

Policy Forum 02-14A: Response to “Agreed Framework Is Brain Dead; Shotgun Wedding Is the Only Option to Defuse Crisis”



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by Hugo Wheegook Kim

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I. Comments On Kim Myong Chol's Essay

Response to "Agreed Framework Is Brain Dead; Shotgun Wedding Is the Only Option to Defuse Crisis"

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The essay of Kim Myong Chol (KMC) recommended the United States to make a "Package Deal" with North Korea by "offering to sign a peace treaty to terminate the relations of hostility, establish full diplomatic relations between the two enemy states, withdraw the American forces from South Korea, remove North Korea from the list of axis of evil and terrorist-sponsored states, and give North Korea most favored nation treatment." Since KMC has often claimed that his voices represent the position of DPRK in terms of its informal speaker from Japan, we can assume that North Korea demands followings by giving up the on-going nuclear program as well as removing other military threat. Politically, North Korea wants recognition of Kim Jung Il's regime from and normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States. Economically, North Korea wants the United States to remove its name from the list of "axis of evil" as well as terrorist states and normalize trade relations with most favored nation treatment. Strategically, North Korea wants to sign a peace treaty with the United States to terminate the relations of hostility and withdrawal of U.S. Forces from South Korea. KMC's article is not different from traditional position of North Korea. However, it must be meaningful to reevaluate the issues at the time of admitted possession of North Korean nuclear program.

Politically, Chairman Kim Jung Il wants to maintain his dictatorial power in his life, which is not acceptable to the civilized world in the age of globalization. This regime killed 2 to 3 millions of innocent people (13 percent of population) by self-isolation to maintain its power, and pushed over 300,000 escapees from its land into northern China by hunger and political oppression. Pyongyang has monopolized information by prohibiting the people to access to mass media including telephone, fax, radio, satellite television, and internet, so that they are not free from speech, press, and association. North Korea never allowed foreign visitors to see its real people and real society in order to cut communications. The United States cannot accept serious violation of human rights, which is against the values of American people. In order to get approval from the United States and the world, North Korea should liberalize domestic politics first by releasing of political prisoners, removal of censorship, undisturbed flow of information, freedom of speech-press-association, and two-party politics. The world does not want to see merciless dictators to threaten happiness coming from peace and prosperity. Whenever those dictators change to a democratic leader, the American people would always welcome, so would the Bush administration. A trick or cheat cannot make difference. It may take one generation for North Korea to move from a totalitarian regime to a

democratic government as long as Kim Jung Il maintains power.

Economically, I advised a road map for North Korea to navigate toward economic development in my conference article of 1995 at the CSIS and "Problems and Remedies of the North Korean Economy: A Strategic Approach," published in *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* VIII (2) (Winter 1996): 223-268. That even recommended openness of the Shinuiju Special Economic Zone (SEZ). North Korea has been losing time, which is essential for economic development, requiring capital, technology, management, marketing, and others. To make the Shinuiju SEZ be successful, it may take at least ten years if all conditions are favorable: five years for design and construction of infrastructure, three years of design and construction of manufacturing plants and equipment, and additional two or three years of recruiting and training of employees and overseas marketing for exports. North Korea should recognize that its comparative advantage in labor is far less attractive than China or Vietnam as long as Pyongyang controls the labor forces. Economic development comes from expansion of production possibility frontier by pursuing comparative advantage in external trade. But isolated self-sanctioned economy could not expand this frontier so that the North Korean economy shrank continuously. Nuclear weapons cannot provide bread to the people, but disturb its economic growth by reducing trade and investment. If North Korea wants to access to the world markets of factors and products, it should first demonstrate true intention of peaceful use of means, not to develop weapons threatening neighboring countries. The world knew that North Korea begged foreign aid, but distributed it to party loyalists suppressing the people, not to the needed people. This would not be possible in the future.

Strategically, North Korea has wanted a peace treaty with the United States, which is a ridiculous hope. The United States is the super power in the post cold war era, which is responsible to maintain the world peace. The counterpart of North Korea is not the United States, but South Korea, which should not be confused. What is the problem for North Korea to make a peace treaty with South Korea? The North is politically totalitarian and unstable, economically in near starvation and collapse, and militarily far less equipped than the South. The population of North Korea is less than one half of that of South Korea. Its peace treaty with South Korea has the same effect from that with the United States because the United States and South Korea have been allied since 1953. Meanwhile, North Korea has insisted the withdrawal of U.S. Forces from South Korea. This is not in its jurisdiction, but is a matter between the United States and South Korea. Pyongyang can express its opinions or hopes, but cannot control sovereign rights of other countries. On the other hand, first, Pyongyang should change the concept of national security from realism depending on military power to pluralism focusing on non-military elements such as diplomatic cooperation, economic development, and social cohesiveness. The nuclear weapons without economic prosperity would be useless. Would North Korea attack the United States, China, Japan, Russia or South Korea? If it made the case, North Korea would be turned to ashes and dust immediately by retaliation. Then, what is the purpose of development of nuclear weapons? It does not provide, but only hurt its national security in various senses. Second, the conversion of defense expenditure to non-defense is essential for North Korea to revive its economy. If two Koreas reach a peace treaty with meaningful disarmament at the level of 300,000 armed forces each, a huge amount of budget could be converted into its reconstruction. Use money not for weapons, but for bread.

In sum, North Korea should give up weapons of mass destruction immediately without any conditions. There is no way for North Korea to get out from current difficulties except political liberalization and economic transformation. If it follows this direction, the world will help North Korea. If not, the collapse of its regime is a matter of time, which is not desirable also for South Korea. Time is essential and the ball is in the court of North Korea. The weapons of mass destruction scare no country, but lead North Korea to be unrecoverable forever.

II. Exchange between Kim Myong Chol and Peter Hayes

Kim Myong Chol (KMC) is author of "Agreed Framework Is Brain Dead; Shotgun Wedding Is the Only Option to Defuse Crisis" and is Executive Director of the Tokyo-based Center for Korean-American Peace.

Peter Hayes (PH) is Executive Director of the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development.

PH: The Agreed Framework cross references to the 1991-2 DPRK-ROK Denuclearization Agreement which explicitly commits both Koreas to forego reprocessing and uranium enrichment activities. It is unambiguous. I am not sure why Kim Myong Chol ignores this cross-referencing, which is the "contractual" basis for the "violation." Politically, of course, the international community believes that the Agreed Framework's nuclear freeze in return for a variety of engagements--political and economic as well as humanitarian--includes all DPRK nuclear weapons related activities, especially enriched uranium.

KMC: A very good question! As I noted in my piece, the denuclearization declaration has been long nullified and thus a dead letter. It is a matter of common knowledge. In the latest talks in Pyongyang the South Korean delegate failed to charge North Korea with the alleged violation according to an Asahi Shimbun report. Such a violation of the nullified accord, is no longer discussed in South Korea. The international belief, which is highly understandable as far as the spirit of the nuclear accord, is totally misplaced in terms of contractual commitments. The wording of the nuclear accord contains no reference to uranium. As far as language is concerned, the nuclear deal is fatally flawed. The north-south denuclearization has the best crafted language. The problem is that it is a total dead letter. The American nuclear behavior in South Korea has totally reduced the accord senseless and null and void.

PH: According to you, the DPRK is no longer a member of the NPT. Is this the DPRK's formal position? I thought that it had threatened to do so and never actually followed through.

KMC: It is now almost ten years that North Korea suspended its membership of the NPT. From the North Korean point view, this long period means that it is out of the NPT. Depending on future progress in talks with the U.S., North Korea may consider joining the NPT again as a full member.

PH: Which strikes is the author referring to? Is he suggesting that nuclear war is inevitable in 2003--the US against the DPRK, or the DPRK against the US and its allies? Why? Why, if indeed the DPRK has proliferated to the extent that he suggests, or if it does proliferate to a limited extent over the next couple of years, wouldn't the DPRK follow the Israeli model that he cites--that is, simply use nuclear weapons and opacity about that capacity to deter external threats?

KMC: No, no. [By "strikes"] I mean "the target year of 2003 comes by the target year of 2003." [Ed Note: This is a grammatical correction by KMC. Also, 2003 refers to the target delivery date for the nuclear light water reactors, not for nuclear targeting of the United States.] The North Korean policy planners have no illusion about the United States. Their assumption is that if North Korea shows any sign of military weakness, the U.S. is ready to attack. A worst-case scenario for a nuclear war with the U.S. is at the root of all North Korean policy decisions. You may call it the siege mentality. They, however, are serious. That is why they built Fortress North Korea and decided to stand up to the U.S. The Korean People's Army and the whole of the nation, including the party, the government and the population, are thoroughly geared for nuclear exchange with the U.S. It is tragic in one sense. It cannot be helped.

PH: What does KMC think that China's view--a declared ally of the DPRK--will be of both the US stance and current strategy; and of the DPRK options that he outlines?

KMC: As a treaty ally, Beijing has every reason to welcome a nuclear-armed North Korea. They have no official reason to object to it. The Chinese and the North Koreans are in the same boat. The Chinese have little trust in them as far as military and foreign policy is concerned. For them, the U.S. remains the undeclared enemy number one.

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.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
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