


Policy Forum 11-21: Why Not Opt for a “Win-Win” Strategy for the Korean Peninsula?

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Why Not Opt for a “Win-Win” Strategy for the Korean Peninsula?

By Haksoon Paik

July 26, 2011

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

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I. Introduction

Haksoon Paik, senior fellow at The Sejong Institute, South Korea, argues that while current prospects for denuclearizing the Korean peninsula are slim, US and ROK policymakers still have several opportunities to facilitate the resumption of negotiations with the DPRK by "returning to the basics".

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II. Article by Haksoon Paik

- Why Not Opt for a "Win-Win" Strategy for the Korean Peninsula?

By Haksoon Paik

The last chance to denuclearize Korea and create peace on the Korean peninsula is slipping away due to the policies of the states involved. Missing from the scene is U.S. leadership, which could make a critical difference in settling the conflict. President Obama has not dealt with the "Korean problem" aggressively and proactively and has not been mindful of the long-term negative effects of "strategic patience" on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia. The failure to address this situation has intensified the threat of war and allowed North Korea to retain nuclear arms. The Korean War has not yet ended as there is an armistice, not a peace treaty, in place, and one of the byproducts of this unresolved conflict is the North Korean nuclear problem. However, the U.S. government is not yet prepared to resolve the root cause of the Korean problem.

The successes or failures of our efforts to solve the Korean problem have been the product of the interaction of the policies of the parties involved. In this sense, neither the U.S. nor North Korea is exclusively responsible for the success or failure of the negotiations: both are responsible and have to cooperate to resolve the conflict. Whatever distrust they have toward each other should be understood, like it or not, as a problem of their own creation.

In 1948, Hans Morgenthau, a founding father of the realist school in international politics, proposed nine rules for the promise of diplomacy in his classic book *Politics Among Nations*. Those rules still hold today. Diplomacy, he argued, must be divested of the crusading spirit. Nations must be willing to compromise on all issues that are not vital to them and to look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations. When President Bush named North Korea one of the "axis of evil" states, treating it as a target of regime change and the preemptive use of nuclear weapons, what could be expected of North Korea? North Korea immediately withdrew from the NPT and began to strengthen its nuclear capabilities.

Unfortunately, President Obama has not made a clear departure from President Bush's North Korea policy. Maintaining this policy has helped North Korea increase its nuclear arsenal. North Korea is now developing highly enriched uranium facilities which will make proliferation much easier. Since the failure to engage North Korea has allowed it to advance its nuclear program and build more

bombs, we should deal with the North Korean nuclear program immediately.

It appears that we have a very slim chance of achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula right now, but there can be a new start by returning to the basics. Here are a few tips that can help us restart efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and build peace on the Korean peninsula.

First, we should break free from the mindset that North Korea will never give up its nuclear ambitions. Intrinsicly, all weaponry, including nuclear weapons, are mere policy instruments, not the goals of policy itself. North Korea's goals are survival, prosperity, and prestige—just like ours. North Korea could give up its nuclear weapons if it could be convinced that denuclearizing can help guarantee its survival and prosperity in negotiations with the U.S. and others, something which North Korea consistently demanded in negotiations and agreed to in key documents until now.

Second, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and his son Kim Jong Un still appear to prefer a negotiated resolution to the nuclear issue with the U.S. Kim Jong Un has inherited all kinds of problems from his father. The father and the son appear to be well aware that there is no *deus ex machina* solution and that they need U.S. help to resolve many of the North Korea's chronic problems including peace settlement. In addition, North Korea wants to engage the U.S. as a countervailing force to dilute Chinese influence over the state as a way of promoting its diplomatic independence, just like it did when it played the Soviet Union and China off against each other in the past. This policy of North Korea seeking competitive favors from its neighbors is an opportunity for the U.S. and others to pursue its interests in Korea by engaging the North.

Third, why continue to ignore the "war and peace" problem in Korea when North Korea has consistently set a permanent peace regime as a *quid pro quo* for denuclearization? South Korea, a U.S. ally, has also been demanding a resolution to the Korean conflict. The end of the Korean War is long overdue. The Korean problem in general, and the North Korean nuclear issue in particular, are "political" problems. The U.S. and North Korea are still at war. What is more "political" than this? That's why we want to see President Obama establish his "political" leadership in dealing with the Korean conflict.

Finally, North Korea has sought to end the Korean War, sign a peace treaty, and normalize its relationship with the U.S. as an "exit strategy" to get out of the trouble it has faced since the Soviet Union collapsed and, more importantly, to guarantee its survival and development in the 21st century. Like it or not, we have to admit that the root cause of the Korean problem is the Korean War and that the North Korean nuclear problem is just a symptom of the disease. All Koreans, regardless of where they are living, have been victims to the treacheries of international power politics since the division of their land by U.S. and Soviet forces at the end of the Second World War. Why continue to leave Koreans to suffer from the unfair, unbearable legacy of World War II and the Cold War? Why not opt for a "win-win" response to North Korea's demands, so that we can end the Korean War, restore peace on the Korean peninsula, and resolve the North Korean nuclear issue once and for all? The Korean people have long awaited such an opportunity for peace and unification.

III. Nautilus invites your responses

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