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Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs | Ambassador Ushiroku

Observations on the Management of North Korea Issues (I)

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The travels of Chongryon-associated Koreans (ChÅsenjin) to North Korea have recently provided an opportunity to acknowledge where the issues lie, and how deep they are, in regards to contact between North Korea and Japan. I take this opportunity to provide for your reference my thoughts on contact between Japan and North Korea, particularly the contact of domestic Chongryon-related elements with North Korea.

Firstly, I believe that there should be a fundamental distinctions be made between our contact with North Korea and our contact with Communist China.

1. That is to say that while there are still the usual arguments in regards to Communist China, they have seized legitimacy through their UN membership. We have ended formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan and proclaimed that it is our basic policy to pursue formal relations with Communist China. Given this, contact with Communist China that follows this basic policy will, on the one hand, necessarily increase pressure and difficulty on Taiwan or be conducted at their expense. In other words, this policy would in effect be pursued "AT THE PRICE OF TAIWAN." At the same time, this is our chosen course of stern and realist diplomacy, and as such we should not continue to take into consideration the injustice of the above. In addition, at this point it appears that Taiwan is prepared to endure heavy burdens.

2. Although the case of Vietnam is slightly different, under the name of Vietnamization, the United States is attempting to maintain the barest minimum in order to save some face. Mirroring the phrase, "après moi le déluge," the troops have been withdrawn leaving no trace. For this reason, it is doubtful to all parties involved whether or not South Vietnam can continue to be a viable nation while also retaining its current qualities and identity.

3. To summarize, among Asia's divided nations, it is difficult to deny that China and Vietnam strongly carry the potential for there to be a situation where "The East Wind Prevails Over the West Wind," or some other similar situations. In contrast with the above, the situation of the Republic of Korea is completely different from that of countries like Taiwan.

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Following the UN resolution on the establishment of Republic of Korea and the attitudes taken when Korea was officially recognized by various countries, including the Japan-Republic of Korea Treaty, in terms of international law the Republic of Korea is a state limited to the south of the Peninsula; notwithstanding their moral claim to the entire Korean Peninsula. To put it differently, even if North Korea were to improve its international position in the future, unlike the situation of Taiwan, North Korea would not replace the Republic of Korea's international position. Even if the state of affairs proceeded in the best possible manner for North Korea, it would still result in international recognition of North-South coexistence, like the German 'One Nation, Two States.' Similar to the situation for West Germany, considering the factors, such as the Republic of Korea's population, geographical area, and position in international society, there is more potential for a situation where "The West Wind Prevails Over the East Wind." It is clear that North Korea will not replace the position of South Korea. In other words, there is no reason to be concerned that the North will grasp legitimacy. As long as this is the case, and barring the North's use of force or unification through violent revolution, the replacement of international positions is an impossibility.

For this reason, our work to enhance contact with the North requires neither concern about an eventuality where the positions of North and South Korea may become replaced, nor concern that such contact is carried out at the expense of the South. We should proceed with ample consideration paid to our ally, the Republic of Korea's position, but without guilt. We should also be prepared to not be swayed by some domestic elements that claim that 'North Korea is next.' They wrongly draw analogies between the Korean Peninsula and the totally dissimilar cases of China and Vietnam. Concerning North Korea, our acceptance of Republic of Korea is certainly not a losing bet.

4. Enhancing our contact with North Korea would contribute towards decreasing tensions in the region. If tensions were to increase such that it risked war on the Korean peninsula, that would present the greatest threat to our national interest, and it would necessitate our complete dedication to decreasing tensions. However, at this time the Republic of Korea has neither the capacity nor confidence to invade the North. Similarly, notwithstanding their true intentions, the North is also subject to an international environment that favors peace. Therefore, it appears that at this time there is an absence of serious and imminent tensions that might concern our national security. From the standpoint of our national security, it is sufficient if our measures to decrease tensions with North Korea simply follows the general trend of detente. We should not pursue, so called, detente so diligently that it causes difficulty for our ally, the Republic of Korea, or that it leads to distancing between Japan and South Korea.

5. Even with the basic understanding as described above, détente with North Korea is more likely than not to be at the level of gesturing, rather than one coming from a deep consideration of domestic politics. Be that as it may, implementing détente with North Korea must reflect the above described basic understanding of the situation and be free of flirtation with North Korea. Furthermore, when we are determining the pace (or interval) and timing of such measures, we must do so while being truly an ally to the Republic of Korea and pay close attention to their position and the possible psychological impacts that détente may have. As a neighboring country, we must be more sympathetic to the Republic of Korea, especially since they are worried that their importance may be waning since the Nixon Doctrine and the thawing of Sino- American relations. (The United States decision to defer the issuance of passports for North Korea is an object lesson to this point.)

The Red Cross dialogue may serve as a sort of benchmark for when thinking about the pace and timing. In the Red Cross example, care must be taken as to not outshine and deflate the diplomatic measures of the Republic of Korea by going much deeper than surface level détente vis-à-vis North Korea. This would also provide invaluable data on reading the atmosphere ahead of the upcoming discussion and deliberation on the Korea issue at the UN General Assembly.