

Discussion of NAPSNet Forum #13 – Kim Jong-il’s Peace Policy

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Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network

DISCUSSION OF "KIM JONG-IL'S PEACE POLICY"

#13B -- January 12, 1998

The is intended to provide expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia, and an opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis. The Forum is open to all participants of the [Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network \(NAPSNet\)](#) . As always, NAPSNet invites your responses to this report. Please see "[NAPSNet Invites Your Responses,](#)" below, and send your responses to the NAPSNet Coordinator at: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org .

DISCUSSION OF "KIM JONG-IL'S PEACE POLICY"

Response by Whee Gook Kim

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I. Introduction

On January 6, the Policy Forum Online featured a paper by Kim Myong Chol, [Kim Jong-il's Peace Policy](#) . The following response was submitted by Whee Gook Kim, President of the East-West Research Institute in Washington, DC. Whee Gook Kim's comments were then sent to the original author, Kim Myong Chol, for a response. Both Whee Gook Kim's comments and Kim Myong Chol's response are included below. Subsequent comments by John Kim, General Secretary of the National Association of Korean Americans, are also included. In all cases, NAPSNet presents the comments as received, except for minor editing for grammar and spelling.

NAPSNet invites your responses either to this discussion or to Kim Myong Chol's original paper. Please send your responses to the NAPSNet Coordinator at: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Whee Gook Kim also invites comments to: ewri@ewri.org

II. Comments by Whee Gook Kim

RESPONSE TO "KIM JONG-IL'S PEACE POLICY"

Whee Gook Kim, President East-West Research Institute, Washington, DC

I am glad to hear an academic-like voice from the North Korean side. However, the position of the DPRK seems to be unchanged, if this is a representative voice from Kim Jong-il.

As I pointed out in my discussions on July 12, 1996, of this NAPSNet, the first thing the DPRK regime has to do is to escape from famine and poverty. [Ed. note: Mr. Kim's remarks can be found in the [July 12, 1996 Daily Report](#) , accessible through the [NAPSNet Complete Daily Report Archive](#) .] The weapons and missiles may be helpful for its psychological security, but no country is going to attack North Korea to take over the headache of its problems. Why then has the DPRK allocated

heavy resources for military buildup, causing the economy to worsen? No answer can be justified in the situation of famine, begging for food from the world community. I am very disappointed by Kim Myong-chol's indirect threat, as he made once before on May 7, 1996 in NAPSNet, of a second Korean War. [Ed. note: See Policy Forum Online #4, [DPRK Perspectives on Ending the Korean Armistice](#) .] What is the purpose of this threat? This is not the cold war period, but the turn of the millennium. The world is trying to remove borders and barriers between countries for mutual betterment. The DPRK should understand how small it is among countries, and how big and strong other countries are. This suicidal threat makes Pyongyang more isolated and reduces its credibility in the world market, jeopardizing its economic cooperation with other countries.

There has been a clear "road-map" for the four party peace talks suggested by South Korea with the United States from the beginning. The position of the United States and South Korea for the proposal has been confirmed from time to time. I recommend that the author review newspaper articles and government documents. The term "legalization" should define a jurisdiction, but the DPRK is NOT included in it. Whether the DPRK likes or not, the status of US-ROK security alliance will remain unchanged in the near future. If Pyongyang wants to join the world community, come silently and peacefully. The presence of U.S. Forces in South Korea is a part of the US military strategy for regional stability. The DPRK is not the only country in the region. We want peace and prosperity in the region, and we don't like noises and endless demands from the DPRK. I hope the author should not confuse the issue which is in reality nonnegotiable.

The author suggested a "US-DPRK peace treaty," with the ROK and the PRC acting as witness. This is very unrealistic and contradictory to his own logic in the same paper. He wrote of the concept of an "outer cluster and inner core. The hard outer crust is American and military, while the inner core is intra-Korean and domestic. There is no reaching the inner core without peeling off the outer layer." Let's apply his theory from the opposite direction. If the inner core is unified and strengthened, common sense dictates that the need for protection by the outer cluster would be eliminated or reduced. If Pyongyang and Seoul are engaged and come closer together, then the greatest beneficiary from this inner core strength would be the people of North Korea. In other words, the first step for the DPRK is to make a peace treaty with South Korea. The United States is not the right partner for the DPRK to conclude a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula with, but can be a guarantor with the PRC to ensure the implementation of this treaty. U.S. Senators may laugh at the suggested peace treaty. Two thousand years ago, Socrates said "Know yourself!" which is absolutely meaningful to the author as well as the leadership of Pyongyang.

The author denied the possibility of a DPRK collapse based on three reasons: no historical record of collapse from famine, no organized opposition force in North Korea, and Confucian culture. First, there have been many historical records of collapse due to economic reasons, including the fall of communist countries several years ago. Kim Myong Chol misunderstood the definition of famine. The economic situation of North Korea is not a simple famine, but a collapse of the economic system which is much worse than in former Eastern bloc countries. The revival of manufacturing facilities and infrastructure will take at least ten years if Pyongyang tries hard with intensive capital investment. The DPRK will have to seek food aid from the world for at least several more years, even if Pyongyang tries to start now. If Pyongyang delays opening and reform, famine will seriously hurt the loyalty of even core party members. Secondly, I agree that there is no opposition force in North Korea because of the threat of public executions and prison camps featuring forced labor unto death. There is no humanity in North Korea except party loyalty, though Pyongyang has repeatedly asked the world for humanitarian aid. That's why many people hesitate to participate in aid activities for the North. Thirdly, I was surprised at the author's use of the term "Confucian culture." Confucianism was the enemy of communism in North Korea, which was dead thirty years ago. So this assumption is not correct. In sum, it is a sign of the impending collapse for the author to deny the regime's

collapse with weak excuses. If there are no breakthrough remedies for the economy, the collapse of the DPRK regime seems to be a matter of years.

If the author really wants to contribute to the revival of North Korea, it is necessary for him to be honest as a scholar or a political scientist by taking reality seriously. If the author were to live in a free society like Unified Korea, I believe that he would regret his paper, which is like the propaganda machine in communist countries during the cold war period. I believe that now is the time for North Korea to take a chance to engage with South Korea, which is currently in power transition. The current economic situation in South Korea is not a problem of growth potential but that of liquidity: a shortage of foreign exchange. If the new administration handles the problem wisely, the economy will recover within a couple of years. The strong economy of South Korea is very important to the North for inter-Korean economic cooperation. A Summit Meeting between Seoul and Pyongyang, which was already proposed by the South, would be an optimistic sign. If the North misses this chance, Pyongyang will have to wait five more years to negotiate with the next administration. By then, North Korea will be managed by external forces.

III. Response by Kim Myong Chol

KIM MYONG CHOL RESPONSE TO HUGO WHEEGOOK KIM COMMENT

First I must thank Whee Gook Kim, President of the East West Research Institute of Washington, DC, for taking the trouble to prepare a response to my essay. Significantly, his comment fails to indicate any specific roadmap. No clear-cut picture emerges of what the Korean question is: no idea of cause and effect. He fails to produce his own version of the Korean question. Consequently, he has no specific prescription. Conspicuously missing are two things: a proper historical understanding of the American role in Korea and any reference to the reunification of Korea. A most likely explanation for this is either a lack of proper knowledge of Korean history or an intentional refusal to face facts squarely. To err is human, to forgive divine.

For information, first I would like to present a Kim Jong-il's picture of the Korean question and then present my response.

According to Kim Jong-il, the Korean question is the matter of putting a long-awaited end to the interventionist, aggressive role of the Americans, terminating the state of war in Korea, and reunifying the divided territory of the Land of Morning Calm: redressing the wrongs the Korean people suffered at the hands of foreign forces and reasserting traditional Korean values throughout the whole Korean Peninsula: Korea for the Koreans and by the Koreans, who will become masters of their own life and destiny. Resolving the Korean question is a gigantic quest for rediscovery of the cultural identity of the Korean nation.

In short, the cause of the Korean question is the American military intervention in Korea: the Americans are responsible for the bisection of the long-homogeneous nation. The effect is the division of the country into North and South, with the latter reduced to a client state. North-South hostility and mistrust have been deliberately bred, instigated, and intensified as what is termed a "red herring" to divert attention from the real cause of the issue.

However, Kim Jong-il is wise enough to seek a negotiated settlement of the issue instead of any downright expulsion of the Americans. What he has in mind is exploring an honorable, face-keeping new role for them. Depending on the situation, Pyongyang will consider forming a friendship treaty with the United States. Once the USA has become a friend to North Korea, Pyongyang will not care about the American military presence in other parts of Asia and the Pacific.

FIRST, WG Kim argues that there is no need for the North Koreans to spend a lot of money for defense buildup, firstly because the cold war is over, secondly because no country is going to attack North Korea, and thirdly because weapons and missiles are only for psychological security. If his argument were correct, Kim Jong-il would be the first to call for a substantial cutback in defense spending and divert the funding for enhancing people's livelihoods. Unfortunately, his view seems to be fatally flawed in the following respects:

(1) As far as Korea is concerned, the Cold War is far from over. If Whee Gook Kim has any contrary evidence, he should produce it for critical scrutiny. No political scientist dare deny that the Korean War was a byproduct of the Cold War. In order to claim that the Korean War is over, there must be a peace treaty in place which formally ends the conflict. In other words, the DPRK and the US need to become friends and establish diplomatic relations as such. However, the situation prevailing on the Korean Peninsula is a virtual near-war situation which leaves the region as the most volatile flashpoint ready to erupt at the slightest provocation. With the Cold War rather sharpening in that part of the Far East, the North Koreans have every good reason to take precautionary defense steps in the best national security interests.

(2) WG Kim should better say that no country is going to attack the United States or Japan. Can he imagine either Japan or the United States facing any unprovoked military attack? If there were no imaginary enemy, there would be no justification at all for the American military presence in the Asia-Pacific region. All Japan and the US should have would be coast guard-type paramilitary forces. B-1s, B-52s, ICBMs, cruise missiles, nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, and American bases are apparently only for either aggressive, intimidating, or forestalling purposes. Does he know any country that is capable of mounting a full-scale sea or air or land attack on Japan or the USA.

(3) The North Koreans see the most undisguised sign of a serious security threat in the American refusal to terminate the state of war and establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang. As WG Kim points out, the North Koreans are well aware of how small their country is. How dare he justify the refusal of the USA, the sole superpower on earth, the most powerful nuclear military power, to be friendly and kind to one of the tiniest and poorest nations in the world? Is this worthy of Great America? Is that the way America should be? No member of the world community would praise such American behavior of bullying a small people. In North Korean eyes, another key evidence of the possibility of American attack is in their most serious violation of the Korean Armistice Agreement, which provides for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and a peaceful settlement of the Korean question of reunification. I recommend that WG Kim read the full text of the 1953 armistice agreement. This very illegal continuing American military presence in South Korea is perceived as the indisputable reminder of their military threat to North Korean security. In short, the present American military conduct is tantamount to an open threat to trigger a second Korean War. The Americans are demonstrating their willingness to make good on this war threat. Compelling evidence is the fact that they are constantly conducting a series of major war games of the largest scale near the DPRK. Are they performing peace dances to please the North Koreans? With no foreign forces on North Korean soil and no peace treaty negotiated with Washington, Kim Jong-il is duty bound to take whatever steps he deems necessary to protect the tiny country from the hostile superpower. Either Chinese or Russian military presence in North Korea could go a long way to alleviate the North Korean security concern and counter the American threat. However, this is the last thing Kim Jong-il and his people would embrace.

(4) Primitive missiles are a poor man's weapon to fight a big foe and guarantee a Pyrrhic victory for the adversary. Kim Jong-il sees no justifiable reason to lay down missiles and other weapons before the Americans totally disavow and dismantle their own nuclear force, including ICBMs and nuclear submarines. WG Kim should better bluntly tell the Americans that their nuclear force is a white

elephant, recalling that it did not deter Kim Il-sung and Ho Chi Min from resisting American intervention. This was also true of the Mideast wars, the Algerian war, and the Falklands war. With an apparent lack of support from Moscow and Beijing, the Kim Jong-il administration engaged the Americans in a nuclear standoff in 1993 and 94 and coaxed them into bilateral talks. The North Koreans were fully prepared to fight a forced second Korean war with the nuclear-armed Americans in what outsiders might term a suicidal action, which would have sent North Korean missiles showering down on the whole of South Korea, with South Korean nuclear power stations and American bases in South Korea and Japan exploding, releasing a huge amount of lethal nuclear fallout.

(5) Kim Jong-il and his people know that they would rather die free Koreans in honor than to become another South Korea. Our modus vivendi may be compared to that of the gray wolf, while South Korea may well be described as a dog for the American lion. The wolf has to suffer hunger and cold but may boast of being free and unfettered, while the dog may have delicious American dog food, a fashionable US-made collar and leash, and a kennel fitted with a GE-made air-conditioner. The dog may be followed by a crowd of reporters when it jogs with the American master. Which is better and more comfortable, a proud but hungry wolf or a well-fed, well-clothed, and well-housed dog? While many may prefer the dog, the North Koreans prefer the wolf. This is a question of choice. The South Korean choice was to become a dog, exchange national dignity and pride for some money from Japan, repress domestic dissent, sell women into kisaeng prostitution for Japanese men, and dispatch troops to Vietnam as cannon fodder for the Americans. The South Koreans developed crony capitalism and ended up a basket case by amassing some US\$200 billion in foreign debt, to be put into an IOU by the IMF. Once hospitalized by the IMF, the patient has little chance of being discharged.

(6) A hard fact is that the Americans and their South Korean client have followed the policy of starving and draining the North Koreans by outspending them on arms, outgunning, and outnumbering them, while imposing economic sanctions on the DPRK. Given such disquieting developments and the absence of a peace treaty to end the state of bellicosity with the Americans, the DPRK regime has been left with two options: to remain wolf or turn dog. They opted to remain a free wolf. Pyongyang has responded by deciding to arm the whole population, fortify the whole land, modernize, and train the regulars at the expense of bread. The American economic sanctions have denied the North Koreans access to high technology, Western funding, and Western markets, while the US-forced defense buildup has produced the American-desired effect of bleeding the North Korean economy. However, the North Koreans are surviving as they did in the Korean War. They are confident that they are resilient enough to emerge stronger from the current arduous long march.

SECOND, WG Kim argues that many countries, including East European countries, perished due to economic mismanagement, but he fails to describe any specific example or produce documented evidence to support his view and adds that Confucianism is the enemy of communism in North Korea. There is no denying that economic consideration is one of the important factors, but it is neither chief nor decisive. His approach is, "Money gone, friends gone," as is the case in capitalist nations where everything is rated according to its exchange value. However, the first consideration in human values is not material but spiritual and cultural. Eastern European "socialist" regimes fell first because of their own client state status (Soviet installations without any indigenous roots) and partly due to the steadily sapping effect of long-term cultural and ideological penetrations by the West. The ancient Israeli kingdom was ruined first as a result of heathen penetration and second by military invasion from the outside. What sustained the centuries-old desires of the Wandering Jews to rebuild Israel? Monetary or spiritual (religious) motivations? WG Kim should know the answer. Money is important, but there is something spiritual which matters more to some people.

North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and China have two things in common: one is the indigenous nature of their regimes and the second their time-honored commitment to spiritual and cultural values. Most observers were totally wrong when they predicted the fall of the Castro regime next door to affluent America in the wake of the disintegration of socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Nearly a million people have fled the island country since Castro's assumption of power. Yet the American blockade has failed to dislodge the Castro regime, which has enjoyed overwhelming indigenous support. This kind of philosophy, mentality or values can be compared to that of Christianity, Confucianism (not a religion), and Islam: love, strong family ties, parental authority, filial piety and obedience, and patriotism, the values that have been undermined in many capitalist countries. In North Korea, traditional Korean values or Confucianism are not the enemy of the Kim Jong-il administration. To be more precise, the Pyongyang regime identifies itself with them, with all its socialist rhetoric, in that they are part and parcel of Koreanism. Why did Kim Jong-il remain in mourning for three years? Why is he a respected fatherly leader? Why does he stress nationalism or Korean traits? The only possible explanation is the Confucian tradition or culture, though very few are conscious of it enough to refer to it. Even when driven out of their homeland during the colonial rule by Japan, there is no reported case in which any Korean family abandoned their children or broke down under the pressure of poverty. Many Koreans rose up in arms against the Japanese in Manchuria and Korea. Even in South Korea, many dissidents, student activists, and civic leaders laid down their lives for freedom and democracy, to reassert Koreanism. Given this line of analysis, North Korea is certain to disappoint WG Kim in several years by making a remarkable economic turnaround.

THIRD, WG Kim stresses the importance of a North-South peace treaty in total departure from the American and South Korean policy. At the Geneva talks, the Americans called for implementation of the 1991 non-aggression agreement (a virtual peace accord between Pyongyang and Seoul). Indications are that Whee Gook Kim is not familiar with latest American and South Korean policy pronouncements. Can I invite him to produce hard and compelling evidence that South Korea is not a client state of the United States? A state which controls its own armed forces and has jurisdiction over its territorial air, sea, and land can be called a sovereign state. South Korea is not by this standard, firstly because the United States has wartime operational control over the South Korean forces, and secondly because Seoul was not involved in the settlement of the September North Korean submarine violation of the South Korean waters. Another piece of evidence is the South Korean refusal to commit itself to the 1953 cease-fire accord, leaving it to be signed by Pyongyang and Washington. Fourthly, South Korea was not a party to the resolution of all the major military crises, such as the Pueblo, the EC 121, the Poplar Tree, and the chopper incidents, and the 1993-94 nuclear standoff. The fifth reason is that South Korea is under a humiliatingly unfair Status of Forces Agreement. In the hope that even a client state such as South Korea would be sometimes encouraged to become courageous enough to reassert its independence, North Korea held several rounds of talks which produced the 1972 joint statement and the 1991 non-aggression agreement. However, the former paved the way for the authoritarian Yushin regime, while the latter led to resumption of Team Spirit war games by Kim Young-sam. The North Korean conclusion is that North-South Korean talks will never get anywhere, unless Pyongyang first engages Washington in peace talks and unless Seoul breaks off from the USA. South Korea can expect to have good chances of shaking off its client state status only when North Korea ends the state of war, signs a peace treaty, and establishes diplomatic relations with the United States. Otherwise South Korea would remain so for good. A sovereign, fully independent South Korea is entitled to full-dress reunification talks with North Korea.

FOURTH, WG Kim alleges that there is no humanity in North Korea except party loyalty, though Pyongyang has repeatedly asked the world for humanitarian aid. He goes so far as to declare that the North Korean population is obedient for fear of possible immediate executions and risk of deadly

prison camps. His language is highly unacademic and unscholarly; it is rather prejudiced. A respected academician should be above such a unscholarly statement. In North Korea and in the United States there is little difference in human nature. In both countries people eat, drink, sleep, study, work, laugh, fall in love, quarrel sometimes for petty reasons, get divorced, and some commit crime. Whee Gook Kim's reference to the public fear of execution and being whisked away to prison camps has no physical evidence. His remark implies that he is ill informed of North Korean politics, provided only with what the South Korean intelligence agency invented. I am afraid that his logic is based on an unfounded mirror image of what is the case in South Korea. Never mistake South Korea for North Korea. The North Korean people are too tough-minded and resourceful to be awed by prospects of immediate public executions. Such threats, unknown in North Korea, would be an open invitation to mass rebellion. One of the essential strengths of the Kim Jong-il regime is that its administration is based on reasoning and education, with stress on the positive and constructive.

FIFTH, I agree with WG Kim that Pyongyang must do everything what it can to combat the food shortage. Mainly because of acts of God and partly because of unsophisticated farming methods, North Korea is seriously short of food. While organizing a nationwide land reconstruction drive involving a host of reforestation and river-improvement projects, North Korea is receiving international assistance in many fields, for which the Kim Jong-il administration and the Korean people are deeply indebted to the United Nations, the United States, the EC, Switzerland, and many other countries. Kim Jong-il II is committed to a drastic overhaul of the politico-economic institutions which have overgrown their original purposes. He is now in the process of a phased introduction of the positive aspects of capitalism, as Roosevelt did for the much-publicized New Deal policy to keep capitalism afloat by importing the positive socialist elements. To help Kim Jong-il succeed in his experiment, the United States is required to lift its almost half-century-old sanctions on North Korea. Why not live and let live? Why not agree to disagree? This is the first step in the right direction toward plurality in this world.

IV. Comments by John Kim

[The following is a response to the above discussion by John Kim, Esq., General Secretary of the National Association of Korean Americans (NAKA). It appeared in the [NAPSNet Daily Report](#) on [February 18, 1998](#) .]

I read Myong Chol Kim's article on the DPRK's peace and security policy and Dr. W.G. Kim's comment with much interest. I think both have good points, but both may be wrong in certain respects.

First of all, I am glad to hear that "Kim Jong-il is committed to a drastic overhaul of political-economic institutions." However, it seems the reform process is moving too slowly. How is the North going to resolve its food, energy, and other economic problems at this slow pace of reform? Too many people may die of starvation before they can be helped by the slow introduction of reforms.

As for the peace treaty between the US and DPRK, M.C. Kim must be daydreaming. First of all, the US never declared a formal war on the North. US troops were sent to Korea under the US-sponsored UN resolutions. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to see how the US government will sign such a treaty. Secondly, even if such a treaty were signed, there is little chance that it would be ratified by the Republican-dominated Senate.

Dr. Kim's suggestion that the North should sign a peace treaty with the South also does not make sense. The North and South already signed a non-aggression agreement in 1991. Then, why do we need another agreement of a similar nature? Besides, the Korean War had a civil war character, and

it is unnecessary and awkward to sign a formal peace treaty for two brothers to end their conflict. What is needed is mutual recognition of their mistakes, apology, and mutual reaffirmation of the 1991 agreement.

With the inauguration of a new President in the South, the North should really reach out to the South and try to implement the 1991 agreement. The North should respond positively to the recent call for a North- South summit meeting by President-elect Kim Dae-jung. By doing so, they will take a big step forward for mutual reconciliation and reduction of tensions in Korea. It is about time that Koreans have some confidence in themselves that they can solve their problems on their own initiatives.

Once the North improves its relations with the South, then the US will also be more willing to improve its relations with the North. Lifting economic sanctions and normalizing relations between the two may be possible thereafter. Thus, it would be more realistic for the North to seek a treaty of friendship and commerce with the US instead of a peace treaty.

As for the future utility of the four talks, I think it is wide-open as for the possible agenda. There can be many subjects on which the four parties can talk about constructively. For instance, how about starting discussions on improving communications on military exercises and incidents, arms control measures (e.g., signing the Ottawa Landmine Treaty, stopping all imports of military weapons by both Koreas), and arms reduction measures on the Korean Peninsula? Both Koreas desperately need to reduce their defense spending to overcome the current economic crisis on each side. How about a discussion on holding a summit meeting of the heads of the four-parties or six parties to end the Cold War in Korea?

Although both Koreas face great difficulties, if their leaders are wise, they can certainly seize this time of crisis and new opportunity to begin a new era of hope, peace, reconciliation, and mutual development-- realizing their long-cherished dream of a peaceful reunification of Korea in the process. God bless Koreans!

V. NAPSNet Invites Your Response

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this discussion or the original essay by Kim Myong Chol. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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