

Rising Sun, Morning Calm, Redeeming Step



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by Roger Cavazos

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I. INTRODUCTION

Roger Cavazos writes "Both Japan and North Korea are presently taking concrete steps, and responding primarily to their own perceived national interest. The path to redemption is rarely linear and never easy. North Korea's tentative reaching out should be met with reversible actions and Japan's bold steps should be encouraged - maybe even followed."

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II. POLICY FORUM BY Roger cavazos

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There existed a tone deaf Japanese leader with an alternate view of history. There also existed a North Korean leader skilled in the dark arts of increasing tensions only to decrease them while asymptotically approaching red lines. Surely a pair of leaders like that can't possibly have productive discussions. But they did. Junichiro Koizumi and Kim Jong-il met one summer day in 2002 just before the autumnal equinox a symbolic 50-50 mix of light and dark. It was the closest the two countries came to normalizing relations. Both countries missed important steps on the road to their own normalization.

Japan habitually feels left out. Most recently, they were not invited to a conference their friends are planning to hold. Historical issues run deep and how Japan deals with them are a core part of several relationships in the region. Deeply engrained historical animosities in the region pre-date World War II and likely will not be resolved soon, but there certainly are ways to prevent animosities from being stirred up and revisited on a regular basis. Japan could use a little redemption to show Asia they are a normal power, able to exercise all levers of national power in a positive way.

A classic path to redemption is dealing with those outside the mainstream. North Korea must be keenly aware that simply talking with Japan has a strong potential to sow discord between Japan and others in the region. But so far the delicate subject has been handled in a way that demonstrates talking with North Korea is not the same as rewarding North Korea. Talking with North Korea is in Japan's self-interest as Japan seeks to account for its citizens and increase stability in the region. Surely a normal, and redeemed, country values the life of each of its citizens.

North Korea has a new leader who has been busy securing his role. By most accounts and interpretations, he is now in control. At the risk of infantilizing some aspects of his behavior, he

“banged his spoon” and did not receive anything since there was nothing external that was more valuable to him than securing his internal domestic rule.

Kim Jong-un’s indelible marks upon the country so far are martial: a nuclear bomb that functions in pristine laboratory conditions and a rocket. The North Korean people still engage in routine “belt-tightening”. No one knows exactly how many are starving in North Korea, but ending an “arduous march” and arriving at paradise or as Kim Il-sung envisioned it in January of 1961 as a place to “...eat rice and meat soup, wear fine clothes and live in tiled-roof houses” would go a long way in redeeming three generations of Kim leadership.

South Korea received a broad range of aid when normalizing relations with Japan. North Korea is almost certainly counting on a similar package of aid, assistance, and international good will if they normalize relations with Japan. Admittedly, it’s a long shot, but it may be just the kind of *Deus Ex Machina* solution North Korea needs to realize the “6.28 policy” of remodeling the industrial and agricultural sector - in short, economic reform with North Korean characteristics.

Neither Shinzo Abe nor Kim Jong-un have to break much new ground. The outline and roadmap were set out by two leaders who were secure in their position, all it takes now is updating the roadmap and following through on the outline. There are few downsides for the rest of the world to bringing North Korea more thoroughly into the international system. Kim Jong-un will have to assess for himself whether the positives of normalization outweigh the negatives of remaining isolated.

Both Japan and North Korea are presently taking concrete steps, and responding primarily to their own perceived national interest. The path to redemption is rarely linear and never easy. North Korea’s tentative reaching out should be met with reversible actions and Japan’s bold steps should be encouraged - maybe even followed.

III. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSES

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