

North Korea: Present and Future

8 April 2013

Yoji GOMI, Member of the Editorial Board, The Tokyo Shimbun

- **Will Kim Jong Un launch a war?**

He doesn't want to, but as he is fermenting a sense of crisis to the extreme, an accidental crash is possible; in that case he will surely pretend that he has been forced to strike back.

- **Does he hold sway over North Korea?**

Basically he does. His policies are, however, inconsistent. Military personnel affairs are in confusion; there may be internal conflict.

- **Who are his brains?**

Chang Song Taek, his uncle, but he doesn't seem to have much say over the military. Hard-liners in the military are gaining power.

- **Why does he keep making these provocations?**

He intends to lead future negotiations to a favorable settlement, to purge his opponents, to hide the lack of experience that is due to his youth, and to divert public discontent.

- **Is the economy of North Korea in crisis?**

There is some improvement in grain production; the country is not at crisis level. Its dependence on China, however, continues.

- **Will North Korea carry out economic reforms?**

The reformist premier is trying to lessen China's influence. There are moves to review the country's agriculture, industry and planned economy, but the results are not clear.

- **Can China control North Korea?**

Though expectations are great, China's move is weak. It hasn't imposed proactive sanctions on North Korea. For China, North Korea is significant as a buffer zone.

- **Are the six-party talks still effective?**

North Korea takes a stance that it won't abandon its nuclear arms. As long as denuclearization remains the theme of the six-party talks, they will not be held. China is also reluctant.

- **How will the U.S., Japan and the R.O.K. cope with the matter?**

The U.S. has a sense of crisis; it may strengthen sanctions. Japan has postponed sanctions of its own and is taking a wait-and-see attitude. The R.O.K. is now looking for an opportunity for talks.