

Abstract

Japan's Role on the Reunification of Korea

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1. Reunification of Korea has ceased to be just an issue of both Korea, North and South, alone; directly and indirectly, it's increasingly an international issue involving the four powers--the United States, Japan, China and Russia. In this milieu, Japan's role is gaining its import for her proximity to the Korean peninsula.
2. In fact, the division of Korea originates from the post-World War II era with the United States and the USSR jointly ruling Korea by dividing it in the wake of Japan's defeat. This outcome, of course, was essentially due to faults by then political leaders in the North and the South. Speaking of a joint rule, actually the defeated Japan ought to have been the target, but the 1945 Yalta Conference placed Korea instead under a joint military rule by the United States and the USSR.
3. Since the division of Korea, Kim Il-sung's misguided reunification policy brought forth the tragic Korean War of 1950, whose aftermaths have evolved ever since as tragedy between the two Korea that continues to inflict pains upon all Koreans for these 60-plus years.
4. In this context of history, we can envision, as follows, what Japan is desired and expected to do for restoration of bilateral relations between Korea and Japan and further for the reunification process on the Korean peninsula:

(1) Japan could take a more positive posture on the recent U.N. resolutions on human rights issues in North Korea. In the meantime, the Japanese government has been obsessed in engaging with North Korea primarily over the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by the North. From now on, Japan is desired to exercise pressure upon the North by also taking up the international concern with human-rights problem in the North. In fact, Japan nominally embraced such human-rights concern when it extended its cooperation to the returning of Koreans to North Korea in the 1970s, a project executed by the pro-North General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. In reality, this

collaboration had been based on a policy geared for Japan's self-interest. Thus the horrendous outcome of those who had returned to North Korea is in effect nothing but a collusion by the two governments of North Korea and Japan.

(2) Granted Japan's expansion of its armament and revision of its pacifist constitution are the sole prerogative of Japan as a sovereign state, not an issue for others to argue about. Yet Japan needs to publicly declare its warning that it will take prompt actions against the North if North Korea initiates a military invasion of South Korea. This might be a hidden provision in the U.S.-Japan military treaty, but such a policy needs to be publicly declared. Japan is justified to do so for the cause of protecting the many abducted Japanese citizens who still remain in the North. Further, such an official policy statement would work as a very effective deterrent against the belligerent North Korean regime.

(3) A certain number of conscientious intellectuals in Japan currently strive to help restore diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan strained over interpretation of the sad history involving the two. Yet they are desired to do more, by working for a national consensus based on just and frank recognition of the past wrongs, with the view that restoring friendly relations between the two would be beneficial to maintaining peace in Japan as well as on the Korean peninsula. I don't believe Germans repeat their apologies for the Nazi crimes for lack of their self-respect.

(4) A substantial number of mainstream Japanese people still hold the mistaken assumption that apologizing for the past wrongs is equivalent to national humiliation and disgrace. Such Japanese hold a sort of superiority complex under a deep-rooted subconscious mentality that Koreans, after all, are the people they had controlled during their colonization of Korea. However, they need to understand that genuine bilateral relations of friendship ought to be based on frank apologizing and that such apologizing would be accepted as such for a better future of Korea-Japan relations.

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