

## PREFACE

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As a new millennium dawns over the Korean peninsula, millenary hopes and expectations are very much in evidence among students of Korean affairs. Half a century after the surprise attack that launched the Korean War, almost 5 decades into the continuing high-tension military standoff that has followed the 1953 Korean War ceasefire, there is suddenly a pervasive and growing anticipation that this tormented and divided nation may now be on the threshold of a new and momentous era: an era of genuine peace, in which the “Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula” is at last dismantled, and a reconciliation between the antagonist governments based in Pyongyang (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or DPRK) and Seoul (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) commences in earnest.

According to some influential voices in both Korea and the West, in fact, the advent of this remarkable new time for Korea is already at hand—heralded by, and prefigured in, the drama of recent events. In this exegesis, the year 2000 was Korea’s *anno mirabilis*. By this telling, the year was marked by occasion after occasion that would once have been judged impossible by observers of contemporary Korea. After all, the June 2000 Pyongyang summit—the courteous, first-ever meeting between the chiefs of the two Koreas—was extraordinary, and entirely unprecedented. North Korea’s subsequent proposal (first reported by Russia’s president) to shelve its program of ballistic rocket tests if other countries would launch the DPRK’s satellites was, for the DPRK, also unparalleled. The spectacle of North and South Korean soldiers working conjointly (on their respective sides of Korea’s “demilitarized zone”) to reestablish the long-severed rail link between Seoul and Pyongyang—as they were indeed doing later in the year—would have been unthinkable even months before.

And with the Norwegian Nobel Committee's award of the year 2000 Peace Prize to ROK President Kim Dae Jung for his work for "peace and reconciliation with North Korea in particular," respected and far-removed elements of the international community registered their own judgment that something tremendously important and promising was gathering on the Korean peninsula.

To one important contingent of students and statesmen, the notion that contemporary Korea should be heading toward an epoch of peace is entirely unsurprising. Quite the contrary; to them, a peace breakthrough on the Korean peninsula is the natural and perhaps even inevitable consequence of the security policies they have advocated. These are the proponents of what has variously been called the "sunshine" or "engagement" approach to relations with the DPRK—an approach that maintains that it is possible to alter the DPRK's menacing patterns of international behavior, and even the regime's inner character, through positive external inducements and rewards.

Since early 1998, when the Kim Dae Jung government was inaugurated, ROK policy toward the DPRK has incarnated this theory; by 1999, with the coalescence of what came to be known as the "Perry Process," the governments of both Japan and the United States became de facto subscribers to the same theory, and joined in the experiment. Engagement theorists, both in the academy and in government, hold that a fundamental change in North Korea's international behavior is in evidence today; that the change is attributable to the approach they champion; and that further salutary changes can be expected the longer and more vigorously their preferred policies are pursued.

What fuels these theorists is easily grasped—when hazard is close by, one should always hope for the best. A generation hence, historians may be better placed to judge the fruits of their theories—and the exertions these theories have occasioned—than are we today. From our present-day

vantage point, however, it may be well to emphasize that the engagement theorists' interpretation of current events in the Korean peninsula is by no means the only one that can be drawn from those events—nor even necessarily the most compelling among competing explanations.

For all the understandable excitement that the recent turn in inter-Korean atmospherics has engendered, this fact remains: that the North Korean government, up to this writing, has taken *no* concrete steps to lessen its conventional, nuclear, and ballistic capabilities to threaten compatriots in the South, or South Korea's allies abroad. And despite the high hopes invested in it by serious people in many countries, the fact remains that the engagement theory is at heart curiously, indeed strikingly, ahistorical. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to offer a single historical example of a situation in which a lasting peace framework has been constructed with a closed, repressive state in the manner that the engagement theory currently proposes to build with the DPRK.

There is, of course, a first time for everything. Millennial thinkers steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition have always professed that the day will come when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6); but that day, according to their same teachings, will be the final day of human history—when life on earth shall end, and reign of the eternal afterworld shall begin.

Modern-day Korea, to be sure, is hardly the first spot on the globe where messianic notions have been embraced and incorporated into foreign policy. Throughout the ages, statesmen and men of affairs have often been tempted by romantic and even utopian visions in their conduct of international relations. But in the international arena, the pursuit of such temptations has consequences. And unfortunately, the historical record suggests those pursuits have seldom contributed to the security and well-being of the populations in whose name they were undertaken.

Moreover, despite the acclaim (and self-congratulation) that the engagement theory has been accorded in some quarters, there are already signs that the North Korean policies informed by it have begun to sag under the weight of their own internal contradictions. The engagement approach has reached an impasse, for it is now Pyongyang's turn to take steps in the envisioned Korean peace process.

For engagement policy merely to maintain credibility—much less to advance—it will be incumbent upon the DPRK to make a major gesture, and soon—to recognize the right of the ROK to exist, for example; or to demobilize part of its enormous and offensively-poised conventional military force; or to offer verifiable assurances that it is eliminating its multifaceted program for the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Any of these confidence-building initiatives, however, would require of the DPRK a total departure from long-entrenched state practices—and a relinquishment of central regime priorities. Pyongyang has always maintained that its claim to authority over the entire Korean people is absolute and non-negotiable; further, it has repeatedly emphasized that it regards military power as its very key to survival.

Ordinarily, governments are not expected to bargain over their self-identified vital interests, much less trade them away. Yet this is precisely what the next phase of the engagement approach would seem to expect of the DPRK. Little wonder that the engagement process, despite seemingly spectacular early headway, now looks to be so very stalled.

Like the millennium itself, the millennial moment in Korean security policy appears to be passing. Certainly it should, at least for the sake of South Korea and her Western allies. Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington will all assuredly be better served by a less age-defying, and less other-worldly, approach to dealing with the North Korean threat.

To be sustainable and effective, a strategy for DPRK threat reduction must begin by striving to grasp the inner motivations, external objectives, and military capabilities of the North Korean regime—and must continue by unflinchingly facing the implications of those inquiries. It should carefully and deliberately move to lower Western vulnerability to North Korea's diverse instruments of menace, while simultaneously denying Pyongyang the means by which to further perfect its techniques for international military extortion. It should aim to anticipate the manners and means by which Pyongyang might find it advantageous to create tension or promote conflict—and prepare to press the regime in its own arenas of comparative disadvantage (such as economic performance and human rights).

No less important, a strategy for reducing the external threats posed by the North Korean regime must attend to the complex particulars of constructing a sturdy regional security architecture for *post-DPRK* Korea. In the final analysis, every one of the great powers of the Pacific—the United States, Japan, China, and Russia—could help the ROK in the great task of building peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula. By contrast, the DPRK—the real, existing DPRK that we know today—has absolutely nothing positive to contribute to such a project.

With the change of administrations in Washington, current U.S. policy toward North Korea will naturally undergo review and scrutiny. The essays in this volume offer a distinct alternative to the current engagement approach. These authors collectively suggest the outlines of a strategy for promoting peace and security in the Korean peninsula manifestly sounder than the ones contemplated or implemented by Washington in recent years.

Peace and freedom in Korea, as this volume underscores, can be treated as a practical strategic objective, one that policymakers need not rely on miracles to attain.