

International Forum: Dialogue between Governments and NGOs, August 8

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When hearing the news on the outcome of the Tory leadership election in the UK of late, I happened to be calling up images of the leaders of the Permanent Five (P5) of the UN, namely, Trump, Xi Jinping, Putin, Boris Johnson and E. Macron. With this lineup I could say it is like a miracle that our planet is not extinct yet. It is, of course, not only due to these leaders alone, but also because of the tens of thousands of existing nuclear weapons and of nuclear power plants. I have heard someone say that it is thanks to the blessing from God that the world has not yet fallen into a nuclear Armageddon. Yes, it is, indeed. The problem of climate change, which our friend Reiner Braun emphasized, must also be added to this list.

Yet, we are not facing the critical situation alone, as there are, on the other hand, also events and developments of hope. That young people of the so-called “millennium generation” are standing up in action here and there around the world is one, the “Candlelight Rally” in Korea is another. Marches of school students in the USA demanding tight gun control is another, and European students in action calling for adequate response to climate change is still another. Looking at students who are so much energized into action, I am impressed to learn that they can do as much as they are doing! Of them, young parliamentarians, such as Ro Khanna and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who I suppose did not really know about the problems of the Korean Peninsula, came to actively join in the resolution in a bid to officially put an end to the Korean War. This is really amazing! A part of this stream was the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and so is the present development of the Korean Peninsula, where I live.

Compared to the last year, when drastic changes continued to happen, now it is like moving ahead step by step on a steep path. The major reason for this is that the DPRK-US Summit in Hanoi ended without fruit. In my opinion, in the background of the failure of the Hanoi Summit Meeting there was a fundamental difference in approach to the denuclearization process: namely, North Korea wanted a step-by-step approach while the US sought a “big deal” to reach an agreement on everything. What turned out to be the biggest problem was the so-called Bolton paper handed to the North Koreans, the one in which John Bolton, the national security advisor to the US President, defined denuclearization. Western News media, such as Reuters, commented that North Korea might have taken it as a document calling for unconditional surrender.

I think there are two problems in this. One is certainly about the definition or the scope of denuclearization. The United States is pursuing the denuclearization of North Korea. But, taking the “Panmunjom Declaration” issued last year, the agreement in Singapore in 2018, or Pyongyang Declaration

in September last year for example, what the peace process of the Korean Peninsula is addressing now is denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and not of North Korea alone. Therefore, there is a difference in understanding of the concept of denuclearization. If it is properly grasped as denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, a change in some form or another in the US nuclear forces or its “nuclear umbrella” will be unavoidable. Whether the change means merely a minor retreat of the currently forward deployed US nuclear forces or South Korea’s break away with the “nuclear umbrella” is up to the outcome of negotiations. I think this is the right understanding.

One more thing which we have to think about is a vision of the future Korean Peninsula. A future vision of a peaceful Korean Peninsula, as I already mentioned above, is the meaning of what was agreed upon in the “Pyongyang Declaration” in September last year. Or in other words, “Let us make the Korean Peninsula a land of peace with no nuclear threat and no nuclear weapons” is the true meaning. That the peace of the Korean Peninsula means the absence of nuclear threat and nuclear weapons was agreed upon there. Therefore, in addition to the North Korea nuclear problem, we have to think about how to address the nuclear threat from the US, which Japan and the ROK have so far regarded as the “nuclear umbrella”.

No doubt, North Korea has not presented before the U.S. or ROK such a demand as withdrawal of or break away from the “nuclear umbrella” in the course of the negotiations up to now. Yet it has demanded the end to the hostile policy towards North Korea from the US, including a change in the offensive US nuclear forces, which we must not overlook. Just having a look at the Joint Statement signed in Singapore, you will note that it includes confidence-building, a new DPRK-USA relationship, a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and complete denuclearization of the Peninsula, which North Korea has repeatedly emphasized. We, therefore, have to understand that the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula cannot be achieved without working for new US-DPRK relations.

After the Hanoi Summit, too, there are changes, including a negative one. That North Korea is intensifying its blame on the South is one example, such as using vocabulary for which equivalent words in Japanese or in English cannot be found.

Another variable is the rise of China’s role in the situation on the Korean peninsula. As you know, prior to the meeting between the US, DPRK and ROK leaders at Panmunjom in June, Xi Jinping himself visited the DPRK to have summit talks. As such, there was a move that made the matter complicated. In addition, given the trade friction between the US and China, there is a concern that great power politics between the US and China may affect the peace process of the Korean Peninsula.

Yet, it seems to me that the key to the future denuclearization process of the Korean Peninsula lies in whether or not the US will change its present position.

For example, Stephen Biegun, the US special representative for North Korea, reportedly said on his way back to the US after that surprise meeting at Panmunjom that the US and North Korea would need to

consider a flexible approach. But this report was wrong. The US internet media “AXIOS” quoted him as saying that he hoped for “a complete freeze of the WMD program”, that he wanted “to negotiate on the definition and a road map on the end state of the freeze and denuclearization”, and that “the humanitarian support and human exchanges should be expanded”. He also said that they were ready to take further steps forward towards improving their bilateral relationship, such as opening liaison offices in their capital cities. But, at around the same time, the New York Times carried articles on June 30 and July 1 speculating that the Trump Administration might have changed the objective of the negotiations from denuclearization to nuclear freeze. In response to these reports, a State Department spokesman said that the objective remained the complete elimination of WMD in North Korea, and that the freeze would be no more than an initial step of the whole process.

The New York Times and other mainstream media took this up and speculated that in a bid to score good points for the coming Presidential election Trump might be trying to curb the target to somewhere near a freeze. However, I think that is pointless. The real problem is, I think, that Trump is still insisting on the WMD. Some of you may say that it is good to completely eliminate or freeze the weapons of mass destruction. But if the objective is switched to that, the negotiation will have to address also WMD possessed by the US forces in the ROK and in Japan. Actually this would render the negotiations enormously difficult. So, unless the direction of proceeding with arms control and disarmament is clearly defined as being within the framework of the nuclear weapons problem and the building of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, I believe, any real progress in the peace process on the Peninsula will be difficult.

As Reiner Braun pointed out, we are neither diplomats nor government officials, nor TV commentators. We, therefore, have to think about what tasks civil society should undertake to promote the peace process on the Korean Peninsula and generate a change internationally in the whole of East Asia. One of the ways to do so, I think, is to support a comprehensive approach, such as achieving the end to the Korean War, conclusion of a peace treaty, and improvement of US-DPRK relations and their normalization.

Another is to grasp the historic momentum of the fluctuation of the division-based order of the Korean Peninsula and promote our movement from the viewpoint of changing the cold-war, confrontational structure of East Asia. One such example is to create a multilateral framework in the whole North-East Asia for disarmament, confidence-building, rulemaking of peaceful settlement of conflicts and so forth. This kind of framework has to be a multilaterally shared system based on the notion of common security. Therefore the military alliance based on hostility against any specific country as a hypothetical enemy and military exercises against it need to be ended. In this sense, our effort will be linked with such campaigns as against the US forces in Japan and in Korea, against the deployment of THAAD and against the missile-defense system Aegis Ashore.

Lastly, the problem of Japan-Korea relations is a hot topic everywhere now. As we discussed in the workshop on East Asia this morning, I do not want to repeat the discussion here. Yet, what we should not

forget is the very nature of the problem in the bilateral relations. When we talk about it, saying things such as: “President Moon Je-in is doing just too much”, or, when criticizing the Abe government, we should not overlook the underlying nature of the problem

As both the San Francisco System that has supported the cold war regime in East Asia and its sub system, the 1965 regime, are now facing a turning point, we should think about what we should do against this background. Specifically, I want to take up one special issue, namely, solidarity with the Korean A-bomb survivors, because they are victims of Japan’s colonial rule as well as of the US atomic bombings, and above all, of the 1965 regime. Therefore, I want to develop a campaign in cooperation with you to take up solidarity with them as our common task.