

LESSONS OF SOUTH KOREA'S CONFLICT PREVENTION EFFORTS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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Abstract:

North Korea has returned to the six-party talks and agreed to give up the nuclear option at the Beijing conference, thanks to Seoul's strenuous conflict prevention efforts. However, it is too early to celebrate Korea's achievement since no one is sure whether Pyongyang will carry out what has been promised. Unfortunately, Pyongyang and Washington interpreted differently what was actually agreed upon at Beijing and it will take time and efforts to bridge the gap among the concerned parties on how to implement the key points they signed.

The Korean case clearly shows that quick-fix of building confidence has certain limitations. Rhetoric and nationalistic emotion prevails over strategic thinking and people are confused as confidence building process has been deeply politicized. Recently, progressive group members and conservatives clashed in *Inchon* when some members of the radical group attempted to destroy the statue of General Douglas McArthur, the symbolic war hero, who successfully launched an amphibious landing in *Inchon* during the Korean War. Those radicals believe that General McArthur is the villain who delayed the unification process by intervening into the Korean War and changed the direction of the war against the interest of Koreans. Of course, most Korean people do not agree with this kind of revisionist view of history. This incident signifies how serious the level of confusion and deep mistrust within the Korean society has grown during the rapid process of confidence-building.

North Korea Central News Agency has been calling for withdrawing of American forces in Korea and this, together with Seoul's successful engagement policy outcome, encourage those radical element of the society to step up their activities to oppose openly the idea of American presence and do not recognize the need for maintaining American forces as a stabilizer for guaranteeing safety of the region. As a

result, the alliance system has been damaged and the American intention has been easily manipulated as obstructing the inter-Korean cooperation and unification.

Ironically, Pyongyang has informed the UN to shut down the WFP office in Pyongyang and many other international agencies in the capital and demanded to withdraw the monitoring staff by the end of 2005. It is not clear why Pyongyang suddenly asked to do so. Perhaps it is related with the fact that Seoul has provided enough food aid (about 500,000 ton per year) and promised to deliver further, if necessary. Pyongyang is now expecting to have an increased production of rice and other crop thanks to 400,000 tons of fertilizers provided from Seoul. Perhaps, it is much convenient for Pyongyang leaders to accept Seoul's aid since Seoul does not strongly enforce intrusive monitoring system unlike other UN agencies. Seoul's dilemma is that excessive increasing confidence-building efforts result in the end of multilateral efforts to assist North Korea.

My major point in this article is that Seoul has to demand Pyongyang an increasing transparency and a more intrusive monitoring system. Seoul should find a way to help the UN to revitalize its mission in North Korea and therefore increase the chance of opening to the outside world through the UN agencies and other global agencies. Pyongyang believes that the UN has always been under the influence of the United States and made resolutions during the Korean War in which it wrongly depicted them as aggressor. Therefore, it is Pyongyang's position that UN Command must be abolished and armistice treaty should be replaced by a peace treaty. But this will not be done without changing the commanding structure of the current United States Forces in Korea. Not many people fully understand the potential danger of replacing the armistice treaty with a new one, although searching for a peaceful settlement seems necessary at this juncture. Seoul has to do its utmost to persuade Pyongyang and its own people that a healthy U.S.-Korea alliance system is a linchpin for the prosperity and stability of the region.