

Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online: Comments on PFO 01-02I: “Korean Peninsula: Are There Things More Important, than Peace?” by Georgi Toloraya



The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

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March 20, 2001

I. Introduction

Markku Heiskanen comments on an essay by Georgi Toloraya discussing the future of US relations with Northeast Asian countries under the administration of incoming US President George W. Bush. Markku Heiskanen is Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Unit of the Finnish Foreign Ministry and the Finnish representative of the Policy Planning and Analysis Working Group of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (COPLA) of the European Union. Heiskanen also served at the Embassy in Tokyo from 1976-78 and 1992-95.

II. Comments by Markku Heiskanen

I just have a few comments to make on the excellent essay on Dr. Toloraya.

I fully agree with his approach to the Korean question, particularly vis-à-vis North Korea. I am certainly not the only one following the Korean developments for years and having also personal contacts with North Koreans as human beings and our brothers and sisters, who cheered when Kim Dae-jung arrived in Pyongyang and who cried when the united Korean team entered the Olympic Stadium in Sydney.

We must not give up the historic momentum to "de-demonize" our North Korean members of humanity. The sufferings of the Korean nation during the past 50 years are unbelievable and even today children are dying of hunger or malnutrition in North Korea, which is a shame to all.

Since I fully agree with Dr. Toloraya's points I am not going to comment them more in details. But let me add a few points to the discussion on Korea and Northeast Asia in general.

At a seminar in Rome, I had the honor to be one of the keynote-speakers with a special honor to share this task with Professor Robert A. Scalapino at the same session. My presentation "On the Prospects of the Role of the EU in Northeast Asia" can be found in the online version of the Rome report, as well as Dr. Toloraya's presentation "Security and Confidence Building in Korean Peninsula; A Russian Point of View". [Ed.- The report can be found at: <http://www.mi.infn.it/~landnet>.]

My presentation is based on a report by COPLA during the Finnish Presidency of the EU entitled "Perspectives of Multilateral Support to Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia; The Role of the European Union", an extensive 30-pages report. There is only a French version of the whole report and it has not been published. The summary in Rome, however, contains the most essential points of the report.

The point in the COPLA report and the presentation in Rome is that Northeast Asia, and particularly in this case the Korean Peninsula, and particularly North Korea, should be connected in an international cooperation network also through "the Eurasian Dimension" with Europe and the European Union. At the same time the "North Pacific Dimension" i.e. USA (Alaska) and Canada (British Columbia) could contribute to the construction of positive interdependence and in this way contribute to the "soft" engagement of North Korea in the system.

Even "the Southern Dimension" (Australia, New Zealand) could contribute to this networking.

More arguments for a EU engagement in Northeast Asia by "soft instruments", economy, environment and so on can be found in my presentation in Rome.

In Rome the Chinese participants welcomed an active role of the EU in Northeast Asia.

As far Finland is concerned we have had "normal" relations with North Korea since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the two Korean states in 1973. For years the Finnish diplomatic representation (Commercial) was the only Western mission in Pyongyang. Several North Korean diplomats are fluent in Finnish. This gives Finland a neutral role in Korea approved by both Korean parties.

During the Czarist Russian Empire Finland was in 1809-1917 an autonomous part of Russia and had close contacts also up to the easternmost parts of the empire, even to Alaska, which was part of Russia until 1867. There were even Finnish Governors in Alaska at that time. During that period Northeast Asia was connected to Europe, with Helsinki as one destination, by the Trans-Siberian Railway. Accordingly, we can construct again the "Eurasian Land Bridge" on long traditions and experiences in the past.

The opening this autumn of the Trans-Korean railway with connections via Trans-Siberian Railways to Europe can open almost a positively revolutionary change in the economic and perhaps also political geography of the whole of the Northeast Asia region, and help North Korea to be connected in the "outside world" in a not face losing way advocated rightly by Dr. Toloraya. This will certainly also strengthen the role of Russia in the region.

This is one of the main gists of my research and also operative work on "the European Dimension" and I am happy to report about the findings and conclusions more later on.

With my best regards,
Markku Heiskanen Helsinki, Finland

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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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