

## The DPRK at Ise-Shima 2016 – strong on rhetoric but light on solutions

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Although the G7 Ise-Shima Summit 2016 has offered comforting rhetorical support for Abe Shinzō's security and political concerns vis-à-vis the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), it has offered little prospect for resolving them. Ultimately Japan needs to move toward multilateral dialogue with key power players in the Korean Peninsula that are excluded from the G7 framework: China, Russia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK).

### **The DPRK, G7/8 summitry and Abe's consistent approach**

The Abe administration has sought to ensure that this year's G7 communiqué addresses two DPRK-related issues. The first is multilateral recognition of the DPRK's nuclear and missile programme as an important security threat to the

international community. The second is recognition of the DPRK abductions of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s (*racchi jiken*) as a significant humanitarian and human rights issue. In this regard, the Abe Administration's approach has been consistent with previous administrations' approaches at G7/8 summits.

Since the turn of the millennium, Japan has consistently sought G7/8 acknowledgement in communiqués of both these issues. At the 1999 Cologne Summit, Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō sought a declaration asserting the need for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the context of the security risk posed to Japan by the [DPRK's Daepodong-1 missile test](#) over Japanese territory on 31 August 1998. This was consequently included in the [1999 final communiqué](#).

DPRK-related issues have been particularly salient on the agenda when Japan has hosted the summit. As host, Japan has [demonstrated a greater ability](#) to set the agenda and put forward its own national interests on security and bilateral domestic political concerns, as well as raise awareness of DPRK security issues to European and North American leaders whose threat perception is lower than Japan's.

At the 2000 Okinawa Summit, Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō sought to ensure that the summit had an emphasis on Asian regional security, including the DPRK. In accordance with MOFA's renkei approach of trilateral coordination of security policy toward the DPRK, with ROK and the US, the Obuchi administration had actively supported Kim Dae-Jung's Sunshine Policy and adopted [a pro-active engagement policy](#) toward the DPRK. The Mori administration was successful in securing a [separate declaration dedicated to the Korean Peninsula](#), which stressed 'strong support for the ROK's engagement policy' and welcomed the DPRK's moratorium on missile-launches, clearly reflecting the

Obuchi administration's security policy concerns. A reference to *racchi jiken* as a ["humanitarian and human rights issue"](#) was also included.

Abe has similarly aimed to utilise his hosting of this year's G7 in Japan to focus greater attention on the DPRK. The administration asserted the necessity of a [stronger statement](#) in this year's communiqué in relation to last year's, especially concerning DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes and the political issue of *racchi jiken*. This is because although the [2015 Schloss Elmau Summit communiqué](#) briefly stated '[w]e strongly condemn North Korea's continued development of nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, as well as its appalling human rights violations, and its abductions of nationals from other countries', many Japanese felt it was not strong enough.

Furthermore, new security developments in the Korean peninsula this year have forced the Abe administration to pursue more concrete commitments from the other G7 leaders at this year's Ise-Shima Summit.

## **Recent DPRK activity as Abe seeks international coordination**

Since Kim Jong-un became Supreme Leader following the death of his father in 2011, the hermit kingdom has increasingly become internally unstable. Recent activity suggests an on-going power struggle. In recent years, numerous high-ranking officials, such as [Defence Minister Hyon Yong-chol](#), have been purged for 'disloyalty'. Kim increasingly needs to use nuclear and missile tests as a means of satisfying the influential military and maintaining his leadership position. As a result, the DPRK has increasingly become provocative in 2016, with a nuclear test on 6 January and numerous ballistic missile tests since 7 February.

In response to these threats, on 2 March, [UN Security Council Resolution 2270 \(UNSCR 2270\)](#) was [unanimously adopted](#) by the UNSC, including nations traditionally allied to the DPRK, Russia and China. [UNSCR 2270](#) 'introduced some of the most robust sanctions in the history of the United Nations' by adopting vigorous trade and technology transfer restrictions

with the [objective](#) of convincing 'Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table and agree to complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization'.

However, up until now the effectiveness of sanctions in deterring the DPRK has been questionable. At this month's Workers' Party Congress, the first in thirty-five years, Kim asserted that North Korea would be a '[responsible nuclear weapons state](#)' and only use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty were threatened, indicating that the DPRK has no intention to abide by UN resolutions.

In response, the Abe administration [indicated prior to the summit](#) the need for other G7 leaders to state explicitly the need for the whole international community to enforce UNSCR 2270. At the same time, Abe has emphasised the importance of the Japan-US alliance [in deterring DPRK nuclear ambitions](#).

## **Abe's achievements at Ise-Shima**

The Abe Administration largely achieved its policy goals concerning the DPRK at this

year's G7 Summit. In his press conference on the last day of the summit, Abe asserted that in the first G7 Summit to take place in Asia for eight years he has successfully conveyed to G7 European leaders, who do not have such an acute threat perception vis-à-vis the DPRK, that it poses a significant threat not just in the Northeast Asian region, but to the international community as a whole. The language in the communiqué suggests that Abe has succeeded in this regard.

The communiqué addresses security issues, the nuclear test and ballistic missile launches, and the domestic political issue of *racchi jiken*. Greater space is allocated to North Korea-related issues than in last year's communiqué. As regards the nuclear test, the [communiqué](#) states that 'we condemn in the strongest terms North Korea's nuclear test in January and its subsequent launches using ballistic missile technology'. This represents stronger language than was used in last year's communiqué. Direct reference to the 'abductions issue' as an urgent concern of the international community was also made, elevating what is essentially a

domestic political issue to an international humanitarian issue.

Secondly, the communiqué fulfilled the Abe administration's goal of getting G7 leaders to commit to ensuring effective international enforcement of UNSCR 2270. To this end, the communiqué encourages the 'international community to fully implement and enforce relevant UN Security Council resolutions'. The G7 communiqué also demanded that the DPRK abide by commitments agreed in the [2005 Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks](#).

Finally, it is clear that from the pre-summit Abe-Obama press conference of 25 May that the Japan-US Security Treaty will continue to function successfully as the cornerstone of Japan's defence policy toward the DPRK. Both leaders [shared the view](#) of the need to strengthen bilateral defence capabilities and deterrence vis-à-vis the DPRK. President Obama [asserted](#) that his visit to Hiroshima on 27 May symbolised that both nations are committed to nuclear non-proliferation, with particular reference to the DPRK's nuclear programme.

Of particular note is multilateral recognition of the importance of the Six Party Talks in solving DPRK-related issues. It may be possible that the agreements made at Ise-Shima will act as a springboard for such discussions. However, it is increasingly apparent that the G7 is an ineffective framework for Japan to formulate effective security policies towards the DPRK. The four European members of the G7 and Canada have limited direct security interests in the Korean Peninsula. Most significantly, the G7 excludes ROK, Russia and China, three states that have significant security interests toward the DPRK and share its borders.

### **Bringing back the power players**

The Abe administration recognises that the G7 is not the most important institution in dealing with the DPRK. Rather, it is the Six Party Talks, which involves all the powers that are directly concerned in the stability of the Korean Peninsula. The Abe administration's diplomatic activity in recent months suggests this, since it aims to move towards re-establishment of

multilateral dialogue among the interested powers.

The Abe administration has sought to overcome the political friction in Japan-ROK relations and strengthen trilateral Japan-US-ROK security cooperation. At the Nuclear Security Summit on 1 April, Prime Minister Abe, President Park and President Obama met for the first time trilaterally and [affirmed](#) 'very concrete cooperation in the security and defense areas'. Japan-USA-ROK high-level trilateral meetings were also held on [19 April](#). ROK-Japan bilateral security cooperation is likely to increase with ROK's Unification Minister [Hong Yong-pyo's](#) visit to Japan in June to discuss policy toward DPRK.

However, attempts to bring Russia and China back into the fold are likely to be less successful. [Abe has attempted to reach out to President Putin](#) in recent months, despite protests by President Obama. Abe flew to Sochi in early May prior to the Ise-Shima Summit and exchanged views with Putin on the DPRK. Both countries also agreed to re-open peace treaty negotiations and Abe proposed Japanese

investment in the Russian Far East. This suggests that Abe also desires a thaw in US-Russian relations. However, the future success of this is questionable, due to Obama and the other G7 leaders' re-affirmation of sanctions on Russia in the Ise-Shima Summit communiqué.

It is also vital for Japan to improve relations with China, DPRK's main benefactor, if progress is to be made to achieve DPRK security goals. However, attempts to adopt positive Japan-China bilateral relations are frustrated due to on-going disputes concerning the Senkaku/Diayou islands. As a result, the [China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Summit](#) has yet to be pencilled in for this year.

The G7 leaders have demonstrated significant multilateral support for Abe's security concerns regarding the DPRK and sympathy for *racchi jiken* at the Ise-Shima

Summit. However, it is also clear that the G7 is an ineffective framework for resolving either issue. The former will require a positive breakthrough in US relations with Russia and Japan's relations with China in order to move toward the Six Party Talks. The latter will require the re-opening of bilateral Japan-DPRK normalisation talks. Both currently appear to be a distant prospect.

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