

faith and development

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American Threat Against Korea

ASIAN CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILIZES

By Sunsong Park
and Francis Daehoon Lee

And now, Korea? Insatiable America! Its concept of “*cordon sanitaire*” is at work. Washington will not step back. Tomorrow, the next conflict could open around the two Koreas. North Korea, with Kim Jong-Il’s extreme boastfulness, does not facilitate things. But the South too could pay dearly the cost of an armed conflict. Not to mention the threat of nuclear warfare with its incalculable consequences! This could explain the hesitant moves at reconciliation between Seoul and Pyongyang, in an instinct of survival.

The Bush administration, which had already destroyed, in 2002, the weak chances of “bilateral diplomatic development” beyond the demarcation line, does not exclude the possibility of renewing hostilities. For what motive? After Saddam Hussein, who was supposed to detain a

terrifying arsenal of chemical and bacteriological arms, it would seem that North Korea has its finger on the nuclear button. A new “rogue state” is born.

The present analysis, done by two Koreans, illustrates once more the extremely simplistic North American scenario. Its anti-terrorist campaign would justify anything. North Korea’s confrontation with George W. Bush’s Manichean way of thinking, does not help. The most insignificant spark could push the Korean peninsula, and Japan, into a major crisis. A dark premonition which gives reason to “Faith and development” to enter, once more, the world of information. The authors of our text are militant peace activists. We may criticize their points of view, but we cannot hinder their discussion.

Albert Longchamp

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For Adam Smith, who advocated a peaceful international economic order based on free trade, there were two factors endangering peace of humanity: capricious ambition of politicians and impertinent rapacity of merchants¹. The two desires often clash with each other, but also unite to produce bigger evil. In colonial plunder of the mercantilist era and world wars of the imperialist era, we see how politicians’ ambition and merchants’ rapacity

converge to produce lethal effects to humanity.

Today we know that Adam Smith’s vision of a world peace based on free trade is a fiction. But he still rings a bell to us by his attention to the two factors that threaten peace of the modern societies. He was a liberal supporting capitalism, but his critique of mercantilism still comes to us valid when we focus on today’s fundamental threat to civilizations.

It is because the old mercantilist creed, *‘Impoverish your neighbors and you shall thrive’*, has been revived in the work of today’s global capitalism governed by ‘light-speed’ financial capital. It is also because we see the old alliance between absolute monarchs and monopoly merchants revived in today’s global setting. The global capitalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is an old-and-new capitalism as such,

based on the familiar globalization of poverty.

America's "National Security Strategy"

The United States is the sole global *hegemon* that governs this new-and-old capitalism. But it is constantly anxious because it is solitary. The *National Security Strategy* adopted by the Bush administration, announced in September 2002, shows its anxiety very well. For the U.S. the anxiety comes from all directions, from the EU now reaching almost an equal economic size as that of the U.S., and from France and Germany gaining higher productivity than the U.S., as well as from China sustaining current economic growth to exceed the U.S. in economic capacity in about 20 years. Washington's anxiety over its weakening economic hegemony is constantly driving itself towards military hegemony.

Possessing almost half of the global military power, the U.S. tends to back up threatened economic domination with its superiority in military power. Again we see a merge of politician's ambition and merchant's rapacity. Indeed, most of the senior officials in the Bush administration are closely connected to petroleum and defense industries. Politics in Washington is currently governed by merchants of death.

This is the starting point of the American war threats to Iraq and North Korea. Control over Iraq is a must for the U.S. for its second largest reserve of oil is a life-and-death resource for the *American way of life*. Control over North Korea is a must for the U.S. for its nuclear program will jeopardize the U.S. East Asian strategy – continued unilateral control over the region to check China.

Political and economic analyses do not stand without an understanding of social psychology. We understand the shock with which Americans have had to endure since the 9-11 terror. The 9-11 terrorist attack surpassed all anticipations of terrorism and was a shock to all peace-loving people around the world. But, the barbarism of the 9-11 terrorist act also invoked its own kind in human nature into full life among many Americans.

Rather than trying to decipher deeper implications of the 9-11 terror, the American leadership thrived on and tried to cram the terror-stricken mentality of the public with war drums. It seems that they still fail to see how threats are produced through economic inequality and political

injustice inherent in the global order established in the late twentieth century. They still fail to see the potential threats springing about from the wonders of technological and industrial drive out of public control.

The U.S. rests at the center of this contradictory progress of civilization that humanity has created in the twentieth century. The 9-11 tragedy compels us to shift our paradigm of civilization and progress, if we want to avoid its repetition. However, the American society is still sadly captured in the terror and shock, while the rulers are exploiting this mentality to justify its war interest. Exploiting the shock situation, the Bush administration is forcing the entire world to accept its simplistic good-or-evil belief, in denouncing Iraq, North Korea and Iran as the axis of evil in 2002 and as outlawed nations in 2003. To this commandment, however, the world replied with a huge No! along with the massive 10 million's march on 15 February this year.

Disruption of the reconciliation process

Recently we are also forced to face a nuclear crisis – a crisis that looks Korean but inviting Japan and many others as key actors. I define the current crisis a nuclear crisis in the Korean peninsula, not as a North Korean nuclear crisis. Even though the alleged nuclear weapons program by North Korea lies at the center of the crisis, it is not wholly or exclusively constitutive to the crisis. The current crisis is a war crisis that threatens to provoke a nuclear warfare involving both the use of nuclear weapons by the U.S. forces and the dreadful devastation of nuclear power plants in South Korea (now 16 plants in operation).

Since the Korean Summit in June 2000, the two Koreas have steadily worked towards peace despite several domestic and international obstacles. The nuclear crisis is now going beyond hampering this reconciliatory process to directly jeopardizing the basic survival of people. In autumn 2002, the first work was started to re-connect railways between North and South Korea and the successful North Korea-Japan summit in September 2002 promised a due process of diplomatic normalization between the two countries. In the same month, the American special envoy visited Pyongyang, as if to add to the growing regional mood of negotiation.

However, the U.S. envoy's visit to North Korea turned out to contradict

expectations for new negotiations. Washington unilaterally announced that North Korea admitted to the envoy of its nuclear weapons program, and demanded North Korea to scrap the program immediately. With this announcement, North Korea's nuclear program resurfaced at the top agenda for peace in the Korean peninsula from the ruins of the Agreed Framework signed by the two countries in 1994. Also with this announcement, the whole process of reconciliation and peace between two Koreas since the Korean summit was put to a sudden danger.

The current nuclear crisis in Korea is a by-product of the strategic acts of the U.S. Since the start of the *War on Terror*, the U.S. has placed North Korea within its simplistic frame of good or evil, and exaggerated North Korean threat to the U.S. and global security as a component of its war on terrorism. Combined with the Bush administration's problematic unilateralism, the war on terrorism has often been mixed up with the administration's need to justify the hegemonic strategy of the U.S. over control and resources. The joint communiqué between the two countries, signed in October 2000, was also nullified in the process, grounding the possibility of bilateral diplomatic development to zero. Understandably, more people began to interpret the events as a U.S. move to check the developments of peaceful process between the two Koreas and between North Korea and Japan in order to sustain the U.S. unilateral control of the region.

Confronting the sole global *hegemon* all by itself, North Korea tends to return to a simple view of the global order and the nation's survival – that bargaining with the U.S. will alone guarantee its security. For two years, North Korea tried hard for diplomatic opening and normalization with the western nations except the U.S. This was its most recent effort to get integrated to the international community, only until North Korean leadership realized its impossibility as long as Washington says no.

The attitude of Bush towards Pyongyang confirmed this – without confronting the U.S. in one way or another, there is no normalization, and North Koreans decided to confront it, fully and decisively. The irony is that this confrontational turn on the part of North Korea has become the biggest threat to its own survival. We oppose both North Korea's and the U.S.' extreme stance to each other.

Since the envoy's visit, Washington

and Pyongyang began to step up counter-threat measures to each other. The chain of events that followed (Washington seizing a North Korean ship carrying missiles to Yemen, North Korea removing nuclear freeze measures by IAEA, etc.) has elevated North Korea's nuclear issue to the status of a direct threat to peace in Korea and its surrounding region.

The winter of 2002 in Korea witnessed both a significant political process of electing a new president and a breathtaking slide into a dreadful crisis at the same time. The new government-to-be led by Roh Moo-hyun has been concentrating its energy to resolve the current crisis by peaceful means. Among other approaches from many angles, South Korea is now trying to persuade the Bush administration with its own mediation plan. This plan includes North Korea's pledge to abandon all nuclear programs and the U.S.' resolving North Korea's security concerns by a written assurance. Neighboring countries like Russia is also trying hard to mediate. But, the very starting point for a diplomatic solution, which is North Korea-U.S. talk, is not yet forthcoming. While South Korea made it clear that war is not an option, the U.S. made it equally clear that it is one. To counter the hawkish stance of Washington, Pyongyang announced its alleged capability to strike targets on the American soil. As the two adversaries are obsessed with mistrust of each other and readiness to counteract, tensions keep on rising. Peace efforts by South Korea and neighboring countries have not produced tangible results yet.

A sufficiently mature civil society

The current nuclear crisis in Korea is already a threat to the lives of Koreans. We remember too well that the North Korea-U.S. conflict of 1993~4 drove the two countries to the brink of war. We are short of wits to think the current 2003 conflict is less serious. The fortunate difference of the current time is that civil society in South Korea has matured enough to commit itself for peace-building and that the South Korean government is actively initiating peaceful paths to resolution, along with the involvement of several concerned countries. However, there are still three sensitive areas of debate.

First, how do majority of the civil society actors view the alleged nuclear program of North Korea? The two Koreas have already agreed on a denuclearization principle in January 1992. The

expected outcome of North Korea's nuclear program would be too negative, let alone the actual danger of having nuclear weapons. Any nuclear weapons program or deployment in Korea will intensify the regional arms race and disable security cooperation. It would make Koreans impossible to think of reunification when there is little regional security cooperation.

Secondly, is there a war possibility in Korea? We think the number one danger in Northeast Asia is the lack of communication combined with deepening mistrust among the stakeholders. Misunderstanding and mistrust can bring a society to destruction when concerned states and international institutions fail to transform the deadly lock. We are not only concerned about escalating suspicion between North Korea and the U.S. Better understanding and mutual trust between North and South Korea and between South Korea and the U.S. are also vital for resolving the current conflict.

In this respect, South Korea should be able to listen and gain trust from its neighboring countries if it wants to play key mediator. When South Korea becomes a trusted mediator in the region, the awaited North Korea-U.S. talks will begin. This will be the beginning point of extinguishing war drums. In this regard, civil society groups in South Korea are keen on support for peaceful settlement of the crisis from the neighboring countries, Japan in particular. We are particularly worried that the Japanese government recently disclosed its intention to consider military actions when North Korea goes ahead with a missile test launch. We are concerned that such a move would only aggravate the already tense situation of the region. We appeal that people in Japan come out more clearly and strongly with its stance against military solution for the current crisis. Voices of peace from South Korea and Japan are vital because of their hosting of the U.S. forces.

Third, how can we rethink about and re-understand North Korea? We believe this is a tremendously important step for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. It is obviously highly difficult to get away from long-standing bias against North Korea, but there are still many plain facts that demand little analysis but more common sense. North Korea has gone through a devastating economic crisis in the mid-1990s. Its effects are still felt and the society as a whole is still unstable. Even without the nuclear crisis, North Korea poses a huge problem for the stability of the region because of its on-going economic crisis. What sustains

North Korea's harsh stance towards the U.S. is not some inborn antagonism towards Americans, but a despair of no-exit situation. Pressure to North Korea will only return damaging results to the actor, let alone desired effects. It is messages of security provision and economic assistance that will bring North Korea a conviction to come out to the international community.

People in South Korea had two great lessons in 2002. We enjoyed the fun of festival through the World-Cup football games in June and since November engraved the value of peace to our hearts through candlelight vigils. When two American servicemen responsible for the killing of two young Korean girls² were acquitted from a sham military trial, we saw huge darkness. A candlelight vigil was proposed by a few young citizens, and it soon became a massive flood of peace marches.

We felt, wept and discussed in a free collectivity at the same place as in June, the festive center of Seoul. And we learned peace would be the festival of all festivals. This was a great social learning. This awakening brightened up the presidential election in December, and made democratic and peace-loving groups come together very strongly. They have succeeded in bringing the power to a candidate who valued principles and dialogues. Now a lot of people and a lot of social groups are ready to go further – take power from wrong hands and give it back to people in order to expand democracy to the daily life-world and expand peace to the whole Korea and to the region.

War is civilization's failure

Peace movements in South Korea are still in their early stage. Korean society has been more familiar with war than with peace. In the past, Koreans supported and fought the national liberation war against colonial rule and committed themselves into self-destruction in the name of national unification. But, now no war will be supported or affordable in Korea. We are equally opposed to wars anywhere in the world, in the sense that military action is by itself a confession of civilization's failure. Today's war threats from Washington, whether for Iraq or for Korea, is an open confession that the world needs a better manager.

Civil society actors in South Korea know very well that peace in Korea and peace in Northeast Asia can only go together. Without Northeast Asian

Common House (proposed by Wada Haruki)³, there is no peace or reunification in Korea. This is where the current candlelight protests in South Korea stand and what they stand for – they cannot be simply viewed as anti-U.S. actions trying to remove the U.S. forces from Korea. The candlelight protests represent a voice to rethink and reformulate : rethink and reformulate the U.S role in the region towards peace-building and rethink and reformulate the Japan-Korea relationship for the same end. For this we need to rethink of the Cold-War order in the region since 1945, whether or how each actor contributed to

peace-building or hegemonic domination.

The candlelight protests are a sign of the time demanding a new, non-hegemonic role for the U.S. in the region. They are a new, popular peace movement calling for a community of cooperation and mutual recognition in our region that does away with mutual demonization.

Understanding of the Other in place of demonization, cooperation and assistance in place of arrogance and domination, neighborhood in place of loyalty and alliance, compassion in place of masculine show-off of power – aren't these what we believe as more humane, wiser,

and more democratic? Aren't these what majority of humanity still believes in? With this spirit, we call for more confidence, more understanding and more solidarity among all of us, for a huge beginning has just started that connects Korean, Japanese and all others peace movements into an irreversible flood.

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Notes :

1. *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, by Adam Smith (1776).
2. In June 2002, during military exercises, two American soldiers based in South Korea ran over two school children with their vehicle. The trial held in November, 2002 acquitted both soldiers.
3. Wada Haruki is a well-known Japanese intellectual and a Korea-Japan -relations specialist.

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