

Policy Forum 11-12: Recommendations for Kim Jong-il to visit Seoul in Spring 2012

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Recommendations for Kim Jong-il to visit Seoul in Spring 2012

By Wooksik Cheong

May 24, 2011

Nautilus invites your contributions to this forum, including any responses to this report.

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I. Introduction

Wooksik Cheong, a Representative of the Peace Network, writes, “the [Lee Myung-Bak] administration should not take the North’s sincerity of nuclear abandonment as a precondition of negotiation. Instead, it should respond in kind to the North’s determination to seek out larger compromise, such as denuclearization for a peace treaty.”

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on significant topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Article by Wooksik Cheong

-“Recommendations for Kim Jong-il to visit Seoul in Spring 2012”

By Wooksik Cheong

On May 9th in Berlin President Lee Myung-bak offered to invite North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to the Nuclear Security Summit that will be held in Seoul next spring “if he pledges to give up his nuclear weapons program and firmly agrees to do so to international society.” If Kim Jong-il accepts President Lee’s proposal it would help stabilize not only the Korean Peninsula, but also Northeast Asia. This could also be the turning point for the international non-proliferation regime.

However, the feasibility and sincerity of this proposal are in doubt. This is not the first time this type of proposal has been made. A similar proposal was offered in April of last year at the first Nuclear Security Summit, which took place in Washington D.C., soon after South Korea was designated as the host country for the next summit.

Pyongyang refused the offer and stated that it would not attend the second summit unless Washington changed its “imperialistic” nuclear policies. Since then, President Lee has not tried to improve the feasibility of his proposal. Instead, he has released the results of the investigation into the sinking of the corvette Cheonan and agreed to military exercises in conjunction with the United States of unprecedented size and directed towards North Korea.

Moreover, President Lee has attempted to prepare for and bring about a sudden change in North Korea as an “opportunity for reunification.” North Korea’s reliance on “nuclear deterrence” in the face of this attempt is a foregone conclusion.

This proposal is no different from the previous one. While requiring the North to make the “strategic decision” to abandon nuclear weapons in order to participate in the Summit, President Lee did not take any corresponding measure. In fact, he repeatedly requested that Pyongyang apologize for the sinking of the corvette Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island.

He also made a statement that treated unification as the absorption of the North by the South. In addition, President Lee said that “North Korea cannot avoid facing a pro-democracy revolt like the

'Jasmine Revolution.'" Such provocative remarks cast doubt on the possibility that North Korea will participate in the historical event next spring. President Lee Myung-bak is unfortunately using his energy and wisdom only to build an image of his leadership as handling the North Korea's nuclear issue.

Next spring will mark a milestone in the situation on the Korean peninsula. Pyongyang is going to declare itself a "Strong and Prosperous Nation" on April 15th to commemorate the "Day of the Sun," which is the 100th anniversary of Kim Il-Sung's birth. The future of the Korean Peninsula depends on North Korea's choice of what it means to be a "Strong and Prosperous Nation." They can either continue to possess nuclear weapons or denuclearize and improve their country by opening up to the outside world, the realization of which was in fact Kim Il-Sung's dying injunction.

The second Nuclear Security Summit, which leaders from approximately 50 countries will participate in, will take place soon after North Korea's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the "Day of the Sun." The most important part of the Summit will be whether President Lee's proposal can be realized or whether he will end up criticizing North Korea. The situation on the Korean peninsula in the spring of 2012 will be integral to finding a solution to the problems facing the two Koreas.

Next year will also bring us closer to 2013, the 60th anniversary of the Armistice Treaty and the 20th anniversary of Pyongyang's withdrawal from the Nonproliferation Treaty. This is why historical awareness and clear vision are now needed to make the year 2012 a year of great transformation.

Thus, I would like to make a few recommendations to the Lee Myung-Bak administration for a breakthrough in North-South relations in 2012. First, the administration should not take the North's sincerity of nuclear abandonment as a precondition of negotiation. Instead, it should respond in kind to the North's determination to seek out larger compromise, such as denuclearization for a peace treaty.

Second, the Lee administration needs to build a foundation of trust between the countries involved by agreeing to the third North-South summit meeting and mediating a North Korea-U.S. summit meeting before the Nuclear Security Summit next spring. Without trust-building among the top leaders, it would be impossible for Kim Jong-Il to decide to give up nukes and participate in the Nuclear Security Summit.

Third, denuclearization and the issues of the sinking of the corvette Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island should be dealt with separately and respectively. While the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong cases can be dealt with in North-South talks, denuclearization should be addressed in the Six Party Talk process.

NOTE: Dae Kwon Son and Sang Mi Chun, Peace Network Interns, contributed to this English translation from the original Korean text.

III. Nautilus invites your responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: bscott@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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