

Policy Forum 05-31A: The EU Stretches its Foreign Policy Wings Over Korea

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Soyoung Kwon and Glyn Ford (MEP)

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I. Introduction

Dr. Soyoung Kwon, post-doctorate fellow at the Asia-Pacific Research Centre of Stanford University,

and Glyn Ford, member of the Korean Peninsula Delegation in the European Parliament, write: "The EU is increasingly showing a new independent stance on Foreign Policy issues as the logic of its industrial and economic integration plays out in the international arena. Now it has broken ranks over the Korean Peninsula, fed-up and concerned with the failure to resolve the ongoing crisis in North Korea."

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II. Essay by Soyoung Kwon and Glyn Ford

-*"The EU Stretches its Foreign Policy Wings Over Korea"*
by Soyoung Kwon and Glyn Ford

The EU is increasingly showing a new independent stance on Foreign Policy issues as the logic of its industrial and economic integration plays out in the international arena. Already the EU has taken a distinct and independent approach to both the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the nuclear crisis in Iran. Now it has broken ranks over the Korean Peninsula, fed-up and concerned with the failure to resolve the ongoing crisis in North Korea.

The Europeans are stepping in. This week the European Parliament (EP) passed a comprehensive resolution on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and nuclear arms in North Korea and in Iran that reflects this new stance. Firstly, the EP urges the recommencement of the supply of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) to North Korea in exchange for a verified freezing of the Yongbyong Heavy-Water reactor, capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, to avoid further deterioration of the current situation. At the same time it is calling for the European Council and Commission to offer to pay for these HFO supplies. Secondly, it urges the Council of Ministers to reconsider paying four million Euro of suspension costs for KEDO (Korea Energy Development Organization) to South Korea in order to ensure the continued existence of an organization that could play a key role in delivering energy supplies during a settlement process. Thirdly, it demands that the Commission and Council request EU participation in future 'Six Party Talks' making it clear that the EU will in future adopt a 'No Say, No Pay' principle in respect of the Korean Peninsula. Having already placed over £500m (\$650m) of humanitarian and development aid into the North, it is no longer willing to be seen merely as a "cash cow". This view was backed in the debate by the Luxembourg Presidency and follows a line initially enunciated by Javier Solana's representatives last month in the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. Fourthly, it urges North Korea to rejoin the NPT, to return to the 'Six Party Talks' and to allow the resumption of negotiations.

Finally the Parliament finds US claims that North Korea has an ongoing HEU (Highly Enriched Uranium) Programme unsubstantiated as it also does of the allegations that North Korea provided HEU to Libya, thus calling for its Foreign Affairs Committee to hold a public hearing to evaluate the evidence. "Once bitten, twice shy" is the consequence of US claims of Iraq's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

The world order is changing; the European Union - like China - is emerging as a significant global power economically with the euro challenging the dollar as the global currency (even prior to the latest enlargement from 15 to 25 the EU's economy was bigger than that of the US). Speaking at Stanford University earlier this month, former foreign policy advisor, Zbigniew Brezenczski, pointed out that the EU along with the US, China, Japan and India will be the major powers in the new emerging global order. Having three Asian countries out of the five major players, he stressed the importance of engaging with the New Asia.

How will those already in play respond? Some may claim that statements by North Korea welcoming the EU's involvement and participation are merely polite, inoffensive small talk not intended to be taken seriously but this is belied by the facts. First, there have been a spate of pro-EU articles appearing on Rodong Sinmun, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party, since 2001. Of 128 EU-related articles between 2001 and 2004, a majority praised Europe's independent counter-US stance, emphasized its increasing economic power and the expansion of its influence, and heralded its autonomous regional integration. Rodong Sinmun portrays the EU as the only superpower that can check and balance US hegemony and American unilateral exercise of military power. North Korea's perception of the EU is well reflected in articles entitled; "The EU becomes a new challenge to the US unilateralism"; "Escalating frictions (disagreements) between Europe and the US"; "The European economy (Euro) dominating over that of the US"; "Europe, strongly opposing to unilateral power play of the US," and so forth. Concurrently, North Korea has pursued active engagement with the EU establishing diplomatic relations with 24 out of 25 EU member states (exception being France). Given the facts, it is not necessary to read between the lines - just not to be blind - to recognise North Korea's genuine commitment to engagement with the European Union based on its perception of the EU's emerging role on the world stage.

The Republic of Korea has publicly welcomed the prospect of EU involvement, while China wishes to go further and engage in bilateral discussions with the EU on its new policy towards the North. Russia will follow the majority. The problem is with Japan and the US. In Japan, opinion is split with the hardliners in the Liberal Democratic Party seeing North Korea as a convenient excuse to justify the abandonment of the Peace Constitution and, therefore, not wanting a quick solution until the crisis has catalysed this transformation of Japan into what its advocates call a "normal" country. The US expects EU's financial commitment, but not participation, with the neo-cons conceiving that EU participation would change the balance of forces within the talks inexorably towards critical engagement rather than confrontation. The question is whether the EU's offer paints the US into a corner or whether it triggers a breakthrough. Will US fundamentalists outmanoeuvre the realists who favour a diplomatic rather than military solution? Only time will tell.

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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