

An Emerging Perspective for Northeast Asian Peace Community and Japan-ROK Relations¹

Wada Haruki ²

The U.S.-DPRK War Crisis is Over

In 2016-2017, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was making a dash in implementing nuclear explosions and test-shooting intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and other ballistic missiles as if he aimed at the level of the equilibrium of nuclear forces with the U.S.A. On the other hand, U.S. President Donald Trump, together with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was making every effort to heighten sanctions and pressure upon North Korea, and began to threaten Chairman Kim publicly in September 2017, saying that he cannot but destroy North Korea totally if Kim would not obey his demand of “a complete verifiable irreversible denuclearization”.

In November 2017, the U.S.-North Korean war crisis became apparent to everyone. In his Seoul parliamentary address, President Trump unhesitatingly denounced North Korea as a “hell” and described North Korean people’s lives as “below slaves”. And he demanded CVID (complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement) as if it were unconditional surrender. After he left Northeast Asia, three U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carriers entered the Japanese Sea to show the attacking capabilities of the United States Armed Forces.

Nevertheless, on November 29, North Korea test-fired a new ICBM, the Hwasong 15, which was estimated to be capable of flying over 14,000 kilometers. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) authorities declared that they had carried out “a historical accomplishment of state nuclear forces and a strong rocket state”. Then it was clear for us that what we saw before us was the possibility of a new U.S.-DPRK war.

In December, concerned people worked to get out of this crisis. I guess that the first person who

1 This is a keynote speech at the Open Daegu for Diversity and Inclusion, a global forum organized by <http://www.creativedaegu.net/> and held at Novotel in Daegu, South Korea on November 30, 2018.

2 Professor Emeritus of the Institute of Social Science, Tokyo University, Japan. fwjg0575@nifty.com

dared to intervene was UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He sent his assistant Jeffrey Feltman to Pyongyang to bring the resolution of the UN General Assembly “Olympic Truce” (72/6), adopted on November 11. South Korean President Moon Jae In seemed to make every effort to approach Kim Jong Un by various channels and persuade him in the name of the Pyeongchang Olympic Games.

Here Kim Jong Un, who looked into the awful image of nuclear war, was persuaded to stop, and he returned to his father’s position of nuclear diplomacy. Kim Jong Il once said to Prime Minister Jun’ichiro Koizumi on the occasion of their second summit (May 24, 2004) the following: “We came to have nuclear weapons for the sake of the right of existence. If our existence is secured, nuclear weapons will no longer be necessary...Complete abandonment of nuclear weapons can only be demanded from an enemy state that has capitulated. We have not capitulated. Americans want to disarm us unconditionally, as in Iraq. We will not obey such a demand... We wish to sing a duet with the Americans through the Six-Party Talks. We wish to sing songs with Americans until our voices become hoarse. We ask you, the governments of surrounding countries, to provide orchestral accompaniment. A good accompaniment makes a duet so much the better.”

Kim Jong Un made his new thinking public through his New Year’s address, expressing North Korean willingness to join the Pyeongchang Olympic Games. And President Trump, who also looked into the awful face of nuclear war, immediately accepted Kim Jong Un’s proposal of a U.S.-DPRK Summit when the special envoy of President Moon Jae In conveyed this proposal to him on March 8, 2018.

The Historical U.S.-DPRK Summit at Singapore

On June 12, 2018, President Donald J. Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un held the first summit in Singapore. They conducted a comprehensive and sincere exchange of opinions on issues related to the establishment of new U.S.-DPRK relations and the building of a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. President Trump showed that he was committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK, and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. After the summit, they issued a joint statement in which their determination was proclaimed as follows: “First, the United States and the DPRK commit to establishing new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity. Second, the United States and the DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.”

Thus, this summit stopped the fear of war between the United States and the DPRK, and opened

a new page of dialogue and negotiation in Northeast Asia. Now all nations and peoples of Northeast Asia should take responsibility of supporting the U.S.-DPRK negotiations to a successful end. It is natural that President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un bear the heaviest responsibilities. They should formulate a program of peace and denuclearization, never ceasing to shake hands.

A New Program is Needed

They should go over the famous agreement of Six-Party Talks in September 2005. That agreement was the document which was established on the eve of North Korean nuclear armament. Now North Korea already possesses nuclear weapons. Therefore, a new high-level agreement toward North Korean denuclearization is necessary. Of course, one clause of the agreement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks should be kept and carefully respected, and that is Clause 5: “The Six Parties agreed to take coordinated steps to implement the ... consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of ‘commitment for commitment, action for action’ ”.

North Korea should move toward denuclearization. North Korea has already stopped nuclear testing and closed sites for that purpose, that is, the Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site. It has also stopped launching ICBM tests and closed that site. Furthermore, it is going to close and destroy the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center.

On the other hand, the U.S.A. should move to give North Korea security guarantees. First, cancellation of one or two military exercises with the Republic of Korea (ROK) was realized. Next, a joint declaration of peace on the Korean Peninsula is needed. But the Trump administration has not decided to begin this process. Third, it is necessary to gradually relax sanctions, which the UN Security Council decided to levy against North Korea. Here the attitude of the U.S. government is most obstinate. Fourth, much more normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations should be done. If it is difficult for the U.S. government to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea possessing nuclear weapons, it is advisable to open liaison offices of both governments in Washington and Pyongyang.

In order to implement complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, it is necessary to close the U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea. Further, the problem of the U.S. armed forces in South Korea may be discussed. In relation with this, the problem of denuclearization of the Japanese Sea, the Japanese Archipelago, and Okinawa should be discussed. Also, the problem of the U.S. armed forces in Japan may be put on the table.

Japanese Absence is Fatal

The South Korean government is making great efforts to promote U.S.-DPRK negotiation. The

Chinese government is also supporting North Korea very much. And it is known that Russian President Vladimir Putin is giving moral support to Chairman Kim Jong Un. But I must admit that this new situation is going on without Japanese participation. Prime Minister Abe is only asking Presidents Moon Jae In and Donald Trump to convey his wishes of negotiation about the abduction problem to Chairman Kim Jong Un. On the other hand, Prime Minister Abe is stating that he is ready to solve the abduction problem and the nuclear-ballistic missile problem, and through this process, establish normal diplomatic relations with the DPRK. However, from the North Korean side, no positive response is available hitherto. Japanese absence creates a serious obstacle in promoting a good dialogue atmosphere around the Korean Peninsula.

But it is Prime Minister Abe's three principles of policy toward the abduction that hinder the Japanese government from actively joining the present new movement. These principles were proclaimed in 2006 when Mr. Abe became Prime Minister for the first time. Abe's first principle is that the abduction problem is the most important problem in Japan. It is understandable that the abduction problem is an important problem to the Japanese, but to say that it is the most important sounds like political demagoguery. Abe's second principle is that there can be no normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea unless the abduction issue is resolved. This is denial of Prime Minister Koizumi's positive diplomacy toward North Korea. The third principle is that Japan will continue to strongly demand the return of all abductees assuming that they are all still alive. North Korea informed Japan that they abducted 13 people and that eight people were dead, while five were still alive. Therefore, the third principle is to say that North Korea is lying and that negotiation with a lying North Korea is impossible. Prime Minister Abe's three principles served to block negotiations with North Korea for a long time. Now it is clear that Japanese people should make efforts to get rid of these three principles.

If we could get rid of Prime Minister Abe's three principles, we might move forward to preliminarily set up a government liaison office in Pyongyang or move further at once to open diplomatic relations with the DPRK unconditionally and set up embassies in Pyongyang and Tokyo. We know a good example of such unconditional opening of diplomatic relations: That is, President Obama's case of establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2014. Once embassies are open in Pyongyang and Tokyo, Japan and the DPRK can negotiate the nuclear and ballistic missile problems, the sanction problem, the economic cooperation problem, and the abduction problem without any haste and apprehensions. Normalization of Japan-DPRK relations can give an irreversible security guarantee to North Korea and provide strong support to U.S.-DPRK negotiation.

Further, Japan can propose some security guarantee measures to North Korea if it takes the further step of denuclearization seriously. For example, complete denuclearization and total demilitarization of Okinawa, which is wholesale withdrawal of U.S. military forces from

Okinawa, can be recommended.

We Can Dream a New Northeast Asian House

Regional community plans have long been the subject of discussion. In July 1990, I proposed my idea first at the Seoul symposium hosted by the *Dong-A Ilbo* newspaper. I said: “A new alliance of the Soviet Union, China, South and North Korea, the United States and Japan in Northeast Asia can be called a house where peoples of the world live together...Rapprochement of South-North Korea on basis of democracy provides the core of that house.” In February 2003, new South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun announced that “Northeast Asia” must develop into a “community of peace and prosperity”. He said, “The Korean Peninsula is located at the heart of the region. Such a geopolitical characteristic demands that we play a pivotal role in the Age of Northeast Asia in the 21st century”.

Encouraged by President Roh’s proposal, I dared to publish the book *Common House of Northeast Asia: a New Regionalist Manifest* (Tokyo, 2003; Seoul, 2004). In this book, I examined my old friend Professor Hiromichi Umebayashi’s idea of a “Northeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone” and recommended it as a possible basic structure of the common house. Professor Umebayashi proposed this idea in 1996. According to him, Japan, as well as South and North Korea can avow that they would neither produce nor introduce nuclear weapons in their own countries, and the United States, Russia, and China can avow that they would not attack the above three countries with nuclear weapons.

Now we must revise this idea. The Japanese Archipelago and the Korean Peninsula are surrounded by three nuclear powers—the United States, China, and Russia. Here, North Korea came to possess nuclear weapons and a war crisis broke out between the DPRK and the U.S. Now the two countries promised to exchange security guarantees and undergo complete denuclearization. In order to realize this agreement, we must now denuclearize not only North Korea, but also the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago with Okinawa. Denuclearization is not possible without demilitarization and neutralization. That is to say, North and South Korea, and Japan should be completely denuclearized, demilitarized and neutralized. Then, the three nuclear Powers should unite with oaths of non-aggression and non-intervention toward the Peninsula and the Archipelago, and no-war with each other. This is the new image of our future Northeast Asia.

What We Need is Korean-Japanese Mutual Help

At present, ROK President Moon Jae In and his people are fighting actively for the progress of the U.S.-DPRK negotiations, implementation of the June 12 agreement, and a new peaceful Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. President Moon has already held the third South-North Korean Summit, concluded an agreement on military issues, and himself climbed up the top of

Mt. Paektu to stand by the Heavenly Pond. This was a bold step forward which even President Kim Dae Jun could not dare to take. All people of Northeast Asia, concerned for peace, are applauding and respecting President Moon.

However, this is not enough to make U.S.-DPRK negotiations move forward steadily. To encourage the U.S. government to take further steps, it is necessary for the South Korean government to invite the Japanese government to join this new peace process and to form a regional alliance of peace promotion with Japan.

Nevertheless, our present situation is far from such optimistic speculation. Cold winds between two nations have long been blowing after the so-called December 1915 agreement on comfort women. The South Korean people almost unanimously were unhappy with the attitude of the Japanese government at that time. It is no doubt that the Japanese government policy should be changed.

To change the Japanese government policy is the duty of the people of Japan. But we should admit that the people of Japan could change their thinking and attitude about their historical past, especially that of the colonial rule only owing to South Korean criticism and encouragement.

In Japan, citizen movements proposing a Diet resolution of remorse and apology for the colonial rule of Korea started in the beginning of 1980s, only after 10 years of Japan-ROK citizen cooperation for democracy. Prime Minister Murayama's statement of August 15, 1995, which first expressed remorse and apology for having inflicted great damage and pain through colonial rule, was issued owing to the influences of the Korean democratic revolution of 1987. Japanese people's growth is too slow. But we have been moving ahead toward a more sincere understanding of our historical past.

Therefore, I ask you, Korean friends, to be patient and never forget persuasion. The next year 2019 is the centennial anniversary of the great Samil Movement. It has been announced that South and North Koreans are to hold a joint meeting dedicated to the commemoration of that movement. The declaration of March First was a great act of persuasion by the Korean people. The passage which I read always with deep impression is as follows:

“Independence for Korea today shall not only enable Koreans to lead a normal, prosperous lives, as is their due; it will also guide Japan to leave its evil path and perform its great task of supporting the cause of the East, liberating China from a gnawing uneasiness and fear and helping the cause of world peace and happiness for mankind”. I sincerely implore you, Korean friends, to face the Japanese today with the same spirit.

Of course, we Japanese should never forget the deep wounds which the colonial rule inflicted on

our neighbors Koreans, and make efforts to cure and atone for the wounds. When Koreans see the monument of victims and comfort women, uncontrollable feelings of anger and anguish appear in their minds. We cannot share such feelings, but we should understand the Koreans' feelings. Presumably, the comfort women issue cannot be solved forever. We should never stop thinking about this issue and continue our efforts of atonement for a long time.

Koreans and Japanese should live together as neighbors and build peace together. Words of criticism, even abuse, are acceptable. But we are not allowed to stop hand-shaking even for a moment. Mutual help is our motto.