

Megumi's Revenge
By
Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones
For
Sanyo Shimbun
December 12, 2004

Megumi Yokota has struck a formidable blow against the Kim Jong Il regime. Pyongyang's claim to have returned "Megumi's remains" to Japan has exploded into an outrageous blunder. Japan's scientific expertise has revealed that Pyongyang's claim was completely false. Long ago, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is believed to have said, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time." Kim Jong Il and his closest advisers obviously have not learned this very fundamental truth. They continue to believe that they can deceive all of the people, all of the time.

Without saying a word, Megumi has focused international attention on the Kim Jong Il regime's most consistent characteristic - it cannot be trusted. Pyongyang is destined to pay a heavy price for many years because of its deceit. At the same time, the Japanese people must now decide, together with their government, how best to deal with North Korea. Should Japan seek revenge or pursue some other course of action? Ultimately, the answer should reflect what is best for the future of Japan and its people, and not just satisfy today's justifiable burning rage.

Megumi and the memory of the other abducted Japanese citizens will make North Korea pay dearly for its past and present blunders. This will be "Megumi's revenge." North Korea's outrageous misconduct has already destroyed any lingering hope the Japanese people may have had to negotiate a diplomatic settlement of the abduction issue. Also, the Japanese people's newly intensified distrust of North Korea will persist into the foreseeable future as a formidable impediment to reconciliation between Tokyo and Pyongyang.

Already the cost to North Korea is becoming evident. The Japanese government moved promptly to postpone delivery of 125,000 metric tons of food aid and US \$3 million of medical aid. But this is only a token price. The postponement of bilateral Japan-North Korea negotiations and the normalization of relations will extract a huge economic price from North Korea.

Without normalized diplomatic relations, Japan will continue to deny North Korea the resources vital to the modernization of its economy. Since normalization talks began over one decade ago, Pyongyang has hoped to receive from Tokyo as much as US \$10 billion in compensation for Imperial Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea desperately needs this money to modernize its economic infrastructure. North Korea also has been eager to acquire Japan's sophisticated technology, but this too will continue to be denied to North Korea. Both the money and technology could enable

North Korea to improve the quality and quantity of its manufactured goods. Pyongyang's ability to compete in the international market would have been enhanced. But North Korea's recent blunder and "Megumi's revenge" make normalization impossible for the foreseeable future. Consequently, Pyongyang's economy will remain stagnate and will fall further behind its primary competitors, South Korea and China.

Pyongyang's blunder also will reinforce the international community's refusal to engage North Korea commercially. So long as the abduction case remains unresolved to Japan's satisfaction, international financial organizations like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank will reject North Korea's application for membership and deny it loans. The United States and the European Union will maintain economic sanctions against North Korea. These sanctions deny North Korea access US and EU technology and machinery. Also, they put a heavy tariff on any North Korean exports to these nations. Because of "Megumi's revenge," these obstacles to North Korea's economic modernization are certain to remain in place for some time to come.

Japan, in short, is not the only victim of Pyongyang's deceit and refusal to act according to international standards of conduct. The United States and European Union share with Japan a common distrust of Pyongyang's leadership. North Korea's deceit as evident in the abduction issue and North Korea's persistent quest for a nuclear arsenal has forged an international consensus that North Korea must halt its deceit. Otherwise, it is destined to linger as the poorest nation in East Asia and face the perpetual risk of political collapse.

Megumi's revenge has strengthened the resolve of Japan, the United States and the European Union to halt North Korea's deceit. These nations have given Pyongyang's leaders a choice. Either they end their deceit and make their behavior consistent with international conduct, or their nation will remain excluded from the international market place, and their people will have to live in poverty and on the edge of famine. The choice is for Pyongyang's leadership to make.

The international community's goal is to halt Pyongyang's deceit, not to merely punish it. Japan's best interests are served by continuing its close cooperation with the international community. Imposing Japanese economic sanctions on North Korea is not likely to achieve the best results for Japan. On the contrary, Japanese economic sanctions could backfire. Sanctions could push North Korea closer to Beijing and Moscow. Right now these two capitals are deeply embarrassed by Pyongyang's deceit. Both nations continue to pressure Pyongyang to reform its conduct and policies. Pyongyang's hardliners would be certain to claim to China and Russia that Japanese economic sanctions reveal that Tokyo's true aim is to destroy the Kim Jong Il regime. This could compel Beijing and Moscow to increase their aid to Pyongyang while also halting their pressure on the Kim Jong Il regime to reform its conduct and policies.

Because of international respect for Japan, and Japan's close cooperation with the international community, North Korea's leaders cannot escape "Megumi's revenge." For the Kim Jong Il regime, the only choice is to reform itself. Otherwise, it will inevitably destroy itself through its own deceit.