

# Japanese Media: Why Did the Hanoi Summit Fail and What Comes Next?

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Japanese coverage of the diplomacy between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un as well as the broader spectrum of international relations over North Korea has been intensive over the first months of 2019. Assessments of what to expect and then what really happened involve interpretations of North Korean intentions, the character of U.S. diplomacy, the role of South Korean diplomacy, the impact of China, and the geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia. Each development over this period has been scrutinized closely, often with an addendum: What does it mean for Japan? The fate of North Korea looms very large for a nation fearful of a missile attack from it, cognizant of the absence of any settlement after 1945 of its claims against Japan's occupational conduct, and nervous about the regional balance of power and U.S. trustworthiness as an ally and nuclear umbrella, when the United States itself is quickly coming under threat from the North's nuclear weapons. Below, the views on the political right range from *Sankei Shimbun* to the establishment-oriented *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and on the political left from *Asahi Shimbun* to *Tokyo Shimbun*. While editorials figure heavily into the analysis, much of the regular news coverage also serves to differentiate Japanese sources.

What negative outcomes does Japan fear from the success or failure of ongoing diplomacy over North Korea? In recent coverage we can identify at least eight worrisome outcomes: 1) failure of the talks resulting in a war scare beyond what occurred in 2017; 2) suspension of U.S.-DPRK talks and China as well as Russia breaking with the UN sanctions regime, fueling prospects of three-way coordination with China taking the lead; 3) discord about how to proceed with damaging U.S.-ROK relations, weakening the U.S. military presence in South Korea at a cost to Japan's defense; 4) South Korea splitting with the U.S. on the North and raising the specter of inter-Korean nationalism deemed hostile to Japan; 5) success of the talks based on "America First," agreeing to a deal on denuclearization (as a process) that leaves Japan's concerns about missiles and abductees aside, isolating Japan; 6) success of the talks leading toward reunification, also strengthening national identity versus Japan; 7) a new geopolitical framework replacing the talks, as the U.S. retreats from the region; and 8) a period of instability, where Trump only delays making decisions and Japan is left frustrated.

Four general responses to the Hanoi Summit and its early aftermath could be discerned in Japanese publications: 1) Trump outfoxed Kim, has a strategy reassuring to Japan, and the outcome in sight is positive; 2) Trump erred in his diplomacy but has been brought to his senses and now will follow a course welcome in Japan, however uncertain the outcome; 3) the situation is growing more dangerous, Trump does not know what to do, and Japan has to keep its eyes on the other players; and 4) Trump will renew diplomacy, keeping Japan off balance in coordinating with the U.S. as Japan struggles with its isolation in this diplomacy.

When anticipating what should come next, sources understandably suggest what their own government should do. Many in Japan emphasize the abductions issue and willingness to offer economic assistance when that along with denuclearization and missiles is addressed. One can discern how Abe Shinzo should proceed in diplomacy with each of the leaders active in the region. Of course, most attention centers on how he should deal with Trump or the alliance.

## The Background to the Hanoi Summit

Speeches by Trump and Abe at the United Nations in late September reflected the mood in the aftermath of the Singapore summit. Trump was all confidence on the prospects both of denuclearization and rapport with Kim Jong-un, claiming that their meeting had been very productive.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Moon Jae-in was predicting a second Trump-Kim summit by year's end, suggesting that Kim was seeking sanctions relief, and also an end-of-the war declaration and humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> Abe in New York now called for a summit with Kim, reacting to the North-South summit that month, where Kim had said that at an appropriate time such dialogue should occur, as transmitted by Moon. While North Korean media insisted that the abductee issue had been completely settled, Japan was conducting lower-level talks seen as a start to reopening the issue, along with talks about normalization of relations and economic assistance if the U.S.-DPRK talks advanced well. *Yomiuri* editorialized in favor of this effort, stressing the abductee theme, while acknowledging the importance of close Japan-U.S.-ROK coordination.<sup>3</sup> *Yomiuri* also editorialized skeptically about Moon's meeting with Trump in New York a week after his summit with Kim in Pyongyang that: the North is promising too little, planning to keep its nuclear weapons, and not agreeing to necessary steps such as a declaration of its nuclear weapons. Suspension of military exercises has made it harder to meet the military challenge, which has not diminished, and they matter for the stability of the whole region, the editorial made clear. Do not be taken in by North Korea's dialogue offensive, it warned in conclusion.<sup>4</sup> For the half year after Singapore, this was the outlook.

A *Yomiuri* editorial on February 22 warned against an easy compromise, insisting that until the triad of nuclear weapons, missiles, and abductees was settled, sanctions remain in place. If agreement is reached, then Abe can look forward to forging an environment leading to a Japan-North Korea summit. The editorial warned against a hasty deal, succumbing to the appeal of "success," casting doubt on Trump's trumpeting of test freezes, and pointing to Abe being asked to recommend him for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. should press for accelerated working level talks, pressure should be maintained, and Moon Jae-in's priority for North-South relations and exceptions to sanctions should not be followed, it advised.

As Kim Jong-un and Trump approached their second summit, the models they had in mind were different. One looked to Pakistan, accepted as a de facto nuclear weapons state; the other to Vietnam, successful in economic opening without threatening arms build-ups.<sup>6</sup> The former model considered arms reduction agreements to be a means to remove the U.S. nuclear umbrella and leave Japan and South Korea at the mercy of the North's short- and mid-range missiles.<sup>7</sup> The latter was encouraged by articles on North Korea's treasure house of natural resources and vast, latent economic power.<sup>8</sup> There was scant hope that a summit in Vietnam would tilt Kim Jong-un away from the Pakistan model as Trump was proposing.

Complaining that there is no progress to denuclearization, *Sankei* was frankest in asserting that if the summit is a "political show," we do not need it, adding in an advocacy piece that pressure must be sustained to the end, finding the North-South talks strange, and reacting to Trump's insistence that he is in no hurry about denuclearization.<sup>9</sup> *Tokyo Shimbun*, at the

other end of the political spectrum, was eager to keep the talks on denuclearization going, asking that Moon Jae-in prove that this is his focus and that Trump not let election planning for 2020 lead him to rush to claim success, while it added that Abe wanted to resolve the abduction issue himself even if he asked Trump to raise the issue.<sup>10</sup> Whether on the right or the left, coverage strongly doubted denuclearization is on the table in U.S.-DPRK talks.

Experts cited in the U.S. and South Korea were similarly clear about the North's intentions. Choi Kang argued that Japan has two roles: to influence U.S. policy on the basis of good bilateral ties and to influence North Korea by reserving economic cooperation until after the abductee issue is resolved and keeping up pressure on it.<sup>11</sup> Chun Yungwoo was insistent that North Korea be judged by its denuclearization actions, warning that if an exception were made, as in allowing sanctions relief for the Kaesong industrial park, the sanctions system would collapse.<sup>12</sup> South Korean critics of Moon's policies as well as U.S. think tank voices skeptical of Trump's apparent softness toward Kim Jong-un were widely cited in the press.

The progressive press was also nervous about Moon's eagerness to lift sanctions on the North early, warning that this would damage ties to the U.S. Meanwhile, both China and the U.S. link cooperation on North Korea to their trade talks, seeing progress in U.S. talks with Kim as good for Sino-U.S. relations.<sup>13</sup> Japanese progressives were pleased with the turn to negotiations and eager for a framework for regional peace and stability to ensue, taking seriously Kim's intention to prioritize the economy, but they doubted Trump's "political show" and called for improved Japan-South Korea ties despite Moon Jae-in's penchant for relaxing sanctions.<sup>14</sup> They too viewed the Hanoi Summit with concern that it could lead to Chinese and Russian moves toward North Korea, not only undermining further sanctions pressure but altering the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia. Russia was especially eager to proceed, seeking South Korea's involvement too. Sergey Lavrov's presence in Ho Chi Minh City on March 25 and his meeting with Wang Yi a day later, just before the summit, renewed calls for sanctions relief in stages.<sup>15</sup> No newspaper advocated making common cause with either Beijing or Moscow. China was blamed for seeking to ease sanctions and urging U.S.-North Korea talks that would lead to that outcome with scant denuclearization. Russia was blamed for seeking to gain influence over North Korea, also focusing on eased sanctions.<sup>16</sup> There was scant hope that Japanese diplomacy with either would be constructive in this context; they were working against Japan's national interests.

Abe on February 20 expressed faith in Trump's approach, equating it to "Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Denuclearization" (CVID), and indicated his position of backing up Trump, while explaining that Japan has repeatedly called for talks with the North but has received no reply.<sup>17</sup> Others in Japan had warned, however, that Trump has too much faith in himself and expresses satisfaction that there is no testing, as if that means a lot.<sup>18</sup> Uncertain about Trump, all sides sought a firm posture unwilling to rush into a deal.

Assuming that Pyongyang had scant interest in shedding its nuclear weapons, the Japanese saw Trump's diplomacy as essentially a stunt for domestic politics, better than Moon's approach with little regard for denuclearization and likely to prove abortive as reality set in and sober voices in the U.S. government got their way. The war scare of 2017 had passed, but there were few ideas about what to do except to ratchet up international pressure, involve Japan in direct talks, and negotiate more patiently with fewer top-down intrusions. Left on the margins, the Japanese could agree on strongly communicating to Trump the

importance of denuclearization and not cutting a deal, such as troop cuts in South Korea, impacting Japan.<sup>19</sup> As the Japanese obsessively watched Trump's moves with Kim Jong-un, the looming trade war gave them cause to consider linkages between Trump's diplomacy with Kim and with Xi Jinping.<sup>20</sup> When Kim visited Xi on January 8, there was talk of Xi playing the "North card" in an attempt to get a better trade deal from Trump. The China angle was foremost in thinking.

As the summit drew near, Japanese conservatives, as reflected in *Yomiuri*, were concerned that the U.S. was shifting to a stage-by-stage approach to denuclearization with a growing possibility of even catering to Moon's desire to loosen the sanctions and reopen Kaesong.<sup>21</sup> The paper editorialized that Trump should prepare carefully for the summit, make strong demands, and press for fuller enforcement of the sanctions regime.<sup>22</sup> Even in regular articles, there was no hiding concern that a Japan-U.S. gap over how to proceed was widening in the weeks preceding the summit.<sup>23</sup> Nerves were on edge in these final weeks.

## The Aftermath of the Hanoi Summit

The overwhelming response in Japan after the summit was relief. A bad deal was averted. The real gap between the two sides has been exposed, and now, based on reality rather than false hopes, matters could proceed. But how? For *Sankei* readers it was a time to gloat that South Korea had been turned from optimism to despair. Moreover, the North's "kingdom" has been revealed as never agreeing to denuclearization unless sanctions are greatly tightened, which the paper proposed to the international community with Japan taking the lead, demanding the full triad of changes. Yet, the threat remains of the U.S. cutting a deal to get intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) relief and of South Korea still rushing for North-South reconciliation, repeating past mistakes, as readers were told.<sup>24</sup> Japan will await direct talks with Kim on the abductees, but a complete squeeze of that country is best for achieving that goal as well as other goals. Already Kim has been put in a tough spot, which *Sankei* assumes to be the best way for countries to proceed.

As others, Japanese were nervous before the summit about Trump prioritizing the semblance of success for 2020 election purposes and to change the negative narrative about him in D.C., while paying attention to stories of divisions within his administration. Satisfaction was taken with the results, listening to Japan and not leaving it weakened on the abductions issue, listening to the South Korean voices concerned about the alliance, and acting in accord with a strategy eyeing the regional situation.<sup>25</sup> Trump had rejected comprehensive sanctions relief and only a limited closure of Yongbyon and stuck to the logic that pressure to denuclearize should not be relaxed. In their ten-minute phone conversation just afterward, Abe offered his complete support and was pleased that his request on February 20 for Trump to raise the abductee issue was granted.

While mainstream coverage lavished praise on Trump for his handling of the summit, some saw a disaster narrowly averted because Trump decided to avoid the criticism that would have come raining down had he made the deal before him. Trump-style diplomacy invited trouble; there was insufficient preparation, and Singapore's shaky deal only opened the door to trouble. Putting stress on "deals" as one's foreign policy approach is a pathway to danger, one analyst warned.<sup>26</sup> In an adjacent op-ed, Fujisaki Ichiro, former ambassador to the United States, wrote that talks should continue with full international pressure kept on

the North. If the talks are extended, Japan's opinion can be included; therefore, the summit ended in good fashion for Japan. Yet, if a four-party framework evolves and excludes Japan, this would be a concern. Thus, Japan should press China and Russia that it is time to act together. Kim Jong-un is not interested in a U.S. security guarantee but in sanctions relief and economic cooperation. The U.S. is acting as a representative of international society, but later South Korea, Japan, and China would be expected to provide economic assistance, and Japan should stick to its three-legged principles for doing so. There is a role for Japan, just not at the present stage of talks apart from close U.S. coordination, while awaiting an opportunity for direct dialogue with the North. Sanctions pressure must be kept.<sup>27</sup>

Concern was spreading in Japan over Trump's ending of large-scale, joint military exercises with South Korea, weakening preparations in case of an incident on the peninsula. Whether this was due to a desire to encourage the North in negotiations or to cut U.S. expenses in South Korea, as Trump was seeking, the effect was disturbing.<sup>28</sup> It could mean reduced pressure on the North and reduced U.S. commitment to its alliances in East Asia, but Japanese officials insisted that in walking away from the summit Trump was keeping up the pressure and his commitment was not diminished.

On the left, the failure was anticipated based on Trump's thirst for a victory for domestic politics, as Kim proved more wily.<sup>29</sup> Yet, note was also made of U.S. national security advisor John Bolton's growing influence, leading to a harder U.S. line and to China and South Korea offering a softer landing to North Korea, giving it a perceived alternative. While the Japanese government is happy that no compromise deal was reached, it should dangle economic assistance in return for progress on the abductee issue.<sup>30</sup> Furukawa Katsuhisa insisted that it is time for Japan to take a leading role in what must be a long-term negotiating process, in contrast to the rushed approach the U.S. was taking.<sup>31</sup> The left agreed with the right that Trump was prone to hasty concessions, but it did not embrace him once he had drawn the line in Hanoi, preferring another path forward.

On March 1, *Asahi* editorialized that Trump was correct to hold back from excessive concessions. Advance preparations were insufficient, and Trump's diplomacy is an experiment in gambling—a dangerous approach. Yet, even as the North turns to blaming the U.S., we must avoid a return to tensions on the peninsula, the paper says, adding that the U.S. should quickly change its way of negotiating so that real talks can proceed. It leaves unclear what is a realistic U.S. policy. According to one account, the two sides had agreed to open offices in each other's capitals and to accept an end-of-war declaration, but the talks floundered quickly on the denuclearization and sanctions tradeoff.<sup>32</sup> Much news from U.S. think tanks was soon relayed on North Korean actions contrary to denuclearization, whether building on sites or preparing for an ICBM test.<sup>33</sup>

A March 1 *Yomiuri* editorial blamed North Korea, insisting that its demands were hard to accept. It accepted Trump's explanation for the breakdown, noted that the abstract agreement reached in Singapore left complete denuclearization unclear, and insisted that a deal must also include elimination of missiles. Further, it doubted that the North would be swayed by the lure of becoming an economic great power since it would find large-scale investment and trade hard to reconcile with a closed system. The article made clear that

Japan fully supports the position Trump took, despite fears from U.S. experts that he might yield, and urges deeper coordination for a comprehensive three-part agreement in which the third leg of abductees would be Japan's responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

Japanese media and the government viewed the summit through the eyes of the abductees' families: Abe meeting with them on February 19, Abe beseeching Trump to press Kim Jong-un on the subject by phone on February 20, and the disappointment of the families showcased on March 1, when Trump agreed to pay a state visit on May 26 and be the first foreign leader to meet the new emperor. This theme made Japanese news coverage distinctive.

Despite early claims of success, North Korea from March 7 has been issuing warnings to the U.S., and Bolton has refocused claims to success on defending U.S. interests and insisting that the possibility remains that the North will trade complete denuclearization for a bright economic future, i.e., this was no failure. Japanese minister for foreign affairs Taro Kono on March 1 indicated Japan's full support for Trump's decision in Hanoi. Yet, the biggest U.S. disappointment was the absence of a promise for real progress toward complete denuclearization. Four stages are required: a freeze, then a complete declaration, then comprehensive inspection, and finally dismantlement. So far, there has only been a testing freeze with declarations of intent to do more, but no real denuclearization. Asking for removal of sanctions for the civilian economy is actually close to a complete removal. Yet, the article stresses that what the U.S. sought in Hanoi had a high possibility of leading to a rupture. North Korea had excessive expectations as it reported at home prior to the summit, and it was shocked by the outcome.

Not acknowledging failure, it did not blame Trump but pointed to the Democrats, the Cohen testimony, and the Russia investigation as tying his hands. The problem was not bilateral but internal to the U.S. Yet, Kim faces a big loss of prestige at home and delay in fulfilling economic promises. After a pause, failure was admitted at home amid warnings of a new path to securing sovereignty and the national interest. Preparations are now seen at a missile test site as well as repair work at another site, but Trump insists that personal ties with Kim are very good and that he would be surprised and disappointed should missile tests resume. Both sides claim that the ball is in the other side's court.

The article reports on activities abroad for liberating North Korea, suggesting that the U.S. may be behind them, beginning a soft power strategy to that end. Having lowered Kim's prestige, not only are economic sanctions being applied, but in and out of North Korea political, psychological, and information war to isolate the regime and change it is starting, the article suggests. If this were done, not only would weapons of mass destruction problems be resolved, but abductees from Japan and South Korea would be returned. Perhaps that is the Trump administration's plan. In brief, this involved raising Kim's expectations in the first summit and watching him convey them internally; dashing them and lowering his prestige; then in response to no progress in denuclearization, intensifying sanctions; and finally with new sanctions and pressure, capitalizing on mass discontent with psychological warfare and other means. In this process ties to Japan will strengthen. Yano Yoshiaki views this as a strategy to overthrow the regime through what he calls soft power, ruling out the use of

military power as too risky due to Kim's weapons and the Chinese and the Russian response. Yano even suggests that if the strategy works in this case, the U.S. may use it to overthrow China's communist system, taking the trade war as but the first salvo in this endeavor.

On March 8, *Gendai Business* focused on the difficult situation Kim is in after the Hanoi summit ended precipitously and whether he or Moon Jae-in can recover. Kim did not meet with Xi Jinping when his train passed by Beijing, as he would have if the talks had been successful. They met in January in close coordination for the fourth time, and after their meeting before the Singapore summit in 2018, Kim was emboldened from Xi's influence, to the point that the meeting with Trump had to be postponed. Not reporting a failed result to Xi suggests a loss of face for Kim and makes the failure even more complete. Especially fatal was the great fanfare before the summit inside North Korea that sanctions would be loosened by news of failure seeping into the country when the media was still reporting that talks would proceed. As a god-autocrat, Kim is especially vulnerable to the reaction. The article doubts that Kim will resume testing since that would lead the U.S. to resume its hard line or that denuclearization is now on the table, since that would be an admission of his failure. Sanctions will arouse popular dissatisfaction, shaking loyalty in the leader. Not having met with Xi Jinping, China's assistance is doubtful. Kim Jong-un is left at an impasse with nowhere to go, and loss of power in sight.<sup>35</sup> As for Moon Jae-in, who had appealed to the world for sanctions relief, he is seen to have totally misread Kim Jong-un. Kim's response to Trump has removed the possibility of the sanctions' relief Moon sought, and Moon has failed as a go-between and spokesperson for the North and transmitter of Trump's intentions to Kim, losing trust from both. His dream of "red reunification" and reunification with nuclear weapons are blown away, the article concludes.

JBPRESS on March 8 blamed the summit failure on Kim's over-optimism and Trump's welcome steadfastness, assessing the breakdown as good for Japan.<sup>36</sup> The worst-case outcome for Japan would have been a deal that only removed North Korea's ICBMs with nuclear weapons still aimed at Japan. The reason the talks collapsed is that the U.S. distrusts North Korea's words on denuclearization as it keeps developing its arsenal. Yet, much of mass media was surprised at the collapse, having looked at the trees but missed the forest and having had little faith that the U.S. would cut a good deal as it relaxed sanctions and that Trump would stick to making America great again. The U.S. has strong determination on denuclearization. Unless the North promises to give up the weapons it already has, the fate of the talks is to collapse.

The North's goals in the talks are sanctions relief and regime survival—which goes first? The author thinks denuclearization will take time and is inevitable to a degree, but a full declaration of what it possesses is a precondition. Kim's aims are regime survival, for which nuclear weapons are important, as well as unification led by North Korea. Trump's basic policy is "America First," use of overwhelming military force to suppress conflict or peace through strength at a time of the revival of great power competition, and no real compromise with North Korea despite minor concessions to draw it into negotiations. North Korea's promises mean little; verification is necessary at all stages. Despite confused messages from the Trump administration, now the process is functional, centering on CVID. Fortunately, Bolton joined the Hanoi talks, and his hardline position on regime change and denuclearization first reflects where things stand. Once pictures of him there were shown, "I was at ease," writes the author. The worst-case scenario for Japan is a unified Korea with



nuclear weapons, posing a military threat and arousing a debate on nuclear weapons in Japan, splitting the country. For now, Japan must rely on the U.S. and succeed by earnestly persuading it to seek CVID, writes Yokoyama Keisan.

On March 13 JBPRESS revealed what it called the secret U.S. strategy behind the stoppage in U.S.-North Korea summit negotiations, even as both sides made clear their desire for talks to resume.<sup>37</sup> Pompeo indicated that some time will be required to get the talks going again, and there was talk on both sides of progress made and expectations of further meetings. Yet, the real outcome was a rupture in ties, readers are told. In return for his dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear facility, Kim sought to rescind the five UN sanctions resolutions imposed since 2016, while Trump called for dismantling all facilities. Kim resisted, saying that relations of trust are insufficient.

Why talks were halted was explained differently by the two sides. The U.S. side demanded a level of denuclearization the North would not accept, while the North eyed removal of sanctions well beyond what the U.S. would accept, readers are told. Yet, the North insisted that it had only sought sanctions relief for the civilian economy and living standards, would have left in place six of the eleven Security Council resolutions, and would have committed to a written document permanently halting both nuclear and long-range missile testing. Yet, the U.S. demanded that more than Yongbyon be closed. Later, Bolton asserted that Trump had appealed for a big deal including all types of WMD and ballistic missiles. The article adds that Kono blamed the North for the breakdown, saying that the Trump administration has continuously called for complete denuclearization as well as the elimination of missiles. Given clashing accounts, it is difficult to judge which is correct, but the article suggests that Trump was on a “fishing expedition.”

In contrast to South Korea’s approach of seeking carrots for the North to get Kim to change his ways, Japan sought more pressure to make Kim realize that the only path to economic growth is to cut a deal to include the abductee issue.<sup>38</sup> The summit outcome was considered a blow to South Korea and vindication for Japan.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the process suspicion of Moon Jae-in has been conspicuous and that remains pronounced in the mid-spring of 2019.

Another Japanese outlook on the failure is that both sides made huge miscalculations, and the negotiating process must start again on a different track, not top-down. Trump exaggerated his deal-making power, and expectations were excessive for Kim to make concessions.<sup>40</sup> Summits are not supposed to be so poorly prepared, and failure can have dire consequences, as can the rush to make a deal with someone whose appetite for getting more will only be whetted, as in Munich prior to World War II. Now an impetuous Trump may lose interest, and the security situation in East Asia will become even more unsettled. At least that is better than a deal to spare the U.S. from ICBMs, leaving Japan exposed. The answer is not cooperating with China or Russia, which sympathize with North Korea on sanctions relief, but direct talks between Japan and North Korea, not occurring now due to Abe’s inadequate diplomatic skill, argued *Tokyo Shimbun*.<sup>41</sup>

While Chinese called on Japan to keep pressing for a cooperative approach with Beijing and Seoul, Japanese concluded that now Kim Jong-un is in a tough position, making him consider greater concessions instead of tricking Trump, and that anti-Trump forces and Japan had not wanted the Trump approach ignoring human rights and rushing to a weak deal.<sup>42</sup>

By April 23, when Japan's foreign ministry issued the *Diplomatic Bluebook*, a softened approach to North Korea suggested that Japan was seeking an opening for talks. In place of language on the "grave and imminent threats" from the North's nuclear weapons and missiles and the need for "maximizing pressure on North Korea," there was hope for a positive response on resolving the abductions issue, not "leveraging the international community's pressure on North Korea" to address it.<sup>43</sup> In response, *Sankei* warned against this shift in Japan's position, while blaming Putin for his words in meeting Kim, inflating Russia's presence, threatening the sanctions web, supporting North Korea's notion of stages, and calling for a return to the failed Six-Party Talks. Turning to China and Russia as his reserves, Kim is taking the wrong approach, only delaying making a choice for denuclearization.<sup>44</sup> *Sankei* differed from *Asahi* in opposing Japan taking a direct role in the diplomacy and for striving to keep the talks going, rather than standing firm.

An article explained why North Korea "hates" Pompeo, referring to an April 18 statement,<sup>45</sup> On February 27 of the five items on a draft deal, only one stood in the way—the facilities beyond the Yongbyon complex, which the U.S. side, apart from Trump, insisted be part of a "small deal." Trump seemed ready to sign a joint declaration, one Japanese source alleges, before Pompeo led him out of the meeting area with the warning that if Trump did so, he would lose the 2020 presidential election. Later, Trump insisted on a "big deal," even adding biological weapons not discussed at the working level. To North Koreans, Pompeo's intercession was to blame. Given this impression, Kim could still be happy with his personal relationship with Trump. To criticize Trump, however, risked returning to the mutual invectives of 2017, inserting name-calling of the supposedly infallible Kim deemed the worst offense by the North. Even so, the article sees flux in North Korea with people no longer willing to suffer, but as markets have spread along with cell phones, the falsity of the government narrative is exposed, foreboding the end of the Kim Jong-un system.

An *Asahi Shimbun* editorial on April 26 insisted that the North has no way out of its isolation but the path of denuclearization.<sup>46</sup> Worrying about the message in Hanoi that this was the only way forward, Kim was trying in the Kim-Putin summit to suggest another way out, but it is hopeless, as Putin made clear after the summit, although in 2018 he had called for relaxing sanctions and shown understanding for why the North had developed nuclear weapons. The editorial called on Abe to use multiple routes to arrange a summit with Kim too, including working with four countries at the G20 summit to get across Japan's position on the North Korean issue.

A *Yomiuri* editorial that day was more concerned that Russia would complicate the process of denuclearization between Washington and Pyongyang.<sup>47</sup> It cited Putin's remarks at a press conference following the summit on guaranteeing the North Korean system and the impact on the process of adding China and Russia. Hoping that direct talks with Trump can avoid the need of complete denuclearization or involvement of China and Russia can do so, Kim is not making the tough decisions. The editorial ends with a call for Russia to meet its obligation to send back North Korean laborers by year's end, as if it doubts Russia's commitment to keeping sanctions.

## Conclusion

Japanese sources have hesitated to criticize Trump, but they were noticeably relieved with the outcome of the Hanoi summit. There is no sharp conservative-progressive divide. The shared message is that maximum pressure must be sustained until Kim Jong-un makes the decision to denuclearize. Criticism of Moon Jae-in is prevalent. Doubts about China and Russia are evident. Yet, optimism prevails that pressure is working and will persist, forcing Kim Jong-un to relent. In this process, Tokyo must find a way to become actively involved. Thus, the notable shift of late to opening the door for an Abe-Kim summit fits into this sense of hope, however artificial it might appear. After all, Japan has been left on the sidelines and has the least optimism that Kim Jong-un will agree to denuclearize or that a step-by-step deal would not unravel soon.

On the far right, *Sankei* expresses strong pessimism that South Korea, China, and Russia are committed to the sanctions regime and to denuclearization. On the left, *Asahi* is the most optimistic regarding diplomacy, and encourages Abe to join the fray, if possible. Leading the mainstream response, *Yomiuri* at least feigns optimism, putting Trump's policy choices in the best possible light and anticipating that Abe can hold firm to his position on abductees, as Kim comes to realize that Japan should be drawn into the diplomatic whirlpool. The divisions are not as sharp as in South Korea and the United States, as the Japanese know they have little chance to play a major role in the current stage of diplomacy engaging the other five parties

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 26, 2018, 1.
- <sup>2</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 27, 2018, 9.
- <sup>3</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 29, 2018, 3.
- <sup>4</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 26, 2018, 3.
- <sup>5</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 22, 2019, 3.
- <sup>6</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 1-11.
- <sup>7</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 6.
- <sup>8</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 9; *Mainichi Shimbun*, February 23, 2019, 2; *Tokyo Shimbun*, February 28, 2019, 24.
- <sup>9</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 2.
- <sup>10</sup> *Tokyo Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 5.
- <sup>11</sup> *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 9.
- <sup>12</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 21, 2019, 7.
- <sup>13</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 3.
- <sup>14</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, January 8, 2019, 14.
- <sup>15</sup> *Tokyo Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 12.
- <sup>16</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 28, 2019, 9.

- <sup>17</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 21, 2019, 2.
- <sup>18</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, February 26, 2019, 3.
- <sup>19</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, January 23, 2019, 16.
- <sup>20</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, January 9, 2019, 2.
- <sup>21</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 27, 2019, 2.
- <sup>22</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 8, 2019, 3.
- <sup>23</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 27, 2019, 7.
- <sup>24</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 1-3.
- <sup>25</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 1-2.
- <sup>26</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 7.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 5, 2019, 3.
- <sup>29</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, February 28, 2019, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 3.
- <sup>31</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 19.
- <sup>32</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 5, 2019, 2.
- <sup>33</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 8 and 9, 2019, 3.
- <sup>34</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 3.
- <sup>35</sup> “‘Rekishiteki daishittai’ o miseta Kim Jong-un to Moon Jae-in ni, kono saki akarui mirai wa nashi,” *Gendai Business*, March 8, 2019.
- <sup>36</sup> “Tsuyoi ishi o shimeshita Beikoku to amaku misugita Kitachosen,” JB Press, March 8, 2019.
- <sup>37</sup> “Beicho shuno kaidan chudan no haigo ni himerareta Beikoku no senryaku,” JB Press, March 13, 2019.
- <sup>38</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 7.
- <sup>39</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 9.
- <sup>40</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 1-2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Tokyo Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 1.
- <sup>42</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, March 1, 2019, 13.
- <sup>43</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, April 24, 2019.
- <sup>44</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, April 26, 2019.
- <sup>45</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, April 24, 2019.
- <sup>46</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, April 26, 2019.
- <sup>47</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 26, 2019.