

## A “Northern” Shadow on US-Japan Relations

By **TAKUBO Tadae**

Japan faces many problems with countries on the Eurasian landmass such as Russia, China, and Korean Peninsula. The US-Japan alliance acts as a bulwark in such matters, but US-Japan relations are now under threat. Differences have started to appear in how the United States and Japan are dealing with North Korea's nuclear development plans and the abduction issue.

The Six-Party talks that were held over three days in Beijing from July 18-20 ended without any remarkable result. The US representative at the talks, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher HILL, said that the talks had gained momentum, but exactly what was achieved? Ahead of the talks, HILL repeatedly asked North Korean representative, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs KIM Kye-gwan, that he wanted to move from the starting position to the next stage within the year, but North Korea refused to make any commitments to the US. Despite this, HILL justified his position by saying that there was no need to set any particular deadline. But wasn't it promised in the February agreement that the next stage was to be a complete declaration of all nuclear programs and disablement of all existing nuclear facilities? If the situation is left as it is, US and Japanese approaches to North Korea cannot but grow further apart.

The issue of concern is whether the US will remove North Korea from its list of nations that sponsor terrorism. If it is removed from the list, international financial institutions will start supplying funds to North Korea, and a split will likely form between the US and Japan, which has taken a hard line on economic sanctions imposed on the North over the abduction issue. Prime Minister ABE and former Chairman of the LDP's Policy Research Council NAKAGAWA, as well as influential members of LDP and various opposition lawmakers who have taken a tough position on the abductions issue, will face a political crisis. One thing to note in particular is the fact that many of those politicians who actively address the abductions issue tend to come under pro-American school. Any worsening in relations between the US and Japan will hurt these politicians the most.

The Honda Resolution on so-called the comfort women issue recently passed the House of Representatives in the US. It appears that Japan and the US miss each other over the issue as Japan has insisted that it is simply a question of whether there was “coercion by the Japanese army” about

the practice as stated in the Honda resolution, while US criticizes the very existence of the official brothels of the time. Those who consider the Honda resolution to be correct are, broadly speaking, the group that wishes to distance itself from US policy, and those who consider it to be incorrect are those who favor US policy.

In the past when trouble has occurred between the US and Japan, solutions have been achieved through a system involving “Japan-hands” in the US and “US-hands” in Japan. But now it has not worked. Many Japan specialists within the US government are now gone, and the only person that showed some understanding of the Japanese position as to the Honda resolution was Senator Daniel INOUE. Moreover, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard ARMITAGE, who has worked for many years to strengthen US-Japan relations, has lost much of his influence within the Republican Party after being implicated in a scandal over the leak of the name of CIA agent. Criticism of him has been pointed because of his continued silence despite leaking the names, and the resulting “sacrifice” of Lewis LIBBY, former Chief of Staff to Vice-President CHENEY, for perjury. US-Japan relations are truly facing a major crisis.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. TAKUBO Tadae, Guest Professor of Kyorin University, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Seiho” of JFIR on July 30, 2007.)**