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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. ROK Weekly Report

1. Introduction

ROK Weekly Report ("Hostage Crisis in Afghanistan", 2007-08-03) This week's report deals with the ongoing hostage crisis in Afghanistan. Many commentators focused on the role of the U.S. in solving the situation, with those on the left blaming the U.S. war on terror as the cause of the incident and calling on the ROK to withdraw its troops, while those on the right expressed concern that rising anti-Americanism could harm the alliance and perhaps affect the outcome of this year's presidential election. Other commentators focused on what the incident means for the rising global role of the ROK. Some called for both NGOs and the government to develop stronger rules for dispatching volunteers into conflict zones, while others criticized the ROK government for attempting to expand its global role without having adequate means of protecting its citizens abroad.

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2. U.S. Must Compromise

Statement by People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy ("WILL US KEEP ON JUST WATCHING KOREANS DIE?", 2007-07-31) Taliban killing civilians under the justification of resisting against the Afghanistan government that the US supports is not only an immoral act but also something that can be espoused by nobody else. The Taliban's request is something that neither the ROK nor Afghanistan government can fulfill, but only the US. However, the US administration is repeating its position of not negotiating with terrorists, showing irresponsibility when the lives of ROK hostages are at stake. What the US must be doing is not stirring up the Taliban with military operations but participating in negotiations. The ROK must not only clearly declare that there will be immediate withdrawal but also demand that the US participate in compromise.

(return to top) Pressian ("WHERE IS THE SPIRIT OF ALLIANCE? US ARMY MUST COMPROMISE", 2007-07-31) wrote that while there have been two deaths among the hostages, in Korea public sentiment is leaning to the idea that US should participate in a compromise. The Democratic Labor Party also insisted that there must be practical and quick management made in order for the Koreans to safely return home. If innocent Koreans are caught in the trap the US made, future US-ROK relations will face a grave situation. It also noted that there is no greater principle or value than saving the lives of citizens. (return to top)

3. Troop Dispatch to Blame

The Korean Action against the Dispatch of Troops ("THE APPEAL STATEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY", 2007-07-25) We condemn the Korean government for supporting the U.S. government's Global War on Terror and participating as part of the coalition. The Korean government did not inform its people of the underlying purpose and role of the dispatch nor of the actual situation in Afghanistan. We strongly urge the government to withdraw the troops immediately. We clearly state that we understand this situation is part of the disaster caused by the U.S. government's Global War on Terror. The U.S. invasion following other foreign invasions and internal warfare has ravaged the land of Afghanistan and devastated the lives of the Afghans. The armed resistance of the Taliban against the U.S. occupation is escalating, resulting in frequent abductions and terrorist attacks. The war and occupation in Afghanistan must come to an immediate end and the international community is obliged to strive to eradicate such ruthless violence. Our wish is an end to the foreign occupation in Afghanistan and the restoration of peace by its own people. Furthermore, we cannot avoid criticizing the US government that is threatening Korean hostages' lives by maintaining the troops and its alliance with the Afghanistan government. The Roh

government also has a great responsibility for this incidence. Is its alliance with US more important than Koreans' lives?

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4. Show Flexibility with Negotiations

Pressian ("WE SHOULD APPLY FLEXIBLY THE INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE CONCERNING HOSTAGE ISSUES", 2007-07-31) wrote that the Blue House sent messages urging the liberation of the hostages to the US and Afghanistan governments. The messages are said to appeal for flexible application of international society's principle and position concerning hostages. Although the ROK government is asking the whole world for support, it is actually the two nations – the US and Afghanistan – that the ROK is asking. The Blue House has admitted that there are limits to the ROK's methods. Although this is seen as a multi-faceted attempt by some, this still remains a speech of exceptional degree. The kidnapping itself might be beyond control, yet the way the ROK government reacted and its international strategy will be discussed in depth after the termination of the situation. At the beginning there was not much criticism regarding the government's management except for fundamentals such as sending troops abroad or the influence US had on current situation in Iraq. However, as there have not been solutions brought up and the victims were sacrificed, the conditions are changing. Of course, as the situation continues, these kind of discussions have a high possibility of becoming controversial issues in the early stage.

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5. Taliban Not Terrorists

Ohmynews ("NEGOTIATION WITH TALIBAN IS NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF", 2007-07-31) wrote that the US has firmly rejected liberation of prisoners, which the Taliban suggested as condition for letting the Korean hostages free, saying that political negotiation with Taliban will not take place. Not compromising with terrorists is surely a firm logic but there arise two unavoidable questions. First, the Taliban are not terrorists. On the blacklist the US made, the Taliban are not included. The Taliban are just fighting against those who invaded their country. Second, would Bush act the same if the hostages were American? However, we cannot criticize only the US for that. claiming that the US is the only one with responsibility. There are always areas we can respond. What matters is President Roh's decision. We all must recognize that sending troops to Afghanistan and Iraq in the first place were terrible mistakes. At least we can coerce the cold-blooded Bush government by threatening immediate withdrawal as a weapon. It is time to boldly say what we must say to the US.

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6. ROK Must Persuade US

Hankyoreh ("WITHOUT BEING SEEN, TRY TO INDUCE US SUPPORT", 2007-07-31) wrote that in order to solve the problem, the US must move. However, the ROK government lacks appropriate means to induce US cooperation. In the midst of victims growing in number and situation deteriorating, experts have concluded that it is an anxious situation, difficult to find the exit. The ROK government should try its best to bring about US cooperation, but the experts mainly agree that this must be done quietly through close deliberation. Other experts pointed out, "Although it is possible for the ROK, in a desperate extreme situation, to intimidate the US by threatening that the ROK government shall withdraw all troops in Iraq, the position is out of choice." Also, since if the

situation drags on and more threats are imposed on Korean hostages, the Korean public sentiment of blaming US can be even tenser, and things are not going to be as easy for the US to keep silent.

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7. Inciting Anti-Americanism

Chosun Ilbo ("ARE PEOPLE USING EVEN THIS TO INCITE THE ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT?", 2007-08-01) wrote that as the situation in Afghanistan is dragging on with two of the victims being murdered, some groups began blaming the US for all the mishaps. Along with the press, the Uri party leader immediately took advantage of the situation. Some part of internal parties inciting anti-America sentiment is used to justify and support the Taliban's terrorism. Representatives of the country's five major political parties visiting the US to urge the responsibility of the US will end up as a political show only threatening the lives of the hostages.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("US STUCK BETWEEN PRINCIPLE AND ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT", 2007-08-02) wrote that the US is currently in deep agony between the principle of never negotiating with terrorists and possible anti-America sentiment in ROK due to the deterioration of the hostage situation. The US claims that liberating the prisoners is neither something the US is capable of doing nor that the US can force the Afghanistan government to do. The US feels very much by burdened by the fact that there is no progress in the process and the fact that Korean citizens and civil groups are demanding direct mediation. Especially the US showed a sensitive reaction to part of Korea attempting to blame the US for this hostage situation. The US especially showed extreme wariness towards political parties using this situation for the upcoming presidential election. (return to top)

8. Incident Harming Alliance

Joongang Ilbo ("US RESPONSIBILITY THEORY GETTING FIERCE", 2007-08-02) wrote that there are slight differences between the solutions given by the US and ROK to the Korean hostage situation in Afghanistan. After the Roh government took office, there has been endless dissonance in US-ROK relations. However there has been some change in last year's agreement on conversion of wartime control and this year's on FTA. The Korean hostage situation has appeared as the new possible turning point in US-ROK relations. The government is wary of "US responsibility theory" being brought in shape because it might incite anti-American sentiment and even trigger a crack in the US-ROK alliance with only four months until the 17th presidential election. As the situation is getting tense, the diplomacy line toward the US is being fully activated. If there is no change in the US attitude, it might cause a sudden rise of anti-American sentiment that can possibly ruin the US-ROK alliance.

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9. Effect on Elections

Yonhap News ("GRAND NATIONAL PARTY WARY OF AFGHANISTAN SITUATION INCITING ANTI-AMERICA SENTIMENT", 2007-08-02) reported that inside the Grand National Party there has been anticipation of the ever-deteriorating situation of Koreans being kidnapped and murdered inciting anti-America sentiment. The Grand National Party is worried that, as the two schoolgirls dying in the US tank incident affected the outcome in the last 2002 presidential election in which President Roh was suddenly victorious, the current hostage situation might also work against the Grand National Party. On the other hand, representative Kim Hyung-oh accentuated that there should not be any

behavior that might cause anti-America sentiment before the hostages are set free, saying that he is much concerned about some politicians and civil societies are inciting anti-Americanism.

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10. ROK's Power Not Equal to Aid

Kukmin Ilbo ("FOREIGN AID FIT TO THE NATION", 2007-08-01) wrote that ever since the kidnapping incident, the ROK's foreign aid and volunteer work is being spotlighted. After the Korean War, because of the international society's aid and volunteer work, the ROK's economy could grow to its size today. The ROK is a successful case to become a "providing" country from a "provided" country. However, in both quality and quantity, the ROK is still in its beginning as a donor country. An even bigger problem is its aid method. The ROK's aid policy lacks a center and direction. For Iraq and Afghanistan's reconstruction, the ROK has provided $319.7 million. However, even when our people are kidnapped and killed, the ROK government cannot speak out loud. To those countries, the ROK is just another ally of the U.S. ROK citizens are doing their best as global citizens, but the government is still behind.

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11. Caution in Sending Volunteers

Maeil Shinmun ("KOREAN HOSTAGES AND THE U.S.", 2007-07-31) writes that a more cautious approach, with the region's religion, culture, and social background taken into consideration, is necessary for ROK organizations when sending out volunteer workers. The fact that ROK citizens are going abroad to do medical, cultural, and labor volunteer work means the national power has been extended. However, how the receiving country feels about it and in which way they need support must be taken into consideration. Certain organizations sending students and medical volunteer workers to Afghanistan where there is war going on is seen as an inconsiderate decision.

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12. Causes of Kidnapping

Pressian ("THREE DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEWS ON THE AFGHAN KIDNAPPING", 2007-07-30) writes that, collating many different opinions on the Afghan kidnapping, there are three main causes to this issue. The first reason is the missionary-work-centered ROK Christianity. However, sticking only to religious matters can easily distort the fundamental problem. Second is the lack of caution. We cannot only blame the hostages for their lack of caution. If the government had known civil organizations were working in Afghanistan, they should have had enough communication with the organizations and developed programs to secure their safety. Third is the reason for dispatching troops. Even if the government had not dispatched troops to Afghanistan, these types of kidnapping could easily have happened. However, whether the dispatch was reasonable and worth risking lives should be thoroughly examined. How much is infrastructure for public consensus established in our society in the process of dispatching troops? Even if we dispatch troops, the decision should be based on more information and more communication and with a clear purpose for it.

(return to top) Haegu Jeong ("EVIL DESTINY BETWEEN ROK AND AFGHANISTAN", 2007-08-01) writes that the reason the relationship between the ROK and Afghanistan started was because we dispatched troops in order to punish terrorists and the militia protecting them while building peace in Afghanistan. Another reason is because we sent volunteer workers and missionaries to help the

Afghan people from their pain in the above process. However, from the Afghan Taliban or people's perspective, whether it is the army or missionaries, or volunteer workers, ROK citizens are just another foreign ally of the U.S. In that sense, the current kidnapping is an outcome of a misled evil destiny. (return to top)

13. Protecting Citizens Abroad

Freezone News ("AFGHAN KIDNAPPING: HOW SHALL WE VIEW IT?", 2007-07-25) wrote that there are not so few voices criticizing the ROK government for their method of dealing with the situation. First of all, when negotiating with such dangerous Taliban, if the president comes out at the start and promise the withdrawal of troops, we have no other cards to use. Secondly, if the government had protected and managed their citizens properly, they should not have allowed the ROK volunteer workers to go there. Thirdly, the ROK government is too easy with Taliban in negotiating table. Rather than protecting citizens, it only puts them into more danger, affects the national image and loses credibility to the Afghan and other governments. When the ROK is withdrawing troops and others from Afghanistan, It is unlikely for the Afghan government to entrust any work to the ROK. After all, other nations such as Japan or China will be taking the ROK's place. Then how shall we deal with this situation? First of all, we need to have a principle on how to deal with kidnapping, bombings, and murders occurred in other countries. Then we need to create policies and rules to protect ROK citizens abroad. There is also problem on how government manages people entering dangerous territories.

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