



Policy Forum 01-02L: The Good Cop and the Bad Cop



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Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 01-02L: The Good Cop and the Bad Cop", NAPSNet Policy Forum, March 22, 2001, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nautilus-institute-policy-forum-online--he-good-cop-and-the-bad-cop/>

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PFO 01-02L: March 22, 2001

The Good Cop and the Bad Cop

By Choi Won-Ki

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I. Introduction

This essay was written by Choi Won-Ki, Editor and Researcher with the Joongang Daily in Seoul. Choi discusses ROK President Kim Dae-jung's recent visit to the US and Kim's meetings with US officials. This is the tenth in a series on the future of US relations with Northeast Asian countries under the administration of incoming US President George W. Bush.

Choi states that Kim seems unable to convince Bush to follow his Sunshine Policy for warming relations with the DPRK. Choi argues that the internal inconsistency in the US, combined with the US-ROK difference over how to approach the DPRK, created such confusion in the DPRK over future policy that leader Kim Jong-il cancelled the inter-Korean Ministers' meeting scheduled for after the summit. Choi concludes with the argument that Kim Jong-il can now either cooperate with Kim Dae-jung or abandon the peace effort entirely.

II. Essay by Choi Won-Ki

"The Good Cop and the Bad Cop"
By Choi Won-ki

With a little movie background, the latest ROK-U.S. summit could be described as Sleepless in Washington for the South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. President Kim, also the sole director of the rapprochement policy for past 3 years, proposed that his U.S. counterpart President George W. Bush adopt his Sunshine Only theme. But try as he may, Bush revealed he rather preferred the theme from the Star Wars. It seems like President Kim will have to sing his favorite tune in a bit lower tone from now on.

President Kim remained Sleepless not just in Washington but in Seoul as well. By the time President Kim arrived for the summit his eyes, diagnosed as subconjunctival ecchymosis were all bloodshot and swelled due his two-week-long search to come up with the right strategy to win over Bush. And Bush during the talks proved himself to be exactly the man President Kim has worried so much.

Back in December 14, 2000 when Bush was admitted as the 43rd President of the United States, Blue House in Seoul instantly fell sober for to Seoul it was like the return of the Cold War spirit. Knowing that the Republican Party has strongly criticized Clinton administration's past 8-year engagement policy to North, Seoul government expressed concern on possibility of U.S. ruining the hard-earned reconciliatory mood.

Even more baffling was President George W. Bush's severe lack of understanding of Korean Peninsula matters. Bush for all his life never lived away of Texas and hardly traveled anywhere else save his trip to Mexico. I mean, he did travel abroad, about three times - which is still far from sufficient.

Bush's security team wasn't much help in lifting any of the burdens either. The Peninsula experts like Colin Powell the secretary of state, Condoleeza Rice, national security advisor, Richard Armitage deputy secretary of state, Paul Wolfowitz the deputy secretary of defense all shared one little problem -their obsolete perception of North. Whatever point of view they had in North came from the 80s, an idea mothballed 20 years ago. Some help that would do for Kim's latest attempt to break down the final remnant of the Cold War era.

After going through countless sleepless nights President Kim finally came up with special lecturing note for junior Bush. The particular notebook carried contents of Kim's live experience in Pyongyang during the first-ever inter-Korea summit meeting which took place last June. Kim would go great lengths to tell Bush what a reasonable fellow Kim Jong-il was and how hard working this guy is to make new changes in his Stalinist State, citing the example of Chairman Kim's inspection to economic zone in China. Thus Kim would wrap up his lecture by advising Bush it would be wiser to go after his comprehensive reciprocity strategy to break down the final wall of the Cold War. Kim even prepared himself to elucidate on his Peace Declaration plan which he has saved for the second inter-Korean summit slated for this year.

The result turned out to be less than satisfactory. The Student Bush didn't seem to be much taken with Lecturer Kim's Sunshine Theory.

First of all, Bush made it known during the press conference that he has strong skepticism toward the North Korean leadership. Even worse, Bush by continuing to use vocabularies like transparency and verification made evident that he is indeed viewing North as a little evil empire, typical of Republican ideology.

The overall atmosphere of the talks didn't look so fine, either. After the summit Bush said that the two sides has discussed in candid and frank manner. Frank and candid is another expression for discord. The standard expression for diplomatic dialogue is harm and courteous? The Daily Telegraph and The Economist focusing on that very phrase wrote that President Kim is probably

disappointed with the latest summit. The speculation was echoed by one of the experts in Seoul who described the whole incident as going for the wool and returning home shorn? The joint statement formed with a total of 1,122 letters after the summit also made plain who got the upper hand of the matter. Kim said that the two sides agreed to dismantle the Cold War structure in the Korean Peninsula but nowhere in the joint revealed the fact. Seoul also tried to express the National Missile Defense program as blurry as possible. The alternative phrase Seoul initially had in mind as Defense System? But meeting with the harsh pressure of the White House the two sides settled for Missile Defense- which is still slightly going against the prior ROK-Russian statement sealed in Feb. 27. That should guarantee future dispute with Russia's Anti Ballistic Missile treaty.

The conflict reached its height as the White House and State Secretary expressed conflicting views concerning the issues of the communist state. Colin Powell, the U.S. Secretary of State, upon President Kim's arrival on March 6 in American time displayed a milder manner pointing out that President Bush would pick up from where former President Clinton has left behind. However the next day he changed his tune by denouncing North as a threat and denied further prospects on U.S.'s negotiation with the North any time soon. On the 8th, Powell stepped even further by pointing out Chairman Kim as a despot and spelled doom for North's open-door policy. The source in Washington related to Powell's confused hot-and-cold statements said Powell received harsh criticism from the hawkish aides of the Bush administration for his relatively soft speech made on the 6th.

However not all was lost in the summit. The unexpected resurrection of North-South Basic Agreement was for one is a good example. In the wake of harsher-than-expected attitude from Bush, Kim announced during his luncheon speech on the 8th that he would resolve the inter-Korean relations based on North-South Basic Agreement which was buried for nearly a decade. Clinched back in 1992, the Basic Agreement ended up as a mere scrap of paper by failing to secure solid binding methods.

Then there's someone else who found oneself in the hot water. Lee Joung-binn, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is the unlucky one who was forced to express regrets four times in a row on behalf of President Kim on matters regarding the NMD expression stipulated in the joint ROK-Russia statement. Lee would probably go down on Korean history as the Ministry who said "sorry" a bit too much.

As we wrap up the whole summit, consider something else. The conflict that has newly risen between Washington and Pyongyang may not be such a bad deal after all. For past two years despite President Kim's broad, give-it-all-policy, all Pyongyang really had in mind was Washington. Seoul was just a temporary station to get them to the right track and nothing more. During the Clinton-era when Sunshine was all the more bright from both sides, Pyongyang was able to go back and forth from Washington and Seoul taking full advantage of trilateral relations - until sudden gust of wind from the U.S.'s side abruptly ended all that. Note that it's only the ties between U.S.-North that has changed. The Seoul-Pyongyang remain firm. Who would North stick to from now on?

Therefore in typical diplomatic terms it is safe to point out that Bush has assumed the role of the Bad Cop and Kim, the Good Cop? Maybe Kim and Bush have planned all this from the start luring Chairman Kim to take the bait.

Kim Jong-il, Outraged

Interestingly enough, it seems like the two summits went too far on their make-believe acts. The conflicting views of the two summits were madly covered by big and small media in both U.S. and South Korea leaving Chairman Kim in the reclusive state to fall into utter confusion. So confused

was he that he later suspended the inter- Korean cabinet meeting indefinitely.

The conservative North Korea watchers in Seoul see the North's latest conduct as an ominous sign that suggest possible cancellation of the second inter-Korean summit. Kim Dal-sul the former senior member of Office of the South-North Dialogue who has been observing Pyongyang for past 20 years pointed out that Pyongyang may have found itself suddenly entrapped. The recent ROK-U.S. summit could have drawn some kind of wall that prevent North from implementing its own reunification scheme. According to his explanation what Pyongyang is likely to have in mind for the second inter-Korean meeting was an establishment of joint reunification body that would allow North to wield certain amount of influence to South Korean society. However Bush's orders to become transparent and verified may have been too much for North to handle.

North dissatisfaction may also stem from the business-related issues. The Hyundai Asan group back in November 1998 launched a joint tourism project with North Korean government by starting a cruise ship to North's scenic Kumgang Mountain. Unfortunately due to various circumstances including worsening conditions of the company itself, Hyundai began to fall behind the monthly payment of \$12 million. This March, Hyundai ended up paying just \$2 million of the stipulated amount without any explanation. Chairman Kim realizing only one sixth of the payment has arrived practically exploded according to the sources. It is known that Chairman Kim vented his displeasure to President Kim via secret lines. Chairman Kim is extremely furious these days said one well-informed source of North Korea. Perhaps this is the reason why Kim Yong-sun the head of Asia-Pacific Peace Committee of North and in charge of Hyundai matters has turned so blue. Unconfirmed rumors swirl around Kim Han-gill, the Minister of Culture and Tourism who managed to visit North despite the stalled inter-Korea cabinet-level talks. Minister Kim claims that he had only discussed on sports and culture exchange between two Koreas and nothing more, yet there are talks that he may have gone as a special envoy to provide additional explanations to North.

These days North, or rather Chairman Kim is left with just two options. He could either accept the grim reality and cooperate with President Kim or be a rascal and scrap out the whole peace attempt including his plans to visit Seoul. If Chairman Kim goes for the first option he'll have to start pondering to rekindle the June 15 spirit of last year that threw two Koreas in emotional glee for a while. However if the Chairman decides on the latter option that would immediately undo all the efforts of President Kim and return inter-Korea relations back to the December, 1997 before President Kim came to power. It's been 30 years since South Korea and Japan normalized their ties and yet no Japanese emperors have ever tramped across the street of Seoul, yet, pointed out Kim Dal-sul. Chairman Kim's visit to Seoul within this year won't prove to be any easier.

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Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
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