

Japan Must Prepare for War Between U.S. and North Korea. North Korea's Nuclear Threat

Yomiuri Shimbun, John Feffer

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The Yomiuri Shimbun

Japan Focus introduction: Once the closest U.S. ally on North Korean issues, Japan is now feeling alone and isolated. The Bush administration has reversed its stance toward Pyongyang and appears to be on the verge of removing the country from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. China and South Korea are racing to invest money into North Korea. Russia backs both inter-Korean engagement and North Korea's integration into the global economy.

Still Japan holds back. Tokyo has expressed considerable displeasure over Washington's decision on the terrorism list, as the abduction issue continues to cast a heavy shadow over policymaking in Japan. Tokyo went so far as to send a delegation to Washington to plead its case in November

And while so many in the region – and even inside the Beltway – are talking about turning a new page with North Korea, Japan remains stuck in the mode of preparing for war. Consider, for example, the series

the Yomiuri Shimbun on "North Korea's Nuclear Threat." The final article in the series, which serves as a foreign policy punch line, recommends that the Japanese government "prepare for war between U.S., North Korea." The Yomiuri offers a fictional scenario in which North Korea crosses a red line by selling nuclear material to an unnamed Islamic terrorist group, and Tokyo is on the frontlines in a new war between Pyongyang and Washington. "The nuclear threats facing Japan are even graver than we tend to assume," the article concludes.

North Korea's nuclear threat functions, in the Yomiuri series, as the rationale for a set of familiar policies. The newspaper recommends that the new government of Yasuo Fukuda cement the U.S.-Japan alliance by renewing its commitment to the Afghanistan support operation. It urges an upgrading of the Proliferation Security Initiative, designed to draw a WMD cordon sanitaire around North Korea. And it all but dismisses the results of the recent inter-Korean summit as irresponsible. In this way, Japan's

largest circulation newspaper speaks for the segment of the political spectrum that has used the North Korean threat as a political tool to advance its own military-diplomatic agenda of creating a "normal" –

that is, ready to go on the offensive – Japanese army.

In the past, however, the architects of the new Japanese militarism had more ammunition, so to speak, at their disposal. North Korea aided their efforts by launching the Taepodong rocket over the islands in 1998. U.S. accusations of North Korea's highly enriched uranium program in 2002 helped to create an image of an untrustworthy and dangerous neighbor. And the abduction issue, which mushroomed after Koizumi Junichiro's September 2002 visit to Pyongyang, transformed North Korea from a military threat into an evil country with which it was impossible to negotiate.



A launcher of the PAC-3 ground-based antimissile missile deployed to a Self-Defense Force base

Since then, however, the Six Party Talks have yielded several key agreements. North Korea has shut down its Yongbyon facility and is close to providing a declaration of its nuclear programs. And there have even been indications that Pyongyang is willing to find some modus operandi on the abduction issue. In other words, despite North Korea's abrupt entrance into the nuclear club in October 2006, the actual threat emanating from Pyongyang has diminished quite considerably.

The foes of engaging North Korea, such as John Bolton and his coevals at the Heritage Foundation, are marshalling their arguments. The Yomiuri series is part of the Japanese side of the campaign to undermine the Six Party process before it has a chance to show any further results. Let's call it "fear-mongering with Japanese characteristics." John Feffer

The following is an "X-day" scenario that Japan might face in the near future.

On X-day, the Prime Minister's Office receives secret information from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. It says: Contact has been observed between North Korean nuclear development officials and an Islamic terrorist organization. North Korea is possibly planning to sell nuclear weapons.

The prime minister immediately holds a meeting of the Security Council of Japan, and tells its members, "If it's proven that North Korea has sold nuclear weapons to terrorists, the United

States will certainly launch an attack."

That means Japan will be a target of North Korean nuclear missiles.

Following North Korea's nuclear tests in October 2006, the six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions succeeded in dismantling some of the country's nuclear facilities in Yongbyon and nearby areas in late 2007.



Yonbyon

However, the United States then shifted its priority to dialogue with North Korea, and Pyongyang kept silent about the fate of the estimated 10 nuclear warheads that the country was believed to possess, and its plans to produce highly enriched uranium.

Five days after X-day, Japanese and U.S. defense officials hold a joint meeting in the central command center of the Defense Ministry on the third and fourth basement levels of its headquarters.

A U.S. officer explains: "On the first day of the

war, U.S. forces will attack underground missile bases in Musudan, Kitaeryong and other locations using bunker-busters and other types of guided weapons. We'll be using 4,000 such weapons per day..."

A frustrated senior Self-Defense Forces officer interrupts and says: "That's five times the number used in the the Iraq war. But is it really enough to stop missile launches?"

North Korea has no missiles capable of directly hitting the U.S. mainland. The Rodong missiles that target Japan have a range of about 1,300 kilometers, and are transported on mobile launch pads. In addition, Rodong missiles have been modified to use solid fuel, which makes it difficult to detect advance signs of launch.

The SDF officer is worried.

Seven days after X-day, a press officer at the U.S. Defense Department shows the press photos of Rodong missiles mounted on trucks taken by a KH-11 reconnaissance satellite.

The officer condemns North Korea, saying the country should get rid of all its nuclear weapons immediately. The North Korean Foreign Ministry issues a counter-statement that says, "We'll rain thunder on the arrogant enemy who violates our sovereign rights as a nuclear power." The wording is a veiled threat that North Korea

might use nuclear weapons.

The prime minister orders the SDF to stand by to defend the nation.

The Kongo, a Maritime Self-Defense Force Aegis-class destroyer, is dispatched to the Sea of Japan with a U.S. aircraft carrier group, and conducts missile interception drills.

Though SM-3 antimissile missiles are extremely reliable, an Aegis destroyer can only carry a maximum of eight. And while most Rodong missiles are not nuclear-tipped, the MSDF possesses only 32 SM-3 missiles. It is unknown whether all the Rodong missiles flying toward Japan can be shot down.

If an incoming missile cannot be shot down with an SM-3, the next line of defense is a battery of PAC-3 ground-based antimissile missiles deployed at an SDF base in Ichigaya, Tokyo. Tasked with defending the capital, the PAC-3 missiles are set up to defend against missiles coming from the west.

Ten days after X-day, Al-Jazeera, a Middle Eastern broadcaster based in Qatar, begins airing a recording of an international terrorist leader made several days before. In it, the terrorist says, "I tell the U.S. government, we now have nuclear weapons."

Of course, this is fiction. But if terrorists do obtain nuclear weapons from North Korea, the United States will surely attack the country. This is the worst-case scenario for Japan.

Since Pyongyang's nuclear test in October last year, the Defense Ministry has been drawing up an action plan for the SDF regarding a possible nuclear crisis.

The plan envisages scenarios such as Kim Jong Il's death and an ensuing collapse of the regime; and North Korea's development of ballistic missiles capable of directly hitting the U.S. mainland.

Japan's goal is to persuade North Korea to abandon nuclear weapons through diplomatic means, such as the six-party talks and the defense alliance with the United States.

The reality, however, is that North Korea seems to be solidifying its status as a nuclear power, just as India and Pakistan did.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates once remarked that Northeast Asia is one of the last places on this planet where armed conflict involving nuclear weapons could occur.

Japan cannot escape from this grim reality, as the nation also has to face nuclear threats from China and Russia, not just North Korea.

The nuclear threats facing Japan are even graver than we tend to assume.

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John Feffer is the co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus and a Japan Focus Associate. His most recent

*book is***The Future of US-Korean Relations: The Imbalance of Power***This article appeared in The Yomiuri Shimbun on Nov. 18, 2007. It is the sixth and final installment in* <http://www.amazon.com/Future-US-Korean-Relations-Imbalance->*series focusing on North Korea's threat to Japan and future tasks for the nation's security policy. Posted at Japan Focus on December 7, 2007.*