

unhindered. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State agreed even during the nuclear crisis that an engagement policy by the South Korean government was reasonable. Although Washington opposed Mt. Kumkang tourism as simply a cash transfer to North Korea, it accepted the strengthening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, because it exposed the North to capitalism.

In the crisis, Seoul was sending two messages. As a responsible and active global player, it discontinued economic and humanitarian aid to the North as a sign to the world that it would not tolerate a nuclear test. At the same time, it continued inter-Korean trade as a sign to the North that it would not abandon Pyongyang.

In October 2007, the two Koreas concluded their summit meeting with a peace declaration. Both sides agreed to continue economic cooperation, including establishing new economic zones in Haeju and Mt. Paektu. Furthermore, both North and South Korea agreed to end the current armistice and establish permanent peace and to work toward mutual understanding and respect of their similarities and differences.

SOUTH KOREA-JAPAN POLITICAL RELATIONS IN 2007: ROH AND ABE'S PATH TO ESTRANGEMENT

Nat Kretchun

I. INTRODUCTION

Young and handsome by prime ministerial standards, Shinzo Abe was to be the proud fresh face of a new Japan. He entered the office on September 26, 2006, with high hopes and an ambitious agenda for change. He was determined to take steps toward shedding the postwar restraints that were placed upon Japan—both internationally and domestically—including, most notably, constitutional changes that would allow for Japan's remilitarization. Many, especially those on the political right in Japan, believed that Abe would help revive Japanese nationalism and allow Japan to assert itself as a world power in political and military as well as economic terms.

Yet, exactly one year later, Abe would resign amidst a plethora of scandals, a loss of domestic support, and Japanese diplomatic difficulties with its regional neighbors. Abe's rocky tenure as prime minister perfectly frames South Korean-Japanese political relations in 2007. Like the Abe administration itself, relations between South Korea and Japan began on a hopeful note before deteriorating into bitterness on both sides and a lack of positive diplomatic interaction.

II. ABE'S INAUGURAL TRIP: HOPE FOR BETTER REGIONAL RELATIONS

On October 8, 2006, just days after being inaugurated, Shinzo Abe broke with the long-standing tradition of a new prime minister traveling first to the U.S. before making any other official visits. Instead, in obvious acknowledgment of

the strategic significance and historically troubled relations between Japan and its two most important regional neighbors, Abe's first trip as prime minister was a diplomatic visit to Beijing and Seoul. This bold choice by the relatively hawkish Abe eased some fears about the new prime minister and gave many Koreans hope that, unlike his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi, Abe would usher in an era of improved South Korean-Japanese ties.

Abe's Goodwill Tour: Overshadowed by Kim's Blast

On October 9, just as Prime Minister Abe arrived in Seoul, the North Koreans successfully detonated a nuclear weapon. The test immediately threw the world, especially North Korea's close neighbors Japan and South Korea, into a frenzy of speculation over exactly what geopolitical implications the Hermit Kingdom's ascension into the nuclear club would have. Newspapers throughout Asia, which had been covering Abe's trip as a sign of hope for greater regional cooperation and stability, turned 180 degrees to cover the greatest and most direct threat to regional security in years. The goodwill that might have resulted from Abe's attempt at positive regional diplomacy was put on the back burner by pressing security concerns over North Korea.

III. SIX-PARTY TALKS: THE TRIUMPHS AND (MAINLY) FRUSTRATIONS OF MULTILATERALISM

Although Prime Minister Abe's trip to Seoul seemed to be a positive omen of good relations to come, the ability of South Korea and Japan to work together in the Six-Party Talks—a forum that would prove to be the two nations' most significant stage for diplomatic interactions in 2007—was imperiled from the start. The reason was Abe's personal convictions regarding the issue of kidnapped Japanese.

After North Korea's successful test of a nuclear weapon, the Six-Party Talks, which had stalled time and time again, took on a renewed urgency. All participants, including (perhaps especially) the DPRK, seemed more ready to work together. While each party had its own set of concerns, the main goal of five parties—the U.S., China, Russia, Japan and South Korea—was prompt, verifiable and lasting denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

For Japan, the Six-Party Talks represented an important opportunity not only to help bring about regional peace and stability through denuclearization but also to reaffirm its position as a regional leader by meeting more frequently and working more closely with the other players in the region.

For Abe personally, the talks represented a chance to engage the North on

other issues of importance to Japan. Chief among those was a discussion about Japanese citizens who had been kidnapped by the DPRK. In Abe's mind, the abductee issue had to be satisfactorily resolved before Japan would provide North Korea with the aid and other incentives it hoped to receive in return for denuclearization. Abe's stance drew tough criticism from all sides.

The third session of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks, which concluded on February 13, 2007, resulted in a joint statement in which North Korea agreed to freeze all its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. The two main concessions in return for the DPRK's compliance in shutting down its Yongbyon reactor were the receipt of fuel aid and steps by both the U.S. and Japan toward normalization of relations with North Korea.

Nevertheless, Abe made good on his earlier claim: Japan would not supply aid to the North until significant steps were taken to resolve the abductee issue. At home, Abe came under attack even from members of his own party for his refusal to send fuel to North Korea. An article that appeared in the *New York Times* in February 2007 echoed the view of many critics claiming, "Tokyo's narrow focus on this issue, seemingly at the expense of regional stability, would leave it isolated." In South Korea, President Roh Moo-hyun was livid that Abe would sacrifice Six-Party progress—and perhaps the security of the entire region—over an issue involving a handful of Japanese who were unaccounted for. Compared with nuclear proliferation, the Japanese abductee issue had relatively little international resonance.

Abe remained defiant. In an address to the parliament, he said, "We must not be isolated and we are not, in fact, isolated. Other countries understood our decision not to provide oil unless progress is made in the abduction issue." In an interview with a *New York Times* reporter, Makoto Taniguchi, a Japanese scholar and former diplomat, said, "Japanese diplomacy has, so to speak, been abducted by the abduction issue."

IV. ABE AND THE ABDUCTEES

If Abe's singular focus likened him to Ahab in *Moby Dick*, the white whale that brought down his administration's ship was the abductee issue.

Many Japan-watchers, especially those in South Korea and China, had been apprehensive about Shinzo Abe's ascension to the prime minister post. The first prime minister born after World War II, Abe was the most decidedly nationalistic leader in Japan's postwar history. Given the intense distrust and bitter grievances that still linger among many of Japan's neighbors over its wartime actions, South Korea and others in the region were wary of a revival of

Japanese nationalism. But compared with some of Abe's other policy goals (such as his desire to revise article nine of the Japanese constitution, which prohibits Japan from militarizing), a tough stance against North Korea on the issue of abductees seemed rather innocuous. However, it was an issue on which Abe staked much of his political credibility with the Japanese public.

From the late 1970s into the early 1980s, a number of Japanese citizens were kidnapped by the DPRK. Although North Korea consistently denied it had done so, the DPRK eventually admitted to kidnapping Japanese citizens. In 2002 and 2004, after meetings with then-Prime Minister Koizumi, North Korea allowed five Japanese captives and then their seven children to return to Japan. The DPRK claims that a total of 13 Japanese citizens were kidnapped and asserts that the eight who have not been returned to Japan are dead. The Japanese government, on the other hand, currently recognizes 16 abductees, and some, based on DPRK-defector accounts, have claimed that the number may be as high as 70–80. This issue is a cause for outrage among many in Japan. It evokes a strong nationalistic response from the often apolitical Japanese, and even some prominent international figures have expressed their support for and condolences to the families of the victims.

Abe has made a political career out of the abductions, and the issue has served him well. By championing the return of Japanese abductees, he was able to stir nationalistic feelings and garner considerable domestic support. With regard to this issue, although some details could be disputed, Japan was firmly in the role of the victim, and because North Korea was widely viewed as a dangerous rogue state, Japan had little fear that the international community would support the DPRK. It was only when Abe made the resolution of the abductee issue a condition for meaningful Japanese participation in any resolutions reached by the Six-Party Talks that he finally overstepped his bounds. At this point, many in the international community did turn against him—including Roh Moo-hyun.

The South Korean president was determined to resolve the nuclear issue as quickly and completely as possible, and Abe and the abductee issue were proving to be an unexpected and extremely frustrating obstacle to progress. The press was aware of Roh's growing lack of patience; for example, when Roh backed out of a dinner meeting at the ASEAN +3 Summit with Abe and the Chinese prime minister, reporters were quick to point to an enmity between Roh and Abe as the true cause.

The *Korea Times* reported a South Korean official traveling with Roh to have said, "Add a touch of a cold, and he might have felt an intense mixture of physical and mental fatigue after a war of nerves with the Japanese prime minister." Roh had reportedly butted heads with Abe in the trilateral meetings

that preceded the dinner in which one of the top agenda items was the Six-Party Talks. Abe insisted that the North's abduction of Japanese people be included in their next joint press statement. He said, "Japan has tried to deal with the abduction issue within the forum despite Seoul's concern that it could complicate the already difficult denuclearization talks."

One of the most puzzling things about Abe's insistence on tying Japanese abductees to the denuclearization negotiations is his seeming failure to acknowledge the parallels between North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens and the huge list of Japanese indiscretions committed in Korea and other parts of the region a half century earlier. Almost every meeting of regional actors since the end of World War II has included at least some reference to other Asian nations' lingering bitterness over Japanese wartime atrocities. To many, it seemed as though Japan regarded its position as victim of a neighboring country's aggression to be unique in the region's history.

The Japanese have put themselves in a difficult diplomatic position over the abductee issue. They can likely expect little more in the way of concessions from the North Koreans; however, Abe's successor, Yasuo Fukuda, is bound by Abe's political maneuvering to include the abductee issue in any talks related to North Korea. From one noted South Korean scholar who described recent Japanese diplomatic missteps bluntly as "utter stupidity" to a former ambassador who encouraged other sides to be more understanding of Japan's difficult position despite its mistakes, observers seem to agree that Japan has made a serious miscalculation in tying meaningful participation in resolving the much more strategically vital issue of denuclearization to that of abductees.

An official at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul said he believes Japan's grievances with the DPRK over abductees made some political initiatives more sensitive, but that the Six-Party process would proceed regardless of Japanese participation. Japan's ability to delay the process, however, was apparent in Prime Minister Fukuda's visit to the U.S. just at the time when President George Bush would have had to notify Congress that he planned to remove the DPRK from the list of state sponsors of terrorism before the end of 2007. After the DPRK agreed to discontinue all nuclear enrichment programs, many observers believed that Bush would finally agree to remove North Korea from the list. However, Fukuda's presence in Washington more or less ensured that such an announcement would not be forthcoming, and that the DPRK would remain on the list at least into 2008. Later, officials at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul said that if North Korea continues to comply with the agreements reached by the six parties, Bush will likely remove the DPRK from the list regardless of Japanese objections.

The Six-Party Talks were both the major forum for South Korean-Japanese diplomatic interaction and the context of a huge point of dispute between the two countries and their leadership. It is safe to say that much of the deterioration in the relations between the two countries over the past year was the result of the abductee issue's injection into the Six-Party framework.

V. OUTSIDE THE SIX-PARTY TALKS: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO HISTORICAL MEMORY

Although the Six-Party Talks were an important source of both cooperation and disagreement between South Korea and Japan in 2007, the two countries continued to battle elsewhere over issues of historical memory in the region, especially the legacy of Japanese colonialism and aggression in Korea throughout the first half of the 20th century. Many issues—such as the content of Japanese history textbooks and claims over the Dokdo (Takeshima) Islands—are still far from being satisfactorily resolved. And even though the Abe administration made progress on some issues, others flared up again.

Comfort Women: Abe's Verbal Blunder and "Coerced" Apologies

In the early 1990s, a group of survivors brought into the international spotlight the plight of young Korean and Chinese girls who had been forced by the Japanese military to serve Japanese servicemen in overseas brothels. These girls were euphemistically referred to as "comfort women," and for many Koreans their story epitomizes Japan's wartime barbarism. During Abe's administration, there was renewed controversy over this issue, triggered by a seemingly unlikely source.

As it demonstrated recently with its statement condemning mass killings of Armenians in Turkey during World War I, the U.S. House of Representatives has at times commented on historical events that did not directly involve the United States. In early March 2007, one such resolution under consideration called on Japan to take clearer, more meaningful responsibility for its military's abuse of thousands of Korean and Chinese girls as sex slaves. The bill, House Resolution 121, eventually passed in July through the efforts of Rep. Michael Honda of California. Honda stated that it was "the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery... during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II."

Prime Minister Abe was outraged. Speaking in parliament, he reiterated the position of conservative scholars that Japanese officials and soldiers did not force women into brothels. Instead, they blame any coercion on contractors used by Japan's military and imply that most comfort women were professional prostitutes. The assertion that the Japanese military had not relied on coercion to staff its military brothels sent shock waves throughout much of Asia.

In the days that followed his initial statement—amidst outcries from South Korea, China, the Philippines, and others—Abe attempted to clarify the statement, and he apologized "as prime minister" for the pain and hardships suffered by those forced to work as sex slaves during the war.

Aside from the apparent lack of compassion in Abe's statement, Koreans were angered by the hypocrisy of the Japanese position. How, they asked, could Abe be so politically insensitive with regard to the issue of comfort women and so adamant about the abductee issue? Their outrage and confusion were echoed in an article in the *Los Angeles Times*:

Anyone struggling to understand the Japanese government's position on the morality of kidnapping people, taking them to another country and forcing them to work against their will can be excused for being confused by the declarations coming out of Tokyo these days. On one hand, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seems prepared to risk his country's reputation by saying that the Japanese military did not coerce the tens of thousands of women from other Asian countries cast into sexual slavery during World War II. Yet his government cannot contain its fury over North Korea's failure to "sincerely" face up to its role in kidnapping a handful of Japanese civilians during the Cold War and forcing them to teach Japanese customs and language to North Korean spies.

There is no hint here of any awareness of the irony.

Another reason for the renewed focus on the comfort women was related to Japan's effort to compensate the victims. A fund had been established in 1995 to compensate the woman, but most refused to accept any money because, as one former comfort woman said, they saw the measure as a way for "the government to avoid taking direct responsibility." Only 285 women accepted money from the fund, which was terminated at the end of March 2007. The women's insistence on receiving an official apology rather than being bought off was largely interpreted as a moral victory for them. Japan is still not free of its historical responsibilities, and the Japanese government will have to deal with the issue for some time to come.

A Sea by Any Other Name

In yet another South Korea-Japan dispute, the two countries continued to argue over the name of the sea between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands, which is known in Japan as the Sea of Japan and in Korea as the East Sea. The Japanese name is a point of contention because it gained international acceptance during the period of Japanese colonial rule over Korea. Although Roh Moo-hyun proposed a rather creative diplomatic solution to the dispute, his efforts to resolve the issue yielded no forward progress.

Roh Moo-hyun wisely realized that should either side accept the name proposed by the other, it would be viewed as weakness and a loss of face. Thus, first in November 2006 at the APEC conference in Hanoi and then again in his New Year's address, Roh suggested another option: rename it the Sea of Friendship or the Sea of Peace. Abe immediately dismissed the idea, and Roh's suggestion was unpopular among many Koreans, who insisted on fighting for the East Sea moniker. Roh stressed the importance of bilateral compromise in dealing with South Korea-Japan issues. He said, "I did not make the proposal overnight. Some say it was improper that I offered the idea at a summit. But if the heads of state cannot talk about such an issue, why should we meet each other? I wanted to discuss it from a broader point of view. ... [I]f the two sides agree to meet halfway and give it a third name, like the Sea of Peace or Sea of Reconciliation, the peoples in both countries would certainly like it, as far as they have consciousness."

Although this effort failed and the relationship between the two leaders deteriorated, Roh's attempt to compromise may indicate that in the future leaders of the two countries may search for new solutions to old problems. Or, at the very least, they might be willing to move slightly from the positions in which they have been entrenched for decades.

Yasukuni Shrine: Abe Tries a New Compromise

The Yasukuni shrine was a foreign relations nightmare for Abe's predecessor, Prime Minister Koizumi, and there was much domestic and international speculation about whether Abe would visit the shrine to pay his respects. Located in Tokyo, the shrine honors Japanese soldiers who lost their lives in World War II. Included among those memorialized are several high-level war criminals who oversaw atrocities that still incense Koreans and Chinese. Japanese leaders are caught between visiting the shrine (thus severely straining relations with South Korea and China) and opting not to go (thus facing criticism from Japan's political right). Koizumi attempted to finesse the issue with a technicality: he said he was visiting the shrine not in his official role as prime

minister but as a private citizen. This distinction did little to appease the South Koreans and Chinese, who had already thoroughly vilified Koizumi and saw his reliance on a technicality as more evidence of his insincerity.

Abe knew he would have to find a new solution to this seemingly impossible problem. In May, he confronted the issue in a way that showed considerable deference to the Sino-Korean position. Instead of visiting the shrine himself, he sent a representative with a small plant as an offering. The responses were mixed. The normally vocal Chinese were surprisingly mum, issuing no official statement regarding the incident. But the Korean Foreign Ministry reacted strongly, calling Abe's gesture "very regrettable" and "running counter to establishing a correct perception of history, which serves as a basis for regional peace and stability." It is likely that icy relations between Seoul and Tokyo in the months preceding Abe's offering contributed to Seoul's angry reaction to the compromise.

Abe showed, as had Roh, that he would endure domestic criticism in exchange for diffusing a contentious issue. While his diplomatic initiative was not considered totally acceptable, his effort to find a creative solution to a decades-old problem bode well for the prospect of future progress.

VI. DOMESTIC POLITICS IN JAPAN: EMBROILED IN SCANDAL

Throughout his term as prime minister, Shinzo Abe's diplomatic challenges were overshadowed by a seemingly endless stream of scandals. The cabinet and ministers he installed to help him realize his ambitious plans for change became the source of one controversy after another and contributed greatly to his extremely quick loss of popular support in Japan. The following is a list, originally compiled by the BBC, of some of the scandals that engulfed the Abe administration; it shows the domestic pressures and crises the prime minister was forced to deal with while trying to conduct foreign relations.

*December 21, 2006: Masaaki Homma, handpicked by Abe as government tax panel chief, resigns after allegations he was living in government-subsidized housing with a woman other than his wife.

*December 27: Administrative Reform Minister Genichiro Sata resigns over a scandal related to a political funds report.

*January 10, 2007: Allegations surface about inappropriate office management expenditures of Agricultural Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka.

*January 27: Health Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa compares women to "birth-giving machines" in a speech.

*May 28: Agricultural Minister Matsuoka commits suicide.

*July 3: Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma steps down over A-bomb remarks.

*July 5: Allegations emerge about inappropriate handling of office management expenses by Agricultural Minister Norihiko Akagi.

*August 1: Agricultural Minister Akagi resigns.

*September 3: Agricultural Minister Takehiko Endo resigns over the misuse of farm subsidies. Yukiko Sakamoto, Parliamentary Foreign Secretary, also steps down over accounting irregularities in political funds reports.

*September 5: Two other ministers are found to have errors in their political funds reports.

As a result of these and other scandals, Abe's approval rating fell below 30 percent. The loss of popular support culminated in a disastrous loss for his party in the upper house elections. According to Japanese political custom, Abe should have stepped down in response to his loss of a public mandate. He initially said that he would not resign because the election results were a reflection of scandals, not public dissatisfaction with his policies; but just a few weeks later, on September 12, he announced that he would step down as prime minister. The reaction from Seoul was cool. The Roh administration issued no statement regarding Abe's resignation.

Abe's Out: Fukuda's Likely Effect on Relations

In the wake of the scandal-ridden Abe administration, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was eager to pick a safe replacement who would promote the issues the Japanese public holds dear: pensions, health care, and income disparities. The party's choice of Yasuo Fukuda is by most accounts a good one for addressing those issues, and many observers have speculated that his selection as prime minister may have positive effects on relations in the region. Fukuda is perceived as less historically revisionist and more sensitive to Japan's immediate neighbors.

Although the new prime minister is bound to some of Abe's positions, he is generally expected to be far less dogmatic in his approach to North Korea. Japan's commitment to participate more cooperatively in the Six-Party Talks is key to ensuring that it does not become regionally isolated and will go a long way in repairing some of the damage to South Korean-Japanese relations under Abe.

In most areas of foreign policy, Fukuda seems to represent a shift to the center, in which, as the *Financial Times* put it, improved regional relations will take precedence over "asserting Japan's determination to flex its diplomatic muscles." There is no doubt that this approach will be welcomed in South Korea, where Abe's departure had become a precondition to repairing strained relations between Seoul and Tokyo.

In his first telephone conversation with Roh Moo-hyun after taking office, Fukuda described his beliefs about East Asian regional diplomacy: "I am convinced that further developing friendly and cooperative relations between Japan and South Korea will lead to the stability and prosperity of East Asia and the rest of the world." In the same conversation, Roh agreed to deliver a message about the abductee issue to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il during their summit meeting. Far more important than the content of the message was the fact that Roh, whose frustration with Abe was unmistakable, would agree to deliver a message on behalf of the Japanese. Roh's readiness to work with the new prime minister was a strong sign that Korea had renewed hopes for the future of South Korean-Japanese relations. Abe's tenure as prime minister also started on a positive regional note, but Fukuda's centrist leanings and regional foreign policy experience give reason to believe that he will not repeat the mistakes of his predecessor.

VII. LEE MYUNG-BAK: POST-ROH PROSPECTS FOR RELATIONS

On December 19, 2007, Lee Myung-bak—Grand National Party candidate and former mayor of Seoul—was elected to succeed Roh Moo-hyun as president of South Korea. Following two consecutive liberals, Lee is expected to bring a much more business like approach to the Blue House.

Many observers believe that Lee's style will facilitate South Korea's relations within the region, especially with regard to Japan. Early statements out of the president-elect's camp have focused on issues relating to regional diplomacy: "[Lee Myung-bak's] transition committee suggested the regularization of trilateral talks among the foreign ministers of South Korea, the United States, and Japan for intensified regional diplomacy...and that shuttle diplomacy with Japan suspended since June 2005 must be revived."

Lee has stated that while he will continue some of the Roh administration's more productive measures with regard to North Korea, he will "not shy away from criticizing North Korea's abuse of human rights." This willingness to take a stronger position toward the DPRK, in combination with Fukuda's likely softer position, may provide more room for productive cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo in the Six-Party Talks.

Consistent with his background as former head of the Hyundai Corporation, Lee has highlighted the possible economic benefits for Japan should increased Japanese participation in the talks lead to closer Japan-DPRK ties. He said that "improved relations between Pyongyang and Tokyo in the future would pave the way for Japan to make investments [in the DPRK]."

Noted Georgetown professor Victor Cha expressed the belief of many scholars that the recent leadership changes in South Korea and Japan should yield positive results for regional relations: “The pragmatism and business orientation of both Lee and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan should mean better relations are on the horizon.”

VIII. CONCLUSION

Despite the political and diplomatic bitterness and impasse of the Roh-Abe era, economic and cultural exchanges between South Korea and Japan remain healthy. According to the South Korean Embassy in Tokyo, for example, some 2.31 million Japanese people visited South Korea last year, and about 2.36 million South Koreans visited Japan. The two countries are key economic partners, and trade between the two countries, even in a year of strained political relations, was robust.

On the diplomatic front, while old issues cropped up along with minor disputes and compromises, the most remarkable feature of the past year in South Korean-Japanese relations was the lack of developments. Despite Abe’s initial attempt to extend an olive branch to Japan’s regional neighbors, he soon repeated many of the diplomatic missteps of his predecessors. As a result of those blunders—and in conjunction with the South Korean leadership’s anger over Abe’s unwillingness to budge on the abductee issue despite its negative effect on regional security—relations between South Korea and Japan quickly soured. In the months leading up to Abe’s resignation, it became clear that Roh was unwilling to work with Abe on bilateral issues and that improved Korean-Japanese relations would have to wait for a regime change. Now that such changes have occurred in both countries, we will see whether Lee and Fukuda can succeed in improving South Korean-Japanese ties.

CHINA-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

Mathias Hartpence

I. THE NUCLEAR TEST AND AFTERMATH

On October 9, 2006, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) conducted its first underground detonation of a nuclear device. Pyongyang’s official news organ acclaimed the event as “historic,” one that would “contribute to defending the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in the area around it.” The nuclear test—which occurred against the backdrop of tensions over the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) issue and the July 5 missile tests and against which all other Six-Party Talks participants had repeatedly cautioned—sent shockwaves throughout the region. The test pushed the nuclear issue back onto the front burner of international attention and underscored the growing rift between China and North Korea.

Given their long-standing postures on the North Korean nuclear issue, calls by the U.S. and Japan for stringent United Nations (UN) sanctions against Pyongyang were not surprising. China’s reaction, on the other hand, was somewhat startling in the extent to which it broke



“Flagrant North Korea” on the cover of a Chinese magazine following the nuclear test in October 2006.

(China Newsweek / 中国新闻周刊)