

### **Do Not Use Abduction Issue for Political Survival**

Tsutomu Nishioka

Prime Minister Naoto Kan is considering a visit to North Korea in a bid to remain in office longer. In response to Kan's request, Hiroshi Nakai, a former cabinet minister in charge of the North Korean abduction issue, secretly met with Song Il Ho, North Korea's ambassador for normalization talks with Japan, in China's Changchun on July 21 and 22. An official from the government's headquarters for the abduction issue accompanied Nakai at the meeting. The official is on loan from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nakai and Song made no progress on the abduction issue, while agreeing to continue talks.

Just before his visit to China, Nakai met with a senior government official (who could be Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano) to make coordination for Kan's visit to North Korea. Earlier, Nakai and Song met several times in third countries. The Foreign Ministry had been unaware of Nakai's contacts with North Korea till this spring. "Unless all abductees are allowed to return to Japan, it may be difficult to get understanding from the Japanese public or the ruling party about such political performance," a diplomatic source said, criticizing the secret contacts with North Korea.

#### **N. Korea seems eager to approach Japan**

The above is a summary of the Sankei Shimbun's scoop reports since July 26. Not only the newspaper but also Fuji Television Network had been aware of the Nakai-Song meeting beforehand. The TV station used a hidden camera to take video footage of Nakai and his party upon his departure from Japan and aboard an aircraft. I myself have been informed of the secret Japan-North Korea contacts since early July and can acknowledge that Sankei reports are roughly accurate. But Nakai and Prime Minister Kan have flatly denied such contacts. Nakai explained that he made a personal trip to Changchung, his birthplace, and had no contact with North Koreans.

The official from the government headquarters said he took a vacation to guide Nakai.

As indicated by these developments, North Korea has been so eager to approach Japan that it has accepted negotiations with Prime Minister Kan even just before his resignation. Economic sanctions by Japan, the United States and South Korea have begun to produce effects, depleting financial resources for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's political spending estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars a year. He might have no choice but to accept negotiations with Japan to make preparations for the centennial birthday of Kim Il Sung next year and make arrangements for his successor Kim Jong Un.

#### **Kan has yet to give up visiting Pyongyang**

North Korea may be hoping to achieve two goals in negotiations with Japan. It may be willing to obtain the relaxation of sanctions and food aid over a short term and get funds worth more than 1 trillion yen through the normalization of bilateral relations eventually. Pyongyang may be expecting to achieve the first goal even under the present lame-duck Kan administration. Particularly, it may be seeking to cut a political deal with Prime Minister Kan over the pending seizure of assets at the headquarters for the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, or Chosen Soren, on which the Supreme Court is expected to issue a ruling within August.

Why have the secret negotiations been leaked? I suspect that the leak has been made intentionally by bureaucrats who oppose Prime Minister Kan's attempt to take advantage of the abduction issue for remaining in office longer. But Prime Minister Kan has yet to give up visiting North Korea. In order to rescue Japanese citizens abducted to North Korea, Japan must put an end to the abnormal situation where Prime Minister Kan is trying to lead diplomacy even after his resignation offer.

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