

Punish S. Korean Lawmakers for Visiting Northern Territories

Yoichi Shimada

On May 24, three South Korean lawmakers visited Japan's Northern Territories with visas issued by Russia. In a stereotypical comment, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto said, "Japan cannot tolerate third-country lawmakers' visit to the Northern Territories, Japan's inherent territory, to demonstrate their admission of Russia's jurisdiction over the territories. It is very regrettable." But the Kan government took no more action. It has fallen short of taking any retaliatory action against the South Korean government, which admitted that it requested Russia's assistance (for the acquisition of air tickets and the like for the three lawmakers) to help lawmakers conduct their missions.

Prohibit the three from visiting Japan

When Dietmen of the opposition Liberal Democratic Party asked Prime Minister Naoto Kan on May 20 about the South Koreans' planned visit, Kan said the Japanese government was confirming facts and promised to make a proper response. On May 24 when the South Korean lawmakers implemented the planned visit, the prime minister sent Japanese Ambassador in Seoul Masatoshi Muto to South Korea's Foreign Ministry to convey the Japanese government's regret over the visit. The South Korean government then said it had nothing to do with the action by some opposition lawmakers. As Prime Minister Kan did not raise the matter at a meeting with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak on May 22, Seoul might have concluded that it would not have to respond to the Japanese protest.

Asked if the statement of regret was the "proper response," a senior Foreign Ministry official said "yes" at a meeting of the LDP's Foreign Affairs Division on May 25. When an LDP lawmaker called for a ban on visits to Japan by the three South Korean lawmakers, the official made a negative answer, noting that if Japan took such action against the South Koreans, the way to treat Russian President Dmitry Medvedev who visited the Northern Territories last November would become a problem (see a blog by Masahisa Sato, an LDP member of the House of Councilors). It is quite absurd that the Kan government, while lacking consistency in dealing with many problems,

is sticking to consistency in its coward diplomacy. Japan's inaction could be interpreted as a message to Moscow that Tokyo would not protest any future visit by the Russian leader to the Northern Territories. Instead of sticking to such minor consistency, the government should impose a clear sanction on those South Korean lawmakers.

Don't allow China, Russia and South Korea to collude against Japan

In early May, South Korean lawmakers created a league to regularize a seminar of South Korean, Chinese and Russian experts on territorial issues. The league, including leading lawmakers from both ruling and opposition parties, could cooperate with China and Russia in shaking substantially Japan over territorial issues (according to Sankei Shimbun reporter Ruriko Kubota). Regarding problems involving Japan's sovereignty, the government, and ruling and opposition parties must be united in asserting Japan's position. Such assertion may lead South Korean politicians to understand that their "Northern Territories game" is dangerous and could antagonize the entire Japan.

Among those who are keeping silent about this matter are former members of the defunct Japan Socialist Party (now belong to either Social Democratic Party or Democratic Party of Japan) who had in the past refrained from protesting the abduction of Japanese nationals by the North Korean Workers' Party, and had effectively been involved in efforts to cover it up. They are almost identical to those who oppose the planned no-confidence motion against the Kan cabinet in the House of Representatives. Voters should give them a hard blow in the next general election.

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