

Korea nuclear weapons and the six party talks

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Just recently, North Korean President Kim Jong Il proudly proclaimed the success of his government's underground testing of their first-ever nuclear weapon in the barren hinterlands of the his reclusive country. Western countries, led by the United States, quickly condemned the move as an imminent threat to the security of the Korean peninsula and the international political system in general, especially in the light of the withdrawal of North Korea from the six-party talks negotiating the shutdown of North Korea's nuclear facilities.

On the other hand, the nuclear testing was hailed overwhelmingly by anti-imperialist states around the globe, led by Venezuela and Cuba, and anti-imperialist movements comprising mostly of Marxist parties of every sort, such as the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Communist Party of India-Maoist. It was seen as a triumph of the Korean people against the intense political pressure by US imperialism to bring the North Korean government to its knees on all fronts - militarily and economically.

Nonetheless, while the North Korean government was euphoric over its success, it earned the ire of the general international community through the United Nations that sweeping economic sanctions were imposed such as strict inspection of cargo shipments entering North Korean territory, notwithstanding the long-standing implied trade embargo by scores of countries around the world. Actually, the Korean peninsula has been the perennial site of unending geopolitical tensions in the East Asian region since the Korean War in the fifties. This paper will examine the nature of the six-party talks and North Korean brinkmanship in the context of North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The Six-Party Talks

The Six-Party Talks include the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea's official name), South Korea, United States, Russia, Japan, and the People's Republic of China, whose essential goal has been the peaceful and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The talks were launched primarily due to the refusal of the United States to foster bilateral talks with the DPRK due to the latter's breach of a 1994 Framework Agreement. Moreover, it contained economic commitments by the member states to the DPRK, in terms aiding its energy requirements for as long as the DPRK abandons its nuclear program, particularly its pursuit of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, the United States and its allies formally assured the DPRK that it shall not result to acts of aggression against the reclusive country and seek alternative ways in resolving the diplomatic issues with the DPRK.

According to Dr. Edberto Villegas (personal communication, 2007), a political economist of the University of the Philippines specializing of socialist politics, the Six-Party talks was formed not only to stabilize the threat of the DPRK against the United States and South Korea, but to secure the geopolitical interests of the member states as well. Japanese participation in the talks is very important as the DPRK has time and again threatened Japan, due to historic tensions since the Japanese invasion of the Korean peninsula a century ago and continues even up to the present, especially as Japan is now seen as a reliable ally of the United States in enforcing its foreign policies in the region. China is also interested in the talks as it is within its national interest that the Korean peninsula is stable to prevent the undocumented

and illegal migration of North Koreans to Chinese territories. (globalsecurity.org, 2007)

North Korean Brinksmanship

In international politics, the DPRK and its leader, Kim Jong Il, has been adjudged the master of nuclear brinksmanship in securing economic and military concessions from world powers, including the United States. As the DPRK knows fully well its geopolitical handicap, it continually breaches international agreements in supposed pursuit and assertion of its national interest and sovereignty, especially when it deliberately withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and insisted on producing nuclear weapons for its defense against perceptions of a conspiracy by the United States forcibly overthrow the Kim Jong Il regime by force.

According Villegas (personal communication, 2007), the DPRK fully believes that only by building up its military capability, particularly nuclear power, can the DPRK secure substantial concessions from world powers, consistent with the Maoist maxim of political power emerging from the barrel of a gun. These concessions, however, are not entirely of a military or diplomatic character, but usually in terms of economic aid, as the DPRK continues to battle years of infertile agricultural lands and famine that has led to the deaths and exodus of thousands of North Koreans.

As can be seen from the recent nuclear testing in the hinterlands of North Korea, the world, while united in its condemnation of the act, has acceded, to a certain extent, to the demands of the North Korean government such as the release of its \$25 million frozen assets in Macau and the delivery of more

economic aid from developed nations. Nonetheless, it can be surmised that the actuations of the DPRK and the flaunting of its military might are not exactly aimed at threatening the world, especially South Korea, Japan and the United States, but only to secure adequate leverage for political and economic agreements which would not have been possible if the DPRK acted otherwise. More so, the DPRK are not that ignorant of the military history of the world to foolishly start military aggressions against perceived enemy states, knowing fully well the superior military power of the United States and its allies. (personal communication, 2007)

However, in order to fully understand the North Korean nuclear question, the DPRK strategy of Songun politics must be examined. According to Han of the Unification Institute in New York, the DPRK views the relationship of the DPRK and the United States not as co-equal states in international law but as opposing and antagonistic entities representing the conflict between imperialism and socialism, in which peaceful coexistence is never possible.

King Jong Il believes that all of these are part of the efforts of the DPRK to foist an ideological confrontation against the United States and secure the socialist gains in the Korean peninsula (Han, 2003) More so, the Songun politics of the DPRK involves the building of a strong revolutionary army to save the North Korean socialist system from collapse, over and above the necessity of putting adequate food on the tables of the Korean people. Such an utterly militarist mindset is a big departure from the classical Marxist theory of empowering the working class and the withering away of the state, leading foreign policy experts to believe that King Jong Il's brinkmanship is merely to ensure the survival of his family's hold on the entire North Korean

political system. (globalsecurity. org) Nonetheless, the military outcome of policies like these has been very effective in forcing the international community to stand at attention and listen to the demands, even blackmail, of the DPRK.

Conclusion: The World and the Way Forward

The Korean nuclear question has given the United States and the international community a terrible political headache which all must continually confront until the threat of the DPRK has been conclusively neutralized. While it is true that independent nations such as the DPRK must assert its national sovereignty at all times against external threats, particularly imperialist countries, the manner by which the reclusive regime of King Jong Il has been conducting the defense of its homeland and revolution borders on a subjective revolutionary hysteria which the rulers of the DPRK are exploiting to the prejudice of the welfare of its people.

There are many other ways to confront modern imperialism which are no less revolutionary, such as the strides achieved by the Venezuelan and Cuban governments in their experiment with socialism without adversely affecting the lives of their people. As such, it is clearly the responsibility of the international community to diplomatically convince the DPRK to gradually embrace the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and cease using military blackmail as a ruse to secure concessions from world powers. An outright denuclearization policy as suggested by the United States and Japan might be totally unrealistic at present, and might even provoke the DPRK further. The path to a lasting peace in the Korean peninsula is an arduous one which can only be confronted if the world itself is prepared to build

confidence with the DPRK that aggression against the communist country is none of the options considered to resolve the long-standing diplomatic dispute on nuclear weapons.

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