

Discussion of “What is the Goal of the U.S. Policy toward North Korea: Nonproliferation or Regime Change?”



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Haksoon Paik

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I. Introduction

The following are comments on the essay "What is the Goal of the U.S. Policy toward North Korea: Nonproliferation or Regime Change?" by Haksoon Paik, Director of the Inter-Korean Relations Studies Program and Center for North Korean Studies at Sejong Institute, an independent think tank in South Korea, which appeared as Policy Forum Online 05-30A: April 7th, 2005.

This report includes comments by Paul R. Harbison, U.S. Army Retired.

II. Comments on Essay by Haksoon Paik

1. Comments by Paul R. Harbison

Mr. Paik's article "What is the Goal of the U.S. Policy toward North Korea: Nonproliferation or Regime Change?" should be renamed "What is the Goal of South Korea toward North Korea: Regime Change or Continued Support" How many experts or negotiators believe that the current U.S. policy will solve the North Korean nuclear problem and achieve the goal of nonproliferation on the Korean peninsula? According to Mr. Paik - none if any. Has North Korea been exporting its nuclear weapons to other countries? I think not. Has the goal of nonproliferation been achieved - perhaps not completely but I don't see other rogue nations importing NoDong missiles either.

The United States owes North Korea no rights or obligations to return to unilateral talks. In fact, based on North Korea's track record of deception and deceit, no rational country would ever enter into bilateral agreements with this rogue nation.

What would be ideal for the South Korean government to do would be to work with its ally (the United States) in banning all imports into North Korea including humanitarian assistance. Then you could see a regime change. Mr. Paik even states that the participant states question the validity of the U.S. judgment that pressure on North Korea with one coherent voice would make North Korea give in. The United States could easily argue that South Korean has consistently supported this regime for well over a decade. The South Korean government has assisted the North Korea government through food aid and providing other humanitarian assistance allowing the North Korean government to maintain its authority over its people.

I do not think that setting up an inter-Korean channel will resolve the nuclear issue. How about stopping all trade and commerce to North Korea? If both South Korea and Japan followed this policy we could see results much faster than with the United States being the only participant. Lastly, having spent well over four decades in South Korea I am appalled at South Korea's attitude to the

United States considering the billions of dollars and gallons of blood spilled by the American taxpayers to make South Korea a democratic country. Perhaps, Mr. Kim Jong Il will be much more helpful once the final United States military forces leave South Korea and South Korea is responsible for its own security.

Mr. Paik should ask his parents or perhaps his grandparents who provided the life-saving support that saved South Korea and gave him the privilege to write such an article. Perhaps, North Korea will be much more understanding when Mr. Paik ask them to change their policy toward the United States.

2. Response by Haksoon Paik

First of all, Mr. Harbison expresses his preference to see the South Korean government conduct a policy of regime change in North Korea instead of the policy that continues to support the Kim Jong Il regime. The goal of South Korea's policy toward North Korea is not to support North Korea itself, a competing authority on the Korean Peninsula, but to peacefully coexist with a nuclear-free North Korea that does not pose a threat to South Korea. This policy will avoid a disastrous military conflict and lay the foundation for a peaceful unification of the Korean nation.

In order to achieve the denuclearization of North Korea, South Korea has faithfully cooperated with the U.S. in the belief that the U.S. will work through diplomatic and peaceful means with a sense of urgency and political will for the earliest possible resolution. Unfortunately, this policy is widely perceived to have failed due to the lack of U.S. leadership in the nuclear negotiations and to North Korea's unwillingness to give up its nuclear program unilaterally.

The South Korean government has faced two conflicting demands: the Bush Administration has insisted that South Korea stop whatever new cooperation it would pursue with North Korea, while a large segment of President Roh's constituency in South Korea favor the promotion of inter-Korean relations through dialogue and negotiation with North Korea. Under these circumstances, I think it is unfair if Americans accuse the South Korean government of not having done enough to help the U.S. government.

Second, by suggesting that it has succeeded in preventing the export of nuclear weapons and the transfer of Nodong missiles to other rogue nations, Mr. Harbison appears to think that the Bush Administration's policy toward the North Korean nuclear problem has not failed, even though the goal of nonproliferation has not been achieved. This argument is an admission that the U.S. has failed to achieve its "original goal" of "denuclearizing North Korea" which is the fundamental goal of nonproliferation on the Korean Peninsula.

Third, Mr. Harbison mentions North Korea's track record of deception and deceit, but it is interesting to see North Korea point out exactly the same track record of the U.S.-for example, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was based on fabricated or "dead wrong" intelligence information and judgments as revealed by the recent U.S. Presidential commission (CICUSRWMD) report. According to the report, Washington knows "disturbingly little" about North Korea's purported nuclear programs. And recently, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing publicly expressed his doubts about "the quality of U.S. intelligence" on North Korea's nuclear program including the highly-enriched uranium program.

Fourth, Mr. Harbison suggests that South Korea join the U.S. in banning all exports to North Korea including humanitarian assistance. I suspect his idea may be difficult to be accepted even by the Bush Administration. Is humanitarian assistance not the most powerful testament to the values the

U.S. upholds around the world? Has even President George W. Bush not distinguished between the North Korean system and leadership, and the North Korean people, defining the North Korean people as the target of the U.S. humanitarian support?

Mr. Harbison appears to support an idea of strangling the North Korean regime by applying economic sanctions, which he thinks will make the North Korean government lose its authority over its people. But in the past any hostile act by the U.S. and other countries has helped the North Korean regime mobilize its people for domestic political gains.

Fifth, I would like to call to Mr. Harbison's attention the findings of the public opinion polls on anti-Americanism in South Korea conducted by South Korean and U.S. polling organizations. Anti-Americanism in South Korea was relatively high during the senior Bush Administration; it was low during the Clinton Administration; but it has risen to its highest point during the George W. Bush Administration. This means that U.S. policy too has been responsible for anti-Americanism in South Korea. In fact, President Clinton's engagement policy toward North Korea was one of key elements of South Koreans' pro-American attitude.

Finally, in order to solve the North Korean nuclear crisis both South Korea and the U.S. have had close consultation and cooperation until now. But this close consultation and cooperation does not mean that South Korea has to automatically accept U.S. policy, particularly when the second-term Bush Administration continues its hitherto policy without showing any sense of urgency and political will to come up with a new, effective policy to achieve denuclearization of North Korea.

Mr. Harbison says that "no rational country would ever enter into bilateral agreements with this rogue nation [North Korea]," but I believe that a more "rational" U.S. would have to take into account the interests, intentions, and capabilities of North Korea in dealing with the nuclear issue. The U.S. assumption that joint pressure on North Korea will make North Korea give in and abandon its nuclear program unilaterally has not led to North Korea's concessions; it has rather produced the opposite outcome, North Korea's announcement that it is going nuclear in defiance of the joint pressure. Considering the deeply-rooted distrust between the two sides, the U.S. has to be more concerned about the likelihood of North Korea going nuclear on a permanent basis in the absence of a "rational" U.S. initiative in this extremely important security and nonproliferation issue. A "rational" U.S. leadership is needed more than ever.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. 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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