nuclear programs separately failed because Tokyo was eventually unwilling (and admittedly unable in view of the public opinion in Japan) to separate the issues one from another when Pyongyang refused to provide Tokyo with the requested information on the abductees. In other words: Pyongyang's refusal to address the 'abduction issue' made sure that the other two panels produced no results from 2006-2008.

After the signing of the so-called February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement' Washington began to announce that the resolution of the Japanese 'abduction issue' was no longer a precondition for taking North Korea off the US State Department's so-called list of states sponsoring terrorism<sup>11</sup>. The White House back then was

<sup>9</sup> Author's interviews with Ambassador Hitoshi Tanaka in 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Roughly 20, as Ambassador Tanaka told this author during an interview in Brussels in 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See *State Sponsors of Terrorism*; US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm>



without a doubt aware that such a decision would in Tokyo be perceived as Washington 'abandoning' Tokyo on the 'abduction issue' seeking to make sure that Pyongyang would not be able to exploit its being listed on the 'terror list' as a pretence not to honour the commitments of the February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement' - in essence, North Korea's commitment to dismantle its nuclear program in return for providing Pyongyang with energy assistance equivalent to one million tons of heavy fuel oil (HFO).

Through the February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement', North Korea agreed to freeze and dismantle its nuclear program in return for the provision of energy from the US, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea. In the framework of that agreement it was also agreed to establish five multilateral working groups dealing with the nuclear issue, the normalization of bilateral US-North relations, the normalization of bilateral Japanese-North Korean ties, economic and energy assistance for North Korea as well as a working group discussing a possible joint Northeast Asian security mechanism (back then envisioned as a 'follow-up' of the 6-Party Talks, i.e. a possible security forum discussing East Asian security amongst the 6-Party Talks members and possibly others). The 'Nuclear Agreement' became possible when Washington retreated from its previous position requesting North Korea to fully dismantle (as opposed to beginning to verifiably disable and dismantle North Korean nuclear facilities) its nuclear program before providing any economic, financial and energy aid. It was agreed that North Korea would be entitled to receive heavy fuel while verifiably disabling and dismantling its nuclear facilities. The agreement and US preparedness to 'soften' previous more assertive positions and rhetoric towards Pyongyang at the end of George W. Bush's presidency (which eventually meant a reduced US preparedness to support Tokyo's insistence to put the 'abduction issue' onto the top of the 6-Party Talks' agenda) did put pressure on Tokyo to try to seek to resume bilateral negotiations with North Korea in order to keep the 'abduction' from falling off the agenda altogether.

In a Financial Times interview on November 12, 2007 then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda (who took over from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who resigned after less than one year in office characterized by financial scandals involving high-ranking members of the governing Liberal-Democratic Party and the loss of 50 million pension records) indicated (albeit

cautiously) that denuclearizing North Korea was at least as important as solving the 'abduction issue'. That was understood as Fukuda indicating that the resolution of the 'abduction issue' was not necessarily the precondition to resume bilateral negotiations with Pyongyang. As a result of Fukuda's more conciliatory approach Japanese and North Korean negotiators met in Beijing in early June 2008 to seek to resume Japanese-North Korean negotiations again applying the above mentioned so-called 'three-track format' with separate panels and working groups discussing diplomatic normalization, the 'abduction issue' and Pyongyang's missile and nuclear programs. The bilateral talks produced (surprisingly) constructive results when Pyongyang committed itself to re-investigate the 'abduction issue' and hand over Japanese terrorists who hijacked a Japan Airlines flight in 1970. Tokyo in return committed itself to consider the lifting of its economic sanctions imposed on North Korea in 2006. Pyongyang, however, did not stick to its promise: The abduction of Japanese citizens was not re-investigated and the terrorists were not handed over. Consequently, Japan's economic sanctions remained in place (and still do until the present day).

### 3. Japan's North Korea policy-trends, controversies and impact on Japan's defence and security policies

The abduction of Japanese citizens earned the country the label 'terrorist' or 'evil' state in the Japanese domestic political discourse (Leheny 2006). This anti-North Korea sentiment resulted (with the help of parts of the Japanese media and conservative politicians) in at times irrational and largely unrealistic assessments concerning the level of danger North Korea posed to Japanese internal and national security. Allegations in Japan that North Korea is actively involved in the smuggling of narcotics into Japan (and thereby threatening Japan's internal security) continue to confirm that perception. (Chestnut 2007).

In the early 2000s, Japan's Ground Self-Defence Forces (GSDF) reduced the number of its main battle tanks and instead put a focus on developing GSDF so-called 'rapid-reaction forces' through amongst others the establishment of the so-called 'Central Readiness Group' (GRG), with the main goal to be able to respond

and counter North Korean guerrilla-style incursions. There is wide agreement amongst (non-Japanese) scholars and analysts that Japanese policymakers have exploited the perceived (real or imaginary) threat from North Korea in recent years to justify similar upgrades of Japan's defence capabilities, including missile defence (Samuels 2007). Using North Korea as what Christopher W. Hughes (as well as others, such as Swedish Japan scholar Linus Hagström) calls 'proxy threat' enabled Tokyo to justify and implement changes on Japan's security policy agenda, officially and openly designed to deal with the threat posed by North Korea. Realistically, however, Japanese policymakers have in recent years also used the potential threat from North Korea to justify US-Japan missile defence, military procurements and the operational expansion of the US-Japan security alliance to address and deal with the potential military threat posed not only by North Korea but also by China. Deliberately 'Super-sizing' a potential military threat from North Korea as Christopher W. Hughes puts it has in the past led to proposals by Japan's defence establishment and policymakers to acquire offensive military equipment, including US-made Tomahawk missiles. The acquisition of offensive military equipment would violate Japan's decade-long principle of so-called 'exclusively defence-oriented policies' which does not permit Japan to acquire and station offensive military capabilities on Japanese territory. Japan's so-called 'defence-oriented defence policies' state that the extent of use of defensive force must be kept to the minimum necessary for self-defence, and that the defence capabilities to be possessed and maintained by Japan are limited to the minimum necessary for self-defence and the defence of Japanese territory.<sup>12</sup> The inner-Japan debate on the acquisition of US-made Tomahawk missiles back then, however, died down fairly quickly and as of today, the acquisition of this and other offensive military equipment remains very unlikely and indeed (at least for now) a 'taboo' on Japan's security and defence policy agenda.

### 3.1 Pre-emptively attacking North Korea?

In 2003 and 2004 (admittedly short-lived) debates emerged in Japanese policymaking circles whether Japan should have the right to attack North Korea pre-emptively should there be clear (enough) indications that North Korea was about to prepare a missile launch towards Japan. In 2003, Defence Agency chief Shigeru

Ishiba suggested to equip Japan with the capabilities to be able to pre-emptively attack North Korea even if the Koizumi government dismissed this suggestion as Ishiba's 'personal opinion', when it leaked to the press (Berkofsky 2004).

In 2005, then Defence Agency<sup>13</sup> chief Kyuma briefly 'reactivated' the idea of equipping Japan with the capabilities to pre-emptively attack North Korea when talking to Japanese and international journalists. A day later, however, he claimed that the Western press (in this case The Washington Post) had misquoted him after his suggestion that Japan should consider the possibility to equip itself with the capabilities to pre-emptively attack North Korea. Although Kyuma denied he suggested that<sup>14</sup>, he - like Ishiba before him - had in reality done exactly likewise and there is no doubt that such a discourse is part of the (albeit unofficial) discourse amongst Japan's conservative and 'hawkish' policymakers and scholars. A July 2010 draft report (authored by the so-called 'advisory council', a group of business representatives charged with the task to draft new Japanese defence guidelines (which were then adopted in December 2010, for details see the box below) urged the Japanese government to revise the self-imposed limit allowing Japan to maintain only minimum defence and military capabilities to defend Japanese territory (as opposed to maintaining military capabilities to project military power outside of Japan). In this context, the July 2010 draft defence guidelines called on Japan to equip itself with the military capabilities and equipment to contribute to regional stability (through the projection of military force) without the US solely depending on the projection of US military power. Until now and in the framework of the US-Japan security alliance Japan's role was (at least on paper) essentially limited to rear area support (above all logistical and medical support on Japanese territory) for US military in the case of a regional contingency.

Furthermore, the draft defence guidelines expressed concerns about Chinese submarines and other advanced ships belonging to the Chinese navy having passed near Japanese territorial waters close to Okinawa island and Miyakojima island on training exercises several times throughout 2010. In this context,

<sup>13</sup> Since 2007 re-named to Ministry of Defence.

<sup>14</sup> A high-ranking Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official maintained in an interview with this author that Kyuma had been misquoted by The Washington Post back then. According to that ministry official Kyuma merely said that Japan should consider the possibility to acquire itself with military equipment with which North Korean missile bases could be attacked pre-emptively.

<sup>12</sup> See Japan Ministry of Defence, *Basis of Defence Policy*; [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_policy/dp02.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_policy/dp02.html)

it was also warned about Chinese plans to build and deploy aircraft carriers which are viewed as part of a Chinese so-called 'anti-access strategy' challenging US military power projection capabilities in the Pacific. Japan, it was suggested, should improve its navy's anti-submarine warfare capability and minesweeping ability. 'Japan needs to draw up capabilities effective enough to cope with such multiple contingencies', the draft defence guidelines read. In this context, the draft report calls up the government to equip Japan with missiles capable of hitting bases outside of Japanese territory, in essence a request to allow Japan to acquire offensive missiles, able to hit missile and nuclear sites in North Korea (something which did no longer feature in Japan's revised defence guidelines adopted in December 2010).

However, there is realistically little doubt that Tokyo (in cooperation with Washington in protection of its military troops stationed in Japan) would quickly react if there were clear indications that Pyongyang was planning and preparing a missile launch towards Japanese territory. Whether this reaction would or could mean a pre-emptive bombing of a North Korean missile silo or 'only' constitute the shooting down of an incoming North Korean missile over Japanese territory remains to be seen.

### **The National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG) (December 2010)**

*In December 2010, Tokyo adopted new defence guidelines, the so-called National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG). A brief overview and analysis of the NDPG is of relevance for this paper as the adoption of the revised guidelines have in (large) parts been motivated and triggered by the perceived potential threat from North Korea (to be sure next to China).<sup>15</sup>*

*Through the adoption of the new defence guidelines, Japan's security and defence policies have been transformed from 'basic' to 'flexible and dynamic', in essence meaning that Japan from now on reserves for itself the right to upgrade (and no longer - if deemed necessary - to limit its defence expenditures to 1% of its GDP) and increase its military and defence capabilities if the security environment should call for such changes (Berkofsky 2011a, Berkofsky 2011b). That does not mean that Japan will from now on spend more than 1% of its GDP on defence, but it is now allowed in principle to do so*

<sup>15</sup> Also as the revised defence guidelines further confirm that the concept and reality of Japan's 'constitutionally-prescribed' (for further details see below) pacifism is indeed only very marginally part of Japanese security and defence policy mainstream thinking.

*if China or North Korea give Tokyo - through e.g. a missile attack - reason to do so. Japan's defence planners cited the September 2010 confrontation with China in the East China as 'evidence' that Japan is indeed in need of revised defence guidelines equipping Japan's navy and the coast guard with the authority to defend Japanese territorial interests in the East China Sea. The defence guidelines - at least on paper not taking into account budgetary issues and problems due to Japan's (very) severe fiscal situation - are seemingly aimed at equipping Japan's military capabilities to react to crisis scenarios going beyond the defence of Japanese territory on Japanese territory.*

*The defense guidelines will be accompanied by a restructuring of Japan's armed forces, including a very noteworthy upgrade of the country's naval and coast guard capabilities. Until 2012, 21 new patrol ships and seven new reconnaissance jets will be added to the Japan Coast Guard fleet to be dispatched to where the (potential) 'action' is: the East China Sea. Japan's navy will increase the number of its AEGIS destroyers from four to six. AEGIS destroyers are equipped with antimissile systems and are at least in theory able to shoot down incoming North Korean Nodong missiles aimed at downtown Tokyo in less than 10 minutes. Furthermore, the number of Japanese submarines will be increased from 16 to 22, while the number of tanks will be reduced from 600 to 400.*

*The number of Japanese tanks - no longer considered to be necessarily relevant in East Asian crisis scenarios - will be reduced from 600 to 400. Most tanks were until today based in Hokkaido and will in the future be re-located to the southern part of the country. The number of Japan's ground forces on the other hand will be slightly reduced, from currently 154.000 to 153.000 troops while several ground forces units will be re-located from the northern part of Japan (mainly Hokkaido) to the southern part of the country. In order to counter a potential Chinese missile attack, the number of Japanese fighter jets deployed on Okinawa will be increased from 24 to 36. Furthermore, antimissile systems will be installed on Japan's Nansei (or Ryukyu) Islands while improving the already existing military communication systems.<sup>16</sup> Japan's military reconnaissance and monitoring will be expanded in southern parts of the country, i.e. on the islands in relative vicinity to Chinese territory.*

*Surprisingly for an allegedly 'pacifist' country is the fact that Japan's new defence guidelines suggest that Japan can contribute to Asian regional peace and stability by 'exposing' military capabilities and equipment. Japan can contribute to regional stability by 'increasing the activity' of its defence hardware and clearly demonstrating' its*

<sup>16</sup> Located in the West Pacific, southwest of Kyushu close to the maritime border of the East China Sea.

*advanced capabilities', the guidelines read. It is hardly surprising that those in Japan who are opposed to upgrade and boost Japanese military defence capabilities refer to such an assessment as 'counterproductive' for Japan's national security running counter to the very fundamentals of decade-long Japanese defence and security policies.<sup>17</sup>*

### 3.2 But really a threat?

Japan's conventional military concerns with regard to North Korea centre around the threat posed by North Korea guerrilla incursions, incursions into Japanese territorial waters as well as attacks on Japanese nuclear power facilities along the coast of the Sea of Japan. Large parts of Japanese territory are exposed to North Korea's stock of 150-200 Nodong-1 1.000-1.300 km medium range ballistic missiles (a long-range North Korean Taepodong missile flew over Japanese airspace in 1998 triggering the joint US-Japan development of a missile defence system).

While Japanese policymakers and the defence establishment point to the immediate threat posed by North Korean short-range Nodong missiles, independent analysts on the other hand maintain that the threat posed by North Korea's conventional military capabilities is realistically fairly limited, resulting from Pyongyang's ageing equipment and technology as well as the lack of funds to train its military appropriately. As regards a threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program, independent analysts maintain that North Korea will for years and maybe decades ahead not be capable of mastering nuclear weapons technology to miniaturize nuclear devices to mount them onto e.g. ballistic missiles. What's more, North Korea's offensive military capabilities are no match for Japan's defensive capabilities, let alone a match for US conventional military capabilities and the 47.000 US military forces stationed in Japan. Nonetheless, Japan's defence establishment and the country's conservative policymakers remain concerned that North Korea might in the longer run decide to equip its Nodong<sup>18</sup> and Taepodong<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In this context the *Asahi Shimbun* points to what it refers to as contradictory and incoherent Japanese security policies: On the one hand the Japanese government announces Japanese-Chinese relations of 'mutual strategic benefits' (as formulated in the press statement of the 2010 Japan-China Summit) while on the other hand planning to use the display of military capabilities to deter a potential Chinese military threat.

<sup>18</sup> Nodong short-range missiles are (at least in theory) able to reach and hit Tokyo in less than ten minutes.

<sup>19</sup> With a range of up to 6.000 kilometres (was last tested by North Korea in July 2006).

missiles with conventional high-explosive warheads or mount biological and chemical weapons on them.

### 3.3 The 'real' threat

Not only North Korea but also - and probably more importantly - the perceived threat from China has been motivating Japanese policymakers in recent years to strengthen the country's defence and military profile, including through the strengthening of US-Japan military cooperation through an envisioned revision of the so-called US-Japan Guidelines for Defence Cooperation (initiated in 2005). Already in 1997 after the publication of the revised version of the US-Japan Guidelines for Defence Cooperation (which were first adopted in 1978) China harshly criticized the revision as a joint US-Japanese policy to institutionalize bilateral military cooperation to defend Taiwan as the guidelines spoke of US-Japan military cooperation in so-called 'Areas Surrounding Japan' (*Nihon Shuhen Jitai* in Japanese), for China until today a synonym for the 'Taiwan Straits'.<sup>20</sup> In February 2005, Washington and Tokyo issued a joint security statement (in the framework of the so-called US-Japan Security Consultative Committee) referring for the first time and explicitly to peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits as of joint US-Japan concern and importance, back then confirming Chinese policymakers that Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits do indeed have to be included as theatre of possible joint US-Japan military cooperation and operations.

While it was in the past and will in the future be continuing to be politically relatively 'easy' to cite a military threat from North Korea as justification to upgrade Japan's defence capabilities, the same is not true for China. Citing China as potential military threat to Japanese national security would (as it did several times in the recent past) almost inevitably lead to diplomatic tension and irritations and China would almost certainly 'return the compliment' by accusing

<sup>20</sup> And not only for China, but also many analysts and observers back then; Washington and Tokyo countered such criticism back then by arguing that the 'Areas Surrounding Japan' do not describe a geographical but instead what was called a 'situational concept', de-facto and according to the US-Japanese interpretation meaning that the 1997 defence guidelines do authorize bilateral military cooperation in 'situations' requiring such cooperation; this could be in Asia but not in Asia only but also e.g. in the Middle East or anywhere else; to be sure, this explanation and interpretation never convinced policymakers in Beijing who continue to argue that the 1997 defence guidelines were the de-facto institutionalization of a possible US-Japan military cooperation in the Taiwan Straits, not least because they were implemented less than one year after the (small-scale) military crisis in the Taiwan Straits in 1996.

Japan of exploiting an 'imaginary' threat from North Korea to justify the upgrade of its military and defence capabilities threatening regional peace and stability (as some Chinese scholars and policymakers did indeed do when Tokyo adopted the above mentioned new defence guidelines in December 2010).<sup>21</sup>

The Japanese public - at least the parts with an interest in the country's foreign and security policies<sup>22</sup> - was largely supportive of the plans to upgrade Japan's navy and coast guard capabilities in December, especially in view of recently stepped-up Sino-Japanese territorial disputes in the East China Sea in September 2010. Furthermore, YouTube video footage which clearly shows a Chinese trawler intentionally ramming into a Japanese Coast Guard ship close to disputed territories in the East China Sea<sup>23</sup> in September 2010 will confirm to policymakers and the public that the navy and coast upgrades are justified and necessary.<sup>24</sup> The Japanese Ministry of Defence announced at the end of October 2010 an increase of the navy's submarine fleet to 22 from the current 16 as part of the fiscal 2011–15 basic defence program. According to the ministry, Japan's need to enlarge its submarine fleet has been influenced and indeed triggered by the rapid modernization and equally rapid growth of China's submarine fleet. Currently, the Chinese navy is estimated to have 60 submarines<sup>25</sup> and has recently reportedly completed the construction of an underground base on Hainan Island to accommodate a nuclear-powered attack submarine.

A few days after the adoption of the above mentioned NDPG on December 17, 2010, the Japanese government also adopted the so-called *Five-Year Midterm Defence Build-up Program* defining (on the basis of the defence guideline) what kind of new military equipment Japan's armed forces would need in the

next five years ahead.<sup>26</sup> While the defence guidelines stress that Japan's defence and security policies will remain 'defence-oriented' (*Japan will continue to uphold the fundamental principles of defence policy including the exclusively defensive defence policy and the three non-nuclear principles*), they read<sup>27</sup>, parts of the 'official'<sup>28</sup> China as well as Chinese scholars feared that Japan's defence policies might no longer be necessarily referred to as 'defensive' or 'defence-oriented' but as potentially 'offensive'.<sup>29</sup>

However, the official Chinese reactions to the defence guidelines published e.g. in the state-controlled newspaper *China Daily* were not so much concerned with the possible implications of the defence guidelines for actual Japanese defence and security policies (beyond referring to possibly 'hawkish' Japanese policies), but much more interested in pointing out that Japan's warning that *'China's military development and lack of transparency were matters of concern to the region and international community'* (as the defence guidelines read) Beijing (unsurprisingly) dismisses as 'irresponsible' and 'totally groundless'<sup>30</sup> (*China Daily* Dec. 17, 2010 a and b, *China Daily*, December 22, 2010). Official Chinese concerns, that Japan's new defence guidelines have the potential to transform Japanese defensive and security policies from 'defensive' or 'defence-oriented' to 'offensive' seem baseless in the sense that the guidelines do not turn Japan into a regional military 'bully' and aggressive military power (as some analysts and parts of the state-controlled media in China claim). Nonetheless, it is accurate

21 Author's conversations with Chinese scholars in Beijing December 2010 confirm this.

22 Admittedly, a relatively small part of Japanese society, which must realistically be described as relatively 'apolitical and only marginally interested in Japanese foreign policies and international relations in general.

23 The Senkaku Islands are controlled by Japan.

24 The captain of the Chinese trawler was arrested and briefly imprisoned. He was later freed, a decision taken by the Japanese government in order to end diplomatic tensions with Beijing which insisted that the captain's imprisonment was 'illegal.'

25 This is an estimate, as China does not officially reveal the number of its submarines.

26 In December 2010, the Japanese government also decided to set up a US-style National Security Council reporting to the Prime Minister on issues relevant to national security.

27 See Ministry of Defence, *Summary of the National Defence Program Guidelines, FY 2011, FY 2011*; [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/pdf/summaryFY2011.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/summaryFY2011.pdf)

28 Beijing's policymakers.

29 Several conversations with Chinese scholars in December 2010 and January 2011 confirm this Chinese perception of how Japanese defence and security policies have supposedly changed through the adoption of the new defence guidelines. However, moderate and well-informed Chinese scholars are well aware that in reality Japanese defence and security policies cannot be referred to as 'offensive' after the revision of the defence guidelines. Numerous conversations and Chinese scholars over recent years confirmed that even moderate ones usually feel obliged to repeat the official government position on the record which in this case (and in many other cases in the context of Japanese defence and security policies) suggests that Japan's new defence guidelines are potentially destabilizing for Asian security.

30 'A certain country has no right to act as a representative of the international community and make irresponsible remarks on China's development', a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said when Japan's defence guidelines were published on December 17, 2010.

to argue that Japan's defence planners sought to respond to the changing security dynamics in East Asia and the modernization of China's armed forces and determination to 'defend' claimed territories in the East and South China Sea are without a doubt on top of Japan's defence planners' list of concerns. After the September 2010 clash between the Chinese trawler and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in the East China, the Japanese-Chinese territorial dispute briefly became a 'quasi trilateral' Japanese-Chinese-American issue when Washington announced that defending Japanese territories in the East China Sea would be subject to US-Japanese military cooperation under Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty.

Beijing's reaction to that announcement (like its reaction to temporary imprisonment of the Chinese sailor responsible for intentionally ramming into the Japanese coast guard vessel) was (unsurprisingly) harsh dismissing it (again unsurprisingly) as 'unwelcome interference' in Chinese affairs. To be sure, it remains very unlikely that Tokyo and Beijing will go to war over disputed territories in the East China Sea (also because both Tokyo and Beijing have in November and December 2010 sought to de-escalate the issue expressing their mutual willingness to address the issue on a bilateral level and in a peaceful manner seeking to follow-up on an earlier mutual understanding to seek to jointly explore natural resources around the disputed territories in the East China Sea); but Washington's spelled out commitment to jointly defend the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea in the framework of the US-Japan Security Treaty is significant, and without a doubt taken seriously in Beijing. To be sure, Beijing referred to Washington's commitment to defend Japanese territorial interests in the East China Sea as 'interference' in China's allegedly 'internal affairs'.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.4 Missile defence

Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Forces (MSDF) have in recent years e.g. reduced the number of traditional destroyers replacing them with at least six destroyers equipped with the so-called AEGIS sea-mobile ballistic missile defence system which is (at least in theory) able to intercept incoming North Korean ballistic missiles. This upgrade was begun in 2007 and was originally supposed to be completed by 2011. Japan's Air Self-Defence Forces (ASDF) have in recent years been

equipped with in-flight refuelling capabilities and Tokyo's air force is since 2008 equipped with precision-guided munitions able to strike North Korean missile bases, at least in theory. Furthermore, the ASDF has in 2008 completed the deployment of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC) ballistic missile systems around Tokyo.

Since North Korea launched a missile over northern Japan in August 1998, Japan and the US are jointly working on developing a regional missile defence system (for details see Hughes, Beardsley 2008). The August 1998 launch was considered to be the 'wake-up call' for Japanese policymakers to consider and actively pursue (since 2005 officially) the development and deployment of a regional missile defence system in Japan. Today, hundreds of North Korean missiles are aimed at Japan (and South Korea) and it is estimated that Pyongyang's Nodong missiles are able to reach downtown Tokyo in less than 10 minutes. Although Japan's current missile interceptor systems - either land-based or deployed on AEGIS destroyers - have been significantly improved through regular tests, including joint test with the US over recent years, analysts and the Japanese government fear that Japan's existing systems would not necessarily be able to intercept and destroy one or more incoming North Korean missiles. Before Tokyo officially committed itself to contribute also to the development phase of the envisioned missile defence system in the early 2000s, Washington had been urging Japan for years to increase its contributions not only to the research but also the costly development phase of the missile defence system. To be sure, given the funds invested into the system over the last decade, Tokyo's refusal to officially declare its interest in the development and eventually deployment phase of the system has always lacked credibility and the official confirmation to be interested in missile defence did not surprise anybody back then (The budget allocated to the development of the system for 2008 amounted to US \$1.8 billion).

In December 2007, a Japanese warship stationed off Hawaii launched a US-developed Standard-3 interceptor missile and successfully destroyed a mock target fired from an onshore marking. This was a (long-awaited) progress of the development of the system. Land-based so-called Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) missile defence systems have already been installed at two bases in Japan and further installations are planned in the years ahead. Furthermore, Tokyo ultimately plans to install the state-of-the-art missile interceptor systems on four of its destroyers equipped

<sup>31</sup> *Beijing also refused the US proposal to mediate in outstanding territorial disputes in the South China Sea involving China and a number of East and Southeast Asian countries.*

with the US-made AEGIS tracking system. However, despite the recent successful testing, it remains yet to be seen whether the envisioned missile defence system will be functioning effectively, i.e. whether it will be able to intercept and shoot down several incoming missiles simultaneously.

In the recent past and in the course of year 2010 some key policymakers within the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), notably former Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada<sup>32</sup>, questioned the effectiveness of the system and have recommended to verify whether the invested funds will bring the desired results in the years ahead. The 'desired results' would be the system's ability to track, intercept and shoot down one or more incoming missiles with accuracy, something which is not universally acknowledged amongst DPJ policymakers to be the capability and ability of the current US-Japan missile defence system. In fact, there are doubts (and not only in Japan) whether missile defence systems will ever be able to accurately track, intercept and destroy incoming missiles with the same target at the same time. Technical feasibility and the system's actual effectiveness to shoot missiles aimed at targets in Japan will continue to be discussed controversially in Japan and the recent (at least temporary) budget cuts implemented by the DPJ-led government indicate that some DPJ policymakers are unlike previous LDP policymakers and governments not prepared to commit themselves to support and co-finance the development of the system without questioning and examining the effectiveness of the system.

While the former Japanese government led by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama was committed to jointly developing ballistic missile defence (BMD) (with Japan allocating funds in 2010 and beyond), it has in December 2009 announced to suspend the allocation of additional funds requested from Japan's Ministry of Defence for the deployment of new Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) surface-to-air interceptors which were first requested by Japan's Ministry of Defence after North Korea's missile tests in 2009. In December 2009, Japan's cabinet approved defence spending guidelines for the 2010/11 financial year which however excluded the allocation of additional funds after April 2011 for additional PAC-3 units envisioned by the previous LDP-led government. This decision could delay the ministry's plans to deploy PAC-3 units at three more Japanese military bases over the next five years even if joint US-Japan missile defence for the defence of

<sup>32</sup> Now DPJ Secretary-General.

Japanese territory features prominently in the above mentioned December 2010 defence guidelines. Thus, it remains yet to be seen whether it will clash with potential budgetary constraints in the course of the year 2011 and 2012.<sup>33</sup> Japan's missile shield - made up of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) surface-to-air missiles and the warship-installed Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) - has been set for completion by early 2011. In view of the December 2009 budget cuts, this could no longer be achievable. Indeed, Japan's defence budget will be decreased by 3 to 5% over the next three to four years although by the time of writing this paper it is yet not clear whether the funding for missile defence will be negatively affected by the upcoming defence budget cuts. While the cost-effectiveness of the PAC-3 element of the ballistic missile defence system is discussed controversially amongst DPJ policymakers, Japan's Ministry of Defence in reality is making most of the day to day decisions on procurement. This means that opponents of the system within the ruling DPJ might not necessarily have a veto over the ministry's decision to expand Japan's missile defence capabilities. Furthermore, there is solid overall public support for missile defence in Japan and the realization that Japan can in terms of national security not afford to terminate developing a system after having invested significant resources into this system for over a decade. Recent doubts about the cost-effectiveness of the system and the reluctance to increase Japan's financial contributions to the involvement in the system's development phase are very unlikely to have a negative impact on Japan's overall commitment to missile defence.

### 3.5 Upgrading the Navy and Coast Guard

The adoption and implementation of the December 2010 defence guidelines will be accompanied by and lead to a partial re-structuring of Japan's armed forces. Furthermore, the guidelines call for a significant upgrade of the country's naval and coast guard capabilities and equipment.<sup>34</sup> In order to respond to the perceived threat posed by North Korean short-range missiles, Japan's navy e.g. will increase the number of AEGIS destroyers from four to six. AEGIS destroyers are equipped with antimissile systems and are - at least in

<sup>33</sup> The appendix of the December 2010 defence guidelines mentions 'budgetary considerations' having a potential impact on decisions to develop and acquire technology and capabilities related to ballistic missile defence.

<sup>34</sup> The on paper restructuring plans are ambitious and the funds available to finance the envisioned armed forces' upgrade and restructuring are scarce. Hence, it remains yet to be seen how quickly and efficiently both will take place.

theory - able to shoot down incoming North Korean short-range Nodong missiles.

In technical terms, the upgrade of Japan's coast guard capabilities and equipment (and thereby increasing the vessels' ability to sink North Korean ships and submarines) does not mean that the coast guard is being equipped with 'power projection capabilities.' However, (like it is the case with missile defence when intercepting and destroying incoming missiles enables to 'better' attack the country whose missiles have been intercepted), the ability of one country's coast guard to sink the vessels and warships of another country would - at least in principle - enable Japan's coast guard to facilitate and support a Japanese invasion of North Korean territory or a maritime battle between Japanese and North Korean warships what could - again theoretically - be part of a Japanese invasion of North Korean territory. Furthermore, the number of Japanese submarines will be increased from currently 16 to 22 in the years ahead.

In 2001, Tokyo adopted a revised version of Japan's so-called 'Coast Guard Law' expanding the Japanese Coast Guard's (JCG) authority to use military power when defending Japanese territory against ships or submarines intruding into Japanese territorial waters. Given the experience and incidents of recent years, 'Defending Japanese territory against intruders' stands above all (if not exclusively) for intrusions by North Korea's military vessels. Consequently and in retrospect, the 2001 revision of the JCG law was aimed at equipping the JCG with the authority and the actual mandate to stop North Korean intruders with military force. According to the scholar David Leheny, the revision of the law back then was a 'Canary of coal mine' testing the acceptance of the expansion of the coast guard's role of defending Japanese territory with military force as the law provides the JCG with a mandate and authority to use military force which exceed those enjoyed by the MSDF (Leheny 2006).

While Japan's navy (Maritime Self-Defence Forces or MSDF) is not allowed to open fire unless shot at first, the JCG is through the revised JCG law authorized to shoot at vaguely defined 'suspicious' ships before being shot at. Roughly one month after the JCG law was adopted, the JCG, sank a North Korean vessel. The JCG opened fire at what in Japan is typically referred to as a so-called 'suspicious ship' (*fusen* in Japanese), i.e. a North Korean vessel intruding into Japanese territorial waters. After having been detected by the JCG, the North Korean vessel refused to follow JCG instructions to stop, prompting the JCG to shoot at the North

Korean vessel with the result of sinking the vessel.

Over recent years Tokyo has significantly upgraded the JCG capabilities enabling it to deal (even) more effectively (i.e. sink) with North Korean vessels in Japanese territorial waters. While Japan's defence budget was reduced in 2005, the JCG's budget was increased adding 21 new boats, seven new jets and to finance the replacement of older ships and planes. In 2006 Japan's defence budget was on the one hand reduced but on the other hand the JCG's budget was increased, which permitted the acquisition of two long-range (12.000-mile) Gulfstream V jets as well as two patrol ships with advanced fire-control systems and advanced targeting night-vision capabilities. JCG vessels have 30mm long-range machine guns installed on its vessels to shoot at North Korean intruders. (Samuels 2007a).

The JCG, however, is not equipped with capabilities to project military power as its vessels do not have torpedoes, anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, air or missile defences, air-searching radars, anti-satellite weapons capabilities and sonars. The JCG employs 13.000 personnel, roughly one-quarter of the size of the MSDF. Its budget in 2007 amounted to US \$1.6 billion. Until 2012, 21 new ships and seven new jets will be added to the JCG amongst other to be dispatched to the East China Sea, 'home' to a latent Japanese-Chinese territorial conflict. The JCG has also assumed an increasingly active role in regional security being e.g. engaged in anti-piracy training in Southeast Asia. In 2006, Tokyo sold three fast patrol vessels to Indonesia and the Philippines. Back then, Japan sought to avoid accusations that it was violating its self-imposed restriction to export weapons to other countries by 'selling' the sale of the vessels as development aid to Indonesia and the Philippines.

### 3.6 Improving intelligence capabilities

Japan has also significantly upgraded its intelligence capabilities in general and reconnaissance capabilities in particular. Between 2003 and 2007, Tokyo has launched four intelligence-gathering satellites (also referred to as 'spy satellites') with the main purpose of monitoring possible preparations for North Korean missile launches (Oros 2007). The launch of Japanese reconnaissance satellites from 2003-2007 has de-facto led Japan to use space for military purposes even if Tokyo continues to refer to the satellites as 'multi-purpose intelligence-gathering satellites.' Through the launch of reconnaissance satellites, Tokyo (at least the



Tokyo led by the Liberal-Democratic Party until 2009) has in recent years shifted the decade-long interpretation of the country's anti-militaristic principle from the one defined in the late 1960s as 'peaceful' use of space ('heiwa no mokuteiki') and non-military ('hi-gunji') to one that authorizes the 'defensive military use of space.' This new approach towards the use of space received its legal basis in 2008 with the passing of the so-called 'Basic Law for Space Activities' authorizing the use of space for defensive purposes.

Through the above mentioned new Japanese defence guidelines, Japan's military reconnaissance and monitoring will in the years be strengthened and expanded in southern parts of the country, i.e. in parts of relative vicinity to Chinese territory. Until the year 2012, Japan's coast guard will be equipped with further 21 ships as well as seven reconnaissance jets to monitor the East China Sea.

### 3.7 Japan's 'nuclear option'

Christopher W. Hughes suggested in his past writings that the perceived so-called 'security dilemma' vis-à-vis North Korea is not yet strong enough to let Japanese policymakers seriously consider the option of equipping the country with nuclear weapons. This, Hughes argues, was not even the case when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006. The same is true for Pyongyang's second nuclear test in May 2009: It did not lead (at least not officially and publicly) to a revival of a discourse of an alleged necessity to equip Japan with nuclear weapons.

To be sure, Japan (like South Korea and Taiwan) has the technological capabilities, equipment and know-how to develop nuclear weapons, but Hughes argues that a Japanese nuclear capability would not constitute a sufficient substitute for the US nuclear deterrence leaving the country (at least in theory) more vulnerable to a nuclear attack than without its own nuclear weapons (Hughes 2007). Furthermore, Japan shows, as Hughes put it, only a 'minimal vested economic interest in nuclear weapons development and the overall international economic costs militate against nuclear armament.' The possibility of nuclear disarmament was initially discussed in Japan after North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006. However, this debate back then was very short-lived and led only by a small minority within the ruling LDP. After North Korea's nuclear test in 2006, some high-ranking LDP policymakers sought to initiate a discussion on Japan exercising its so-called 'nuclear option' developing and deploying Japanese nuclear weapons

to counterbalance the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and weapons program. Advocates of Tokyo taking Pyongyang's nuclear test as a justification to re-activate the discussion on arming Japan with nuclear weapons back then were former foreign minister Taro Aso, then chairman of the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) and Shoichi Nakagawa. However, Aso and Nakagawa (together with Abe Shinzo, like Nakagawa and Aso North Korea hardliners within the LDP) back then were unable to get significant support within the LDP to revisit Japan's so-called 'Non-Nuclear Principles' and consider the development and deployment of nuclear weapons which since the late 1960s is prohibited by the 'Non-Nuclear Principles.' The three 'Non-Nuclear Principles' are a parliamentary resolution (which was never adopted into law) that has served as basis for Japan's nuclear policies since their inception in the late 1960s. The principles state that *Japan shall neither 1. possess nor 2. manufacture nuclear weapons nor shall it 3. permit their introduction into Japanese territory.* The principles were introduced by former Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato in a speech in the Japanese parliament 1967 in the context of negotiations over the return of Okinawa (from the US) to Japan in 1972. The Japanese parliament formally adopted the principles in 1971 and they remain 'just' that until today: 'principles' as opposed to law, a fact that has been pointed out numerous times by scholars, policymakers and parts of the Japanese press (above all the influential pro-defence, pro-constitutional revision daily newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun) in favour of revisiting and indeed abolishing the principles making (at least in principle) nuclear armament possible for Japan.

Although nuclear armament or allowing the US to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan does not feature on the DPJ's (official) policy agenda, Japan's Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada suggested during a parliamentary committee in March 2010 that Japan has the right to let the US introduce nuclear weapons into Japan during what he called a 'defence emergency' (meaning a nuclear attack from North Korea). At first glance, Okada's statement pointed towards a possible change of Japan's long-established so-called 'non-nuclear principles', i.e. the self-imposed ban to introduce, produce and stockpile nuclear weapons in Japan. However, the same Okada emphasized during the same committee that his government was not thinking about seeking to abolish the country's 'non-nuclear principles' (something which Prime Minister Kan confirmed several times over recent months).

The above mentioned July 2010 draft defence

guidelines suggested to the government to consider revising at least one of the 'Non-Nuclear Principles', albeit only indirectly. 'It may not necessarily be wise to have as a principle anything that unilaterally limits what the United States can do beforehand', the draft defence guidelines read in July 2010, suggesting that Tokyo should consider reviewing the self-imposed ban to allow US warships to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan in the case of a military emergency (involving such a North Korean nuclear attack).

The influential daily newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun followed up on the draft defence guidelines' suggestion to consider a partial revision of the 'Non-Nuclear Principles'. 'In order to make the US military's nuclear deterrent work for Japan, the government should give serious thought to exempting the port calls and transit through Japanese territorial waters by US vessels carrying nuclear weapons from the principle of not permitting the introduction of such weapons into Japan', a July 2010 Yomiuri editorial read. The conservative Yomiuri Shimbun with its 11 million readers will continue to make its 'case' in favour of revisiting the non-nuclear principles, like it does since the early 1990s with regards to constitutional revision in general and abolishing Japan's pacifist Article 9 in particular.<sup>35</sup>

The above mentioned July 2010 draft version of Japan's defence guidelines drafted by the government-nominated advisory council draft called (albeit indirectly) for a revision of at least one of Japan's 'Non-Nuclear Principles'<sup>36</sup>, probably not least because in December 2009 (for the first time officially) it was acknowledged by the Japanese government that Japan has over decades violated one of the 'Non-Nuclear Principles' when it numerous times allowed US Navy ships equipped with nuclear weapons to call Japanese ports since the late 1960s. In December 2009 secret agreements under which Japan allowed the US military to bring nuclear weapons into the nation leaked to the Japanese media and public. The existence of such agreements was for many years known amongst Japanese policymakers and the defence establishment, but for decades LDP-led Japanese governments consistently denied

<sup>35</sup> *The Yomiuri has almost 20 years been on the very forefront of constitutional revision and has in numerous articles and editorials 'explained' why Japan should or indeed 'must' abolish its pacifist Article 9.*

<sup>36</sup> *That said, however, Japan would without a doubt have the technological know-how and experience to go nuclear within a year or so; furthermore in 2003 it was being revealed (through the declassification of US documents) that Japan has in the 1960s allowed the US to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan. To be sure, the Japanese government denies that this ever happened.*

their existence. The secret agreements were in fact declassified for the public in 1999, and a US researcher even made a copy before it was reclassified on security grounds.

After these revelations the Japanese government back then led by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama nominated a foreign ministry panel to investigate whether Japanese governments had since the late 1960s indeed violated one of Japan's 'Non-Nuclear Principles'-namely the one prohibiting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan. The panel took roughly three months to publish their results and presented them to the Prime Minister and the public in March 2010. The panel's report indeed, concluded that there existed three secret agreements between Japan and the United States, including one allowing the US to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan concluded when the bilateral security treaty was revised in 1960. Although the panel did not confirm that there existed secret agreements during the time of the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960 between Japan and the United States over bringing nuclear weapons to Japan by US forces, it mentions a so-called 'tacit agreement' which de-facto and reality tolerated port calls by US vessels carrying nuclear weapons over decades. The panel also concluded that the minutes of a meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and then US President Richard Nixon during negotiations on the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1969 revealed a US-Japan agreement secret to allow nuclear weapons into Okinawa Prefecture 'in times of emergency.'

In essence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs panel confirmed what had been known amongst Japanese policymakers for decades when the panel concluded that the possible entry of nuclear-armed warships and submarines entering Japanese ports without prior consultation was agreed in the early 1960s and again confirmed in a Japanese Foreign Ministry briefing document of January 1968. That document stated that 'there is no option but to continue in our present position of allowing nuclear-armed US warships to enter Japan.' Until Okinawa's return to Japan in 1972, the US had stationed both tactical and strategic weapons on the island, aimed primarily at China. During the negotiations over Okinawa, the minutes of a meeting in October 1969 show that the US opposed Tokyo's position of making Okinawa nuclear-free. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it became official US policy to stop loading tactical nuclear weapons onto its surface warships and submarines which led Japanese Foreign Minister Okada in March

to claim that this meant that nuclear weapons had not been brought into Japan for the past two decades. However, the US military continues to deploy strategic nuclear weapons, such as cruise missiles and long-range ballistic missiles, on its warships and submarines, possibly including to ports in Japan.

### 3.8 'Non-nuclear-principles' remain in place

The revision of Japan's 'Non-Nuclear Principles' is not on the policy agenda of Japan's current government. Instead, Japanese Prime Minister Kan announced in August 2010 that he plans to embed the country's non-nuclear principles into a legal framework, i.e. forbid Japan by law to introduce, stockpile or manufacture nuclear weapons in Japan. 'I would like to consider enshrining the principles into law', Kan said while visiting Nagasaki to attend the memorial service for the 65th anniversary of the US atomic bombing of the city during World War II. Whether embedding Japan's 'Non-Nuclear Principles' into a legal framework, however, will take place any time soon remains yet to be seen. It was announced and indeed promised by Japanese governments over decades and has yet to take place.

Japan's December 2010 defence guidelines do not alter Japan's decade-long position of not seeking to revise to develop and deploy nuclear weapons. In other words: The three 'Non-Nuclear Principles' will remain in place and the government did not follow the above mentioned advisory council's advice to consider the revision of at least one non-nuclear principle, i.e. allowing US warships to introduce nuclear weapons into Japan in the case of a military emergency. 'To address the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will play active role in international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts while however continuing to rely on the US 'nuclear umbrella', the December 2010 defence guidelines read. Such a statement reflects the 'longest-serving' contradiction of Japanese security policies whereby Japan allegedly promotes and advocates nuclear disarmament while at the same time relying on US nuclear deterrence capabilities.

Although Japan's December 2010 defence guidelines put an end to the official and on the record discussions of revising one or more of Japan's 'Non-Nuclear Principles', there nonetheless remains some on the record 'appetite' amongst the Japanese defence establishment (including scholars from the National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS), a think tank affiliated with Japan's Ministry of Defence) to more actively and openly discuss Japan's nuclear option in view of

concerns that US President Obama's plans to reduce the US nuclear arsenal could have negative implications for the protection of Japan by the US nuclear umbrella, not least because North Korea is very unlikely to join Obama's vision for a nuclear-free world.<sup>37</sup>

It was argued in interviews in 2010 with this author that an overall reduction of US nuclear weapons could have an impact on the US ability to continue 'covering' Japan with an umbrella which in turn would allegedly 'oblige' Japan to develop and deploy Japanese nuclear weapons on Japanese territory in view of the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program. Some scholars and policymakers interviewed by this author in 2010 maintained in this context that the Japanese public would be supportive of Japan equipping itself with nuclear weapons should North Korea continue to conduct nuclear tests. Such an assessment, however, is highly questionable (i.e. wrong) and was not at all confirmed by any of Japanese opinion polls conducted by Japan's major newspapers over recent years. In fact, it is accurate to conclude that the Japanese public in (very) large parts considers the country's nuclear armament as a taboo issue while at the same time considering the US nuclear umbrella to be sufficient in deterring other countries from attacking Japan, including North Korea.

Japan's public 'allergy' against a nuclear armament notwithstanding, there is a debate on nuclear armament amongst Japan's political and scholarly elites, but attempts by Japan's pro-nuclear policymakers and scholars to cite growing support amongst the Japanese public for nuclear armament to counterbalance the potential threat by North Korea's nuclear program are not credible and do not reflect the thinking of the Japanese public on nuclear armament.

### 3.9 Non-nuclear reality

Leaving aside that the US administration and US President Obama stressed repeatedly that the envisioned overall reduction of the US nuclear arsenal will not have an impact (at least not an immediate one) on the US ability and commitment to protect US allies with military means, including nuclear weapons, moderate and well-informed Japanese scholars like Yoshihide Soeya (and arguably many others too) dismisses discussions in Japan on a possible nuclear armament as 'irresponsible' and 'unrealistic.' During a lecture at Pavia University in Italy in July 2010, Professor Soeya maintained that the discussion on Japanese nuclear

<sup>37</sup> Author's conversations with Japanese scholars and officials.

armament is not only led by a minority of what he called 'misguided' scholars and policymakers, but is also a 'totally unrealistic option' for Japanese foreign and security policies. Developing and stationing nuclear weapons, Soeya maintains, would de-facto mean the end of the US-Japan security alliance, the very cornerstone of Japan's regional and global security and defence strategies and policies. This would in turn increase Japan's vulnerability to military threats in East Asia, including the one posed by North Korea. The view that developing and stationing nuclear weapons in Japan is without a doubt shared amongst the mainstream of Japanese scholars and policymakers.

Even if suggestions to equip Japan with nuclear weapons will most probably continue to make occasional headlines in the Japanese and international press suggesting that Japan is indeed actively considering the development and deployment of nuclear to counterbalance the perceived nuclear threat posed by North Korea. The US itself would be strongly opposed to Japan going nuclear as this would almost inevitably jeopardize any efforts and initiatives to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions and would possibly lead other powers in the region (such as South Korea (and possibly also Taiwan) to consider equipping themselves with nuclear weapons (in turn further increasing the existing so-called 'security dilemma' in East Asia). In sum, Japan will most probably in the years ahead continue to adhere to its three 'Non-Nuclear Principles' and strategic and cost-benefit considerations will make Tokyo stick to its policy, Japan's policy of relying on the US nuclear umbrella (Hughes, Llewellyn 2007)<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, Japan relies very heavily on importing civilian and nuclear fossil fuels and the strategy to develop and deploy nuclear bombs in Japan could lead exporters of civilian and nuclear fossils to reconsider the exposing of Japan to potentially extreme economic vulnerability.

Japan has without a doubt the technological capabilities to develop and eventually deploy nuclear weapons, but the costs associated with deploying nuclear weapons and warheads are extremely high: Japan would have to acquire delivery systems, submarines and command-to-command control systems. What's more, Japanese nuclear would be an insufficient substitute for the US nuclear umbrella for many years

<sup>38</sup> Which was confirmed in the December 2010 defence guidelines: 'To address the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will play active role in international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts' while however continuing to (voluntarily) rely on the US 'nuclear umbrella', the guidelines read.

ahead (Self, Thompson 2003). Furthermore, Japan arming itself with nuclear weapons would increase the perceived so-called 'security dilemma' in East Asia whereby a Japanese strategy to increase its deterrence capabilities would be interpreted as an offensive policy leading others in Asia (above all China and North Korea) to increase its military capabilities. However, discussions on Japan's 'nuclear option' or revising one or more of its 'Non-Nuclear Principles' will remain on the agenda should North Korea continue not to honour its 2007 commitment to dismantle its nuclear program or worse continue to weaponize plutonium turning it into weapons-grade plutonium needed for nuclear bombs (all of which is likely as Pyongyang from a North Korean perspective 'cannot afford' to give up its nuclear ambitions and programs, its only 'credible' bargaining tool', in absence of anything else). In November 2009, Pyongyang announced to have completed reprocessing 8.000 spent fuel rods, sufficient plutonium for possibly two nuclear bombs.

### 3.10 Tokyo's ban to export weapons and weapons technology

The above mentioned July 2010 advisory council draft report called for a relaxation of Japan's ban to export weapons and weapons technology. (Japan Times July 29, 2010). Dating back to the 1967s, Japan has a policy of not exporting weapons or weapons technology. This ban was placed on weapons exports to communist states, countries to which the United Nations bans such exports and parties to international conflicts. The report also calls for a review of the ban on exporting weapons to allow Japanese companies to take part in joint development and production of military equipment even with companies from nations other than the United States.

The self-imposed ban to export weapons meant a ban on arms exports and the development or production of weapons with countries other than the US, hurting the global competitiveness of defence contractors such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. Consequently, Nippon Keidanren, Japan's largest business association lobby for years has called for an easing of the restriction on arms exports, which in the past has kept Japan's defence industry from joining multinational projects such as the Lockheed Martin-led F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Under pressure from the country's defence industry and its lobbies, requests to allow the Japanese defence industry to sell its products outside of Japan are not new and have been repeatedly made since the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s.

In December 2004 e.g., Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and Kawasaki Heavy Industries were allowed to establish a business relationship with US defence contractors cooperating in the development and deployment of the above-mentioned US-Japan missile defence system. Before the ban was officially eased in 2004, Mitsubishi Heavy Ltd. and other Japanese defence contractors already cooperated in joint military projects with US defence contractors such as Raytheon, the world's largest missile maker, and Lockheed Martin Corp. (the biggest US defence contractor). The 2004 easing of the ban to export weapons and weapons technology meant that Mitsubishi Heavy Ltd. was allowed to sell and export components used for the US-Japan missile defence system to the US. Mitsubishi supplied US partner companies with motors, nose cones and other components for sea-based antimissile systems.

### 3.11 Weapons export ban remains in place

Japan's December 2010 defence guidelines, however, left the self-imposed ban to export weapons and weapons technology in place after it had been in the second half of 2010 widely anticipated that the government would (to be sure under pressure from Japan's defence industry) decide to officially abolish the ban to enable the domestic defence industry to join international weapons development projects. Until mid-December 2010, the Japanese government planned to in the future officially allow Japanese defence contractors to export weapons and weapons technology to be exclusively used in either UN peace-keeping and peace-enforcement missions or missions combating international terrorism. In the framework of such missions, Japanese defence contractors envisioned joint projects with counterparts in Australia, South Korea, the US and Europe.

However, shortly before the adoption of the defence guidelines in December 2010, Japanese Prime Minister Kan decided to no longer pursue the ban's abolition, due to domestic political considerations. The government's current (People's New Party PNP) and former (Social Democratic Party, SDP) coalition partners were categorically opposed to revising the weapons export ban and the ruling DPJ feared that both the PNP and SDP would not have supported the DPJ lawmaking initiatives in the Upper House, the second chamber of the Japanese parliament. Whereas the DPJ (by the time of this writing in December 2010) was equipped with nearly a two-third majority in the parliament's Lower House, it did not command the necessary majority in

the Upper House to adopt laws related to the fiscal 2011 year by the end of March 2011 without coalition partners and support from the SDP.<sup>39</sup> However, in December 2010 the government did not exclude the possibility of revisiting its decision to leave the ban in place in the future: *'Measures to follow the international trend of defence equipment will be studied'*, read the guidelines, what probably de-facto means that Tokyo reserves itself the right in the future to revisit its decision not to abolish the self-imposed ban to export weapons and weapons technology.<sup>40</sup>

Such an ambiguous approach does not serve Japan's national security interests and should be replaced by a politically more courageous and indeed realistic one.<sup>41</sup> 'If the government wants to open new possibilities for Japanese companies to participate in international joint ventures, we should not avoid a clear political decision to change the principles themselves, i.e. tackle the problem upfront. Just making another ambiguous exemption from the general rule might be easier for the government but is not good for the country in the long run. The December 2010 defence guidelines do not mention the relaxation of the weapons embargo, but still talk about exploring possibilities for more international joint ventures.

Japanese defence contractors have throughout the year 2010 repeatedly met with Japanese policymakers, including Japanese Defence Minister Kitazawa known for close ties to the defence industry and his 'advocacy' towards lifting Japan's ban to export weapons and weapons technology in order to seek to make sure that the abolition of the weapons export ban would be part of the December defence guidelines.<sup>42</sup> In 2001, Japan's defence industry will, without a doubt, continue to seek to exert pressure on the government to eventually abolish the ban and will continue to request to be allowed to collaborate with US defence contractors in the context of the development of the envisioned

<sup>39</sup> Back then, such support was vital to guarantee the DPJ a relatively problem-free adoption of the budget and there was wide agreement amongst analysts and commentators that both the PNP and SDP would have refused to provide the DPJ with the necessary votes in the Upper House, had the government decided to review the ban to export weapons and weapons technology.

<sup>40</sup> Something which several well-informed Japanese analysts and scholars confirmed this author in conversations in December 2010 and January 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interview in February 2011.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. the English text of a press conference held by Japanese Defence Minister Kitazawa on December 17, 2010 <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/pressconf/2010/12/101217.html>

US-Japan missile defence system. Such collaboration will continue to take place and it is indeed likely that such cooperation in (partial) defiance of the weapons export ban will be extended to defence contractors from other countries in the future.

## 4. Japan and the 6-Party Talks

North Korea launched a long-range missile (capable of reaching Guam and Alaska, at least in theory) on April 5, 2009 (BBC World Service April 2009). While Pyongyang back then 'celebrated' it as a successful launch of a communications satellite into orbit, analysts widely agreed that the launch was actually a failure with parts of the missile (or satellite as Pyongyang claims) falling into the Sea of Japan shortly after its take-off. Indeed, in many ways, the April 2009 launch rather demonstrated the technical shortcomings of North Korea's missile programs and technologies as opposed to demonstrating North Korea's ability to pose a tangible threat to regional and Japanese national security. Nonetheless, in Tokyo's view North Korea's short-range Nodong missiles pose a credible threat to Japanese territory and there is agreement amongst Japanese and non-Japanese scholars that Japan's ability to actually shoot an incoming Nodong missile cannot be taken for granted, i.e. there is as mentioned above no guarantee that Tokyo's existing missile interceptor systems (either land-based or mobile, stationed on AEGIS destroyers) will be able to shoot down a Nodong missile before it hits Japanese soil.<sup>43</sup>

In defiance of UN Security Council sanctions shortly imposed after North Korea's April 2009 missile tests requiring UN Member states to freeze assets of three North Korean companies (The Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (Komid), The Korea Ryonbong General Corporation, and Tanchon Commercial Bank which are believed to have been active in procuring equipment and funds for North Korea's ballistic missile and weapons programs), Pyongyang threatened to resume nuclear testing. Which it did at the end of May of that year: On May 25, 2009, Pyongyang conducted an underground nuclear test. This was North Korea's second nuclear test after the first test in October 2006. Almost immediately after the test, the UN condemned it and began working on

<sup>43</sup> North Korea has in recent years successfully tested its Nodong missiles and although there remain doubts among the missile's accuracy and reliability, the improved Nodong missiles pose a military threat to Japan and after the recent missile tests are increasingly perceived as such in Japan.

a resolution while Pyongyang a day later on May 26, 2009 test-fired another two short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan putting Japan's armed forces on high alert. In June 2009, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1874 toughening the UN sanctions regime, amongst others calling for UN member states to inspect North Korean ships suspected of transporting nuclear materials and other prohibited items to and from North Korea. Tokyo's reaction in turn to North Korea's nuclear test included prohibiting all Japanese exports to North Korea.

Already on April 5, 2009, Pyongyang announced to pull out of the 6-Party Talks<sup>44</sup> following a unanimous UN vote condemning North Korea's April 2009 missile launches (Landler, Saltmarsh 2009). 'There is no need for the 6-Party Talks anymore. We will never again take part in such talks and will not be bound by any agreements reached at the talks', North Korea's foreign ministry announced on April 14, 2009. On April 14, 2009 Pyongyang announced to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and ordered all IAEA inspectors to leave the country. Ten days later (on April 25) Pyongyang claimed to have resumed reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods to extract weapons-grade highly enriched plutonium, breaking the February 2007 agreement on the production of such material.<sup>45</sup> Whether Pyongyang has actually resumed processing spent nuclear fuel rods as international inspectors in the course of that year suspected, cannot be confirmed by absolute certainty. (Financial Times April 26, 2009).

### 4.1 Passing the buck to Japan

Japan, as far the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) (whose server is ironically based in Tokyo and run by ethnic Koreans residents in Japan) claimed, is 'entirely responsible' for the fact that Pyongyang was 'obliged' to end its participation in the 6-Party Talks (Korean Central News Agency April, 2009). 'Whenever the talks opened, Japan raised issues completely

<sup>44</sup> A multilateral forum established in 2003 and hosted by Beijing; the 6-Party Talks (US, Japan, South Korea, China, Russia and North Korea) are aimed to negotiate and oversee North Korea's verifiable and sustainable denuclearization.

<sup>45</sup> North Korea agreed for the first time in 2005 to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and return to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to UN safeguards. It again confirmed these commitments in February 2007 in the framework of the 6-Party Talks and last year it seemed that Pyongyang was willing to begin living up to that commitment promise when it began partially dismantling the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon. It is estimated that Pyongyang has in the past extracted enough plutonium for up to eight nuclear bombs.

irrelevant (Pyongyang hereby refers to the so-called 'abduction issue' - for details see below) to the talks, deliberately throwing obstacles in their way and making desperate efforts to bring the talks to collapse', Pyongyang declared back then.

To be sure, that was not the first time that Pyongyang accused Tokyo of 'sabotaging' the 6-Party Talks. Two days before the start of a 6-Party Talks session scheduled for December 8, 2008 e.g., North Korea issued a statement saying that it would not accept Japan as a participant of the multilateral talks in protest of Tokyo's refusal to provide North Korea with energy aid as agreed in an agreement reached in February 2007 in the framework of the 6-Party Talks (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008). Under that agreement North Korea was to receive one million tons of heavy fuel oil or the equivalent in energy aid from the other five participants in exchange for disabling its plutonium-producing facilities at Yongbyon and verifiably revealing the full extent of its weapons program.

While until December 2008 roughly half of the promised energy aid had been delivered mostly by Russia, China and South Korea, the Japanese government withheld the Japanese share of energy arguing that Pyongyang had not lived up to its July 2008 promise to provide Tokyo with further information on the fate of the kidnapped Japanese in North Korea. Pyongyang failed to meet the December 2007 deadline to submit the so-called 'nuclear declaration' and only submitted it with a 6-month delay on May 29, 2008. That list, however, was considered to be incomplete not providing nearly enough detailed information on North Korea's nuclear program and activities. Consequently, the first version of that list was rejected as sufficient and transparent account of North Korea's nuclear program and facilities and it was requested that Pyongyang provided the US, Japan, South Korea, China and Russia the numerous blanks of that list in order for humanitarian, energy and economic aid to be activated. The list handed to Washington consisted of roughly 19.000 pages of operating records of the nuclear facility in Yongbyon and its weapons grade plutonium program there. Absent on this list, however, was an account on the number of nuclear weapons North Korea might already have manufactured. Furthermore, the US and Japan (and admittedly others too) had doubts about the amount of plutonium North Korea claimed to have produced. While Pyongyang declared to have processed 37 kilos, Washington estimated that the country had already produced close to 60 kilos. There was also concern whether Pyongyang provided an accurate description of its highly enriched

uranium program and whether the country had been accurate and transparent about the proliferation of nuclear materials and technology in the past. (Bader, Thornton, Bush 2008).

While Washington (and admittedly others too) suspected that Pyongyang had in the past sold nuclear materials and technology to Syria, Pyongyang strongly denied this. Six weeks later, Pyongyang submitted a revised and second nuclear list, then considered to be good and detailed enough, to lead Washington to announce within a few days to take North Korea off the US State Department's list of states sponsoring terrorism and terminate the application of the so-called Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA), in the case of North Korea in effect since 1950.

#### 4.2 Japan spoiling it?

When the 6-Party Talks were started in Beijing in 2003, Japan emphasized continuously that the missile and nuclear issues must be solved together with the 'abduction issue' before being able to envision progress of Japan-North Korean relations and provide Pyongyang with economic and financial aid (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs September 2003). Pyongyang on the other hand requested numerous times between 2003 and 2009 that Tokyo should not even be 'allowed' to participate in the talks as long as it insisted to put the 'abduction issue' onto the agenda of the talks (Korean Central News Agency December 1, 2003). China and South Korea were not as 'outspoken' as Pyongyang about Tokyo's firmness to put the 'abduction issue' onto the agenda of the 6-Party Talks, but made it clear on various occasions over the years that they feared that Tokyo's 'fixation' with the 'abduction issue' could set the 6-Party Talks at risk and give Pyongyang an 'easy' excuse to interrupt them (Hagström 2008).

This and Japan's refusal to provide North Korea with the above mentioned energy and economic negotiated in the February 2007 agreement led scholar Maaïke Okano-Heijmans and others<sup>46</sup> critical of Tokyo's policies towards North Korea refer to Japan as the 'spoiler' of the 6-Party Talks, arguing that Tokyo in the past was deliberately obstructing and indeed 'sabotaging' the 6-Party Talks with its insistence to make progress on the 'abduction issue' in the framework of the 6-Party Talks. Japan, she argues, did e.g. not honour its commitment to provide North Korea with energy and humanitarian

<sup>46</sup> The Australian scholar Gavan McCormack e.g.

aid as agreed in the February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement.' However, Okano-Heijmans fails to mention that North Korea submitted the nuclear declaration with a six months delay and that this list was immediately dismissed as an insufficient and incomplete account of the country's nuclear activities and facilities.

It would have been politically very difficult or indeed impossible for the Japanese government to decide to provide Pyongyang with humanitarian and food aid before Tokyo (and Washington) had considered the information on North Korea's nuclear declaration sufficiently accurate and accountable. When Pyongyang submitted the revised version of the nuclear declaration, the US, China, Russia and South Korea began preparing to provide North Korea with the promised energy aid (agreement agreed in February 2007). Japan, however, did not participate in the multilateral efforts to provide North Korea with the promised energy and economic aid, again citing the absence of progress as regards the 'abduction issue.'

Whether or not Japanese energy and economic aid in the framework of the 'Nuclear Agreement' would have kept North Korea from conducting missile and nuclear tests in 2009 of course cannot be verified. But in view of the amount of aid and funds Tokyo was prepared to provide North Korea with in the past, it cannot be excluded that a Japanese decision not to block the provision of energy aid to Pyongyang in 2008 could have had a positive impact on North Korea's security policy behaviour, i.e. could have contributed to convince North Korea to forego the missile and nuclear tests in 2009 (in 2002 e.g. Tokyo offered to provide North Korea with aid worth roughly 20% of North Korea's GDP, for details see below). Tokyo, however, chose not to use economic and financial incentives as a diplomatic tool, but instead insisted that the resolution of the 'abduction issue' was the precondition for the provision of Japanese aid and funds for North Korea.

### 4.3 Lack of Japanese economic diplomacy

Japanese aid - or the prospect of it - was also in South Korea considered to be a crucial diplomatic tool and instrument creating sustainable and lasting incentives for North Korea to denuclearize. In 2008 (when South Korea's current president Lee Myung Bak took office) Seoul officially ended its so-called 'sunshine policy' towards North Korea, i.e. the policy of providing the North with economic, financial and humanitarian aid regardless of Pyongyang's missile and nuclear testing. Seoul nonetheless continues to hope that Japanese

economic and financial aid will eventually be instrumental and central to supporting the recovery of North Korea's economy should Pyongyang decide to resume the dismantlement of its nuclear program and facilities.

Back in 2008, the South Korean administration led by President Lee Myung Bak hoped shortly after taking office in February 2008 that Japan would in the years ahead provide North Korea with up to US \$10 billion in economic and financial aid.<sup>47</sup> (North Korea interestingly did the same thing: Maintaining in the past that it would ultimately need additional Japanese and South Korean funds to disable and dismantle its nuclear program (Ashizawa 2006). US \$10 billion was according to South Korean calculations 25% of the amount needed to raise North Korea's annual GDP per capita to US \$3.000. Japan's initially ambitious and potentially far-reaching economic engagement policies towards North Korea envisioned in the early 2000s were equal (at least in terms of possible funds foreseen for the support of North Korea's ailing economy, for details see below), however, are all but indefinitely suspended and a resolution of - or at least progress on - the above mentioned 'abduction issue' will continue to be the very precondition for Tokyo to consider resuming any food and humanitarian aid policies towards North Korea.

### 4.4 Tokyo's OK with the Status Quo?

In retrospect, Japan's role in and impact on the 6-Party Talks were always very limited, regardless of Tokyo's insistence to put the 'abduction issue' onto the agenda of the multilateral talks. As regards initiatives to resume the multilateral talks after its regular interruptions (caused by North Korean missile and nuclear tests) Tokyo has in recent years deliberately taken a back seat knowing that its (positive) influence on North Korea convincing it to return to the 6-Party Talks has always been very limited, i.e. eventually virtually non-existent.

While North Korea in Tokyo is considered to be an imminent and concrete military threat to Japanese security, Tokyo is de-facto leaving it up to others (China and the US) to seek to 'defuse' that threat focusing on efforts to equip itself with the instruments and military capabilities to counter the perceived military threat from North Korea in case it becomes even more imminent and concrete (as it would be the case should Pyongyang continue to develop nuclear weapons).

<sup>47</sup> A very significant amount of money taken into account that according to the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) World Factbook North Korea's overall GDP in 2008 amounted to US \$ 40 billion.



Such a contradiction (or 'strategy' if one chooses to attribute a more positive-sounding characterization of what Japan is currently doing with regards to the nuclear crisis) does not serve Japan's national security interests and has de-facto made Tokyo a 'bystander' in the context of the 6-Party Talks over the last two years.

While a resolution of the 'abduction issue' is looking like a 'lost cause' for Japan, i.e. an issue which will continue not be addressed and dealt with in Pyongyang, Tokyo's defence establishment and parts of the foreign and security policymakers have seemingly yet to fully understand that a fairly narrow-minded focus on the 'abduction issue' has run opposite to Japan's national security interests. Okano-Heijmans argues (admittedly in a paper before Pyongyang's second nuclear test) that Tokyo is satisfied with the current status quo as it enables it to justify changes and upgrades on its security policy agenda. As has been elaborated above, there is indeed no doubt that Tokyo has been (and still is) using the perceived threat from North Korea to justify and explain changes of its military and security posture. However, after North Korea's second nuclear test in May 2009, it is probably not accurate (or indeed speculation feeding the argument that North Korea and a perceived threat from it is being exploited to justify any and every change on or upgrade of Japan's defence profile) to claim that Japan's policymakers and the defence establishment are content with the current status quo of North Korea possibly resuming the development of its nuclear program.

Recently (end of January 2011), South Korea proposed to resume military talks with Pyongyang as early as February 2011 after North Korea earlier agreed in principle to participate in such talks in a joint attempt to ease military tensions.

Furthermore, there are (also at the beginning of 2011) some indications that the stalled 6-Party Talks could be resumed in the first half of 2011 although it remains yet to be seen whether Pyongyang agrees to resume the talks after it has clearly demonstrated its willingness (as agreed in 2005 in the framework of the 'Nuclear Agreement') to disable and dismantle its nuclear facilities. In view of the above mentioned November 2010 revelations about a very new and modern North Korean uranium enrichment facility, this can certainly not be taken for granted. In fact, the past in general and North Korea's missile and nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 have demonstrated that North Korea's 'on paper' willingness to give up its nuclear ambitions does not get reflected in the reality of Pyongyang's security and military policy behaviour, i.e. missile and nuclear tests

take place regardless of agreements brokered in the framework of the 6-Party Talks. Its missile and nuclear programs will (in the absence of anything to 'offer' in the framework of bilateral or multilateral negotiations) continue to be Pyongyang's only 'bargaining tools' and it remains yet to be seen whether Pyongyang will be willing to give those 'tools' up in favour of economic and energy aid.

#### 4.5 Wary of China

When assessing the Japanese role or 'non-role' in the framework of the 6-Party Talks it should not go unmentioned that Japan's very limited 'enthusiasm' to play a more active and potentially more constructive role in the 6-Party Talks is influenced by at least two additional factors:

Firstly, Tokyo is well aware that North Korean willingness to make concessions and resume the dismantlement of its nuclear program and facilities will eventually depend on the outcome of US-North Korean (currently stalled) bilateral negotiations. That meant (and will most probably continue to mean should the 6-Party Talks resume later in 2011) that Tokyo chose to focus on bilateral issues such as the 'abduction issue' knowing that investing many resources and much energy into seeking to convince North Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions in the framework of the 6-Party Talks would most probably have led to the same results had Tokyo invested very little resources and energy.

Secondly, the fact that China - Japan's foremost geo-strategic rival - is exerting a leadership role in the framework of the 6-Party Talks is probably another reason why Tokyo's level of 'activism' in the framework of the 6-Party Talks is and will continue to be limited. To be sure, Beijing itself has exploited its role in and impact on the 6-Party Talks as alleged 'proof' that China is a responsible power and stakeholder, an assessment which is not necessarily shared by Japan's defence establishment.

While China's engagement in the framework of the 6-Party Talks is officially being acknowledged as positive and constructive promoting a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, the Chinese role and engagement in the 6-Party Talks in Tokyo is being observed with scepticism and suspicion. Not least, it is above all China's economic and financial support for North Korea of recent years which has kept the North Korean economy and regime from collapsing. There is a near-consensus amongst policymakers and analysts that Beijing is

not and cannot be interested in nuclear-armed North Korea either (not least because of Chinese fears that Tokyo - and even worse from a Chinese perspective - Taiwan could decide to go nuclear too). However, there is also a near-consensus amongst analysts that China is supporting the North Korean regime keeping it economically afloat to prevent that its collapse could trigger a Germany-style reunification resulting in the Korean Peninsula turning into a US ally possibly armed with nuclear weapons (indeed, one of the 'worst-case scenarios' for Chinese policymakers and scholars). From a Japanese (realistic) perspective, the survival of the North Korean regime is essential for China to control and limit US and US-Japan influence in the region.

As sad and appalling the abduction of Japanese citizens to North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s was, the issue should - from a Japanese national and regional security perspective - not have limited and - as it eventually did - eliminated Japanese influence on North Korea's denuclearization process in the framework of the 6-Party Talks. The longer Tokyo's policymakers insisted on solving the 'abduction issue', the less North Korea considered Tokyo to be a relevant actor and contributor to the 6-Party Talks. Should the 6-Party Talks resume this year (for which there are no indications, especially after North Korea's sinking of a South Korean warship) this is very unlikely to change: Japan will remain a marginal, at best, and irrelevant participant of the 6-Party Talks as far as Pyongyang is concerned. Unless Tokyo decides to take the 'abduction issue' off the agenda of the 6-Party Talks and/or offer economic and financial aid without insisting on progress in the 'abduction issue' (both of which Tokyo will not do), Japan will continue to be a very marginal actor - or indeed from a North Korean perspective a 'nuisance' around the 6-Party Talks negotiation table in Beijing.

## 5. US-Japan friction over North Korea

In the past, North Korea has been partially successful in seeking to drive a wedge between the US and Japan and respective approaches towards North Korea. After North Korea's 1998 Taepodong-1 test (when the missile flew over Japanese territory, the de-facto starting point of US-Japanese efforts to jointly develop a missile defence system) e.g. Tokyo reacted to the missile test by threatening to withhold its fund for the Korea

Energy Development Organization (KEDO).<sup>48</sup> The US on the other hand was not as alarmed as Tokyo about the missile test and did not want to see the missile test derail the KEDO process and the 1994 so-called 'Agreed Framework' between the US and North Korea.

Japanese security concerns posed by North Korea's Taepodong missile were not completely shared in Washington, and Tokyo was essentially (under US pressure) obliged to continue supporting and more importantly co-financing the KEDO process. In October 2006 after North Korea's first nuclear test, US policies and approaches again diverged from respective Japanese ones. To be sure not least because of the US focus on its war against terrorism and its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington did not take Pyongyang's nuclear test as seriously as Tokyo did back then. Tokyo and Washington jointly supported the UN resolutions 1695 and 1718 but Washington refused to back a Japanese plan to implement a US-led economic blockade towards North Korea (going far beyond the limited economic sanctions formulated in the UN resolutions 1695 and 1718). After the February 2007 so-called 'Nuclear Agreement' in which Pyongyang committed itself for the first time officially to dismantle its nuclear facilities, Washington became even less enthusiastic about supporting Japanese hard-line policies towards North Korea, in particular Japanese insistence to put the 'abduction issue' towards the top of 6-Party Talks agenda. Tokyo feared that it might have been forced to enter a process of normalizing relations with North Korea without having achieved tangible progress on the 'abduction issue'. This fear was (at least temporarily) confirmed when Washington took North Korea off its so-called 'terrorism list' in 2008 without having consulted with Tokyo.

Over recent years and towards the end of the George W. Bush presidency Tokyo in particular was repeatedly worried that the US might be more concerned about overall regional stability and nuclear non-proliferation and willing to accept a nuclear-armed North Korea if it committed itself to not selling nuclear technologies and materials to others (Hughes, Krauss 2007). Ultimately, these fears, however, turned out to be baseless as there were (and still are) no indications that Washington was ever willing to accept a nuclear-armed North Korea at the expense of Japanese and indeed regional security. Nonetheless, it must be concluded

<sup>48</sup> KEDO was to provide North Korea with two light-water reactors as an alternative to nuclear energy. Additionally KEDO agreed to provide North Korea with regular heavy fuel oil shipments. The light-water reactors, however, were never built and the heavy fuel oil was delivered with long delays or not all.

that Washington was indeed towards the very end of George W. Bush's second presidential term prepared to no longer support Japanese insistence in achieving progress on the 'abduction issue' at the expense of jeopardizing possible progress in multilateral efforts to denuclearize North Korea.

Japan's (eventually unsuccessful) efforts to re-activate bilateral Japanese-North Korean negotiations initiated by former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in 2007 were not least motivated fears in Tokyo that Washington would (as it in fact did) not insist on a resolution of the 'abduction issue' in order to make progress in the framework of the 6-Party talks. In other words: The Fukuda government decided to seek to re-activate bilateral negotiations fearing that Washington would reduce its support for Japan's efforts to put the abduction close to the top of the 6-Party Talks agenda. Given the recent 'joint' US-Japanese experience with North Korean refusal to honour its commitment of the February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement', however, US-Japanese friction or disagreements as regards respective policies towards North Korea have become very unlikely. In other words: Not only Tokyo but also Washington under US President Obama will continue to wait for Pyongyang to resume disabling and dismantling its nuclear program before offering Pyongyang any economic, political or financial incentives.

### 5.1 North Korea and the US 'terror list'

Pyongyang's harbouring of Japanese Red Army terrorists - who face charges in Japan of having hijacked a Japanese airliner plane in 1970 - was the reason why the US included North Korea in its State Department list of countries sponsoring terrorism, available on the website of the US State Department. The list is significant as it prohibits by law North Korea from receiving many forms of US economic assistance and some trading rights. In 2007 and 2008 North Korea has made the removal from that list a pre-condition for progress on the nuclear issue, i.e. Pyongyang agreeing to stop its clandestine nuclear program.

In 2007 and 2008, Washington and the US State Department then led by Condoleezza Rice urged Tokyo several times not to insist on the resolution of the 'abduction issue' in order not to jeopardize progress in implementing the 'Nuclear Agreement' with North Korea. Washington - as it turned out correctly - was concerned back then that Pyongyang would use Tokyo's insistence to address the 'abduction issue' in the framework of the 6-Party Talks as justification to refuse

making progress with regards to the dismantlement of its nuclear program and facilities. Consequently, during former Japanese Prime Minister Abe's visit to the White House in May 2007, former US Secretary of State Rice told Abe that the US administration had no legal obligation to link the kidnapping and terrorism list issues. This was widely (and appropriately) understood as indication that Washington was no longer willing to give North Korea a justification (or excuse) to jeopardize progress of the 6-Party Talks as Pyongyang has repeatedly argued that Japan's attempt to put the 'abduction issue' onto the agenda of the 6-Party Talks would amount to deliberately 'sabotaging' the talks. While Washington was preparing North Korea's delisting in mid-2008, Washington - amongst others through President Bush and his Secretary of State Rice - sought to reassure Tokyo on US support on the 'abduction issue' announcing to continue keeping up the pressure on Pyongyang with regards to the 'abduction issue' (through amongst others threatening to impose additional economic sanctions should Pyongyang continue to not address Tokyo's requests to re-address and indeed re-investigate the fate of Japanese abductees in North Korea in a serious manner).

However, North Korea's delisting in October of the same year made clear that Washington was not prepared to follow-up its on paper and verbal pressure with 'real' economic and political pressure through sanctions choosing the prospects of possible progress on North Korea's denuclearization over Tokyo's strong requests not to 'abandon' it on the 'abduction issue'. Worse from a Japanese perspective, the delisting took place when it was very obvious that Pyongyang was not serious about re-investigating the 'abduction issue' (as it has promised in June 2008 of the same year, temporarily and in August 2008 opening the prospects of re-opening bilateral Japanese-North Korean negotiations). What's more, when then Prime Minister Taro Aso (who more than once made a name for himself as one of Japan's most outspoken and uncompromising North Korea critics) took office in October 2008, Pyongyang announced to terminate the re-investigating of the 'abduction issue' citing Tokyo's hostile policies towards North Korea under Prime Minister Aso's leadership. Although Tokyo worked hard to convince the US not to do so, on October 11, 2008, Washington took North Korea off its list of terrorism-sponsoring states in return for Pyongyang's promise to resume disabling its nuclear facilities and allowing international monitors access to its nuclear sites.

Very shortly before the official announcement of the de-listing on October 11, (in fact, reportedly only 30 minutes before it) Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso received a phone call from US President George W. Bush. The 10-minute telephone conversation between Bush and Aso was reportedly set up at very short notice by the US ambassador Thomas Schieffer, who unlike the US president in Washington thought, it was appropriate to inform Tokyo on such radical change on the Washington's North Korea policy agenda in advance. Then Prime Minister Aso tried to sound unconcerned when speaking to the press commenting on the fact that North Korea would be taken off the 'terror list'. 'Taking North Korea off the US terror list', he said back then, 'does not prevent Japan from seeking to solve the so-called 'abduction issue'. We will be able to hold sufficient discussions on the abductions in the process of negotiations to come. The delisting does not mean a loss of leverage, Aso was quoted as saying to the Japanese press the day after the delisting.

LDP politician Shoichi Nakagawa (who became finance minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Taro Aso and was forced to resign over attending a G-8 press conference in Rome in drunk state a few months after taking office) accused US North Korea chief negotiator Christopher Hill of suffering from the so-called 'Stockholm syndrome', i.e. sympathizing too much with North Korea unable to see what Tokyo typically refers to as Pyongyang's 'evilness', when Hill throughout 2008 indicated (later promised) that North Korea would be taken off the US State Department list of states sponsoring terrorism. The delisting back then represented the de-facto end of joint US-Japanese policies towards Pyongyang, at least until Pyongyang resumed its missile and nuclear testing in 2009.

'Taro Aso has put a brave face on the latest US-North Korea deal and will have to acquiesce to a large degree, but clearly he does not like the sense that Japan has been abandoned on the 'abduction issue' and even potentially worse, on the 'nuclear issue', Christopher W. Hughes, professor of International Politics and Japanese Studies at the University of Warwick told this author.<sup>49</sup>

Naturally, taking North Korea off that list took Tokyo by (unpleasant) surprise which until then believed that keeping Pyongyang on that list was a joint US-Japanese

policy approach towards North Korea.<sup>50</sup> What's more, the US decision to take North Korea off the US State Department's list of states sponsoring terrorism rendered obsolete earlier US and US State Department policies and approaches towards the 'abduction issue'. In 2000 and again in 2003, the US State Department directly linked a possible removal of North Korea from its list of states sponsoring terrorism to progress on the 'abduction issue'(Green, Prystup 2007, Niksch, Pearl 2008).

In retrospect, Washington's taking North Korea off its terrorism list must be interpreted as US 'fatigue' to address and support Tokyo's insistence to deal with an issue of the past at the expense of making progress on North Korea's denuclearization. Washington meeting Pyongyang's request to be taken off the US 'terror list' had to be understood as Washington's determination not to give Pyongyang any additional 'excuse' to further delay its denuclearization and the dismantlement of its nuclear facilities. That this undermined a then joint US-Japanese approach towards North Korea was seemingly secondary to the outgoing US administration in October 2008. It was obvious back then that outgoing US President Bush wanted (at least on paper) progress towards a possible resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue before leaving office, before the US presidential elections in November, and as it turned out (temporarily) damaging relations with Japan was a price Bush was willing to pay at the time. Until Washington took North Korea off its terrorism list, there was wide agreement amongst scholars that Japan's hard-line policies towards North Korea were an 'add-on' of US policies towards Pyongyang, i.e. a belief that Washington's and Tokyo's hard-line policies and policy approaches towards North Korea would continue to be jointly voiced and advanced in the framework of the 6-Party Talks (Kang 2005).

When over the years (and until North Korea's delisting) supporting Japan's hard-line position on the 'abduction issue' Washington was well aware that doing so could or indeed would be helpful in requesting Tokyo to provide Pyongyang with large-scale economic and

<sup>50</sup> This was not the first time that the US undertook an important North Korea policy initiative without consulting with Japan. When Washington entered into the so-called 'Agreed Framework' (AF) agreement with North Korea in 1994, Japan had been consulted very late and in a limited fashion. The AF was - in return for North Korea - freezing its nuclear program to provide North Korea with two proliferation-proof light-water nuclear reactors. The reactors were never built, but Japan (like South Korea) contributed roughly US \$1 billion to the project (through the Korean Energy Development Organization, KEDO) from 1995 to the definite suspension of the project in 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Author's interview with Christopher W. Hughes in October 2008.

financial aid after a possible resolution of both the nuclear and 'abduction issues'. As far as the US was (and still is) concerned, Japan and South Korea and not Washington would have shouldered the main burden<sup>51</sup> of providing Pyongyang with economic and financial aid after the dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program and facilities.

## 6. Back to the past:

### The 2002 Japan-North Korea summit and the 'Pyongyang Declaration'

The 2002 Japan-North Korea summit was not least a result of Japanese fears that the US under George W. Bush (who labelled North Korea as part of the so-called 'axis of evil' in 2002) would pre-emptively attack North Korea involving Japan in a military conflict with North Korea. Hence, the successful (at least initially) Japan-North Korea summit must also be understood as Tokyo's initiative to avoid military conflict with North Korea at a time when Washington was indeed seriously considering to attack North Korean nuclear facilities. Tokyo's willingness and initiative to travel to Pyongyang for a bilateral summit was indeed remarkable given the Koizumi cabinet's composition of politicians characterized by outspoken and straightforward (albeit often irrational and overly emotional) hard-line positions towards North Korea (as it was the e.g. case for Koizumi's Chief Cabinet Secretary and later Prime Minister Shinzo Abe). Koizumi himself too until the Japan-North Korea summit was not known for his engagement approach towards North Korea, and his determination to expand security and military cooperation with the US throughout his entire tenure as Prime Minister was above all motivated by a perceived threat from North Korea. Indeed, a number of reasons led Tokyo to conduct an engagement policy toward Pyongyang around 2000. Even though that attempt to engage North Korea economically and politically was met with resistance and harsh criticism amongst Japan's North Korea hardliners inside and outside the then ruling LDP, this policy was deemed necessary at the time, because of the launching of a long-range Taepodong Missile over Japanese territory in August 1998, the new revelations

<sup>51</sup> As it was the case of the financing of the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to which US financial contributions have always been very little compared to Japanese and South Korea contributions in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

about the abductions of Japanese citizens, frequent incursions of North Korean spy ships into Japanese territorial waters and suspected smuggling of North Korean drugs and counterfeit currency into Japan.

The result of this Japanese re-activated engagement course was the Japan-North Korea Summit in September 2002. On September 17, 2002 Japan's former Prime Minister Koizumi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il held a one-day summit in Pyongyang that temporarily restarted Japanese-North Korean normalization talks which until then had been suspended since 2000. The summit resulted in Japanese former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and North Korea's leader Kim signing the so-called 'Pyongyang Declaration'<sup>52</sup>. In the declaration North Korea pledged to unilaterally extend the country's moratorium on missile testing beyond 2003 (when it expired), admitted that North Korean secret service agents had abducted 13 Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s (of which 8 had died, as Pyongyang claims until the present day) and issued a vague promise to start complying with international agreements related to nuclear issues. In return, Prime Minister Koizumi officially and publicly apologized for Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945 and offered to provide North Korea with a large-scale economic aid package (for details see below).

The Japan-North Korea normalization talks (first initiated in 1991) however, broke down again very soon after the summit when in October 2002 US reconnaissance satellites detected what was believed a clandestine North Korean nuclear program in October 2002, violating the so-called 'Agreed Framework'.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, North Korea's admission that its secret service agents had indeed kidnapped a number of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s led to a popular outrage in Japan putting additional pressure on the Prime Minister and his policymakers to suspend normalization talks with North Korea. At the end of October 2002 Japan and the DPRK nonetheless held normalization talks in Kuala Lumpur, where Tokyo

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (MOFA), [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html)

<sup>53</sup> The US presented North Korea with alleged 'evidence' accusing Pyongyang of having resumed its nuclear program using highly-enriched uranium (HEU), in addition to the program using and processing plutonium which had been terminated since the so-called bilateral US-North Korean 'Agreed Framework', a bilateral agreement committing the US to provide North Korea with energy assistance in return for North Korea to stop all nuclear activities, came into effect.

requested Pyongyang to allow the children of the five Japanese abductees, who had returned to Japan in October 2002, to return to Japan as well, halt its nuclear weapons program and dismantle North Korea's medium-range Nodong missiles. Pyongyang for its part agreed to none of that and instead accused Tokyo of violating the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration not providing Pyongyang with the promised economic and financial aid.

In Japan, the Pyongyang Declaration has been criticized for not mentioning nuclear proliferation and the 'abduction issue'. Through the Pyongyang Declaration Japan committed itself to uphold the moratorium on North Korean missile testing. When North Korea conducted a missile test in 2006, it breached that agreement leading Tokyo to impose economic sanctions. Japan's humanitarian and food aid to North Korea has in the past been channelled through the UN World Food Program. Tokyo has linked food shipments to progress in Japan-North Korea relations meaning that Japanese humanitarian and food aid for North Korea had been very sporadic (and in the end non-existent) in recent years. In fact, given the small amounts of Japanese humanitarian and food aid, there was realistically very little (if any) reason to be concerned that Pyongyang could use Japanese funds and aids for its missile or nuclear programs. Japan (and the US) has more than once in the recent past provided North Korea with humanitarian and food aid without preconditions or progress on the nuclear issue. When dealing with North Korea (and other countries 'of concern') the EU e.g. separates between humanitarian on the one and political and security issues on the other hand. That meant in the past that the EU (unlike Japan and the US) continued to provide North Korea with humanitarian and food aid despite the unresolved nuclear weapons program issue (Berkofsky 2009). In the framework of the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, Tokyo offered Pyongyang a large-scale economic aid package in return for progress in North Korea's denuclearization process and the 'abduction issue'. Through this Japanese aid package Pyongyang de-facto agreed to renounce its claims for reparations for Japan's occupation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Pyongyang accepted Tokyo's request to refer to the aid package as 'economic cooperation' (as opposed to 'reparations').

After the (back then envisioned) establishment of Japanese-North Korean diplomatic relations with North Korea, Tokyo was considering an economic aid package for North Korea in the range of US \$5 to \$10

billion, which in proportion would have corresponded to what Japan had offered South Korea after bilateral diplomatic relations in 1965. Japan's comprehensive assistance package would have consisted of grants, low-interest long-term loans, humanitarian assistance, and the financing of credits for private firms provided by amongst others the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.<sup>54</sup> The amount of funds considered would have been a very significant amount of money, given that, the entire North Korean economy was estimated to be worth US \$20 billions in 2003 (Manyin 2003). Washington back then was concerned that the Japanese financial assistance could directly or indirectly finance the modernization of North Korea's armed forces. (Noland, Haggard 2007) Pyongyang initially accepted Japan's offer which was remarkable in the sense that Pyongyang had previously insisted that any Japanese economic assistance had to be labelled 'reparations' or 'compensation'.

## 7. Japanese sanctions

No other country has (since 2006) a tougher sanctions system imposed on North Korea than Japan (Hughes 2006). The current Japanese economic sanctions imposed on North Korea were adopted in 2006, when North Korea conducted a long-range missile test in July of that year. The sanctions included the banning of all North Korean imports and stopping its ships entering Japanese territorial waters. They had an impact on North Korea's export of products like clams and mushrooms, what earned Pyongyang Japanese yen on Japan's market. Tokyo's 2006 sanctions were banning port calls by a ferry that ethnic Koreans in Japan used to send hard currency back to their homeland (Hughes 2006). Over decades these shipments have been an important source of hard currency revenues for North Korea. It is estimated that up to US \$ 250 million - mostly gained from the lucrative pachinko business run by ethnic Koreans in Japan - have been shipped in the past from Japan to North Korea on an annual basis.<sup>55</sup> How

<sup>54</sup> See Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration; [www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html)

<sup>55</sup> Roughly half of Japan's pachinko parlors (pachinko is a pinball form of gambling generating huge amounts of revenue) are owned by ethnic Koreans in Japan - Other sources claim that North Korean remittances are much lower than that having declined to as little as US \$30 million level since the early 1990s, following the bursting of Japan's economic 'bubble' and the decade-long economic crisis throughout the 1990s. Fact is that many of Chosen Soren's credit unions went into bankruptcy in the 1990s and several of these credit unions have been closed after revelations surfaced that some of them had transferred money to the regime in Pyongyang.

much money is currently being transferred, i.e. how effective Japan's economic sanctions are in hindering money transfers from Japan to North Korea, remains difficult to estimate with certainty.

In June 2008 - after an interruption of almost one year - Tokyo and Pyongyang resumed bilateral talks after Pyongyang, North Korea promised a 're-investigation' of the fate of Japanese citizens abducted by Pyongyang in the 1970s and 1980s (Weng 2008). Furthermore, back then Pyongyang for the first time voiced its willingness to hand over to Japan the four remaining of the nine hijackers of a Japan Airlines flight in 1970. In return, Tokyo agreed to partially lift sanctions against Pyongyang, allowing certain North Korean ships to make port calls in Japan. (Kang, Lee 2008) Tokyo was also ready to lift restrictions on individual travel and charter flights between the countries.

After North Korea's missile tests in April 2009, Japan announced to extend economic sanctions for one year, including the ban on imports imposed in 2006. Tokyo also announced to tighten the oversight of fund transfers from Japan to North Korea and decided to strengthen a ban on selling luxury goods to North Korea, including pricey beef, caviar, alcohol and cars. The Japanese cabinet also approved measures to tighten monetary transmission rules to North Korea. Under the 2009 sanctions, any monetary transmission to North Korea over 10 million yen (US \$ 100.000) and cash delivery over 300.000 yen (US \$ 3.000) has to be reported to the government. However, given the very limited Japanese-North Korean bilateral trade volume (and the increasing trade with China, the actual and concrete impact of Japanese economic and trade sanctions on North Korea's economy will continue to be relatively limited.<sup>56</sup> In 2006, Japanese-North Korean bilateral trade amounted to a very modest US \$ 120 million (down from roughly US \$ 370 million in 2002), In 2008, trade with China accounted more than 70% of North Korea's overall external trade, and more than 90% of foreign investment in North Korea originates from China. Trade with North Korea never amounted to more than 0.1% of Japan's overall trade. The current sanctions will remain in place until Pyongyang decides to return to the 6-Party Talks and resumes the agreed dismantlement of its nuclear program and facilities

<sup>56</sup> North Korea's main export items to Japan are clams, men's suits, mushrooms, and coal. Japan's primary exports to North Korea are cars, electrical components, woollen fabrics, and general machinery. Many of the electronics components and clothing materials that are sent to North Korea are assembled into finished products and re-exported to big Japanese discount stores such as the so-called '100 Yen shops.'

agreed in the framework of the above mentioned February 2007 Nuclear Agreement.

## 8. Japanese money to Pyongyang

Roughly 650.000 Koreans live in Japan of which an estimated 200.000 have close links to North Korea sending money to the North on a regular basis. Due to its chronic lack of hard currency, North Korea has in the past counted on the North Korean community residing in Japan to send yen and other 'hard' currencies to North Korea. In the past, the pro-Pyongyang North Korean Residents Association of Japan (*Chosen Soren*) regularly sent gifts and funds to DPRK although these contributions were necessarily sent on a voluntary basis. Over 90.000 Koreans emigrated from Japan to North Korea in the 1960s and 1970s and were in the past 'used' and abused as sources of revenue for the political leadership in Pyongyang.

The Japanese government was for decades concerned that the money sent to North Koreans from Japan found its way into North Korea's military and later missile and nuclear programs. After North Korea's first nuclear test in October 2006, the US urged Japan to cut off this flow of funds as part of international sanctions against North Korea. Initially, Tokyo was slow to act, but eventually Japanese sanctions (for details see below) were able to obstruct the credit cooperative system run by the North Korean Residents Association. However, it remains difficult to assess with certainty how well the Japanese government was able to disrupt efficiently the flow of yen to North Korea in recent years.

### Ethnic Koreans in Japan

*Under Japanese colonial rule on the Korean Peninsula from 1910-1945, Koreans were made Japanese citizens by default. Although they never enjoyed equal rights and were always the subject of discrimination, Koreans living in Japan were nevertheless allowed to vote in Japanese elections. However, as soon as World War II ended, Koreans lost their Japanese citizenship. Most Koreans back then returned to their homeland during the first five post-war years, but the outbreak of the Korean War halted this, leaving almost a million Koreans in Japan concentrated mainly in the major metropolitan areas. With the signing of the San Francisco Peace treaty in 1951, Japan regained its independence and Koreans in Japan were forced to register as foreigners ('aliens' in 'Japanese English'). When in 1965 Japan and South Korea signed the so-called South Korea-Japan Basic Treaty all those Koreans in Japan who*

*did not apply for South Korean citizenship became North Korean citizens by default. This was part of the reason that the original ratio of North Koreans to South Koreans in Japan was about 2:1, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of Koreans who came to Japan was from the south of the country. Over the ensuing years, more and more North Koreans have switched to South Korean citizenship, and the ratio has reversed. With the signing of the 1965 treaty, Tokyo recognized Seoul as the only lawful government in Korea excluding North Korea from reparations and initially also economic assistance. Japan has consistently refused Pyongyang's demands for war reparations and instead offered Pyongyang a few years ago the same economic cooperation and assistance it had offered Seoul after establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1965.*

## 9. Conclusions

In March 2010 it seemed (albeit temporarily) that the resumption of the 6-Party Talks in 2010 could become a possibility when Pyongyang (through its diplomats in the UK and during exchanges with the EU Delegation in Pyongyang) indicated that it could be willing to resume negotiations in the framework of the 6-Party Talks. However, it very quickly turned out that North Korea would link its return to the 6-Party Talks to the resumption of bilateral talks with the US, a formula Washington is likely to continue to find unacceptable. Several interviews and conversations with US scholars and a former government official having worked on US policies towards North Korea in February 2011 confirm that Washington (despite its overall interest and willingness to engage Pyongyang through dialogue) will not re-enter bilateral negotiations with North Korea unconditionally, i.e. will not agree to negotiate with Pyongyang, unless North Korea verifiably demonstrates its willingness to resume the dismantlement of its nuclear programme.

Japan's foreign policymakers - above all former Prime Ministers Koizumi, Abe and Aso have - partly out of ignorance and partly driven by an 'obsession' to base Japan's North Korea policies on the assumption of North Korea as 'evil country'- failed to understand that their approach towards the regime in Pyongyang ran counter to Japan's and regional security interests. Furthermore, Japan's insistence to discuss the above mentioned 'abduction issue' in the framework of the 6-Party Talks led to the fact that Japan is being perceived as an obstacle to the North Korean nuclear crisis in the framework of the 6-Party Talks.

As regards the 'abduction issue', Tokyo's attempts to put the issue on the very top of its North Korea policy agenda has not served Tokyo's national and security interests. Without denying Tokyo's legitimate and understandable right to receive accurate information on the fate of abducted Japanese citizens, insisting on progress on the 'abduction issue' on a bilateral and multilateral level (in the framework of the 6-Party Talks) has significantly diminished Japan's role in multilateral attempts to sustainably denuclearize North Korea. Japan, as it has been concluded before, was above all perceived as 'trouble-maker', as opposed to constructive player and actor in the framework of the 6-Party Talks. As it was elaborated above, Japan's behaviour and North Korea strategy were in 2008 eventually 'punished' by Washington taking off North Korea from the above mentioned so-called 'terror list'. Japan's attempts of the early 2000s to engage North Korea politically and probably more importantly economically after the 2002 Japan-North Korea summit in Pyongyang were serious and substantive even if they were mostly driven by a desire and strategy to solve the 'abduction issue.' That these attempts failed is largely a result of Pyongyang's unwillingness to address the 'abduction issue' in a serious way.

Analysts (this author amongst them) argue that Tokyo's alleged antagonistic policies towards North Korea gave Pyongyang the perfect excuse (or justification) to ignore Japan's requests for progress on the 'abduction issue'. As elaborated above, Tokyo was indeed exploiting the 'abduction issue' to portray North Korea an 'evil country' and 'terrorist state' to justify the above mentioned changes of its security and defence profile. To be sure, Pyongyang's de-facto refusal to address the 'abduction issue' (as opposed to providing Tokyo with the bogus information on what happened to the Japanese citizens in North Korean captivity) provided easy arguments for Japan's conservative press, scholars and policymakers to explain the alleged 'necessity' to equip Japan with the means and capabilities to defend Japanese territory against North Korea. North Korean occasional intrusions into Japanese territorial waters too did their share to confirm Japan's conservative policymakers that North Korea is a concrete and imminent threat to Japanese national security.

The near-abandonment or worse the recent reversal of North Korea's economic reforms begun in 2002 will most probably make sure that investments of and trade with other countries (except China which in 2008 accounted for more than 70% of North Korea's external trade) will



continue to decrease (Babson 2006, Berkofsky 2007). While trade with North Korea amounts to no more than 0,1% of Japan's overall external trade, trade between China and North Korea more than doubled between 2002 and 2006, before Japan's economic sanctions were imposed on North Korea in 2006 (and extended and tightened in 2009). Japan's exports to North Korea cars and busses as well as synthetic fibre products. North Korea in turn exported above sea food, vegetables and hard coal to Japan.

During a Japan-South Korea summit in late 2009, then Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama supported South Korea's President Lee's proposal of a 'grand bargain' to resolve the nuclear crisis definitely. Such a 'grand bargain' calls on North to take irreversible steps to dismantle its nuclear programs in return for a security guarantee and economic aid from US-led negotiating partners, including South Korea, Japan, China and Russia. This is in essence, what North Korea has already agreed to do (but failed to implement) in the framework of so-called February 2007 'Nuclear Agreement' negotiated in the framework of the 6-Party Talks in Beijing.

Given the increasing improbability that Pyongyang will in the months and indeed years ahead not agree to take up again the 'abduction issue', it cannot be excluded that - should the nuclear issue remain unresolved (i.e. should North Korea continue to develop its nuclear program) - Japanese future governments will sooner or later seem themselves obliged to insist less on a however-shaped 'resolution' of the 'abduction issue'. However, if that is likely to happen remains yet to be seen.

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