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I. ROK WEEKLY REPORT

1. Introduction

ROK Weekly Report ("ROK HOSTAGES IN AFGHANISTAN", 2007-08-10) This week's report continues the focus on the ongoing hostage crisis in Afghanistan. Commentators on the left continue to focus on US responsibility for the crisis, while those on the right accuse them of using the incident to stir up anti-Americanism. More moderate voices criticized both sides for distracting from

the primary issue of how to free the hostages. Other commentators reflected on what the crisis says about the need for the ROK to develop greater awareness of developing countries, and the Islamic world in particular.

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2. Public Opinion Survey on Hostage Crisis

PRESSian ("59% SAY 'U.S. GOV'T IRRESPONSIBLE'; CAUSE IS AGGRESSIVE MISSIONARY WORK, KEY IS U.S.", 2007-08-06) writes that according to a survey of 700 adults all over the ROK, aggressive missionary work was voted as the main cause for the kidnapping, and 61.2% said the key to this problem was the US. It seems that if the situation worsens, anti-American voices will increase. In addition, there were more people (65.8%) who agree with the idea of a prisoner swap than those who don't (28.1%). Regarding the ROK government's attitude, 52.1% thought they were doing a good job, while 59.3% thought US's attitude of "no negotiations with terrorists" was irresponsible as an ally. 59.3% replied that they disagree with the US's "war against terrorism," and 48% opposed to dispatching ROK troops to Lebanon as UN Peacekeeping Forces.

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3. NGO Statement on Kidnapping

NGO Statement (""YELLOW RIBBON"", 2007-08-10) A group of 78 NGOs announced a "Yellow Ribbon" campaign for the hostages' safe return on 08/07/07. In a press release, they pleaded to the citizens to join the yellow ribbon campaign hoping for the hostages' safe return. The statement appealed to the Taliban for a prompt release, and pointed to the responsibility of the ROK in supporting the Afghanistan occupation and the vicious cycle of violence. It reflected on ROK society's ignorance of the death and pain the Afghanistan people are going through, and on the effort and support from the US, UN, and peace and human rights organizations to free the hostages.

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4. Stirring up anti-Americanism

Seoul Economic Daily ("DEPLORABLE POLITICAL PARTIES UTILIZING THE ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT", 2007-08-03) wrote that we cannot help taking precautions against some political parties and civil organizations' behaviors connecting this kidnapping situation with the anti-American campaign. It is deplorable that even candidates for the presidential election ally themselves with the anti-American sentiment to gain votes. By this behavior, to distort the essence of this situation gives families of the hostages more pain. It is hard to predict at this moment that if we incite the anti-American sentiment, the US will change its attitude toward this situation. It is desirable for us to wait to understand the position of the US and cooperate with the US.

(return to top) Seoul Shinmun ("US RESPONSIBILITY THEORY DIFFERENT FROM THE US ROLE THEORY", 2007-08-04) wrote that it is neither right nor desirable for the political parties and civil organizations to blame the US, not to just ask it to play a role. The primary responsibility for the hostages is not the US but the Taliban. Especially the behaviors of some civil organizations should be criticized because they tried to distort this situation into the anti-American campaign, advocating cessation of the US occupation of Afghanistan and the abolition of the US-ROK alliance. Portraying the Afghan government as a dependant state of the US is neither courteous to our counterpart nor helpful for the negotiation. (return to top) Munhwa Ilbo ("NO SHAKING THE 'AFGHAN ANTI-

AMERICAN CARD'", 2007-08-03) reported that all political parties are being influenced and utilizing the "Afghan anti-American card" at the same time. Some civil organizations showing the anti-Americanism on the left added that this Korean kidnapping is because of the war on terror that the US started and the long negotiation for the release of the hostages is also due to the US failure to persuade the Afghan government. This is another "anti-American card." Political parties show us that they are using this anti-American card for the upcoming presidential election. Even the Grand National Party plays the US card, just like the ruling party, which received help from the death of two schoolgirls in the 2002 presidential election. (return to top)

5. Need to Persuade US

Ohmynews ("THE AFGHAN KIDNAPPING SITUATION", 2007-08-08) wrote that, before the US-Afghan summit meeting, although the US was rather worried about the anti-American sentiment in the ROK, the US expected that it was just unfounded fears for several reasons. The big thing is the tone of the press regarding the general opinion in the ROK. There is no criticism on the outcome of the summit meeting. Chosun Ilbo even condemned people for pointing out the responsibility of the US. Donga Ilbo also rebuked them as "those who on the left and speak in support of DPRK utilizing the two schoolgirls in the US tank incident for the candlelight vigil to incite anti-American sentiment." Furthermore, they claimed that to those on the extreme left "the death of the hostages is the secondary problem." However, it is sure that if there were no criticism of President George W. Bush's "feigned ignorance" and no voice asking for the withdrawal of the ROK army, the Bush government would keep its inattentive attitude.

(return to top) Kyunghyang Shinmun ("THE US RESPONSIBILITY THEORY AND THE ANTI-AMERICANISM DISPUTE", 2007-08-05) wrote that while the desperate voices asking that the US government should play a more active role for the early release of the hostages are getting loud, some groups consider these voices as inciting anti-American sentiment. We are worried that the terms of this dispute focuses not on the solution but on the ideological dispute "the US responsibility theory vs. no anti-Americanism." It is hard to understand the perspectives of some of the parties and the conservative media that they consider the US responsibility theory as unconditionally inciting anti-American sentiment. Although we need to urge the role of the US to some extent but temper the excessive demands, to block all the voices asking for the help of the US in the name of fighting "anti-Americanism" can spread disunity, weakening the negotiation power and causing ideological disputes. (return to top)

6. Options After US-Afghanistan Summit

Donga Ilbo ("KIDNAPPED FOR 21 DAYS; TOUGH BUT RESOLUTE", 2007-08-08) reported that, as expected, the US-Afghanistan summit reaffirmed the principle of no negotiations with terrorists, and we must be able to accept this as a fact. The government should find a practical solution to release the hostages, maintaining much more intimate relations with these nations without violating the principles. It must not only ask for humanitarian support from all the nations and organizations that could influence the Taliban, but also must hold direct negotiations with the Taliban. Meanwhile, movements demanding the hostages' prompt release both inside and outside the ROK are greatly inspiring.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("AFTER US-AFGHANISTAN SUMMIT TALK, 'THERE IS NO COMPROMISE FOR THE KIDNAPPER'", 2007-08-07) wrote that the US-Afghanistan conference as expected reaffirmed the international norm of no compromise with terrorists. The ROK government must solve this problem while dealing with the US, Afghanistan, and the Taliban at the same time. There is barely any option for negotiations for the ROK. The withdrawal of 200 ROK troops focusing

on medical support and rebuilding cannot have a major impact. (return to top) Yonhap News ("US-AFGHANISTAN MUST DO THEIR BEST TO SAVE INNOCENT LIVES", 2007-08-07) reported that the US and Afghanistan governments should not just keep on announcing the principal that there shall be no negotiations with terrorists, but rather they must try their best to rescue innocent lives with all diplomatic methods and means, imagining what would they do if their own people were to be taken hostage. (return to top) Seoul Shinmun ("US-AFGHANISTAN SUMMIT TALK FINDS NO SOLUTION FOR THE HOSTAGES", 2007-08-08) wrote that it is sad to hear that the US-Afghanistan summit talk ended without achieving expectations. Especially, the US must find a creative solution that will in a large sense not deviate from the principle of not allowing prisoner-hostage exchanges, while being flexible in the actual negotiation process. Meanwhile, the ROK government should hold its own face-to-face negotiations with the Taliban while inducing support from institutions (national Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies) that have influence over the Islamic world. (return to top) Saegae Ilbo ("WATCH OUT FOR KOREAN HOSTAGE SITUATION TURNING INTO LONG-TERM CRISIS", 2007-08-06) wrote that although it seems to have avoided the worst condition for the hostage situation turning into a long-term crisis, the ROK government should strive to rescue the hostages without loosening the pressure. It should never be taken advantage of by the Taliban, and should clearly inform the Taliban of what is possible and what is not. The US traded five Iraq female prisoners for an American reporter abducted last February, violating the principle of not negotiating with terrorists. It is encouraging that there are parts of US government mentioning a "creative solution," which would likely be similar to the one in February. (return to top)

7. Need to Refocus ROK Diplomacy

Naeil Shinmun ("WORRIES IF KIDNAPPING SITUATION CONTINUES FOR A LONG TIME", 2007-08-08) writes that regarding the kidnapping, there are worries about the rapid spread of distorted views on the hostages and Christianity. On the other hand, as Protestant churches' careless decision and the Afghanistan policies of the US tangle with each other, it is serving as an opportunity for people to try to understand Islam. These results are interpreted to be caused from the sense of shame and helplessness that there is nothing the government or the people can do about the situation. It is an acceptable diagnosis, but it is time to overcome the sense of shame and helplessness and bring all there is to bear to free the hostages.

(return to top) Hankuk Ilbo ("THOUGHTS ON THE AFGHAN KIDNAP", 2007-08-06) writes that ever since the kidnapping, many disagreements in ROK society, such as the government's role and responsibility, the trust between the government and the people, and different views on the development and abuse of Christianity are all surfacing. In a way, it can be an opportunity to bring the issues to the table and address them. Moreover, from this situation, we have witnessed our "unbalanced diet" that leans toward powerful countries such as the US and Japan, but when it comes to anti-U.S. countries, our diplomatic skills are at a very low level. If we don’t acquire a diplomatic skill equal to a 10th biggest economy, the ROK will always remain a "diplomatically undeveloped country." Ideological disputes also need to be reconsidered. Conservative powers trying to define progressive powers' ideas of "U.S.'s roles and responsibilities" as anti-American, and trying to use this in the presidential election while the hostages' lives are at risk, only makes ROK an international mockery. (return to top) Maeil Shinmun ("LET'S MAKE A KOREAN "ASIA ECONOMIC INSTITUTE"", 2007-08-07) writes that if you search and Japanese national policy institutes, you can easily notice how the ROK, even after dispatching troops, lacks information about Afghanistan. The ROK not only lacks information channels, but also is without any professionals who know Afghanistan's local languages. When Sunil Kim was kidnapped in Iraq, there were many calls to study Islamic countries and empower professionals in that area. However, nothing changed since then. If we develop professionals in Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, it will be very helpful in learning their tendencies, building human networks, and conducting negotiations in the future. In

the negotiation this time, the ROK government was too helpless. Afghanistan-related information came from Japan. The author stresses the importance in establishing an institute focusing mainly on underdeveloped countries. (return to top)

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