



Policy Forum 06-63A: Strange Tempests Follow Missile Tests



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Essay by Kim Tae-kyung

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I. Introduction

Kim Tae-kyung, a staff writer at OhmyNews specializing in Northeast Asia regional issues, writes "Thus, this event should be an issue between North Korea and the U.S. Of the many concerned countries, Japan has taken the hardest stance in response to North Korea's missile launch. Indeed, Japan acts as if it had been attacked by North Korea."

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II. Essay by Kim Tae-kyung

- Strange Tempests Follow Missile Tests
by Kim Tae-kyung

India recently test fired the Agni III, an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear warheads at a range of 4,000 kilometers. The event provoked criticism that the U.S. applies a double standard in dealing with the missile program of North Korea. Responding to the criticism, Tony Snow, the White House spokesman, argued that India is a significantly different country from North Korea. He emphasized that India has developed its missile program in an acceptable way by not threatening neighboring countries.

U.S. President George W. Bush signed an agreement promising a transfer for nuclear technology from the U.S. to India during his trip to India last April. Meanwhile, India, a nuclear power, has not ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The U.S. argues that North Korea's missile program is another matter because of its threats. However, North Korea has not made war since the end of the Korean War in 1953. The U.S., however, has been involved in many wars: the Vietnam War, the invasion of Cambodia, the invasion of Grenada, the Iraq War, etc. India has made war three times against Pakistan because of Kashmir issues and has had border conflicts with China.

The U.S. originally supported Japan's draft of a U.N. resolution that would have invoked Chapter 7, authorizing military action against North Korea to enforce sanctions. When opposition by China and Russia forced them to drop the reference to Chapter 7, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton was quick to argue that any resolution would be considered binding. However, the U.S. invaded Iraq without a U.N. resolution in March 2003 based on the alleged existence of weapons of massive destruction. However, weapons of massive destruction were never found in Iraq.

In fact, the list of absurd double standards that the U.S. applies is quite long. But let us skip the ethical aspects of these double standards because they are not the focus of this article.

The tests of the Taepodong 2, recently launched by North Korea, seem unsuccessful. At this time, it is unclear if the Taepodong 2 was originally designed to reach Alaska or Hawaii, or not. However, it is very likely that the Taepodong 2 was used to get the attention of the U.S. in order to promote bilateral talks with North Korea. In short, the Taepodong 2 was launched with political and diplomatic intentions.

Thus, this event should be an issue between North Korea and the U.S. Of the many concerned countries, Japan has taken the hardest stance in response to North Korea's missile launch. Indeed, Japan acts as if it had been attacked by North Korea.

On July 7, Japan submitted a draft on sanctions against North Korea to the U.N. The draft mainly urges the members of the U.N. to introduce preventive actions by not providing materials, products, procurement, technology, and financial support to producers who are involved in North Korea's missile and weapons programs.

In the draft, Japan claims that a tough response is warranted based on Chapter 7 of the Charter of the United Nations. According to the 51st article in that chapter, the "inherent right of individual or collective self-defense shall not be impaired" if it is necessary to "maintain and rebuild international peace and security." In fact, the draft prepared by Japan urges the international community to take military action against North Korea.

In August 1998, North Korea launched Taepodong 1. Those missiles flew over Japan and fell into the Pacific Ocean. The Taepodong 2 missiles did not pass over Japan. In fact, two of the seven missiles fired came down near Russia. If any country has the right to complain about the missile launch, it is Russia.

In 1998, the U.N. Security Council warned North Korea through a press release. The threat posed by North Korea's recent missile launch is less significant than it was in 1998. But Japan's proposal to punish North Korea includes much stronger measures than the warning in 1998. Because of this, Japan's draft has not gained the support of China.

The draft suggests that the members of the U.N. should not provide financial support to North Korea if there is a chance the funds might be used for missile programs or weapons of massive destruction. However, this conditionality can be interpreted and applied randomly. If for example Japan or the U.S. strongly argued that the financial resources raised by the Kaesung Industrial Complex or Kumkang Mountain are being set aside for North Korea's missile programs, then the projects would be at risk of being halted.

Some Japanese politicians go even further. On July 10, Abe Sinjo, the chief cabinet secretary, said that it would be necessary to discuss intensively the range of self-defense options backed by Japan's constitution because some public opinion supports attacking North Korea's missile bases. Nukaga Hukusiro, the national defense minister, and Aso Daro, the minister of foreign affairs, agreed that preemptive strikes by Japan should be understood as part of its right of self-defense.

Indeed, these conservative politicians are echoing the opinions of hardliners because they want to enhance their political influence inside Japan by promoting fears of possible attacks from outside. However, a more serious concern is that the logic employed by these politicians resembles the logic used to support Japanese aggression in former times. For instance, Japan invaded Chosun (today's Korea) in 1592 so it could later attack the Ming dynasty in China. Japan claimed that it was borrowing a route to China.

Similarly, Japan may ask South Korea to "lend" a route in order to reach North Korea rather than directly landing in the North. Japan's approach, claiming that preemptive attacks on North Korea are needed to protect its own citizens, may further promote broader attacks on the entire Korean peninsula.

Right wing groups in Japan still argue the so-called "hypothesis on the Korean peninsula as a weapon against Japan." They believe that Korea threatens Japan's security because it projects from the Asian continent like a forearm toward Japan. Reviewing historical records, Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 was followed by the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the invasion of China in 1937.

On July 11, Jung Tae Ho, the spokesman of the Blue House (South Korea's presidential palace), criticized Japan's hypothesis saying pre-emptive attacks were greatly minatory approaches that would damage the peace on the Korean peninsula and in the Northeast Asian region, particularly because of Japan's history of having invaded Korea on the excuse of "protecting its own citizens residing in Korea." Unfortunately, South Korea and Japan have also had significant conflicts over the issue of Dokdo Island this year.

Some people argue that North Korea's missile tests have motivated the U.S. to develop a missile defense system (MD). However, the origin of the MD can be traced to the space-based defense plan promoted by the Reagan administration in the 1980s. The Bush administration has actively pursued the MD since 2001. Even without North Korea's missile launch, the MD would have been pursued. In fact, the main targets of the MD are ballistic missiles from Russia and China.

Japan's reactions to North Korea's missile tests are quite furious. Japan has not hesitated to provoke South Korea and China, and has made a huge issue out of the possible threat posed by North Korea. If Japan does not deal with tensions or conflicts with its neighboring countries in a well-measured and serious manner, it should not be considered a real member of the Northeast Asian region.

An important factor, which should be remembered, is that Japan's invasions did not stop with Korea and China. Japan's aggression went further in World War II. In fact, everyone knows how the story of Japan's aggression ended.

Ha Jong Moon, a professor in Japanology at Hanshin University in South Korea, pointed out in an interview with the Peace Broadcast Channel (PBC), on July 11, that Japan would be put under situations "holding a blade rather than a ball" through its militarization. He emphasized that the militarization of Japan would not have a positive impact on the future of the country.

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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Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project (napsnet-reply@nautilus.org)

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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org