

The North Korean Peace Process and the Abduction Problem: A Japanese Role?

Wada Haruki, translated by Gavan McCormack

A Japanese Role?

In a 3 May 2019 interview with *Sankei Shimbun*, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo said,

“To resolve the abductions problem, nothing is more important than for Japan to adopt a positive approach. To break through the current mutual distrust between our two countries there is no other way than for me as Prime Minister to meet directly with Chairman Kim. So I am thinking to meet Chairman Kim without any preconditions for frank and open-ended talks.”

This “unconditional talks” formula attracted considerable attention from both political and media circles in Japan. On 19 May the National Association of Families of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (*Kazoku-kai*) and the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Abducted by North Korea (*Sukuukai*) held their first joint public meeting for a long while and attracted 1,000 people. Prime Minister Abe himself participated and on this occasion too expressed his interest in unconditional talks, even though he added, cautiously, that in fact there was no prospect of such talks occurring. Still, the audience responded with enthusiasm. On the following day *Yomiuri Shimbun* published the results of an opinion survey that found 47 per cent in favor of dialogue with

North Korea compared to 40 per cent stressing the use of pressure, and 52 per cent favoring Prime Minister Abe’s unconditional talks formula far exceeding the 33 per cent that opposed it. Prime Minister Abe’s unconditional talks formula raised high expectations for direct Japan-North Korea negotiations on the part of both the abducted families association and the general public.

But what was the Prime Minister really thinking? What was he aiming at?

Primacy to Sanctions - The Abe Government’s Consistent Line on the Abductions Issue

In the context of the confrontation between the US and North Korea that suddenly flared into crisis in 2017, it was Prime Minister Abe, the US’s most faithful ally, who urged exclusive attention to sanctions and military intimidation. After North Korea’s 6th nuclear test on 9 July, 2017, President Trump declared before the United Nations General Assembly that “if provocations are not stopped” he would have “no choice but to completely destroy North Korea.” Abe said that, “since the prospect of resolving the problem by negotiations has become zero,” “all efforts to solve the problems by negotiations have come to naught,” “what is called for is not dialogue but pressure,” and “all options are on the table,” so he “supported the president’s resolve.” On 28 September, Prime Minister Abe conducted a “national emergency” dissolution of the Diet. At the press

conference held on that occasion he spoke of his “determination to devote myself body and soul to break through and solve this situation that can only be described as a national emergency, dealing with the North Korea threat in such a way as to protect Japanese lives and livelihood.”

The Prime Minister of a country that faces a crisis of peace or war owes it to his people to explain what is going on and how he proposes to maintain peace. So much the more so in the case of a Prime Minister of a country such as Japan obliged to abide by a constitution that permanently renounces the use or threat of force for resolution of international disputes. He must explain how he will preserve peace and appeal to the people for their trust. However, Abe explained neither the nature of the crisis nor what he planned to do. He simply sought the trust of he people in himself as he proceeded towards joint actions 100 per cent with the US president. With victory as majority party in the general election held in October, Prime Minister Abe judged that he had won public support for his North Korea policies.

In fact, Prime Minister Abe ordered the Self Defense Forces (SDF)’s uniformed senior officers to study “how the SDF might respond under the [2015] security laws in the event of US military operations against North Korea.” The *Asahi Shimbun* recently (17 May 2019) revealed that the SDF Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force commander, Admiral Kawano Katsutoshi, was in ongoing discussion with US Army Chief of General Staff General Joseph Dunford and US Naval Commander for the Pacific Admiral Harry Harris, on SDF battle plans.

Visiting Japan and South Korea in November 2017, President Trump declared to 2,000 US and Japanese SDF forces gathered at Yokota Air Force base in Tokyo his readiness to “exercise overwhelming capability.” He announced that Prime Minister Abe had said

that the US and Japan were “100 per cent together.” Once the president left, US and South Korean naval forces began joint exercises in the Sea of Japan, with three US aircraft carriers participating. It was a demonstration of extreme intimidation towards North Korea. North Korea responded with an ICBM test on 29 November, declaring thereafter that “the great task of nuclear force completion” was complete. The crisis of a US-North Korea war commencing from the Sea of Japan reached its apogee.

As this high point of crisis approached, South Korean president Moon Jae-in was the regional leader whose attitude contrasted most sharply with Prime Minister Abe’s. In a 15 August speech, President Moon declared that “no second Korean War can be allowed to break out on the Korean peninsula,” and “no country can decide on military activities of any kind without Republic of Korea consent.” From December, various actions were taken by United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres and President Moon. These in due course bore fruit.

Contemplating the prospect of nuclear war, Chairman Kim and President Trump stopped and turned back from the precipice. In February 2018, North Korean representatives at the Pyongchang Olympics in South Korea called for a South-North summit. A special envoy of President Moon visited North Korea on 5 March and held talks with Chairman Kim at which it was agreed to hold a South-North summit. That was announced on 7 March. The South Korean president’s special envoy then proceeded to the US bearing Chairman Kim’s proposal for a US-North Korea summit. Trump immediately responded by accepting. It was 8 March.

Abe was doubly shocked: first that President Moon Jae-in had seized the Initiative and was working to negotiate a meeting between Trump and Kim, and second that, without so much as a word to himself, his ally and friend, Trump had

responded to Chairman Kim's proposal by agreeing to a summit meeting. That was an even bigger shock.

As soon as Prime Minister Abe heard this news, on the morning of 9 March he held a telephone conversation with President Trump, insisting that maximum pressure be maintained on North Korea to achieve "complete, verifiable, irreversible" nuclear disarmament (CVID). To this he secured the President's agreement. Also, seeking Trump's cooperation in resolving the abduction issue" he got the response from Trump that he "well understood" the point. Till that time, the abduction issue had been seen as just a phrase to be repeated from time to time, but from 13 March, when South Korea's National Intelligence Director Seo Hun came to report to Japan, it became policy to "devote every effort to resolve the nuclear, missile, and abduction problems through cooperation between Japan, the US, and South Korea."

On 11 April, Japanese Foreign Minister Kono met President Moon and called for the abduction problem to be entered on the agenda for the South-North summit. President Moon responded, "Let us have our two countries work together," but said nothing about the summit agenda. It was clear that, albeit indirectly, he was refusing. On 16 April, Prime Minister Abe called on President Trump, affirming the need for maximum pressure to be maintained and asking for the abduction problem to be part of the leaders' summit agenda. Trump responded, "I will do my best."



Kim Jong-un (left) and Moon Jae-in 27 April, 2018 at Panmunjom

The South-North summit was held on 27 April, 2018. The US-North Korea summit, whose cancelation was announced on 24 May, was then held as planned on 12 June. On 7 June, five days before it, Prime Minister Abe visited the US again and re-stated the principle of no relaxation of sanctions until the North took concrete actions towards denuclearization. Again he asked that the abduction issue be raised at the summit. Abe's behavior was highly unusual. With President Trump and the US government having agreed on a summit in order to avoid a US-North Korea war, for Abe to be constantly raising his own country's abduction problem seemed extraordinarily self-centred and presumptuous. Consequently, Abe had to add that he himself intended to meet with Chairman Kim to seek a solution for the abduction problem. However, North Korea had already rejected any summit with Japan. On 6 May, *Rodong sinmun* published an editorial entitled "Before packing your bags for a trip, first change your attitude." Prime Minister Abe was asking for something he knew North Korea would refuse.

The Abduction Three Principles - A Design to Block Diplomatic Negotiations

Why did Prime Minister Abe, greatly shocked at the opening of summit talks between the US and North Korea, push the abduction problem and call for it to be resolved at the US-North Korea summit?

It is necessary to consider the character of the abduction problem.

Prime Minister Abe is a politician who came to attention through his hard line on the abduction issue. He rose to prominence by riding a current of opposition to Prime Minister Koizumi's 2002 visit to North Korea and the first Japan-North Korea summit, was then appointed LDP Party Secretary-General by Koizumi and eventually became Party president and Prime Minister. One could even say that he became Prime Minister because of his hard line on this issue. When he became Prime Minister in 2006 he set out three basic principles for resolution of the abduction issue and to accomplish them he set up an "Abduction Problem Measures Headquarters" directly under the cabinet.

Principle One was "The abduction problem is the most important task Japan faces." When Abe resumed the Prime Ministership in 2012 after the March 2011 Tohoku disaster, the wording was somewhat toned down to *an* important task but soon it became again the most important. Nobody doubts that the abduction problem is *an* "important problem" but it is just political demagoguery to say it is "the" most important problem Japan faces. That is not the sort of stance likely to lead to resolution of the problem.

Principle Two was "without resolution of the abduction problem there can be no normalization of relations." This amounted to a repudiation or cancellation of the negotiating stance of Prime Minister Koizumi and Foreign Ministry Bureau head Tanaka Hitoshi that had hinted at resolving the abduction issue while carrying on negotiations towards diplomatic normalization.

Principle Three was "Taking the view that all the abductees said to have died are still alive, they must be promptly returned. Once returned, the problem is over." This was a fateful principle.

In 2002, North Korea apologized and admitted to the abduction of thirteen people, but said that two others had never entered the country. Of the thirteen, it stated that eight were already dead and five were still alive. It returned the five to Japan and in 2004 allowed all the families of the five to return. In response, the Abe government's Principle Three did not recognize the abductees as having died and branded the notification as a lie. Ten people (eight plus two, with two others added to make a total of twelve people - were alive, it asserted. The result of calling the other side a liar was that diplomatic negotiations became impossible. The problem could not be solved save by causing the collapse of North Korea's state system. In other words, the abduction problem was not a foreign relations matter to be settled by diplomatic negotiations but was the ground for condemning and sanctioning North Korea. The sanctions, begun in 2006 and reaching their full scope in 2009, were distinctive Japanese measures against North Korea's nuclear testing but politically they may be understood as measures in response to the abductions.

When Abe in 2012 resumed the Prime Ministership he tried to resume negotiations with North Korea and in May 2014 he adopted the Helsinki Agreement that included reopening of investigation into the abductions in return for a partial easing of sanctions. However, sticking to the Three Principles, he could not accept the North Korean report that all the abductees were dead, so Japan-North Korea relations were once again ruptured. The Abe Three Principles live on to this day as principles governing the basic policy of the Japanese state.

Consequently, at the commencement of a peace process to avoid a US-North Korea war, what Prime Minister Abe was urging upon international society was not a call for help in solving the abduction matter but a demand, based on the Three Principles, that North Korea be pursued, its crimes not forgotten but exposed and denounced in accord with those Principles. Prime Minister Abe was asking President Trump to propose “immediate return of all victims” in accordance with the third of the Three Principles. If such a proposal had been seriously implemented it could have led to the collapse of the US-North Korea summit.

Prime Minister Abe Backed Into a Corner of His Own Making

The 12 June 2018 Singapore meeting between US and North Korean leaders produced a dramatic development. The two leaders shook hands and pledged before the people of the world that they would avoid any US - North Korea war. President Trump guaranteed North Korea its security and Chairman Kim Jong-un reaffirmed his unshakable commitment to the complete de-nuclearizing of the Korean peninsula. A joint communique pledged cooperation in construction of a “stable peace system” on the Korean peninsula. President Trump told Prime Minister Abe that he had raised the abduction matter during the talks. If he did, however, it is clear that it had absolutely no impact. Kim Jong-un just ignored it.

Within Japan too the US-North Korea talks were widely acclaimed. All of a sudden the mood became one of dialogue. The Families Association was spurred into action and the expectation spread in the media that Japan too would move towards negotiation. Prime Minister Abe had to say that he would “sit down face-to-face” in a summit meeting with Chairman Kim.

On 3 July, the month that followed the talks, Tanaka Hitoshi, the diplomat/fixer who had set up the [2002] Koizumi visit to North Korea, broke his long-enforced silence. At the Japan National Press Club he called for Japan to have its own strategy, and proposed the setting up of a liaison office in Pyongyang to negotiate the nuclear and abduction problems with North Korea. Pressure thus mounted on Prime Minister Abe. On 14 September, at a meeting addressed by candidates for election as LDP party head, the question of what to do about the abduction problem was raised. Abe repeated his stock phrase “I will meet with Chairman Kim and solve this problem.” Ishiba Shigeru, [the other candidate] took up the Tanaka proposal and declared forthrightly, “I will begin with the setting up of a liaison office for North Korea in Japan and for Japan in North Korea.” Ishiba gained 45 per cent of party member votes but, Abe, calling on the support of Party members in the Diet, held his position as party chief and Prime Minister.

In the autumn of that same year, as US-North Korea negotiations went through a difficult period, South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in did his best to help the situation by pressing ahead with South-North rapprochement. The Abe government heightened its antipathy for President Moon’s South Korea. From October the Abe government responded quite negatively to a succession of incidents: the ruling by the South Korean Supreme Court on the wartime forced labor dispute, the dissolution of the Comfort Women Rehabilitation Foundation set up under the December 2015 South Korea-Japan agreement, and the South Korean Navy warship’s locking its radar onto a Japanese Self Defense Force plane in December 2018. In his policy speech on the opening of the Diet session in January 2019 Abe delivered a “comprehensive global vision.” Concerning North Korea he said

“Towards the resolutions of the

nuclear and missile issues, and most importantly, the abductions issue, we will take bold actions without missing any single opportunity, by breaking the shell of mutual distrust, and with myself meeting face-to-face with Chairman Kim Jong-un. We will seek to settle the unfortunate past and normalize relations with North Korea.”²

He had not one word to utter on South Korea. His attitude was to refuse to have anything to do with it.

The only precedent for such “refusal to deal” (*aite ni sezu*) by the Government of Japan had occurred in the middle of the Sino-Japanese War. In a 16 January 1938 speech to the Diet, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro said, “Henceforth we will have no dealings (*aite to sezu*) with the Guomindang [KMT] government.” Remembering that Konoe then proceeded to all-out war against China, I was horrified by the words Abe used. In contrast with his ignoring and confronting South Korea, Prime Minister Abe posed as being positively disposed towards North Korea, reaching out to embrace it. But in negotiating towards resolution of the most important problem, the abductions, the third of the abduction Three Principles, that “...all the abductees said to have died are still alive, they must be promptly returned,” amounted to confrontation with his neighboring country. To show these two faces at the same time was effectively to refuse dialogue with North Korea. If he was sincerely seeking dialogue with North Korea he should also be seeking reconciliation with South Korea.

When the second US-North Korea summit in February 2019 ended with the parties walking away with no agreement, that seems to have been seen in Prime Minister Abe’s circles as reassuring and as a matter for celebration. In

that context Prime Minister Abe set about taking measures to reactivate the abduction issue. Central to his “new” policy was the “unconditional meeting” proposal noted at the beginning of this article.

Yokota Takuya, General Secretary of the Abducted Families Association, Iizuka Koichiro, son of [abductee] Taguchi Yaeko, together with others including Nishioka Tsutomu, made two consecutive visits to the United States over a two week period to explain the demand for “immediate return to Japan of all abductees.” As Minister responsible for dealing with the abduction problem Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide also visited the US.

After various public meetings on this issue in Japan, a “show” was set up involving President Trump’s visit to Japan in late May as “national guest.” The main subject was the abduction problem. Prime Minister Abe organized a meeting between the President and the abductee families and persuaded the President to speak about his support for the abduction victims. The Prime Minister claimed that his “unconditional talks” formula enjoyed President Trump’s support. The finale to the show was the demonstration on 27 May, 2019 of the US-Japan military alliance by the President and his wife together with the Japanese Prime Minister and his wife on the deck of the Japanese MSDF’s helicopter destroyer Kaga, its largest and newest warship.



Trump and Abe and their wives aboard the Kaga

To this point the expectations of Prime Minister Abe in regard both to negotiation with North Korea and to resolving the abduction issue were high, not only on the part of ordinary people but among the abducted families. The fact is, however, that it was Abe as Prime Minister who now found himself under pressure, even if he had brought it on himself. Since North Korea had made clear it would not accept his negotiations on the comfort women issue, the more he spoke of “unconditional” and “frank and open-minded” talks, the more the voices of Japanese people calling for negotiations and for the opening of diplomatic relations grew. Constrained by such voices, Prime Minister Abe found himself in a dilemma.

The Path to Japanese Participation in the Peace Process

There is a path by which Japan could participate in the peace process opened by the US-North Korea talks. It is the path of diplomatic normalization between Japan and

North Korea. Normalization of relations with North Korea has been for many years the diplomatic problem facing Japan. Japan should by all means have peaceful and friendly relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) which is one of the closest countries to it. In fact, however, it has diplomatic relations with all the countries of the world *except* North Korea. Furthermore, North Korea is a country that emerged on the northern half of the Korean peninsula that had been under Japanese colonial control for almost half a century until 1945. The Japanese state has done nothing to address this past. Furthermore, during the Korean War that broke out in 1950 Japan under US military control served as a military base and source of every conceivable support for the US military in aiding South Korea and fighting North Korean and Chinese forces. The relationship has been hostile ever since then. So it is not merely a neighbor country but it was a neighbor country with which a colonial relationship followed by a hostile relationship during the half-century since the Korean War has still to be settled. Negotiations towards diplomatic normalization started in 1991 but, 29 years on, they are still not over. These negotiations were broken off because of the Three Abduction Principles enunciated by none other than Prime Minister Abe.

If we wish for the opening of Japan-North Korea negotiations, we must scrap the Abe Three Abduction Principles and seek resumption of the leadership talks with North Korea broken off in 2004. On the North Korean side there is no reason why they should refuse such negotiations. The Pyongyang Declaration agreed in 2002 exists as a basic framework for normalization of relations.³ In accordance with it, negotiations on economic cooperation were left to be conducted after the opening of diplomatic relations. But at present, under the United Nations Security Council-mandated sanctions, even if economic cooperation were to be agreed it could not be implemented.

North Korea negotiated with Japan in 2002 and again in 2004 but nothing came of it so they recall it as an experience of failure not to be repeated. Consequently, even if there was a call to negotiate over normalization of relations, it seems unlikely that North Korea would be interested in opening a liaison office or negotiating the opening of negotiations on normalization.

For now, the possible and realistic path is to establish diplomatic relations unconditionally and open embassies in Tokyo and Pyongyang based on the Pyongyang declaration. Once embassies are opened necessary negotiations can immediately be opened. Four matters could be simultaneously placed on the table for discussion: nuclear weapons and missiles, economic cooperation, sanctions relief, and abductions. Being unconditional would mean establishment of diplomatic relations with sanctions, nuclear weapons and ICBM missiles still in place. At that point, a precedent to learn from would be President Obama's unconditional opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2015. The opening of an embassy is not inconsistent with Security Council-mandated sanctions.

Since economic cooperation would be under a ten-year plan it could be synchronized with reduction/elimination of nuclear weapons and missiles. As for the implementation, it would have to be done through rigorous consultation with neighbor countries. The easing of sanctions also should also be regulated by consultations involving North and South Korea, the US and North Korea, and the UN Security Council. However, on the basis of a sovereign [Japanese] decision it should be possible to relax separately those [Japanese] sanctions under which all trade between the two countries has been stopped.

Negotiations on the abduction problem have to start afresh with new and more realistic content. Firstly, in the case of Soga Miyoshi

and Kume Hiroshi (who North Korea insists never entered North Korea) it seems certain they were taken on board a North Korean spy ship, so discussion could commence by asking whether they might have been taken on board a ship and killed without actually "entering the country." Whether North Korea admits it or not, the Japanese side believes this is what happened and will demand compensation. As for the other abductees, the report of the North Korean investigative committee prepared under the Stockholm agreement must be subject to close scrutiny and points that remain uncertain about the deaths must be cleared up. In cases such as Yokota Megumi, where family or relatives exist in North Korea we must be able to ask them questions directly. In cases where physical remains were provided [by the North Korean side in the past] the Teikyo University staff that conducted the DNA analysis of remains presumed to have been those of Yokota Megumi will have to be questioned.⁴ If it is judged necessary, a re-examination will have to be carried out by both Japan and North Korea. In the case of those said to have died it will be necessary to seek out the location where they died, and so far as is possible to inspect the site of death or suicide and the place of interment or grave in order to reach a conclusion. If that is not possible, negotiations would have to be continued leading to further investigation. In cases where the circumstances of death are not clear reparations equivalent to those payable in the case of death would be sought. Some of these claimed by North Korea to be dead may still be alive and they may present peculiar problems for the North Koreans. One such might be Taguchi Yaeko, who tutored [in Japanese] Kim Hyun-hee, the woman who was responsible for the bombing of KAL Flight 858 over the Andaman Sea in November 1987. But in such cases we will just have to let the North Korean side know how we understand things and wait for a change in its attitude. In the case of any victims still alive, whether or not they are people whose names are now known, we will help them to repatriate

if they wish. Overall it will be important to negotiate with a cool and serious attitude.

Once diplomatic relations are opened, we can implement easing of the distinctive Japanese sanctions, cultural exchange, humanitarian aid and the opening of traffic in shipping and other communications. And once diplomatic relations are opened, negotiations can be conducted without fear of relations collapsing to zero again when the negotiations are not going well. Through normalization of its diplomatic relations North Korea will certainly change its own position in international affairs. With North Korea securing meaningful guarantees of its security we should be able to take some definite steps in the direction of its denuclearization. This is the path towards Japanese participation in the peace process and it is the path towards helping the US-North Korea negotiations.

If he is serious about his resolve to conduct unconditional talks with Chairman Kim and to settle the abduction problem, I urge Prime Minister Abe to take steps in this direction. If he is unable to do so, then there will be no alternative but for people to look towards the next Prime Minister.

Appendix: Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration (17 September 2002)

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Chairman Kim Jong-Il of the DPRK National Defense Commission met and had talks in Pyongyang on September 17, 2002.

Both leaders confirmed the shared recognition that establishing a fruitful political, economic and cultural relationship between Japan and the DPRK through the settlement of unfortunate past between them and the outstanding issues of concern would be consistent with the fundamental interests of both sides, and would greatly contribute to the peace and stability of the region.

1. Both sides determined that, pursuant to the spirit and basic principles laid out in this Declaration, they would make every possible effort for an early normalization of relations, and decided that they would resume the Japan DPRK normalization talks in October 2002.

Both sides expressed their strong determination that they would sincerely tackle outstanding problems between Japan and the DPRK based upon their mutual trust in the course of achieving normalization.

2. The Japanese side regards, in a spirit of humility, the facts of history that Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of Korea through its colonial rule in the past, and expressed deep remorse and heartfelt apology.

Both sides shared the recognition that, providing economic co-operation after the normalization by the Japanese side to the DPRK side, including grant aids, long-term loans with low interest rates and such assistances as humanitarian assistance through international organizations, over a period of time deemed appropriate by both sides, and providing other loans and credits by such financial institutions as the Japan Bank for International Co-operation with a view to supporting private economic activities, would be consistent with the spirit of this Declaration, and decided that they would sincerely discuss the specific scale and contents of the economic co-operation in the normalization talks.

Both sides, pursuant to the basic principle that when the bilateral relationship is normalized both Japan and the DPRK would mutually waive all their property and claims and those of their nationals that had arisen from causes which occurred before August 15, 1945, decided that they would discuss the issue of property and claims concretely in the normalization talks.

Both sides decided that they would sincerely

discuss the issue of the status of Korean residents in Japan and the issue of cultural property.

1. Both sides confirmed that they would comply with international law and would not commit acts threatening the security of the other side. With respect to the outstanding issues of concern related to the lives and security of Japanese nationals, the DPRK side confirmed that it would take appropriate measures so that these regrettable incidents, that took place under the abnormal bilateral relationship, would never happen in the future.
2. Both sides confirmed that they would co-operate with each other in order to maintain and strengthen the peace and stability of North East Asia. Both sides confirmed the importance of establishing co-operative relationships based upon mutual trust among countries concerned in this region, and shared the recognition that it is important to have a framework in place in order for these regional countries to promote confidence-building, as the relationships among these countries are normalized.

Both sides confirmed that, for overall resolution of the nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula, they would comply with all related international agreements. Both sides also confirmed the necessity of resolving security problems including nuclear and missile issues by promoting dialogues among countries concerned.

The DPRK side expressed its intention that, pursuant to the spirit of this Declaration, it would further maintain the moratorium on missile launching in and after 2003.

Both sides decided that they would discuss issues relating to security.

Prime Minister of Japan
Junichiro Koizumi

Chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission
Kim Jong-Il

September 17, 2002
Pyongyang

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Notes

¹ The Japanese original of this article by Wada Haruki was published in the August 2019 issue of the Japanese monthly, *Sekai* (pp. 46-53) as “Rachi mondai to Beicho heiwa purosesu” [The abduction problem and the US-North Korea peace process]. The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus acknowledges with thanks the permission to translate given by author Wada Haruki and *Sekai* editor Kumagai Shinichiro.

² For provisional translation of the Policy Speech by Prime Minister Abe to the 198th Session of the Diet, 28 January 2019, see [here](#).

³ See text of the Pyongyang Declaration attached as an appendix to this article.

⁴ Translator note: On the dispute over the DNA analysis of remains handed over by North Korea as belonging to Yokota Megumi, see my analysis: Gavan McCormack, “[Disputed Bones: Japan, North Korea, and the 'Nature' Controversy](#),” and “[Disputed Bones – Japan-North Korea Clash](#),” *Japan Focus*, 13 June 2005.