

The Japanese Rightwing's Contrived Hysteria

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By *GREGORY CLARK*

Japan seems headed for yet another bout of emotional confrontation with North Korea and China.

The latest anti-North Korea anger concerns the fate of Yokota Megumi, a girl that Pyongyang admits it abducted from Japan in 1977. Pyongyang authorities had claimed she had since died, but DNA examination of the bone they produced to prove her death suggests it is not hers. Images of Yokota's grieving parents calling for economic sanctions against North Korea have flashed across the TV screens for weeks. The rightwing media call for even stronger measures to punish and isolate North Korea for its "insincerity."

But if the bone does not belong to Yokota, doesn't this suggest that the woman could still be alive and active? Instead of grief, there should be relief. Instead of sanctions, there should be more contacts to get to the truth of things.

Pyongyang's officials have already admitted that they have a problem with their "special agencies" -- North Korea's all-powerful spy outfits. The conclusion should be obvious: At least some of the abductees, including maybe Yokota, have had to work in the agency's spy-training outfits, and cannot be released now for fear of jeopardizing spy operations.

Further escalation of tension with Japan makes

it certain that the "special agencies" will want to hold on to the missing abductees a lot longer. This seems to have registered with some of the Japanese handling negotiations with Pyongyang, including Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. But in the media and among ambitious rightwing politicians such as Deputy Secretary General Abe Shinzo, the scenarios said to be needed to counter North Korea's "insincerity" range from national mobilization and preventive attack to obtaining the nuclear arms and rockets needed to counter North Korea's alleged military threat if sanctions are imposed.

Nowhere is there mention of Japan's far greater "insincerity" in refusing apologies or compensation for once having forced hundreds of thousands of Koreans to work in Japan, or in refusing any study of the bones recently found of people, probably Chinese and Koreans, who perished in a wartime Tokyo vivisection camp.

With China we see the same contrived hysteria. The rightwing vents fury on Beijing's warnings that relations with Japan cannot improve as long as Japanese prime ministers continue to pay respects at the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. The rightwing insists angrily that every nation has the right to honor its war dead, and that Beijing's warnings are crude intervention in Japan's affairs.

But Beijing makes it clear it has no problem with Japan honoring its 3 million war dead. Its problem is the way the shrine also honors the 14 former Japanese leaders convicted and executed for instigating a war that led not just to a 3 million Japanese dead but also to an estimated 20 million Chinese war dead. Some in Japan realize that this is the real issue, but it

is ignored by a rightwing determined to stir up popular dislike for China. And when the polls show the dislike exists, the rightwing then uses this to justify further anti-China activities.

The distortions in Japan's several maritime disputes with China are even more dangerous. China claims that the border of the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) between Japan and China in the East China Sea should be decided on the basis of its continental shelf (which extends much of the way to Okinawa) rather than the median line between the two coastlines. The claim has some basis in international law, and Beijing has called for talks on the issue.

For Tokyo, talks are not needed. The issue is already decided. The median line is always described as Japan's EEZ border, not as its claimed border. Any Chinese activity near or within that line is considered a violation -- despite the fact that the Sino-Japan Fisheries Agreement of 1997 recognizes that the agreement was needed because the EEZ issue had not been decided.

Meanwhile, Tokyo steers carefully away from any suggestion that the issue should be put before the International Court of Justice, where it is quite possible that Japan would lose.

Japan's claim to a EEZ over a vast area of the Pacific Ocean around a tiny fragment of coral reef known as Okinotori Island, far to the southeast of Okinawa, is even more dubious.

The 1982 U.N. Law of the Sea Convention states quite clearly: "Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf." This particular rock is no more than a meter or so wide and high.

Yet fervent rightwingers such as Tokyo Gov. Ishihara Shintaro are already calling for military action to repel Chinese activity in Japan's claimed EEZ around the alleged

"island."

Curiously there is almost no debate among the Japanese public over the rights and wrongs of these war-threatening issues. Once the rightwing says black is white, the rest of Japan follows meekly along. Even in the progressive media, it is now taken for granted that Japan's EEZ claims are quite correct and that any Chinese challenge to those claims proves hostile intent.

Taiwan is another flashpoint. The rightwing not only calls for Taiwan's independence from China but also U.S. military support for any confrontation with China over Taiwan -- despite the fact that Japan in 1972 specifically recognized China's sovereignty over Taiwan. Somehow rightwing logic says that China's anger at the attempted denial of its internationally recognized sovereignty is proof that such sovereignty should be denied.

Almost without debate, the rightwing has been able to have China listed in Japan's defense strategies as a potential enemy. China's military buildup is cited as the reason. There is no mention of the reasons for that buildup: U.S. "neocon" strategies to force a military confrontation with China, ideally over Taiwan, plus Japan's military buildup and its close cooperation with U.S. strategies.

Details such as the constant U.S. spy flights down the Chinese coastline, the U.S. 1996 dispatch of two fully armed aircraft carriers into the Taiwan Strait, not to mention U.S. nuclear threats against China during a former period of Taiwan Strait tension, combined with rightwing talk about Japan's "right to collective self-defense," could see Japan dragged into a full-scale war with China.

The emotional passivity of the Japanese public on this is as disturbing as the belligerence of Japan's rightwing.

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