

TOWARD A DURABLE PEACE IN NORTHEAST ASIA

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The most pressing challenge facing the people of Northeast Asia in the 21st Century is the forging of a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula. But today, prospects for peace in the region remain dim. North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, and the United States' reluctance to engage Pyongyang in diplomatic negotiations, have created an impasse that could quickly explode into a second Korean War. The Six Party Talks holds out the hope that a "peaceful diplomatic solution" can be forged in the near future. But the process of diplomatic dialogue and resolution of the nuclear issue alone cannot dissipate the threat of war. Even if a negotiated settlement is achieved, as now seems increasingly possible but still far from certain, implementation of any accord between the United States and North Korea will prove extremely challenging. The fundamental problem is neither the participants in the process, be it two, four or six nations. Nor is it in the terms of any agreement. Inevitably, successful implementation of any accord will require mutual trust between the Washington and Pyongyang. Building that trust began in 1994 with the first US-North Korea nuclear negotiation and the forging of the Agreed Framework of 1994. But that agreement, and the subsequent trust it fos-

tered, has now been rejected by both parties. If any accord is to be successfully implemented and a durable peace built in Northeast Asia, it will require nothing less than a radical transformation of the region's balance of power and network of international relations. To many, this may seem a distant and rather idealistic wish. Looking back over the past half century, however, nurtures perspective and fosters hope that such a transformation is indeed a realistic goal. After all, half a century ago, the emergence of stability, prosperity and democracy in the region then seemed wishful thinking.

Introduction

Forging a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia is the most pressing challenge facing the people of Northeast Asia in the 21st Century. The continuing impasse between Washington and Pyongyang over North Korea's nuclear ambitions does not auger well for the future. Despite the intense diplomacy of China, South Korea, Japan and Russia, progress toward a negotiated resolution has been extremely slow and uncertain. Hopes of a peaceful solution soared when these nations convened the so-called Six Party Talks in Beijing at the end of August 2003. While little substantive progress was achieved, at least tensions subsided as the two primary antagonists, the United States and North Korea, shifted their focus from matching each others efforts to escalate tensions to restraining their rhetoric and searching for common ground.

Some hesitant progress toward compromise has been achieved because of the Six Party Talks process. In October, President Bush shifted from refusing to give North Korea any concessions to expressing the willingness to consider giving North Korea its long sought security

assurances Pyongyang responded by giving up its insistence on “legally binding” US assurances and promised to accept “multilateral” assurances instead. Both sides appear to be destined to compromise regarding the timing for the exchange of their respective concessions. Pyongyang wants the United States to agree to a “simultaneous” exchange before it will agree to phase out its nuclear program. Washington insists upon a “step by step” process that begins with North Korea renouncing publicly its plans for a nuclear arsenal. The phrase “coordinated” steps offers a way out of this impasse.

Other, more formidable impediments remain. Probably the most problematic of these will prove to be the issue of “verification.” Washington was extensive, and yet to be fully defined regime of rigorous inspections to confirm whether North Korea has in fact “irrevocably” dismantled all of its nuclear weapons related programs. Pyongyang can be expected to quarrel over the extent and intrusiveness of “verification process,” just as it did a decade ago during the first US-North Korea nuclear negotiations.

The Six Party Talks process itself is an impediment to progress toward a settlement. Bringing together six nations to resolve any issue is a complex and time-consuming endeavor. In the past, the so-called Four Party Talks of 1996-98, that involved China, the two Koreas and the United States, proved unproductive. Whereas during those talks, the primary obstacle to progress was the rivalry between Seoul and Pyongyang, that has subsequently abated and been replaced by mutual distrust between Washington and Pyongyang. Either or both sides’ adamancy and mutual hostility could eventually undermine the Six-Party Talks process.

But even if we take the optimistic point of view and project that the Six Party Talks will yield an accord, still there is reason to be concerned about long-term prospects for peace in Northeast. No diplomatic accord can be successfully implemented without mutual trust between the participating parties. North Korea’s previous promises and subse-

quent breaking of its previous pledges regarding its nuclear ambitions has devastated its credibility in the eyes of the international community. Thus, even if we are optimistic that a “peaceful diplomatic solution” will be forged, few can say with confidence that North Korea can be expected to abide by the accord’s terms. In other words, prospects for an eventual confrontation with North Korea over its nuclear ambitions will continue to loom over Northeast Asia, particularly the Korean Peninsula.

Looking to the future, we need not be so pessimistic if we consider the awesome accomplishments of the people of Northeast Asia in recent decades. Our purpose here, in short, is to place the current, rather bleak situation regarding the Korean Peninsula and North Korea’s nuclear intentions into the broader perspective of the past. In so doing, we might find reason to be confident that prospects for forging a durable peace are not as dubious or idealistic as many might conclude given present circumstances.

After all, the people of Japan, South Korea, and China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan)—one quarter of humanity—have transformed the region during the past century with their intense effort. One century ago, the region was in political turmoil, economically backward and its people struggling to survive despotic rule, war, famine and disease. Today, these nations are among the most prosperous, productive, healthy and technically sophisticated in the world. Also, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan are maturing democracies. China’s economic development is pushing that nation toward more representative government. These impressive accomplishments strongly suggest that the people and governments of Northeast Asia have the potential to transform their region’s highly unstable Cold War-era balance of power into a durable peace.

Looking Back

The situation in Korea seemed hopeless when I first arrived in South Korea. I arrived at Kimpo Air Force Base on a frigid, dark Christmas Eve at the end of 1963; only ten years after the Korean War Armistice had been signed. I was a young American soldier ignorant about East Asian values. From behind the barbed wire fence that surrounded my US Army compound in Yongdongpo, Korea, I saw intense poverty. Wherever I looked, I saw dark factories, unpaved sidewalks and streets, and poorly feed and clothed people.

Politically, Korea was dominated by a despotic ruler, former army general and then President Park Chung-hee. He had won election because of corruption. I knew this very well. During the South Korean presidential election of 1963, I was a crypto-analyst at the super secret National Security Agency (NSA) at Ft. Meade, Maryland just north of Washington, D.C. My job was to help break the South Korean diplomatic codes that reported the election's results to the South Korean embassy in Washington. From this I learned how the results were changed to ensure Park's election. In short, South Korea's government was not only despotic, it was corrupt. Eventually, Park's rule would discard all respect for human rights.

In June 1964, I traveled widely in Japan from Tokyo by train to Kyoto and Osaka, then by boat to Shikoku and Hiroshima, and back to Tokyo. Japan was still recovering from the war and far from becoming the economic world power that it is today. Nevertheless, relative to South Korea, Japan's post-war reconstruction was proceeding at an impressive pace. But who could have guessed that Japan would soon become an economic superpower and South Korea would soon join the ranks of the world's most productive, technologically advanced and economically prosperous nations.

War's Legacy

After these initial impressions, I learned to look beyond the obvious. My American colleagues four decades ago claimed East Asia's poverty and despotism were a consequence of the East Asian people's ignorance of Western ways, laziness and reluctance to discard their "traditional" values in favor of "superior" American values. Gradually I learned that these views were completely inaccurate and reflected the sense of racial superiority many Americans then felt toward the people of East Asia at that time.

Once back in the United States, my efforts turned to the study of East Asian history, philosophy, language and culture soon taught me an entirely different explanation for the problems that plagued East Asia in 1963. I discovered that the people of East Asia, particularly Korea, had been the victims of repeated wars. Since 1894, war has repeatedly interrupted and reversed Northeast Asian nations' drive to escape poverty and despotism. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, fought over mastery of Korea, crumpled the two millennium-old Chinese Empire. It also confirmed the rise of Imperial Japan. In 1904-05, Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War shoved the Russian Empire toward eventual collapse. Again, Korea was the cause and stage for this war.

World War II in East Asia and the Pacific raged from 1931 to 1945. Millions died and economic development was severely impeded. This time, Korea was not the war's cause. But Korea's division at the end of World War II became the impetus for continuing instability in Northeast Asia. The Korean War of 1950-53 devastated the Korean Peninsula. Japan benefited from the war because the United States relied on it as a logistical base. But again economic development in Korea and China was severely disrupted.

The Cold War's rivalry between the capitalist United States and communist Soviet Union intensified instability in Northeast Asia.

Japan aligned itself with the United States against China and Russia. Korea's division oriented each half of the Korean Peninsula toward distant allies rather than close kinsmen. South Korea's political culture and economic practices became intertwined with those of Washington, D.C., while Pyongyang looked in the opposite direction, toward Beijing and Moscow.

A century of foreign power rivalry over Northeast Asia and super-power efforts to impose their wills and ideologies on Japan and a divided Korea retarded progress toward prosperity, reunification and a durable peace, especially on the Korean Peninsula. I concluded that traditional East Asian values were not the reasons for Northeast Asia's problems.

Beyond the Obvious

What I had observed in Korea and Japan forty years ago was obvious to the human eye, but it was also very misleading. What is reality today does not necessarily enable us to foresee the reality of tomorrow. Forty years ago, what I witnessed in Northeast Asia convinced me that Korea was a hopelessly impoverished land that could never escape poverty, nor could it ever achieve true democratic government. As for Japan, I failed to foresee the potential for it to become a world economic power and model for democracy in a non-Western society. Obviously I was wrong.

Invisible to me in 1963 and 1964 during my travels in South Korea and Japan were the values and aspirations that motivate the people of both nations. Despite their troubled historical legacy, Koreans and Japanese share a Confucian tradition. Parents educate their children to prepare themselves for a life of contributing to the common good of one's family and society. This preparation encompasses respect for the wisdom and experience of one's elders, for teachers and for the mem-

bers of one's family. Parents teach children the values of sincerity, loyalty and hard work.

Also, both Japanese and South Korean societies after 1945 came under intense influence from the European Christian tradition as Americans interpreted it. Americans accented democracy and capitalism, and demonstrated the benefits of these value systems to the people of South Korea and Japan. After 1960, tens of thousands of young East Asians flocked to the United States to study at universities. At the same time, thousands of Americans ventured to Japan and South Korea to teach, work, study and serve with the US Armed Forces. The mingling of Confucian and Christian values forged the system of values that guided post-war Japanese and South Korean societies toward democracy and prosperity.

I was unaware and insensitive to this gradual synthesis when I first arrived in East Asia. Only through my own subsequent study of Confucianism, East Asian history and international politics did I become increasingly aware of how the East Asian people were adapting Christian views to their traditional Confucian values. Today, the people of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Philippines merit the praise for East Asia's transformation from pervasive poverty, despotism and war into one of the world's most prosperous and stable regions. China reluctantly and belatedly joined in this transformation, but its progress toward prosperity is equally impressive. This in turn brightens prospects that China too will gradually transition from its current authoritarian toward a more representative government.

Despite this most laudable accomplishment, the Cold War persists on the Korean Peninsula. Increasingly, war threatens to destroy in the near future what the people of East Asia have achieved so diligently over the past half century. If East Asia's transformation is to be completed, and its prosperity and progress toward democracy are to be protected and perpetuated, a durable peace must be forged in the near future.

Work in Progress

Such a transformation has been underway since 1990. It began with the normalization of relations between Seoul and Moscow. Then came the quickened pace of North-South Korea dialogue in 1991 that culminated in the two Korea's Basic Agreements of 1992. The two Korea's simultaneously enrolled in the United Nations. Normalization of relations between Seoul and Beijing soon followed in 1992. But then the process abruptly halted. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and US satellite imagery provided convincing evidence that North Korea had not, as it had promised South Korea and the international community, given up its pursuit of a nuclear weapons arsenal.

Two years of intense diplomatic effort restored positive momentum to the Korean Peninsula's transformation. The US-North Korea Agreed Framework held out renewed hope of the region's peaceful transformation and Korea's reunification. That hope, however, once again was smashed in October 2002 when North Korea admitted to having established a second nuclear weapons program.

War's Haunting Shadow

War on the Korean Peninsula lingers as a future possibility. A second Korean War would have catastrophic consequences, not just for the Korean Peninsula, but the entire region and even around the world. The most devastating impact would be on the Korean peninsula, and the Korean people, both north and south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Panic would sweep across the region as tens of thousands of people died and were wounded. All economic activity in the region would halt abruptly, interrupting commerce around the world for an extended period of time.

A future Korean War would be even more deadly and devastating

than the first. During the first Korean War, the region was still impoverished and struggling to rebuild after World War II. Today, Northeast Asia is second only to the United States in terms of economic importance to the world economy. In the previous Korean War, South Korea's population was much more scattered than it is today. Now, the Seoul metropolitan area is home for upwards of one third of South Korea's nearly 50 million people. As for Japan, in 1950, it was beyond the battlefield. Today, however, Japan is within easy reach of North Korea's ballistic missiles and possibly also commando teams that might wreck havoc on Japan's communications and transportation systems.

The Clash of Priorities

Obviously, there is a pressing need to minimize the risk of war. The apparent cause of the current crisis in Northeast Asia is weapons of mass destruction—nuclear bombs, ballistic missiles and chemical/biological weapons. But behind this highly visible facade lurk much more fundamental causes—the perpetuation of the Cold War in East Asia, lingering mistrust between the primary antagonists, the United States and North Korea, and the continuing inability of the Korean people to achieve national reunification.

The US Bush Administration, with Japan's concurrence and South Korea's hesitant compliance, is striving to end the Cold War and reunify Korea by first disarming North Korea and pushing it toward economic collapse. The Bush Administration has discarded the previous Clinton Administration's preference for diplomatic and commercial engagement of North Korea, a strategy that was backed by armed deterrence. President Bush prefers a more assertive and unilateral strategy. It accents armed deterrence, allows for diplomacy, yet also holds open the option of military action to compel North Korea to give up its

weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. Otherwise, the Bush Administration appears intent upon forcing North Korea's eventual collapse through economic and diplomatic isolation, and possibly even military action.

China and Russia favor engagement to the Bush Administration's confrontational strategy. These nations are striving first to convert North Korea from its Cold War strategy of armed deterrence and coercive diplomacy to compliance with international norms of conduct. Beijing and Moscow, with quiet encouragement from Seoul, seek to induce both Pyongyang and Washington to favor and pursue a process of gradual, mutual discarding of their hostile stances toward one another.

Washington and Pyongyang, however, continue to mirror image one another's words and deeds. President Bush's condemnation of Kim Jong Il and boasting about the United States' military ability to defeat North Korea have given North Korea's generals ample evidence to convince their leader Kim Jong Il that Washington is pursuing a "hostile" policy toward it that is designed to "strangle" and destroy his regime. Kim Jong Il's similarly hostile response to President Bush has convinced him that North Korea is intent upon using its weapons of mass destruction to "blackmail" the United States and other nations into submitting to Pyongyang's demands.

Fortunately for all concerned parties, the other nations most concerned about Northeast Asia's peace and prosperity—Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia have intervened. Their formation of the Six-Party Talks forum holds out the promise that war can be avoided. If this diplomatic forum is to be successful, then the "Six Parties" must draw upon their priorities and values to formulate a comprehensive plan of action not just to rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons, but to end the Cold War in East Asia and to outline a path toward Korea's reunification.

Priority should go to erasing the need for the weapons of mass

destruction in Northeast Asia. But this can be accomplished only if the political and military context for the entire region has been dramatically altered. So long as North Korea is convinced that it faces a hostile and nuclear armed enemy, i.e. the United States, it cannot be trusted to relinquish its nuclear capability. At the same time, so long as the United States is convinced that North Korea cannot be trusted to fulfill its pledges not to build a nuclear arsenal, distrust will perpetuate tensions in the region.

Cart Before the Horse

The only way out of this cycle of distrust is for the United States to shift its basic approach to North Korea from the Bush Administration's preference for containment and confrontation and back to engagement. Engagement of communist nations dates from the Republican Nixon Administration and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The Nixon Administration moved to phase out containment, a policy first formulated by Democratic President Truman, and phase in engagement when it approached China in 1971. Within a few years, the US overture had defused tensions between the two nations and set the stage for the normalization of their relations.

The Republican Reagan and former Bush Administrations pursued engagement with the former Soviet Union and its satellite nations in East Europe and Central Asia. Again, within a few years, bilateral relations had improved greatly and the reduction of their nuclear arsenals initiated.

Similarly, South Korea initiated engagement with communist nations in the 1980s, with the full support and urging of the Reagan and Bush Administrations. The endeavor reaped bountiful rewards for South Korea. Engagement's consequence included convincing North Korea that it would be better off engaging South Korea. Subsequently,

the two Koreas have made impressive progress toward reconciliation and peaceful co-existence and economic cooperation. Both halves of the Korean nation now are engaged in economic cooperation and cultural and educational exchange even while maintaining their respective military forces. They eventually hope to reach a point of mutual confidence which will facilitate a phased reduction of their military arsenals.

In each of the above cases, the normalization of relations came before the resolution of each sides' outstanding bilateral issues. Seoul normalized relations with Russia and China despite their half century support of South Korea's arch rival Pyongyang and possession of weapons of mass destruction. Because of growing mutual trust, Seoul now is much less concerned about Moscow and Beijing as potential threats, although they continue their friendship with North Korea. In other words, Seoul, Beijing and Moscow have put the Cold War behind themselves.

Washington and Pyongyang must agree to do like wise. They must eventually agree to simultaneously phase out their reliance on the Cold War strategy of armed deterrence, both nuclear and conventional. But this will become possible only if United States initiates the process by recognizing North Korea as a sovereign nation and normalizes diplomatic and commercial relations with it. Doing so would open the way for each side to nurture mutual respect and trust through diplomatic dialogue, economic activity and educational exchange.

This would require that the incumbent US president resume his predecessors' strategy of engagement toward North Korea. As mentioned earlier, this would not mean a radical shift in traditional US policy since 1971. Rather it would be a return to previous Republican presidents' policy.

But the present Bush Administration has chosen to ignore the fact that his father actually initiated engagement with North Korea in 1991-92 when president. Normalization of US-DPRK relations in the

same pattern that Seoul pursued with Moscow and Beijing would require nothing less than a complete reversal of the incumbent Bush Administration's current strategy. The younger Bush insists that all outstanding bilateral issues be resolved before normalization becomes possible. This would require that North Korea unilaterally disarm itself of all weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, the Bush Administration insists that North Korea submit to a still to be defined process of verification.

Here we encounter the fundamental shortcoming of Bush's strategy—verification. North Korea might sign another agreement to halt and dismantle its nuclear weapons programs. Technologically, however, it is impossible to achieve 100 percent verification that North Korea is complying with its commitments. In short, mutual mistrust will persist, and it will inevitably erode the credibility of any agreement produced either by the Six Party Talks process or bilateral US-North Korea negotiations.

A New Marshal Plan for Northeast Asia

The best way to end North Korea's quest for a nuclear arsenal is to erase the conditions that have convinced both North Korea and the United States that they need to maintain such arsenals in Northeast Asia.

Eventually, the Six Parties would do well to formulate a new "Marshal Plan" for the Korean Peninsula. The United States developed and implemented a similar plan to rebuild post-World War II Europe. The Six Party plan would aim to rebuild post-Cold War North Korea with two purposes in mind. While inducing North Korea to re-orient its economy away from military and toward civilian industrial production, the economies of the two Koreas' also could be gradually integrated. Already South Korea and Russia are working

with North Korea to merge the two Koreas' railroad networks. North and South Korea are making hesitant progress toward re-opening land and air transportation links. China appears positively inclined toward such an approach. The United States and Japan support these efforts.

President Bush has berated Kim Jong Il for his people's poor quality of life, lack of sufficient food and medicine, and human rights. Pointing out these shortcomings does nothing to improve the situation for the people of North Korea. President Bush would do well to recall his often-repeated proclamations about being Christian. An essential feature of Christianity is emphasis on forgiving those who offend you, and helping those in need. President Bush could replace his rhetoric with deeds. This would mean providing diplomatic and financial support for a new "Marshal Plan" to promote the opening of North Korea to outside influence so that the people of North Korea could better realize the benefits of adapting foreign methods to domestic conditions.

Consistent with the need to replace the present status quo is the normalization of diplomatic and commercial relations between all of the so-called Six Parties. This will require that all the participants draw upon their traditional values to resolve their lingering reasons for mutual irritation. North and South Korea, Russia and China already have established precedents for the United States and Japan to emulate in this regard. South Korea, without preconditions, has normalized relations with its former enemies Russia and China. It did so without clinging to past grievances. Likewise, Seoul and Pyongyang are making gradual progress toward reconciliation. Only Japan and the United States remain reluctant to release themselves from past grievances with North Korea.

Resolving Bilateral Issues

For Japan, North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens remains the most outstanding grievance. North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's display of insincerity regarding resolution of this issue, more than the abductions themselves, probably is the greater cause for the Japanese public's intense outrage over this issue. Kim Jong Il would do well to recall Korea's traditional respect for those who establish their sincerity through actions. He cannot erase the past misdeeds, but his more recent apology should be matched with equally earnest actions such as allowing all the immediate family members for the abducted Japanese citizens to return to Japan. Kim Jong Il should repeat his apology to the people of Japan, and provide a fuller accounting of what happened to the abducted Japanese citizens who died in North Korea. At the same time, Japan's government and public must recognize that it is impossible to erase past misdeeds. Instead, it is better to work toward changes that will ensure such outrageous acts are not repeated.

Conclusion

Before a durable peace can prevail in Northeast Asia, North Korea must be transformed. But before this can happen, we must transform our intentions regarding it. Instead of striving to isolate and bring about its collapse, we should work together to quicken the pace of economic change in North Korea. Such change requires learning foreign techniques, which in turn require knowledge of foreign languages and working with foreigners. The quicker the pace of change in North Korea, the sooner and greater will be its transformation. Eventually, North Korea, like all the other nations of East Asia, will face the choice of either rejecting engagement with the international community, and thus risking the loss of all the benefits gained from engagement, or

remaining engaged and continuing to receive the benefits of its transformation. As Pyongyang has come to realize through humanitarian aid, it cannot survive should it become estranged from the international community.

In the past, America's engagement of East Asia combined with the diligent cooperation of the East Asian people helped transform the region into one of the most dynamic economically and technologically in the modern world. But process was voluntary on both sides. It also was gradual over a century of intense encounter and effort. Often misunderstandings disrupted the process, sometimes even reversing it. But persistence prevailed. Ultimately, America's Christians and East Asia's Confucians forged the mutual understanding and respect that enabled the two sides to achieve the synthesis of ideals and values that has transformed East Asia.

If the Cold War is to end in Northeast Asia, and Korea is to be reunited, then the Six Parties must work together to forge a new synthesis of values and priorities conducive to peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. Essential to the success of this undertaking are Confucian sincerity, Christian forgiveness, Yankee ingenuity, East Asian diligence, and hard work by everyone. If war is to be avoided, prosperity preserved and perpetuated, and East Asia's transformation completed, the time has come to restrain the rhetoric and to begin the real work of ending the Cold War in East Asia.

Obviously, North Korea is the last of the nations of Northeast Asia to be drawn into modernity, and the broader international community. Surely the combined resources of the region's other nations are sufficient to reorient North Korea's economy away from its concentration of armaments and convert it into a productive trading partner. Once prosperous, North Korea, like all other nations, will come to realize that prosperity requires peace. Such a new "Marshal Plan" would set a standard for the United States to emulate.

Toward this end, the United States would do well to review the

amazing accomplishments of the East Asian people over the past century. That success was not unilateral nor achieved solely by the United States. Surely such a review of the past would convince the government of the United States to place trust in its allies and friends in the region, particularly South Korea and China, to begin to work with them to forge a durable peace in Northeast Asia.