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North Korea Coming in from the cold?

Gavan McCormack

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Coming in from the cold?
by Gavan McCormack
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North Korea ranks high on the Bush administration's list of 'terror states'. The January 2002 'Axis of Evil' speech and the June 2002 commitment to preemptive war were stark signals from Washington to Pyongyang. The formal presidential statement of strategy presented to Congress in September 2002 referred only to two 'rogue states', meaning states that brutalize their own people, ignore international law, strive to acquire weapons of mass destruction, sponsor terrorism, 'reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands.' These states, which constituted 'a looming threat to all nations', were Iraq and North Korea.

It is true that the acts to which Kim Jong Il confessed in September 2002 - kidnapping and spying - could be described as 'terroristic'. Yet simply to label North Korea in such terms is neither to understand the burden of the past nor to offer any prescription for the present or future. 'Normalcy' has not been known in the area of East Asia surrounding the Korean peninsula for a hundred years. Colonialism, division, war, Cold War and confrontation have profoundly distorted the frame of state and inter-state relationships. The warping has affected not only state systems but also minds and souls.

The historical task facing the region may be seen as that of 'normalizing' relations between three states, Japan, North Korea and South Korea, all of which at one time or another and to varying degrees, have employed cruelty and terror as an instrument of state purpose, eliminating both terror and the roots of terror, and negotiating a new accommodation between them and the global super-power, the United States (which reserves the right to employ violence, virtually without restriction, in pursuit of its global interests while labelling 'terroristic' those who oppose it). The construction of a just and peaceful order will require the resolution of long unsettled issues, from the legacy of Japanese colonialism to the Second World War and the Cold War. The longer the backlog of unsettled issues accumulates, the more abnormal the relationships become.

The briefest historical digression on the question of terror in the recent past is enough to show how ambiguous the concept is. One figure regarded in Japan as the epitome of 20th century terrorism is An Chong Gun, the assassin in 1909 of Ito Hirobumi, the then Japanese 'resident' in Korea; yet to Koreans, both North and South, An is a national hero. As for Japan, while Prime Minister Koizumi has associated himself closely with George W. Bush's campaign against terror, at the same time he is well known for the deep reverence he shows to the deceased Japanese terrorists who laid Asia waste in the 1930s and 1940s in the name of the

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Japanese emperor, and above all for the Japanese progenitors of the suicide bomb, the kamikaze. Although the difference in scale of their acts is immeasurable, both An Chong Gun and the Imperial Japanese Army (under its commander-in-chief, Emperor Hirohito) were 'terrorist', distinguished above all by the fact that the latter had the backing of a state, while the former did not. At the heart of the terror of the 1930s and 1940s that defined the Japan-Korea relationship was the abduction by imperial Japan of hundreds of thousands of young Korean men for forced labor and young women for forced prostitution.

North Korea's image and reputation as a brutal, inhuman regime, responsible for terrorism and massacre, goes back to the Korean War of 1950-1953. Its behavior was far from blameless, but research in recent decades has shown that the greatest atrocities of the war were those committed by the United States, whether at Nogunri, Taejon or elsewhere, or by the deliberate devastation of dams, power stations, and the infrastructure of social life in breach of international law. The US military strategy was to leave not a stone upon a stone, sowing terror with every means at its disposal. Yet North Korea is almost universally blamed, even for the things of which it was victim. The terrorist label was affixed to it, but not to the US.

In South Korea, the violence of the fratricidal war was only slowly purged. In 1967 and 1969 over one hundred students, artists and intellectuals who were studying or resident in Europe and North America were dragged back to Seoul, accused of spying, tortured, tried, and a number of them sentenced to death or long terms of imprisonment. The most eminent was the renowned composer, Yun I-Sang (who died in 1995), now regarded as one of both Korea's and Germany's greatest composers of the 20th century. His death sentence was eventually commuted, but the torture left a mark on him from which he never fully recovered. Others, such as the then Oxford university student Park No Su (Francis Park) were executed. In 1973, Kim Dae Jung, abducted by agents of the Korean CIA from a Tokyo hotel room, barely escaped with his life, but the affair was quietly buried by the two governments in 1975 and to this day has never been properly investigated, much less resolved by apologies and compensation. In 1980, hundreds, if not thousands, of people were slaughtered in one of the century's worst state atrocities - the Kwangju massacre. So, in South Korea until 1987, in effect yesterday, kidnapping, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and execution were practiced; the country's poets, scholars, political activists and trade unionists suffered immeasurable hardships. Only the triumph of a popular mass movement against the US- and Japan-supported military regime ended the terror. Terror stemmed not from anybody's innate evil, but was incubated by the national division system and perpetuated by the bipolar logic of the Cold War.

Today, to accomplish a 'normal' relationship between these states requires the working out of a common understanding of the past, a framework for cooperation in present, and a shared vision for the future. In concrete terms, the major issue between North Korea and Japan, at least in Japanese eyes, is the abductions, and between North Korea and the United States, in US eyes, that of nuclear weapons, or weapons of mass destruction.

The Abductions

On 17 September 2002, Japanese prime minister Koizumi made a one day visit to Pyongyang. In a dramatic exchange with

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, he apologized for 'the tremendous damage and suffering' inflicted on the people of Korea' during the colonial era (1910-1945), while Kim Jong Il apologized for the abductions of 13 Japanese between 1977 and 1982 and for the despatch of spy ships into Japanese waters (most famously the ship that was sunk in an exchange of fire with the Japanese coastguard in December 2001. The revelations about the abductions of thirteen Japanese, one of them a 13 year-old schoolgirl, of whom eight had died and only five survived, stirred a mood of public anguish and anger in Japan comparable to that which swept over the United States in the wake of 11 September 2001. The whole of Japan, it seemed, was outraged about the injustice suffered, sharing the pain of the abductees and their families, and united in resolve to support them and to force North Korea to make amends.

On 15 October, the five surviving Japanese, who by then had been living in North Korea for about 25 years, flew back to Japan in a special plane. When they returned, they did so, apparently, as North Koreans, taking leave of the North Korean public service jobs and their families in Pyongyang, and with the badge of the 'Dear Leader' Kim Jong Il in their lapels. Initially, they were reluctant to return to Japan at all, preferring that their relatives come to visit them in Pyongyang. Only when subjected to heavy pressure from the Japanese government did they agree to make a short visit. When they got to Japan, the fact that none of them would speak a word ill of North Korea, even, apparently, to their families, was cited as evidence of their having been brain-washed and unable to express themselves freely. When they intimated after about one week that they preferred to return home early, not waiting the maximum two weeks, a frenzied campaign unwound to demand that they be restrained. Television stations and print media gave the abduction blanket coverage, featuring family members almost daily. The Japan-North Korea agenda in government, Diet and media was steadily appropriated by bellicose right-wing forces committed to the overthrow of North Korea, a position close to that of Tokyo Governor Ishihara who on several occasions has spoken of waging war. On 24 October The Chief Cabinet Secretary, Fukuda Yasuo, announced that, despite the agreement with Pyongyang that they would be returned after two weeks, the hapless five would not be allowed to go back and Pyongyang would be required to 'send back' their children.

When the decision to detain them was announced, the Japan Times (25 October) spoke of the government's policy to 'have them stay in Japan permanently' as something 'essential ? so that they can express their free will.' The Yomiuri (25 October) headed its story by referring to the decision that the Five be 'allowed to stay', then going on to add: 'the government will not allow them to return to North Korea, regardless of their intentions ' (italics added). The slide between the language of volition and the language of coercion was something that would have attracted the attention of George Orwell, but few gave it more than a passing thought. If coercion is freedom, then war is peace.

What Tokyo referred to as the 'free will' of the abductees, actually meant the wishes of their families, that is to say the sanguineous rather than the affinal families, and of the politicians and bureaucrats representing the Japanese state. Depriving the Five of their freedom of choice, the Japanese government was adopting the pre-war principle of the priority of the family, the ie, over the individual, despite the

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constitutional provisions under which all citizens as individuals are guaranteed rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, freedom of thought and conscience, and (under Article 22) 'freedom ? to move to a foreign country and to divest themselves of their nationality.' [1] By its decision to keep the Five permanently in Japan, the Japanese state was in effect abducting them again.

In Pyongyang, Japan was seen to be in breach of the agreement under which the five abductees would return after up to two weeks to consider their long-term future. The children could not simply be 'handed over' (by force if necessary, as the Japanese side implied). Pyongyang had, after all, initially suggested that the abductees take their children with them on their Japan visit, but the offer had been declined, so the imputation of bad faith, and the suggestion that the abductees, if once returned to their Pyongyang homes, might never be allowed out again, was gratuitous. Ever since the decision was announced to block the abductees from returning to Pyongyang, negotiations over normalization have been deadlocked.

In relation to the children in Pyongyang whose 'return' to Japan is sought, although the Japanese state saw the children as unquestionably 'Japanese', belonging to Japan, with one exception they were going about their lives in Pyongyang with no idea that their parents were Japanese, let alone originally abducted Japanese, or that they had been taken from them and would not be allowed to come home. The Japanese government's insistence that they were Japanese would undoubtedly have astonished them if they heard it. From their point-of-view, they had simply been deprived of their parents, without explanation, just as twenty and more years ago, the families of the Five were deprived of their children. These are children whose parents have been suddenly and inexplicably 'spirited away'.

At Kuala Lumpur, when follow-up talks on normalization were held in late October, the North Korean delegates were asked to show more 'sincerity', and were told that 'although it concerned the life of human beings, Japan and North Korea seemed to place a different value on people's lives.' When it was announced in late October 2002 that compensation would be demanded from North Korea for the abductions of the 1970s and 1980s, the hypocrisy was breathtaking, since Tokyo has always ruled out any compensation to the former 'Comfort Women', slave laborers, and other victims of the colonial era. It had waited patiently for Pyongyang to weaken its position to the point where the 17 September 'Pyongyang declaration' could be framed in terms of perfunctory formula, carefully designed to have no legal and scant moral consequence. It may have been in some narrow sense in the 'Japanese national interest' to do this, but it was a heartless resolution to a huge historic injustice. Japanese colonialism finally escaped the possibility of ever being found illegitimate, despite the mounting historical evidence to the contrary. The Japanese message to Pyongyang therefore seemed to be precisely the opposite of what its delegate proclaimed in Kuala Lumpur: Korean and Japanese lives were indeed of different value, a handful of Japanese lives weighing far more than hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of Korean lives.

The hard-nosed approach to negotiations and the handling of the abduction issue were popular in Japan. The government's decision to retain the abductees was also taken more-or-less as natural and good, it being inconceivable that any of the 'Pyongyang Five' could actually want to go

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back and live there unless they had been brain-washed. To recover their 'true' identity as Japanese before they could become capable of free choice, the unfortunate victims would have to be subjected to a prolonged process of psyche-scrubbing. Total surveillance and media and political concentration on them served this purpose.

Even more poignant than the Pyongyang Five and their families is the case of Kim Hye Gyong, the 15-year old daughter of Yokota Megumi. Kim's mother, who was snatched on her way home from a badminton game and taken to North Korea in 1977, when she was a 13-year old schoolgirl, married a Korean man in 1986, gave birth the following year to her daughter, and in 1993 (according to the North Korean explanation) died of suicide when suffering depression. A barrage of Japanese efforts was launched to persuade this young girl, brought up by her North Korean father, to leave home and 'visit' her grandparents in Japan. Interviewed for Japanese television, she tearfully asked why her grandparents, having promised to visit her, now insisted instead that she go to see them. Her grandparents responded with the enticement of an offer to take her to Disneyland. Japanese government statements make it clear, though not to her, that any such 'visit' would become a one-way trip, as it had become for the five 'returnees'. Here too, the rights of the Japanese state, and of this child's grandparents (the ie, although the maternal Japanese ie rather than the paternal North Korean one), were given priority over the rights of the girl herself.

The tragedy of the abductees continues, their rights and wishes honored in the abstract, but in practice secondary to the amour propre of a roused Japanese mass opinion and a government swayed by fierce anti-Korean and neo-nationalist sentiment. Mass opinion in Japan experienced a tumult of emotions - sadness shared with the victim families, rage at Pyongyang and desire for revenge, and the belief that Japan would have to teach North Korea how to be a 'normal state'.

However, there were other voices. One Japanese commentator (Yamazumi Masanori) tried to set this in context by asking how normal is the Japan that 'invaded a neighboring country and turned it into a colony, appropriated people's land, names, language, towns and villages, killing those who resisted, forcibly grabbing and abducting and sending off around various war zones young men as laborers and soldiers for the imperial army and women as 'comfort women', at the cost of countless lives, and then for 57 years did not apologize or make reparation.' The respected Korean-in-Japan novelist, Kim Sok Pon, denounced both North Korea, for the abductions and for its 'traitorous and shameful ' act of abandoning claims for reparations, and Japan, for its 'historical amnesia'. Such voices, and there were others, were drowned in the chorus of self-righteous Japanese anger.

In the aftermath of the 17 September meetings, Japan's apology for the crimes of Japanese imperialism was almost totally forgotten. As righteous rage boiled over, the sense of 'Japan as victim' eclipsed any sense of the pain caused by 'Japan as aggressor'. The peculiar Japanese phenomenon of displaced violence, in which school children wearing traditional Korean dress are insulted or abused on the subways or in the streets of Tokyo, Osaka and other cities, spread. Calls for retribution were uttered from high quarters. Korean institutions were placed under guard. Death threats were reported. The conservative Yomiuri began to use

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words like 'odious' to refer to North Korea, while the Asahi (19 September) declared: 'Is it really necessary to establish diplomatic ties with such an unlawful nation?' On 14 October, Prime Minister Koizumi, responsive to the popular mood, denounced North Korea as a 'disgraceful state that abducts and kills people'.

The fierceness of Japanese hostility to North Korea, and the reluctance to face Japan's crimes against Korea, may indeed stem from the fact that North Korea so closely resembles Japan as to be seen as an affront, a kind of burlesque, second-class representation of a divine, myth-based state. Hostility to North Korea is strongest in Japan among those conservatives and neo-nationalists whose prescription for their own country - imperial, patriarchal, monolithic, patriotic, anti- 'Western' - is actually closer to the reality of North Korea than to any conventional, citizen-based democracy. Both countries, superficially poles apart, preserve at a deep level a mythological, imagined identity as special, unique, and superior, rather than the modern frame of citizenship, popular sovereignty and equality.

The readiness in Japan to concede that the Pyongyang perception of the world, however twisted by dictatorship and marked by the criminal acts for which it now apologized, was nevertheless founded in a sense of justice and righteous historical grievance, was conspicuously absent. After the brief Koizumi overture of 17 September, Japan retreated from any attempt to understand the worldview of Pyongyang, make 'sincere' amends for the colonial and Cold War past, or to cooperate in the process of Pyongyang's attempted opening. By December, Japan seemed committed to a belief that Pyongyang was steadily weakening, to the point where it would have no alternative but to return to the negotiating table on Japanese terms. Ultimately Japan's money would, in that view, prove an irresistible card. Meanwhile, following 17 September, considerable pressures were brought to bear to lock Japan into the US strategy of focus on WMD, ratcheting up the pressure to force submission and regime change upon Pyongyang.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

The issue between North Korea and the US has long centered on so-called weapons of mass destruction. Although the issue is presented to the world as the threat posed by a 'rogue' regime pursuing incomprehensible policies that threaten innocent neighbours, the fact is that North Korea's real uniqueness in the nuclear age is its facing and living under the shadow of nuclear threat for longer than any other nation. In the early winter of 1950 General MacArthur sought permission to drop 'between 30 and 50 atomic bombs' and lay a belt of radioactive cobalt across the neck of the Korean peninsula. The Joint Chiefs of Staff several times deliberated and came very close to using the bomb, and during the autumn of 1951 one US operation, known as 'Operation Hudson Harbor', involved the dispatch of a solitary B 29 to Pyongyang as if on a nuclear run. It was designed to cause terror, and undoubtedly it did. Four years after the war ended, the US introduced nuclear artillery, mines, and missiles into Korea, adding thereafter to its stockpile kept adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone and designed to intimidate the non-nuclear North. When nuclear weapons were withdrawn in 1991, at South Korean demand, the US continued its rehearsals for a long-range nuclear bombing strike on North Korea, certainly until 1998, and probably till today.

North Korea seeks no apology, but it seeks an end to the threat of nuclear annihilation

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under which it has lived for almost its entire history. Yet its demand is treated with something akin to derision in Washington, and by Washington's allies. As the US hostility to Iraq has a peculiar intensity because of the failure to unseat Saddam Hussein in 1991, so the US hostility to North Korea has a visceral quality - what Bruce Cumings refers to as an 'exterminist hatred' - because North Korea fought the US to a standstill in 1953 under Kim Il Sung, father of its present leader, and has resisted it ever since.

The world is full of nuclear hypocrisy. It bows to the prerogative of great powers because they possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) even as it resents their monopoly. While membership in the 'nuclear club' earns respect for club members, and a seat on the United Nations Security Council, those who would join the club are either denounced as evil or else covered up and protected (Israel, South Africa, Pakistan) provided they also serve 'Great Power' purposes. Even as Washington under George W. Bush demands that other countries meet various obligations, disavow any nuclear plans and substantially disarm their conventional forces, the US itself refuses to ratify the nuclear test-ban treaty, withdraws from various conventions to control missile and chemical and bacteriological weapons development and deployment, signals its intent to pursue nuclear hegemony including the domination of space, continues to base its defence on nuclear weapons (an armoury of an estimated 9,000 of them), deploys 'conventional weapons' which use the radioactive by-products of nuclear technology (depleted uranium), and pushes Congress to authorize small nuclear warheads, known as 'Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator' weapons, undoubtedly with North Korea's bunkers and underground complexes in mind.

In 1993, a crisis erupted over North Korea's suspected nuclear development program that led in the spring of the following year to the brink of war. In the end the attack was deterred because of the advice to President Clinton on the likely costs of 'Operations Plan 5027': up to one million people would be killed in any full-scale war on the peninsula, including 80,000 to 100,000 Americans, the war would cost over $100 billion and cause losses amounting to more than $1,000 billion (one trillion).

Following the visit of Jimmy Carter to Pyongyang in June 1994, a deal was done that became known as the Geneva 'Agreed Framework'. North Korea would drop its nuclear program in return for the light-water nuclear reactors to be provided for it by a target date of 2003, while the US in return pledged to 'move towards full normalization of political and economic relations.' The leading study of these events, by Don Oberdorfer, concludes by saying that Pyongyang played the nuclear card 'brilliantly, forcing one of the world's richest and most powerful nations to undertake negotiations and to make concessions to one of the least successful nations.'

But it was a deal on which the US was reluctant from the start. Because it hoped or expected that North Korea would collapse long before any nuclear technology would have to be transferred to it, the '2003' pledge was never taken seriously. Delays were chronic. Construction on the site only began in 2002, when a few large holes were dug in the ground. No electricity could possibly be generated until around the end of the present decade at the earliest. Not only did Washington renege on its part of the bargain in terms of provision of power generation facilities, but it was agonizingly slow and reluctant about its

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commitment to 'move towards full normalization of political and economic relations'. There was a breakthrough under Defense Secretary William Perry in 2000, when visits were exchanged between Marshall Jo Myong Rok, Kim Jong Il's right-hand man, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and in October 2000 a Joint US-North Korea Communique reaffirmed the 1994 agreement and expressed renewed commitment to a fundamental improvement in relations and an end to the Korean War. Clinton himself would have gone to Pyongyang had time not run out.

Under the George W. Bush administration, the Agreed Framework came to be seen as a one-sided North Korean commitment to abandon its nuclear program. In early October, Bush's special envoy to Pyongyang, James Kelly, demanded that Pyongyang comprehensively alter its behavior, abandoning its WMD (weapons of mass destruction) programs, ceasing the development and export of ballistic missiles, refraining from threats to its neighbors, support for terrorism, and 'the deplorable treatment of the North Korean people.' Where the first US presidential envoy, William Perry, brought 'the olive branch of d?nte' to Pyongyang in May 2000, the second, Kelly, in October 2002 brought Bush's ultimatum. The hard liners driving Washington policy during 2002 seemed set on nothing short of regime change, in Pyongyang as in Baghdad.

Kelly reported that Pyongyang had admitted the possession of a uranium enriching program and 'other weapons', unspecified, that were 'even more powerful'. The world's media reported that Pyongyang had 'an active nuclear weapons program'. Kelly described his Pyongyang counterparts as 'assertive, aggressive' in manner, and reported that they 'failed to indicate a positive stance.' They returned the compliment by describing him as 'extremely high-handed and arrogant', declaring dialogue with those who were 'keen to disarm it and destroy the Korean-style socialist system' out of the question. You bully and hector us, they seemed to be saying, and we will bully and hector you.

What North Korea subsequently declared to the United Nations was that it had indeed purchased gas centrifuge technology that could be used for enriching uranium, but that it had not operated the devices. Whether possession of a 'device' amounts to a 'program' is a moot point. In any case, no nuclear weapon has ever been developed anywhere without testing, and North Korea has done no testing. It is true that it had an obligation under the 1994 'Agreed Framework' to allow inspection by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), but only when 'a significant portion' of the reactors are complete and before 'key nuclear components' are delivered. Since there had been no progress in providing economic development assistance for so long, Pyongyang presumably took the view that the obligation, like the reactors, had been postponed.

Even assuming North Korea is actively engaged in nuclear weapons design, which is not at all clear, having once admitted it there seems nothing it can now do with it but bargain it away. The Ministry of Unification in Seoul, which has better reason to understand Pyongyang thinking than others, takes this view: 'their true aim is not to continue the nuclear development program, but to seek a breakthrough in relations with the United States.' Pyongyang would seem to have calculated that the one thing the US is bound to take seriously is a nuclear weapon program. With their backs to the wall as the crisis of the regime deepened, and desperate for a breakthrough to 'normalize' relations with the US and Japan, it was engaging not so

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much in irrational brinkmanship as in what Alexandre Mansourov calls 'premeditated coercive diplomacy.'

There was also speculation in Seoul that Washington might have misunderstood, even perhaps deliberately distorted, the Pyongyang 'admission'. One theory was that the reference to something 'even more powerful' than nuclear weapons might have been a rhetorical allusion to the power of the unity of the Workers Party and people, rather than a sinister chemical or biological doomsday project. Kim Dae Jung's senior presidential advisor questioned the timing of the US revelation, when the Koizumi visit was imminent and North-South economic cooperation was gaining momentum. Could it be that Washington did not want peace and reconciliation to break out between the two Koreas and Japan?

The bottom line in Washington's East Asian policy is that Japan 'continue to rely on US protection', any attempt to substitute for it an entente with China would 'deal a fatal blow to U.S. political and military influence in East Asia.' [2] The Bush administration has made clear its demand for Japan to revise its constitution, expand its defense horizon in order to support 'coalition' operations as a fully-fledged NATO-style partner, and (the Armitage report) turn itself into the 'Britain of the Far East'. [3] As the US president in September 2002 redefined his country's role as global hegemon, justifying preemptive war and giving notice that preemptive nuclear strikes were under consideration, the meaning of Japan's alliance had plainly been transformed.

If on the other hand, relations between Japan and North Korea, and between North and South Korea, were to be normalized so that the tension drained from them, the comprehensive incorporation of Japan within the US's global hegemonic project would be difficult to justify. If North Korea were removed from the 'axis of evil', evil would become a purely Islamic attribute and the Bush agenda would become much more difficult to sustain, and if peace broke out in East Asia the justification for the US military base presence in South Korea and Japan would be more difficult to sustain. For Japan to begin to 'walk its own walk', normalizing its relations with the continent and becoming the 'Japan', rather than the "Britain' of East Asia (the subordinate, comprador role assigned it by the Bush administration) would be a nightmare for Washington perhaps even greater than 9:11.

Conclusion

Since its foundation in 1948, the North Korean state has been constructed around the foundation myths of the guerrilla bands that fought against Japan in the 1930s. Since the 1950s it has lived under threat of extinction at the hands of the global superpower. Only when peace is reached with Japan and the US can there be any prospect of the dissolution of the 'guerrilla state'. Now, as the leading Japanese scholar Wada Haruki has argued, the evidence suggests that North Korea is no longer monolithic, that powerful elements in that state do indeed wish to set aside the guerrilla model of secrecy, mobilization, absolute loyalty to the commander, priority to the military, and pursue Perestroika (for which in 2001 the Korean word 'Kaegon' was coined). [4] They want to come in from the cold.

The North Korean state may have committed almost every crime in the book, but it is not alone in that. What is virtually unprecedented is the fact of its admitting and apologizing for some of its crimes. Because it is also poor, desperate and friendless, it seems to be prepared to give

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up almost everything, but pride and face are precious above all else. In the autumn of 2002 the readiness by Japan and the US to make any concession to North Korean 'face', to see in historical context the pain and the sense of justice, however perverted, that drive it, was conspicuously absent, yet the more the pressure is ratcheted up to force submission from Pyongyang, the less likely is any successful outcome.

The apology from Kim Jong Il, the attempted economic reforms, the moves to open road and rail links with South Korea (and to join the trans-continental system), and the growing web of economic cooperation that is being negotiated with South Korea all point to a will for change in Pyongyang. The 17 September Declaration, while flawed, was a positive and historic development. The Korean problem remains a problem not only because of the recalcitrance, violence or madness of North Korea, but also because of the arrogance and hegemonic unilateralism of the United States, and the self-righteousness, studied historical amnesia and deliberate irresponsibility of Japan. Pyongyang negotiators no doubt listen with some astonishment when they are lectured by Tokyo about their need to show sincerity, since Japan has evaded, denied, obfuscated its responsibility toward its former colony for a half century.

The task for historians, philosophers and public intellectuals of the region is to construct a moral and historical frame in which the state crimes of the 20th century can be located, responsibility clarified and victims compensated. One suggestion is an 'East Asian Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. [5] Other proposals, even more visionary, call for moves toward the construction of an 'East Asian Common Home', [6] and it is notable that the Pyongyang Declaration itself referred in this vein of establishing 'co-operative relationships based upon mutual trust among countries concerned in this region'. Only out of such process of reflection and re-imagination is it likely that Japan's sympathies, now so excited by the sufferings of its own people, might be extended to the region, including the current plight of an entire nation. The Pyongyang Five undoubtedly deserve compensation, and the mystery surrounding the deaths of the other eight abductees (and other suspected but not confirmed cases of abduction) must be cleared up, but these issues can only be satisfactorily addressed by reference to universal considerations of justice and humanity, and by those same standards so do the countless victims of Japanese state crimes deserve the redress that should naturally accompany the apology issued by Koizumi. Such a universalist frame of justice and human rights has yet to be embedded in social and political practice in Japan as well as in North Korea.

Notes

1. The Japanese government, early in December, tried to cast its acts in a different light by saying that the abductees themselves decided, by their day 10 in Japan, that they would not return to their Pyongyang homes. However, this report merely cites 'sources' and makes no allusion to the immense pressures placed on the Five or to the plight of the children. ('Abductees voiced desire to stay early', Daily Yomiuri Online, 3 December 2002 **http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/newse/20021202wo42.htm**)

2. Zalmay Khalilzad et al, The United States and Asia: toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture', (better known as the 'Rand Report'), June, 2001 **http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1315/**), p. 15.

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3. Institute for National Strategic Studies, 'The United States and Japan: Advancing toward a Mature Partnership', Washington, National Defense University, 11 October 2000, commonly known as the 'Armitage Report'. (**http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/sr_japan.html**). Recommendation 3 of the subsequent Rand Report of June 2001 reads: 'Support efforts in Japan to revise its constitution, to expand its horizon beyond territorial defense, and to acquire capabilities for supporting coalition operations.'
4. Wada Haruki, 'Can North Korea's Perestroika succeed?', **http://www.zmag.org**, posted October 2002.
5. Yoshioka Tatsuya, 'Higashi Ajia ni shinjitsu wakai furamu', Gendai shiso, November 2002, pp. 8-17.
6. Kang Sangjung, Tohoku Ajia kyodo no ie o mezashite, Heibonsha, 2001.

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