

Policy Forum 99-07J: Two Reports on North Korea



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Two Reports on North Korea

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I. Introduction

The following essay is by Cheong Wooksik, a representative of the [Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea](#) , and was translated by You Sanghee. Cheong compares the two recent reports on US policy toward the DPRK; that of former Defense Secretary [William Perry](#) and that of the US Congress's [North Korea Advisory Group](#) .

Cheong argues that while the Perry report was designed to provide policy alternatives, the Republican report was meant to criticize the Clinton administration's DPRK policy. He concludes that while, compared to the Republican report, the Perry report appears progressive, it makes no new proposals for reducing the reliance on military deterrence on the Korean Peninsula.

II. Essay by Cheong Wooksik

"Two Reports on North Korea" by Cheong Wooksik, Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea Translated by You Sanghee

1. They Reflect Partisan Conflicts in US Domestic Politics

With the presidential election only a year away, the two parties in US politics are experiencing more disagreements regarding North Korea and the US's North Korean policies. The Perry report released on October 12 and the Republican report submitted to the House of Representatives on November 3 clearly show the long-standing conflict between the Clinton administration and the Republican party over North Korea.

Since the Perry report was written by the administration at the request of the Congress, it may be regarded to carry more importance than the Republican report, which was written by the conservative party at the request of House Speaker Denis Hastert. However, this may not be true. This is not simply because the Republicans are majority and that they have a higher chance of winning the presidential election next year. Rather, it is because the US media and public opinion tend to lean closer toward Republicans, and also because the "North Korea crisis scenario" is serving as a good excuse for increasing the US defense budget as well as reviving the "star wars" missile defense system, a long-time dream of US militarists. Added to these factors is the economic interests of the US military industry, which boasts 3 million employees and 10,000 lobbyists.

Discord between the Clinton administration and Republicans over North Korea policies started when they disagreed on the evaluation of 1994 Agreed Framework. Whereas the Clinton administration counted the Agreement as one of its biggest diplomatic successes, the Republican hard-liners criticized it, saying that the Agreement failed to halt North Korea's nuclear weapons development and only prolonged the Communist regime. The Republicans later came to take the majority power in both houses of Congress.

Last year's number of incidents seemed to tip the balance of power in favor of the Republicans. For example, allegations of nuclear development at Kumchang-ri and North Korea's satellite launch supported the Republicans' theory of a "nuclear warhead crisis." However, as the Kumchang-ri allegations were resolved after the site inspection in May, and as the US and North Korea successfully concluded the Berlin negotiations in September on the former's easing of economic sanctions and the latter's freezing of its missile launches, the Republican hard-liners seemed to lose ground. But at the same time, the Berlin agreement partly strengthened the arguments of hard-liners and conservative US media that the US once again fell for North Korea's brinkmanship diplomacy.

Two reports on North Korea released amid this confusion can be regarded as symbols of the current partisan conflict in US politics, and also of how the US's North Korean policy will turn out in the future. The two reports differ essentially in that the Perry report was written with the purpose of providing a policy alternative, whereas the Republican report was written mainly to emphasize the North Korean threat and to criticize the US's North Korean policy.

2. Perry Report and Republican Report

The Perry report bears significance in that it urged the US to embrace the spirit of the Agreed Framework, facing the reality that North Korea is imposing a heavier threat than before. It argues that the US should move away from its 5 year-long position of "time is on our side; we'll wait till North Korea collapses" that it has taken ever since the Agreed Framework. Mr. Perry seems to have understood reality as well as to have learned a valuable lesson from the last 5 years when he says that "the US should negotiate with North Korea not as we would like it to be, but as it is in reality." Also, the Perry report recommends a comprehensive package-deal of negotiations rather than

separate negotiations on each issue as necessity arises. The Perry report sets three stages in moving toward permanent peace on the Korean peninsula: in the short-term, the policy focus is to deter North Korea's nuclear programs and missile development; in the mid-term, the US should encourage the North to give up development of weapons of mass destruction; and in the long-term, the goal should be to dismantle the Cold-War structure on the peninsula. Mr. Perry points out that the US along with its allies should be prepared to pay reasonable costs to achieve such goal.

On the other hand, the Republican report compares the current circumstances with that of 5 years ago, and argues that the Perry report is not strong enough to deal with North Korean threat. However, the Republican report, written in the form of questions and answers, is dominated by vague phrases such as "-is believed", "-is thought", "-is credited", etc. Through an endless array of such ambiguous expressions, the Republicans clearly wanted to emphasize that North Korea's nuclear and missile threat is increasing, and that aid to the North without adequate monitoring will only prolong the current North Korean regime. It also added that the human rights conditions in the North are deteriorating. The Republican report further described the North Korean government as a criminal organization by citing its production and trafficking of illegal drugs, distribution of counterfeit money, etc. It also criticized the Clinton administration for trying to talk with such a vicious regime. In other words, the Republican report takes a classic approach of hawks - exaggerating the negative image of North Korea. They are making up for their lack of evidences by exaggerating the bad image of the North.

3. Republican Report Helps Perry Report Look Progressive

Among the two reports, the Perry report looks far more progressive and even radical. However, this is not because the Perry report is progressive in itself, but because the Republican report is far too conservative. The gist of the Perry report is to induce North Korea into arms reduction through economic support and diplomatic normalization. However, such recommendations are not enough to realize the ultimate goal of dismantling the Cold-War structure, let alone the first goal of deterring North Korea's nuclear program. The Perry report promises to normalize diplomatic relations, ease economic sanctions, and decrease international pressure on North Korea if the communist regime gives up development of weapons of mass destruction. But the report does not have specific plans as to how the US will decrease its threat against North Korea.

North Korea has suggested negotiation on a "change of status", instead of "withdrawal" of the US troops stationed in South Korea. Also North Korea is demanding that the US eliminate its nuclear preemptive option on North Korea, the only nation to be subject to such an option. This means that North Korea, with no military capacity to communize the South, has changed its stance and is now requesting that the US also change its position to that of a fair peace-keeper on the Korean peninsula. However, the US has repeatedly refused to accept North Korea's demands. The Perry report, allegedly based on reciprocity, has not changed at all when it comes to military issues.

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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