

Political Transition in the Republic of Korea, Sunshine 2.0, Demilitarization and the Peace Process

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The 1987 June Democratic Uprising was a nationwide grassroots movement in the Republic of Korea (ROK) directed against the military regime of president Chun Doo-hwan, a ROK army general who came to power in 1979 following a military coup and the assassination of President General Park Chung-hee.

Chun Doo-hwan (1979-1987) had announced the appointment of a new military dictator: Army General Roh Tae-woo as the next unelected president of the ROK.

This self-proclaimed decision in defiance of public sentiment was conducive to the June 1987 mass movement in support of constitutional reform with a view to instating the holding of direct presidential elections. While the June movement put an end to unelected military rule, what was achieved was a military-civilian transition whereby General Roh-Tae-woo, was instated through the conduct of presidential elections. (In 1996, Roh was sentenced to more than 22 years in prison on bribery, mutiny and sedition charges.)

While the June movement was a landmark, it did not modify the social hierarchy, the corrupt political and corporate networks, the authoritarian nature of the leading corporate giants (Chaebols), not to mention the shadow decision making processes within the military and intelligence apparatus, conducted in liaison with Washington.

Thirty years later, the irony of history is that another grassroots protest movement, The Candle Light Movement in part inspired by the 1987 June Uprising successfully sought the impeachment of president Park Guen-hye, daughter of General Park Chung-hee who ruled the ROK from 1963 to 1979. According to media reports, the mega protests gained impetus on November 12, 2016 with one million protesters, rising to 1,9 million on November 19, and culminating on December 3, with 2,3 million. "[The 2.3 million mega-protest](#) ... was a critical turning point that halted Park's last attempt to escape impeachmentUPP Rep. Lee Seok-ki.(right)

The government backlashed on grassroots organizations and the labor movement. In turn, under Mrs. Park's presidency, the neocolonial relationship exerted by the US was reinforced

with particular emphasis on expanded militarization.

Rep. Lee Seok-ki of the United Progressive Party (UPP) was accused without evidence of “plotting to overthrow the ROK government” of president Park Guen hye.

That government was indeed overthrown, by the people’s Candlelight movement, by a democratic process which was ratified by the constitutional court.



If convicted on charges of bribery, corruption, abuse of power, coercion and leaking government secrets (in a total of 18 cases), Park Guen-hye faces between 10 years to life in prison. Bear in mind, these accusations are but the tip of the iceberg, they do not include Ms. Park orders to arbitrarily arrest her political opponents and repeal fundamental civil rights.



In a bitter irony, it was the constitutional court under pressure from the Conservative Party, which ratified president Park’s baseless accusations against Rep. Lee Seok-ki, which led to his imprisonment. That erroneous decision by the Constitutional Court, which was in part upheld by the Supreme Court, invoking the 1948 National Security Act must be challenged and annulled.

Park Geun-hye at the Seoul central district court in South Korea. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Reunification and The Sunshine Policy

The Sunshine policy initially established under the government of Kim Dae-jung with a view to seeking North-South cooperation had already been abolished by Park Guen hye's predecessor president Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013). In turn, this period was marked by a heightened atmosphere of confrontation between North and South, marked by successive war games.

The administrations of both presidents Lee and Park were largely instrumental in repealing the Sunshine Policy which had been actively pursued during the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003-2008), with increased public sentiment in favor of reunification of North and South Korea.

Sunshine 2.0. The Demilitarization of the Korean Peninsula

The legacy of history is fundamental: From the outset in 1945 as well as in the wake of the Korean war (1950-53), US interference and military presence in the ROK has been the main obstacle to the pursuit of democracy and national sovereignty.

Washington has consistently played a role in ROK politics, with a view to ensuring its hegemonic objectives in East Asia. The impeached president Mrs. Park served as an instrument of the US administration.

Will the popular movement against the impeached president prevail?

It was conducive to the conduct of new presidential elections leading to the election of Moon Jae-in as president of the ROK.

Supported by the Candle Light movement, Moon Jae-in's presidency potentially constitutes a watershed, a political as well as geopolitical landmark, an avenue towards national sovereignty in defiance of US interference, a potential break with a foregone era of authoritarian rule.

President Moon Jae-in had worked closely with president Roh Moo-hyun as his chef de cabinet. He has confirmed his unbending commitment in favor of dialogue and cooperation with Pyongyang, under what is being dubbed Sunshine 2.0 Policy, while also maintaining the ROK's relationship with the US.



While President Moon Jae-in (left) is firmly opposed to the DPRK's nuclear program, he has nonetheless taken a firm stance against the deployment of the US-supplied Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence Missile Defence System (THAAD).

In recent developments, the ROK Defense Ministry acting behind his back took the initiative

(May 30) of bringing in four more launchers for the THAAD missile system. “President Moon said that it’s ‘very shocking’ after receiving a report” on the incident from his national security director” (Morningstar, May 30, 2017)

President Moon’s commitment to cooperation with North Korea coupled with demilitarization, will require redefining the ROK-US relationship in military affairs. This is the crucial issue.

The World is at a dangerous crossroads: How will the policies of President’s Moon’s administration affect the broader East Asia geopolitical context marked by US threats of military action (including the use of nuclear weapons) not only against North Korea but also against China and Russia?

In the present context, the US has de facto control over ROK foreign policy as well as North South Korea relations. Under the OPCOM agreement, the Pentagon controls the command structure of the ROK armed forces.

Ultimately this is what has to be addressed with a view to establishing a lasting peace on the Korean peninsula and the broader East Asian region.

The Repeal of OPCON and the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC)

In 2014, the government of President Park Geun-hye postponed the repeal of the OPCON (Operations Command) agreement “until the mid-2020s”. What this signified is that “in the event of conflict” all ROK forces are under the command of a US General appointed by the Pentagon, rather than under that of the ROK President and Commander in Chief.

It goes without saying that national sovereignty cannot reasonably be achieved without the annulment of the OPCON agreement as well as the ROK - US Combined Forces Command (CFC) structure.



As we recall, in 1978 a binational Republic of Korea – United States Combined Forces Command (CFC), was created under the presidency of General Park (military dictator and father of impeached president Park Guen-hye). In substance, this was a change in labels in relation to the so-called UN Command.

“Ever since the Korean War, the allies have agreed that the American four-star would be in “Operational Control” (OPCON) of both ROK and US military forces in wartime Before 1978, this was accomplished through the United Nations Command. Since then it has been the CFC [US Combined Forces Command (CFC) structure]. ([Brookings Institute](#))

Moreover, the Command of the US General under the renegotiated OPCON (2014) remains fully operational inasmuch as the 1953 Armistice (which legally constitutes a temporary ceasefire) is not replaced by a peace treaty.

The 1953 Armistice Agreement

What underlies the 1953 Armistice Agreement is that one of the warring parties, namely the US has consistently threatened to wage war on the DPRK for the last 64 years.

The US has on countless occasions violated the Armistice Agreement. It has remained on a war footing. Casually ignored by the Western media and the international community, the US has actively deployed nuclear weapons targeted at North Korea for more than half a century in violation of article 13b) of the Armistice agreement. More recently it has deployed the so-called THAAD missiles largely directed against China and Russia.

The US is still at war with North Korea. The armistice agreement signed in July 1953 –which legally constitutes a “temporary ceasefire” between the warring parties (US, North Korea and China’s Volunteer Army)– must be rescinded through the signing of a long-lasting peace

agreement.

The US has not only violated the armistice agreement, it has consistently refused to enter into peace negotiations with Pyongyang, with a view to maintaining its military presence in South Korea as well as shunting a process of normalization and cooperation between the ROK and the DPRK.

Towards a Bilateral North-South Peace Agreement

If one of the signatories of the Armistice refuses to sign a Peace Agreement, what should be contemplated is the formulation of a comprehensive Bilateral North-South Peace Agreement, which would de facto lead to rescinding the 1953 armistice.

What should be sought is that the “state of war” between the US and the DPRK (which prevails under the armistice agreement) be in a sense “side-tracked” and annulled by the signing of a comprehensive bilateral North-South peace agreement, coupled with cooperation and interchange.

This proposed far-reaching agreement between Seoul and Pyongyang would assert peace on the Korean peninsula –failing the signing of a peace agreement between the signatories of the 1953 Armistice agreement. The legal formulation of this bilateral entente is crucial. The bilateral arrangement would in effect bypass Washington’s refusal. It would establish the basis of peace on the Korean peninsula, without foreign intervention, namely without Washington dictating its conditions. It would require the concurrent withdrawal of US troops from the ROK and the repeal of the OPCON agreement.

Bear in mind, the US was involved in the de facto abrogation of paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice agreement, which forecloses the parties from entering new weapons into Korea. In 1956, Washington brought in and installed nuclear weapons facilities into South Korea. In so doing, the U.S. not only abrogated paragraph 13(d), it abrogated the entire Armistice agreement through the deployment of US troops and weapons systems in the ROK.

Moreover, it should be noted that the militarization of the ROK under the OPCOM agreement, including the development of new military bases, is also largely intent upon using the Korean peninsula as a military launchpad threatening both China and Russia. Under OPCOM, “in the case of war”, the entire force of the ROK would be mobilized under US command against China or Russia.

The THAAD missiles are deployed in South Korea, against China, Russia and North Korea. Washington states that THAAD is solely intended as a Missile Shield against North Korea.

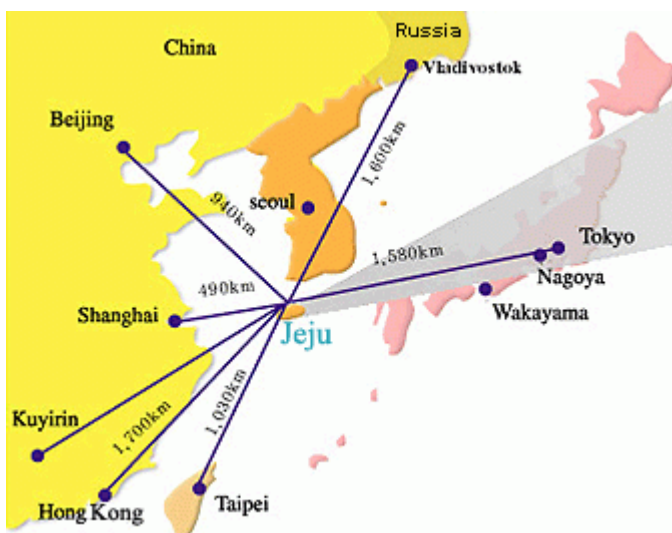
Similarly, the Jeju island military base is largely intended to threaten China.



THAAD System

The Jeju island military base is also directed against China.

Less than 500km from Shanghai



Moreover, Washington is intent upon creating political divisions in East Asia not only between the ROK and the DPRK but also between North Korea and China, with a view to ultimately isolating the DPRK.

In a bitter irony, US military facilities in the ROK (including Jeju Island) are being used to threaten China as part of a process of military encirclement. Needless to say, permanent peace on the Korean peninsula as well as in the broader East Asia region as defined under a bilateral North-South agreement would require the repeal of both the Armistice agreement as well as OPCOM, including the withdrawal of US troops from the ROK.

It is important that the bilateral peace talks between the ROK with DPRK under the helm of President Moon Jae-in be conducted without the participation or interference of outside parties. These discussions must address the withdrawal of all US occupation forces as well as the removal of economic sanctions directed against North Korea.

The exclusion of US military presence and the withdrawal of the 28,500 occupation forces should be a sine qua non requirement of a bilateral ROK-DPRK Peace Treaty.

The Republic of Korea's Relationship with the United States

Military rule was imposed by the United States starting in the immediate wake of World War II. At the Potsdam Conference (July–August 1945), the US and the Soviet Union agreed to dividing Korea, along the 38th parallel.

There was no “Liberation” of Korea following the entry of US forces. Quite the opposite. A US military government was established in South Korea on September 8, 1945, three weeks after the surrender of Japan on August 15th 1945. Moreover, Japanese officials in South Korea assisted the US Army Military Government (USAMG) (1945-48) led by General Hodge in ensuring this transition. Japanese colonial administrators in Seoul as well as their Korean police officials worked hand in glove with the new colonial masters.



While Japan was treated as a defeated Empire, South Korea was identified as a colonial territory to be administered under US military rule and US occupation forces. America's handpicked appointee Syngman Rhee [left] was flown into Seoul in October 1945, in General Douglas MacArthur's personal airplane

US Sponsored Military Dictatorship

The underlying model of military dictatorship applied in the ROK from 1945 to 1987 was not substantially different to what was imposed by Washington in Latin America and South East Asia.

At the same time, as of the 1980s, a major shift in US foreign policy occurred. US interventionism was geared towards the replacement of military regimes by compliant “democratic governments”, which would not in any way weaken or jeopardize America's interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

Most of the US sponsored military dictatorships in the course of the 1980s were replaced by US sponsored democracies, (e.g. Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Philippines, Indonesia). Meanwhile, US increasingly intervenes in national elections, promotes political leaders and instigates “regime change”.

What has developed in many countries is a facade of democracy, what might be described as a “democratic dictatorship”.

Sweeping macro-economic reforms are often imposed. Democratically elected leaders continue to be threatened if they do not conform, heads of state are often co-opted.

What the foregoing suggests is that the repeal of authoritarian rule in the ROK, with

government's run by the military replaced by an elected president, does not necessarily imply a shift in the structure of the State.

Financial warfare directed against the Republic of Korea

As we recall, in the ROK, the democratically elected president Kim Dae jung had been instructed by Washington in no uncertain terms (prior to the elections) to implement sweeping macro-economic reforms in response to the speculative onslaught against the Korean Won in 1997 at the height of the Asian crisis.

Succumbing to political pressure, president Kim Dae-jung, a former dissident, political prisoner and staunch opponent of the US backed military regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, had caved in to Wall Street and Washington prior to his formal inauguration as the country's democratically elected president.

In fact Washington had demanded through its embassy in Seoul that all three candidates in the presidential race commit themselves to adopting the IMF sponsored "bailout". Kim Dae-jung was committed to democracy and national sovereignty. He had the support of the Korean people. Yet what occurred was a process of political arm twisting both prior as well as in the wake of the 1997 presidential elections. Kim Dae jung remained firmly opposed to the IMF bailout agreement. He candidly warned public opinion and accused the outgoing government of organising a massive sell-out of the Korean economy:

"Foreign investors can freely buy our entire financial sector, including 26 banks, 27 securities firms, 12 insurance companies and 21 merchant banks, all of which are listed on the Korean Stock Exchange, for just 5.5 trillion won,' that is, \$3.7 billion." (quoted in Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order*, Global Research, Montreal, 2003)

The 1997 Asian crisis was engineered. It was the result of financial manipulation. The ROK had been the object of a deliberate process of economic destabilization instigated by powerful financial institutions. Yet in the wake of the election president Kim Dae-jung was obliged to conform to Washington's demands.

What the foregoing signifies is that a democratically elected government does not in itself ensure democracy and national sovereignty.

Reunification. The Road Ahead

America's neo-colonial practice applied both prior and in the post World War period has been geared towards weakening the nation state. Washington seeks through military and non-military means the partition and fracture of independent countries. (eg. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Central America, Iraq, Syria, Sudan). This foreign policy agenda focussing on fracture and partition also applies to Korea.

There is only one Korean Nation. Washington opposes reunification because a united Korean Nation would weaken US hegemony in East Asia.

Reunification would create a competing industrial and military power and nation state (with advanced technological and scientific capabilities) which would assert its sovereignty, establish trade relations with neighbouring countries (including Russia and China) without

the interference of Washington.

It is worth noting in this regard, that US foreign policy and military planners have already established their own scenario of “reunification” predicated on maintaining US occupation troops in Korea. Similarly, what is envisaged by Washington is a framework which would enable “foreign investors” to penetrate and pillage the North Korean economy.

Washington’s objective is to impose the terms of Korea’s reunification. The NeoCons “Project for a New American Century” (PNAC) published in 2000 had intimated that in a “post unification scenario”, the number of US troops (currently at 28,500) should be increased and that US military presence should be extended to North Korea.



In a reunified Korea, the military mandate of the US garrison would be to implement so-called “stability operations in North Korea”:

While Korea unification might call for the reduction in American presence on the peninsula and a transformation of U.S force posture in Korea, the changes would really reflect a change in their mission – and changing technological realities – not the termination of their mission. Moreover, in any realistic post-unification scenario, U.S. forces are likely to have some role in stability operations in North Korea. It is premature to speculate on the precise size and composition of a post-unification U.S. presence in Korea, but it is not too early to recognize that the presence of American forces in Korea serves a larger and longer-range strategic purpose. For the present, any reduction in capabilities of the current U.S. garrison on the peninsula would be unwise. If anything, there is a need to bolster them, especially with respect to their ability to defend against missile attacks and to limit the effects of North Korea’s massive artillery capability. In time, or with unification, the structure of these units will change and their manpower levels fluctuate, but U.S. presence in this corner of Asia should continue. 36 (PNAC, [Rebuilding America’s Defenses, Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century](#), p. 18, emphasis added)

Washington’s intentions are crystal clear.

Concluding Remarks

It should be understood that a US led war against North Korea would engulf the entire Korean nation.

The US sponsored state of war is directed against both North and South Korea. It is characterised by persistent military threats (including the use of nuclear weapons) against the DPRK.

It also threatens the ROK which has been under US military occupation since September 1945. Currently there are 28,500 US troops in South Korea. Yet under the US-ROK OPCOM (joint defense agreement) discussed earlier, all ROK forces are under US command.

Given the geography of the Korean peninsula, the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea would inevitably also engulf South Korea. This fact is known and understood by US military planners.

What has to be emphasized in relation to Sunshine 2.0 Policy is that the US and the ROK cannot be “Allies” inasmuch as the US threatens to wage war on North Korea.

The “real alliance” is that which unifies and reunites North and South Korea through dialogue against foreign intrusion and aggression.

The US is in a state of war against the entire Korean Nation. And what this requires is the holding of bilateral talks between the ROK and the DPRK with a view to signing an agreement which nullifies the Armistice and sets the term of a bilateral “Peace Treaty”. In turn this agreement would set the stage for the exclusion of US military presence and the withdrawal of the 28,500 US forces.

Moreover, pursuant to bilateral Peace negotiations, the ROK-US OPCOM agreement which places ROK forces under US command should be rescinded. All ROK troops would thereafter be brought under national ROK command.

Bilateral consultations should also be undertaken with a view to further developing economic, technological, cultural and educational cooperation between the ROK and the DPRK.

Without the US in the background pulling the strings under OPCOM, the threat of war would be replaced by dialogue. The first priority, therefore would be to rescind OPCOM.

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