

JAPAN-DPRK RELATIONS ERASING THE PAST - SOME SUGGESTIONS

Improving bilateral relations requires much more than the convening of negotiations between delegations from two government. The Korean Peninsula's particularly complex geo-political situation troubled history makes this especially regarding Japan-DPRK relations. Koreans north and south of the de-militarized zone (DMZ) do not trust any superpower; neither Russia or China and certainly not the United States and Japan. Although the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) signed the very important Agreed Framework bilateral agreement in October 1994, the agreement did not automatically erase the deep mutual distrust that still separates the people of the United States and North Korean.

Japan now is about to resume normalization talks with the DPRK. Regardless of how well the negotiators and their governments conduct these discussions, the legacy of Imperial Japan and the Cold War will strongly influence the atmosphere. The United States experienced a similar phenomenon during the 1993-94 nuclear negotiations because of the US involvement and extensive bombing of North Korea during the Korean War.

For the United States, long term, sustained humanitarian assistance to the DPRK seems to be gradually erasing the old, negative memories of the Korean War and the Cold War and replacing them with new, positive images. People in both North Korea and the United States are benefitting for this process. But the effort must continue for several years before both nations can really begin to trust each other.

Since 1995, the international community has generously given food aid to the DPRK. Japan was one of the first nations to do this. Food aid must continue, and the United States and Chinese governments are committed to the continuation of supplying grain to the DPRK. The time has come, however, to also begin teaching the North Koreans how to improve their agricultural production and how to modernize their farming methods.

Recent discussions in Pyongyang with authorities in the DPRK government and United Nations strongly suggest that North Korea is ready to begin making very important changes in its agricultural sector. A concrete plan of action is being negotiated between the DPRK government and the UN Development Program office in Pyongyang. This three year agricultural revitalization program will be the main topic of discussion at the 3rd UNDP Round Table Meeting on DPRK Agriculture scheduled to be held in Geneva, Switzerland June 21-22, 2000. The UNDP estimates the extensive modernization program will require \$300,000,000 or \$100,000,000 per year to implement.

Japan could win the appreciation of the UNDP, WFP and DPRK farm population by contributing to this program in two ways. First, the Japanese government could contribute farm equipment needed to improve agriculture. The support could include: pipes and pumps to repair the irrigation system, small tractors and spare parts, rice planting and threshing machines, small machine back hoes to dig holes for trees and irrigation ditches, fork lifts and small trucks to load and unload, and to move grain, fruit and vegetables from farms to cities at harvest time. Unlike

rice and currency, farm machines can only be used to grow food. They do not have military significance.

Secondly, the Japanese government could further maximize the positive imaging building of its assistance by selecting qualified non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in Japan to supervise the distribution of the machines and farm supplies in the DPRK. Relying on Japanese private organizations will allow private Japanese citizens to meet and work with North Korean farmers. Also, reliance on NGO's will emphasize the humanitarian, non-political nature of the assistance.

Additionally, sending farm machines will ensure continuing access by NGO's to North Korea and its people. Japanese technical experts would have to teach North Koreans how to use and repair the machines. The North Koreans would have to rely on spare parts and technical advise from Japanese experts.

Sending food aid does not solve the basic causes of hunger, nor does it require that North Koreans work with Japanese. Once the food aid has been distributed and eaten, there is not enduring benefit for either Koreans or Japanese. On the other, hand, farm machines will make it necessary for North Koreans to work with Japanese to learn and to work together. North Korea will benefit by increasing its food production. Japan will benefit by erasing the negative past and building a positive future in the minds of North Koreans.

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