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One Step Forward in Denuclearization of North Korea

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Japanese mass media has been uniformly criticizing the Bush administration for its decision to proceed to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Nor is it satisfied with the declaration submitted by North Korea which did not include any nuclear weapon. However, I have to say that these are sentimental arguments which are ignorant of the framework of the six-party talks. The six-party agreement reached in Beijing on February 13 2007 stated that North Korea would disable the Yongbyon nuclear facilities and submit a declaration of all nuclear programs as second-phase actions, in return to which the US would remove North Korea from the list of states that sponsor terrorism by taking "simultaneous actions" in line with the principle of "action for action." Any postponement of the removal of North Korea from the list would result in the failure of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula during the Bush administration.

There is also criticism against the Bush administration in that the US has eased the pressure on North Korea's uranium-enrichment program and its suspected supply of nuclear technologies to Syria. The Bush administration has been blamed for its compromise with North Korea on these issues in a separate document with ambiguous expressions. However, no matter how severely North Korea is accused, Pyongyang would not admit those facts at all. In addition, there is no clear evidence for those problems. Therefore, even such a promise by North Korea not to conduct those practices should be regarded as a considerable accomplishment. The US is also criticized for acknowledging North Korea as a virtually nuclear weapon state because the declaration did not include existing nuclear warheads. However, I think it is a big misunderstanding. Although a military official stated that North Korea should be treated as a nuclear weapon state, the international society would not be indulgent enough to accept such outrageous statement.

The third-phase of the Beijing agreement calls for the conclusion of a peace treaty between the US and North Korea and the normalization of diplomatic relations between the US and North Korea and between Japan and North Korea. In return, Pyongyang has promised it would return to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) regime and accept inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency

(IAEA). The NPT does not allow any state other than the US, Russia, the UK, France and China to possess nuclear arms. In other words, it is a discriminatory treaty. India and Pakistan –its staunch rival- do not participate in the NPT for this reason. North Korea will never obtain the reward as long as it adheres to the nuclear possession. Inspections conducted by the IAEA would not allow any secret nuclear possession. Neither could North Korea acquire a light water reactor. Although the third-phase would not be completed during the Bush administration, it is impossible for North Korea to dominate North East Asia with nuclear weapons. Japan should not panic over the Bush administration's decision to remove North Korea from the list of states that sponsor terrorism. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula comes to the crucial stage from now on. Japan still has variety of cards to play, such as large-scale economic co-operations as part of normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations, as agreed in the Japan-North Korea joint declaration in 2002.

(This is the English Translation of an article written by Mr. YOSHIDA Yasuhiko, Visiting Professor at Osaka University of Economics and Law, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Seiho” of JFIR on June 30, 2008)