

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**JAPAN'S ROLE AND POLICY TOWARD THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR**  
**CRISIS DURING 1998-1999**

**A. Introduction**

The tension on the Korean Peninsula after the 1994 nuclear crisis was awakened again by the launch of North Korean missiles in August 1998. This action was seemingly a political tactic of the North Korean government. However, it successfully aroused the security concerns within the Northeast Asian region. This incident stirred up Japanese realization of the strengthening of the intelligence potential as well as the defence cooperation with the United States. It also had an impact on the Japan-North Korean relations, especially toward the procedure of their normalization of diplomatic relations. To deal with Pyongyang's 1998 nuclear crisis, the Japanese government decided to stop the Japan-DPRK normalization negotiation temporarily. Moreover, Tokyo prohibited air and sea freight between Japan and North Korea, and halted the humanitarian aid including food and financial contributions.

In terms of the disarmament and the nuclear non-proliferation regime, North Korea's nuclear ambition was likely a direct impediment of the nuclear-free creation of the region. Under the circumstance, the Government of Japan perceived that Japanese security along with regional peace and stability was at high risk. Despite the similar approach that Pyongyang had once performed in the first crisis during 1993-1994, Japan's policy makers reconsidered the new security approaches to confront with the nuclear threat in 1998. In line with the disarmament and non-proliferation policies, the Japanese government openly protested the missile tests and the nuclear development program of North Korea by issuing a condemnatory speech, imposing sanctions, and freezing the diplomatic negotiations against Pyongyang's nuclear brinksmanship.

In fact, the frequency of the nuclear tests was less important than the fact that Pyongyang had nuclear weapons capabilities and much of the quantity of missiles and nuclear warheads in hands. This concern raised the following questions over the role of the key actors such as Japan, U.S., South Korea, China, and Russia and the resolutions toward the North's aggressions: What were the threat perceptions of Japan and other major states over the 1998 nuclear crisis? What were their roles and policies in dealing with North Korean aggression? What influenced Japan in applying those roles and policies? How different did the Government of Japan treat the first crisis to the second? To what extent did Japan play an active role in seeking a peaceful resolution?

Similar to Chapter Two, the historical event is under review. This chapter focuses upon Japan's role and policies over the 1998 North Korean nuclear crisis along with its role in the bilateral and multilateral framework, such as the security arrangement between Tokyo and Washington; and trilateral cooperation among Japan, U.S., and South Korea. The main discussion concentrates on the effects of Pyongyang's more aggressive action and Tokyo's shifted reaction.

## **B. An Overview of the 1998 Nuclear Crisis**

Despite the agreement between the United States and North Korea on the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework in 1994, East Asian peace and stability remained in jeopardy. Due to the different interpretation of the agreement, the denuclearization procedure was sluggish, particularly in 1998. On one hand, Washington required that Pyongyang must end the process of loading spent nuclear fuel rods and, after that, the U.S. provided the heavy-fuel oil shipment for the electrical manufacturing for the North Koreans. On the other hand, the North preferred that Washington must first start the delivery of fuel oil and Pyongyang later halted the nuclear weapons program. Besides, North Korea was angry that U.S. did not lift the economic sanctions but, instead, delayed the construction

of the two light-water reactors and the delivery of heavy-fuel oil.<sup>1</sup> Pyongyang also accused that Washington intended to reform the North Korean regime and to disarm it. The U.S. Congress made a decision to freeze the financial contributions for the shipment of heavy-fuel oil, while Pyongyang announced the continuation of its nuclear program in response.<sup>2</sup> As a result, North Korea's nuclear issue was locked in a stalemate. These strategic moves were increasingly serious and led to the second nuclear crisis of North Korea by the end of the 1990s.

On August 31, 1998, Pyongyang tested an intermediate-ballistic missile by firing the Taepo-dong1 with a range of over 1,500 km. crossing Japanese archipelagos and falling into the Pacific Ocean.<sup>3</sup> The launch of Taepo-dong1 was more serious than the missile tests in the first crisis. In light of national security, the medium-range missile of North Korea had a firing capacity to reach farther distance than the Nodong-1 and the Scud missiles which were launched in the first crisis. Further, the North signalled that it had potential to attack all of Japan's cities.<sup>4</sup> More important, this test directly affected Japanese living, specifically the way of life nearby the sea. Thus, Pyongyang's 1998 nuclear development obviously alerted the Japanese to the major threat of national security. In terms of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the 1998 ballistic missiles test of the North was served as another stage of the nuclear development, of which both technology and weapons could be transferred rapidly to other states. That was very dangerous and threatening to peace and security of Japan and other countries in the international community. By all reasons, the Government of Japan suddenly responded to the North's aggression by cutting all assistances and holding a meeting of Japan and DPRK for the normalization of diplomatic relations. It was essential that Tokyo conducted foreign and security policies with great caution, in particular close cooperation on the security arrangement together with Washington and Seoul. Furthermore, Tokyo

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Sullivan, *Washington Post*, 15 May 1998, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

<sup>2</sup> "Asia Yearbook," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1999): 139.

<sup>3</sup> Jung-Hoon Lee and Chung-In Moon, "The North Korean Nuclear Crisis Revisited: The Case for a Negotiated Settlement," *Security Dialogue* 34, no.2 (June 2003): 141.

<sup>4</sup> "Asia Yearbook," 134.

willingly worked with other nations in the operations of non-nuclear proliferation and anti-missile tests.

For the United States, the missile launching by North Korea in 1998 was one of Pyongyang's political approaches that the North used to apply for international assistances. Though the missile fell into the Pacific Ocean, which implicitly targeted U.S. territories, Washington did neither fear nor worry much about Pyongyang's act. It was senseless if North Korea decidedly waged war on the U.S. army with its small amount and less effective nuclear bombs. In fact, the U.S. threat perception referred to the proliferation of the nuclear weapons and technology to the rogue states such as Iraq and Iran.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the uncertainties and security environment of the Asia-Pacific region and Japanese territories along with the surrounding areas were included in, according to their security accord, the U.S. threat perception as well. Under this notion, at the meeting of the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee on September 20 and 22, both countries shared a security perception of the North Korean missile test on August 31 as a security threat to East Asia.<sup>6</sup>

From the viewpoint of South Korea, both of North Korea's missile tests in 1993 and 1998 meant security threat to the region due to the violation of the North-South Joint Declaration on Denuclearization and the Safeguards Agreement of the IAEA. It was also a threatening action against the engagement of the two Koreas under the Sunshine Policy initiative of President Kim Dae-Jung.<sup>7</sup> It was unlikely that Pyongyang was willing to encourage the idea of one Korea and a nuclear-free zone for the Korean Peninsula. For Seoul, the idea of Korean reunification could not proceed unless Pyongyang ended the nuclear program and abided by the Safeguards Agreement. Consequently, South Korea agreed with Japan and the U.S. that the North posed a nuclear threat to East Asia by the 1998 missile launch and its nuclear weapons program. To resolve the problem, President

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<sup>5</sup> "Asia Yearbook," 142.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Sectoral Analysis of the International Situation and Japan's Foreign Policy," [www.mofa.go.th](http://www.mofa.go.th).

<sup>7</sup> "Asia Yearbook."

Kim continued driving the engagement policy, namely the Sunshine Policy, in peaceful means.

For China, although it has never considered missiles in terms of weapons of mass destruction as Washington did<sup>8</sup> due to the possession and the once provided cooperation of nuclear weapons and technology with North Korea, China expressed no opinion about the North's nuclear development program. As North Korean missile tests in both crises were not defined as Chinese key security threats, Beijing rather paid attention to the original threats to national sovereignty, particularly the Japan-U.S. security arrangement. In China's view, the military cooperation between Tokyo and Washington in the missile defence system could raise the tension over East Asian countries and lead to the weapons race within the region.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they rather targeted China and indirectly opposed the rise of China as a major power of the region.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Beijing strongly disagreed with Tokyo's and Washington's proposals of financial sanctions against Pyongyang.

Concerning the Russia-North Korea relations, the contact between the Russian Federation and South Korea broke their friendship. The launching of the Taepo-dong1 missile of Pyongyang increasingly worsened their poor relations. The Government of Russia, like other parties, was unhappy with the North's threatening act of no prior notification. Under this circumstance, Moscow demanded the formal declaration of Pyongyang over the missile test in August 1998. Actually, it was possible that Russian movement, in light of opposing the North's nuclear projects, was intended to distort the fact that Russia had provided nuclear materials and technology to support the development of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. There was disclosed evidence that the number of Russian scientists had worked at the nuclear labs within the same area of other nuclear plants of North Korea since the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>8</sup> "Asia Yearbook,"106

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "North Korean Nuclear Program," <http://cns.miis.edu/research/korea/nuc/chr93.htm>.

missile test of North Korea in 1993 and 1998 was not a direct threat toward Russian interests.

According to a report in the New York Times on August 17, 1998<sup>12</sup>, the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America (CIA) believed that North Korea hid the plutonium waste at the underground nuclear facilities at Kumchang-ri in order that the IAEA inspectors could not trace the plutonium reprocess. The Clinton Administration asked the North for the permission of international examination of these suspected sites. At the same time, the U.S. proposed a package of agreements for purposes of decreasing tension of the region and enhancing the diplomatic relations, in exchange.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, all the key actors jointly made all efforts in seeking peaceful resolutions in order to reach the goal of ending the nuclear problem and preserving regional peace and stability. For instance, Japan stopped implementing the sanction measures against North Korea. Instead, Tokyo decidedly funded the construction of the two reactors at Sinpo in accordance with the provisions of the KEDO mission.<sup>14</sup> Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung declared that they fully supported and cooperated with the U.S. Administration in dealing with North Korea.<sup>15</sup> Further, Beijing and Moscow visited Pyongyang to induce the North to pursue the Geneva Agreement.

### **C. Japan's Disarmament and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy**

According to the Disarmament and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), every government of Japan has made an exclusive contribution to global issues relevant to the non-proliferation and the disarmament regime since early 1990s. To promote peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region, Tokyo held the meetings with the representatives

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<sup>12</sup> Japan's Defense Agency, "Nuclear Weapons and Ballistic Missiles in East Asia," East Asian Strategic Review (2000): ch. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas W. Lippman, Washington Post, 11 September 1998, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Washington Post, 17 October 1998, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Yoshihisa Watanabe, Daily Yomiuri, 21 March 1999, [www.yomiuri.co.jp](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp).

of, for example, Pakistan and India after their nuclear tests in May 1998 and discussed the resolution of the denuclearization and the disarmament. Moreover, Japan performed a leading role in light of the non-proliferation regime by arranging the Conference on Urgent Actions for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, namely “Tokyo Forum on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament” during August 30 – 31, 1998 in Tokyo.<sup>16</sup>

In part of peaceful cooperation on denuclearization and disarmament, Tokyo seriously made ultimate sacrifices in seeking resolutions regarding nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament through such multilateral framework as the G8, the United Nations Security Council, and the United Nations General Assembly. Japan employed diplomatic and technical skills to urge North Korea and other nuclear states to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Moreover, as the basic approach on nuclear disarmament, the Japanese government continued the process of submitting the draft resolutions called “Nuclear Disarmament with a View to the Ultimate Elimination of Nuclear Weapons” to the fifty-third General Assembly of the United Nations in 1998.<sup>17</sup> By the strong decision, 160 countries including the five nuclear states voiced no objection toward the Japanese proposal.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, Japan induced the nuclear nations including India, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, and particularly North Korea to ratify the treaty aiming to prevent armament and proliferation of nuclear weapons among the nuclear powers.

The Taepo-dong1 missile launching by North Korea into the Pacific Ocean, as aforementioned, raised a security alarm toward the Government of Japan and the citizens throughout the country. Resulting from the 1998 nuclear crisis, the Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata stated at the Press Conference on September 1 that the test of a ballistic

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, “Conference on Urgent Actions for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1998/9/901.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook.

<sup>18</sup> Japan’s Defense Agency.

missile by North Korea definitely challenged the non-proliferation regime.<sup>19</sup> Since the nuclear-free zone of the region was regarded as a Japanese security goal, the Government of Japan made all efforts to denuclearize North Korea in collaboration with the U.S. and South Korea. To carry on the cooperative research on the defence system under the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system along with Washington in September 1993, the Japanese Security Council authorized the Japanese government in fiscal year 1999 to do the technological research jointly with the U.S on the Navy Theatre Wide Defense (NTWD)<sup>20</sup> system in line with the Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) program.<sup>21</sup>

These movements showed that Japan had a proactive role in the anti-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the disarmament in the multilateral approach over the nuclear issue, especially North Korean nuclear crisis.

### **1. Japan's Role and Policies toward North Korean Nuclear Crisis**

Japanese attitude over the 1998 crisis differed from that of the 1994 crisis. The Taepo-dong1 ballistic missile caused security concerns toward the Japanese due to the longer range of the missile, which had potential of destroying most parts of the whole country. Importantly, there was no prior notification of the North about the test. Under the circumstance, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka announced on September 1, 1999 that the North Korean missile test directly threatened Japanese security. This aggressive action raised deep concerns in terms of the regional peace and stability as well.<sup>22</sup> The North argued that it was not a missile but a satellite launch. North Korea did not feel guilty but threatened again by citing that it had nuclear capability to attack big cities in Japan. Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata stated in the Press Conference

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "The Test Ballistic Missile Launch by North Korea," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1998/9/901.html#4>.

<sup>20</sup> The NTWD was served as a detector as well as a deterrent mechanism against the ballistic missiles above the atmosphere of Japanese territories.

<sup>21</sup> Japan's Defense Agency.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Announcement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary on Japan's Immediate Response to North Korea's Missile Launch," [www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1998/9/901-2.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1998/9/901-2.html).

on the same day that it possibly affected the bilateral relations between Japan and North Korea.<sup>23</sup> The idea of continuation to normalize their diplomatic relations thus collapsed. As a result, the abduction issue, which remained one of Japan's core interests, was also suspended. It was necessary that Japan reconsidered North Korea policy and seriously responded to Pyongyang's posture.

In the second crisis, Japan's role and policies over North Korea's nuclear issue dramatically changed from 'the wait and see' posture to 'the reactive manner'. In terms of the wait and see position, the Governments of Japan during 1993-1994 gave more priority to the Japan-U.S. security arrangement and the resolution of economic decline than to the nuclear reactive policy. On the contrary, the reactive role referred to the sudden action that the governments strongly counteracted to Pyongyang's nuclear aggression at an early stage of the 1998 nuclear crisis. As mentioned, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi reacted to North Korea's missile launching in 1998 by debating the revision of North Korea's policy at an emergency meeting with his cabinet to prepare the self-defense measure against Pyongyang's nuclear threat.<sup>24</sup> On the same day, the Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka expressed that Tokyo really opposed that action because it was not only the reason of a security threat but also the risk toward the operations around the sea of Japanese vessels and airplanes as such.<sup>25</sup> This stance was also transmitted directly to the Government of North Korea by the Japanese government.

Apart from the condemnation upon the North's aggression, the Japanese officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released foreign and security policies in dealing with Pyongyang's nuclear issue to cut all relations with the North. A few days later Japan decisively suspended the diplomatic relations, the food aid, the US\$1 billion contribution to KEDO for the construction of the light-water reactors at Yongbyon, and

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<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Announcement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary."

<sup>24</sup> Anek Permwongseni, *Asia Yearbook* (Bangkok: East Asian Institute, Chulalongkorn University, 1999). (in Thai)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Comment by Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka on North Korea's Test Missile Launch," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1998/8/831.html>.

the inter-flight of North Korean air charter between Pyongyang and Nagoya. In addition, the government promoted the study of their own intelligence satellite.<sup>26</sup> At the global level, Japan demanded that the UN Security Council launch a press statement on September 15 that North Korea's actions in August had endangered the regional fishing industry and maritime freight activities and deterred the trust-building operation of East Asian nations.<sup>27</sup>

Owing to the sharing perception of North Korea's nuclear threat, the Government of Japan decided to closely cooperate with the U.S. and South Korea. At the bilateral level, Tokyo's and Washington's leaders agreed to take various occasions to put strong pressure against Pyongyang's missiles launching, development, and exports in the Japan-U.S. Summit meeting on September 22. They affirmed the exchange of information and viewpoints at all levels and more so in the future. Likewise, Japan and South Korea planned to exchange information and attitudes, but at a high level. Under this agreement, the two counterparts consisted of Japan's Foreign Minister Komura and Japan's Defense Agency (JDA) Director-General Nukaga – South Korean Minister of Defense Cheon Yong Taek, and Foreign Minister Komura – South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Hong Soon Young. In the trilateral stage, Tokyo preferred to develop the security cooperation by continuing the research on the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system together with Washington and Seoul. Moreover, Japan agreed with the proposal of consultation among the highest-level authorities. Lastly, Japan and the two countries confirmed to continue the ministerial-level consultation among them at the UN General Assembly (UNGA).<sup>28</sup>

However, the tough measure of the Japanese Government by freezing financial contributions to KEDO was objected by the Clinton Administration and the Government of President Kim Dae-jung. On October 21, the Government of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi eventually announced its decision to lift the economic sanctions and to make

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Announcement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary."

further cooperation with the KEDO.<sup>29</sup> In this context, it was reasonable that Japan's North Korea policy relied on the U.S. policy. The Japan-U.S. security alliance was the key factor that supported this point. The Government of Japan since post-war has realized that the Japan-U.S. relations was the cornerstone of Japan's foreign and security policies as always mentioned in the Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan. Additionally, the controversial issue over the amendment of Article 9 under the Japanese Constitution regarding the military arrangement of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) was another factor that influenced the Japanese policy makers to conduct the policy dependent on the U.S.

#### **D. Summary**

The Government of Japan reacted differently toward North Korea's aggressive manner between the first and second nuclear crises. Tokyo did not respond to Pyongyang's missile launches in the first crisis, whilst in the second one, the Japanese government seriously made a condemnation against North Korea's aggressive posture and immediately froze all of the contributions toward the North. The difference of Japan's approach toward North Korea's nuclear brinksmanship between the first and second crises based on the security threat perceptions, the sudden action and the contributory movement. The Japanese policy makers realized that the second crisis became more serious not only for Japanese security interests but for the non-proliferation as well as the disarmament regime of an international community.

From the study and analysis over Japan's role and policies over the second crisis (1998) of North Korea's nuclear activities, it was found that Japan's foreign and security policies mainly relied on the U.S. policy. In terms of alliances which related to the concept of balance of power, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. had stated that states generally associated

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook.

with each other to achieve common security.<sup>30</sup> Noticeably, even though it was reasonable that the Japanese government could react toughly to North Korea in the 1998 nuclear crisis, Japan precisely pursued the U.S. policy by returning to the resumption of financial contributions to KEDO. The important factor of Japan's policy decision-making was the alliance with Washington, under which Washington had enormous potential to support and protect Japanese security and regional stability from Pyongyang's nuclear threat. Shortly, Japanese policy makers realized that the supreme interest was to balance the power with the U.S. in terms of alliance in order that the country could maintain national safety and regional stability.

Regarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Disarmament Policy, Japan played a leading role or a so-called proactive approach in promoting peace and stability of the region. In this context, the Government of Japan created good relations and mutual trust with other nations in the international community in order to prevent an arms race and nuclear proliferation and to preserve regional peace and security. The important vehicle of Japanese policy implementation on the global level consisted of international institutions.

The nuclear tension on the Korean Peninsula neither found the progress nor sought a peaceful resolution. Moreover, the leader of North Korea still insisted to have hostile policies against Japan and other relevant countries. There was an argument on the shifted perspective of Japanese leaders over the North's nuclear issue that Japan, under the next generation-led by political leaders including Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, changed the policy and attitude toward North Korean nuclear program to a hard-line manner. Thus, the next chapter was to study and analyze Japan's North Korea policy together with its role over the bilateral and multilateral negotiations to ease the tension on the Peninsula in the Twenty-first Century.

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History (New York: Longman, 2003), Ch.3, p.66.