

## Act Vigorously: Japan's National Defense Kiyoto Maeda, Visiting Fellow, Office of the Japan Chair

The world is being rocked by crises in both the Middle East and Northeast Asia. Just as the United States prepares for a showdown with Iraq, North Korea appears to be taking steps toward acquiring nuclear weapons. An uninformed observer thus could be forgiven for thinking that these two original members of the "axis of evil" are in fact working together.

North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program presents an immediate threat to Japan. Following a victory in Iraq, the Bush administration could put more pressure on North Korea to give up its WMD programs. It is highly likely that North Korea may have already decided to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, partly because of its self-defense strategy (based on the *Juche* self-sufficiency ideology) and partly because of its fear of a possible U.S. military strike on its nuclear facilities.

For the duration of the current standoff, it is absolutely imperative that Japan be firm in its resolve not to let North Korea acquire a nuclear weapons capability. A nuclear-armed North Korea would have a far stronger bargaining position, owing to both its ability to use WMD against Japan and its ability to sell these weapons to other states of concern. That said, Japan's role in the current crisis is to remain calm in the face of any provocation and to support U.S. diplomatic efforts toward North Korea.

It is of the utmost importance for Japan to pursue diplomatic and peaceful solutions to security issues in Northeast Asia. Yet, while maintaining its pacifistic values, Japan should prepare several contingency plans. Following are two such plans:

*Contingency Plan A: North Korean Ballistic Missile Launch.* On February 25, 2003, North Korea fired a cruise missile (Silkworm) into the Sea of Japan, timing the test to coincide with the inaugural ceremony of South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun. Although Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda believes that this missile launch does not violate the Pyongyang Declaration, it does demonstrate North Korea's ability to ratchet up tension with military demonstrations. U.S. and Japanese strategists think that some provocative actions including a ballistic-missile test is likely during mid-March when a coalition attack on Iraq might occur (despite the fact that Minister of Defense Shigeru Ishiba has warned that it is legal for Japan to strike North Korean missiles aimed at Japan, if Japan learns of their imminent launch).

If deterrence fails, and North Korea launches a ballistic missile over Japan or into the heart of Japan, the first thing that Prime Minister Koizumi must do is convene a National Security Council meeting. This meeting would determine whether the launch was an act of war against Japan. If it is determined to be an act of war, it is conceivable that the Self Defense Force (SDF) could consider taking appropriate measures under close consultation with U.S. forces. Even if it is not determined to be an act of war against Japan, a North Korean ballistic-missile launch will make the U.S. diplomatic position much more severe and trigger a discussion of possible economic sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. If economic sanctions are deemed appropriate, Japan would be one of the main actors in the region responsible for clamping down on the drug smuggling, money remittance, and trade that generates hard currency for North Korea. Depending on North Korea's next steps, the international community may move to the next stage of action, namely a possible naval blockade. In that case, Japan would have to consider whether to join the international ship-inspection operations, most likely under the Law Concerning the Conduct of Ship Inspection Operations in Areas

Surrounding Japan (the Ship Inspection Operations Law which was a piece of legislation prepared with the U.S.-Japan Security Guidelines of 2000).

A longer-term response is a ballistic missile defense (BMD) system. It is important to remember that, unlike many nations, Japan's national security strategy is highly defense-oriented (as opposed to nations like Russia, China, and the United States that deploy offensive nuclear weapons). A BMD system would mesh well with Japan's strategy. In considering a BMD system, Japan should keep in mind the feasibility and total cost of such a system. Because Japan is a naval power with Aegis-equipped destroyers, a sea-based BMD system is a likely option.

*Contingency Plan B: Concerning a 'Situation in Areas Surrounding Japan.'* North Korea has been taking additional provocative actions. It has recently threatened to pull out of the Korean War Armistice Agreement. It has also flown a MIG-19 into South Korea's airspace. In the event that tensions become much greater on the Korean peninsula, Japan should be prepared for any contingency. It should develop an evacuation plan for the approximately 40,000 Japanese nationals living in South Korea. Japan should also consider what kind of logistical support it could and should provide U.S. forces stationed in Japan under the Law Concerning Measures to Ensure the Peace and Security of Japan in Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan, another piece of legislation prepared with the U.S.-Japan Security Guidelines of 1997.

In support of the mission of the allied forces, it might be possible to dispatch Japanese personnel in a liberated Iraq may be on option. Japan could also aid the United States by hosting a donor conference for post-war Iraq. A firm commitment to the United States will strengthen Japan's position with respect to North Korea.

I am not hoping for a crisis. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that "heightened awareness and readiness deter crisis and save our lives," as Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge mentioned when the threat level for the U.S. homeland was raised. A full-blown crisis on the Korean peninsula will be a test case for the effective operations of the U.S.-Japan security alliance as well as for Japan's national defense capability. Long-term planning will contribute to the optimal performance of both.

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