

Return of All Abductees Is Non-Negotiable

Tsutomu Nishioka

On August 29, Japan and North Korea held intergovernmental talks in Beijing for the first time in four years. At the preliminary working-level talks that were extended for one day, the two sides agreed to hold official talks to discuss matters of interest to both. The Japanese side announced that the matters would naturally include North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens. But North Korea fell short of specifying the problem as a topic for the official talks.

N. Korea demands \$50,000 for a body

The intergovernmental talks had been proposed by North Korea to discuss the return of the Japanese war dead and their relatives' visits to the graves as a humanitarian issue. Though being concerned that the abduction problem could be shelved, the Japanese government accepted the proposal that it took as representing the first North Korean approach to Japan after Kim Jong-un became North Korea's top leader.

Kim Jong-un, first secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, apparently hopes to get a substantial amount of money from Japan and have Japan lift various sanctions on North Korea. The U.S. government has paid massive dollars for the remains of U.S. soldiers who died during the Korean War in the 1950s. A report says that North Korea has asked Japan to pay 4 million yen (about \$50,000) for the remains of every war dead in line with the U.S. payments. Japanese statistics indicate that the remains of 21,000 war dead, including civilians who died on their escape journey to Japan around the end of World War II, are still left in North Korea. The reported North Korean demand amounts to 80 billion yen (about \$1 billion). A daughter of Japanese terrorists who hijacked the Japan Airline jet Yodo and defected to North Korea is reportedly involved in the activities of an association of relatives of the war dead left in North Korea, indicating some North Korean spy agency's engagement with the association.

Kim Jong-un will first try to get money for the return of war dead

remains without taking any action on the abduction problem. Japan's Noda Administration, which has listed the resolution of the abduction problem as one of its top priorities, is likely to reject such attempt. If the attempt fails, Kim Jong-un may take some action on the abduction problem.

Over 10 abductees gathered in Pyongyang?

In early July, I got confidential information that said: "Negotiations to restore relations with Japan will be held at the special instruction of Kim Jong-un. In preparation for the talks, secret police known as the State Security Ministry has gathered more than 10 Japanese abductees in Pyongyang and put them under its control. An order has been issued to unconditionally arrest as a spy anyone, even if he or she is from the ministry, other than officials in charge of the abductees, who would approach or try to take information from the abductees."

According to information I have got, North Korea has classified the Japanese abductees into three groups – (1) those who are under control by the State Security Ministry and have never engaged with external spying operations, (2) those who are under control by spy agencies and have been forced to cooperate in such operations as terrorist attacks, and (3) those who are under control by the Workers' Party's powerful Organization and Guidance Department and aware of key secrets. Kim Jong-un attempts to get massive money and put an end to the abduction problem by returning only the first group. This group excludes the eight abductees who have been claimed as dead by North Korea, including Megumi Yokota and Yaeko Taguchi.

The Japanese government must make two points to Kim Jong-un through official talks. The first point is that the return of all abductees is the precondition for proceeding with discussions on humanitarian issues including the return of war dead remains. The second point is that the Japanese side has information confirming the survival and whereabouts of the second and third group abductees and will not allow North Korea to put an end to the abduction problem by returning only the first group. It is an urgent challenge for Japan to lead Kim Jong-un to rightly understand the two points.

Tsutomu Nishioka is Planning Committee Member, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals, and Professor at Tokyo Christian University.