

Japan-US-ROK Solidarity Urged to Respond to Lawmaker's Protest

Yoichi Shimada

As the United States and North Korea announced their agreement on the North's nuclear issue on February 29, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton welcomed it as "a modest first step in the right direction." Again, however, the agreement is likely to become the first dangerous step for the United States to plunge into a maze and to increase risk for Japan and South Korea also being dragged into the maze. While North Korea has accepted a moratorium on nuclear activities, uranium enrichment activities subject to the moratorium have been limited to those in Yongbyon. Plutonium-related facilities are excluded from the moratorium in Pyongyang's announcement. The United States might have made a misstep at the starting point. In exchange for the moratorium, the United States agreed to provide North Korea with nutritional assistance including a therapeutic peanut-based paste known as Plumpy'Nut, which is put into an airtight package for long preservation. This food product is suitable for commandos and clandestine operatives and could effectively support state terrorism.

The N. Korean deal is a tiresome performance

As expectations have grown on Myanmar's democratization, international moves have accelerated to lift sanctions on and launch investment in Myanmar. The expectations have been triggered by the Myanmar government's release of political prisoners. The biggest indication for an iron-fist regime's full-fledged reform is the release of political prisoners. If a reward is given for a tiresome performance represented by the partial moratorium on uranium enrichment which composes only a part of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, it may only delay the release of political prisoners as the first true step for democratization. The release of foreign abductees would have similar implication in the case of North Korea.

A development that came in the past week and could trigger a breakthrough on the Korean Peninsula was a hunger sit-in that South Korean National Assemblywoman Park Sun Young conducted before the

Chinese embassy in Seoul in protest to China's deportation of North Korean defectors. Before she fell unconscious and was taken to hospital on March 2, the 11th day of her sit-in, the action led to movements for supporting and siding with her in South Korea. The Chosun Ilbo has assessed that one national assemblywoman fought against a taboo involving North Korean defectors, attracting global attention. This assessment is not exaggeration. In fact, the U.S. Congress has set an emergency Senate-House joint hearing for March 5 on China's possible violation of the U.N. refugee convention.

Protection of defectors as a preparation for "freedom unification"

If China has no choice but to tacitly allow North Korean defectors to go to South Korea even via third countries, North Korea may reach the same situation as seen in East Germany that fell on a massive exodus of citizens. Nevertheless, the South Korean government had fallen short of making a strong protest to China, taking up the problem in any international arena or seeking help from allies or friendly countries. This time, however, South Korean President Lee Myung Bak had nothing but telling the lawmaker on phone during the hunger strike that he thanked her for doing what all should do and for making a good step. Taking this opportunity, Japanese politicians should encourage and help the South Korean government to get tough against China. Such experience could help to lead to a situation where South Korea would call for a "freedom unification" of the two Koreas with U.S. and Japanese support to counter China's attempt to take control of the North in turmoil.

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