

November 25, 2008

No Independent State Tolerates Abduction of its Citizens

By HANAOKA Nobuaki

It came as no surprise that the United States has removed North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Two months' delay of the removal, originally scheduled for this August, carries no political implications. Some people in Japan quite naively regard this delay as a sign of solicitude of the US towards Japan in relation to the abduction issue. But this is wide of the mark. Rather, we should assume that the abduction issue has been no concern of the US from the outset. Government officials of Japan, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, must have been aware of this fact. The removal was to be carried out sooner or later. If Japan could have lead the US to give it a second thought by every political and diplomatic means, Japan should deserve due credit for its "hidden strength." Of course, this is not the case. Here lie the political responsibilities of the Japanese government. It might have given the Japanese public a wrong message that the US would not remove North Korea from the list, as long as the abduction issue remains unsolved. In fact, it was quite the other way around. For all the member states in the six-party talks other than Japan, their immediate concern was North Korea's nuclear weapon and missiles. While expressing sympathy and regret to the issue, they hold in their heart that the abduction issue is a bilateral problem between Japan and North Korea, which is to be solved by themselves.

The Japanese government should frankly acknowledge the fact. So far, it has neglected to explain to the nation the harsh reality that the removal of North Korea from the list has indeed little to do with the abduction issue. The Japanese government has glossed over this reality and did an abrupt backflip in the face of the removal. This kind of attitude would seriously undermine the public's confidence in politics. The bottom line is that the abduction issue is not the most immediate concern for countries other than Japan. To them, containment of North Korea's nuclear weapon and missiles was the most prioritized issue. If so, Japan should tackle the abduction issue on its own. Foreign agents infiltrated the Japanese border and abducted a large number of innocent Japanese citizens. This is nothing but the epitome of a state crime that infringes Japanese sovereignty. No independent state tolerates this enormity. It is by right a duty of an independent sovereign state to dispatch a commando unit to perform a special mission to recapture the abductees. Japan has, as it seems, abandoned this option in the first place.

Japan has failed in its task to protect the lives and property of its citizens. As the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea points out, the abduction issue is "an ongoing terrorism." Setting aside the promise to conduct reinvestigation on abduction, North Korea has not even tried to establish an investigation committee on the

abduction. Prime Minister ASO Taro expressed his discomfort with the US government at the House of Councilor's Budget Committee. There is a slight change in his attitude compared to the way he reacted when he first received the report of the removal of North Korea from the list. The Japanese government should be accused of its lack in foresight as it was not prepared, though amid the turbulence of domestic politics, to react when the US should remove North Korea from the list. If we are deprived of the option to resort to force, what could be done instead? Japan has no choice but to reinforce the sanction policy in its own right. Japan should not go hand in hand with other countries in providing energy assistance to North Korea. The abduction issue poses a fundamental question upon *raison d'etre* of a sovereign state.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. HANAOKA Nobuaki, Journalist, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on November 6, 2008)