

North Korea Challenges America's Unending War Strategy at the United Nations

DPRK Human Rights Briefing at UN

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Global Research, October 17, 2014

[Netizen Blog](#)

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [United Nations](#)

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The briefing held at the United Nations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Tuesday, October 7 was an opportunity to hear the DPRK's response to US and EU initiatives targeting the DPRK. The US and the EU have been using the UN to try to demonize the DPRK as a perpetrator of grave human rights violations and to rally the UN Security Council to refer the DPRK to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (1)

In the past few month, the DPRK Mission to the UN has held several press conferences alerting journalists to threats to international peace and security taking place on the Korean Peninsula. This briefing, however, was not only open to the press covering the UN, but to UN member nations and also to NGO's with access to UN Headquarters in NY.

At the briefing, the DPRK presented the "Report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies" (Report) that it had published on September 13 about human rights in the DPRK.

DPRK's Deputy Ambassador at the UN, Ri Tong Il, opened the briefing by introducing the Report. Also taking part in the presentation were Mr. Choe Myong Nam, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the DPRK and Mr. Kim Song, Counselor at the DPRK Mission.

Ambassador Ri explained that there has been an increasing tendency to carry on a human rights campaign against the DPRK. He referred in particular to a meeting organized by US Secretary of State John Kerry to discuss allegations of human rights abuse in the DPRK. The US sponsored meeting was held on September 23 at a hotel near the UN. The DPRK was not invited to the meeting, and it was denied the right to attend when it asked to participate.

Ambassador Ri said that the purpose of this briefing being held by the DPRK was to focus on correcting the misinformation being spread about human rights in the DPRK and to provide a more accurate understanding of the situation of human rights in countries with differing social and political systems. He pointed out that the UN with 193 member states is made up of nations with different political systems, different values and different ideologies.

Ambassador Ri listed the 5 chapters in the Report giving a brief introduction to each of the chapters. Then he welcomed questions or statements from those present. Diplomats from several missions at the UN, including the Cuban and Venezuelan Missions, responded, thanking the DPRK for the briefing. They referred to the criticism of some nations at the UN who sponsor country-specific human rights resolutions. Experience has demonstrated that

such resolutions are most often politically motivated, and not geared toward improving conditions for people. Instead the purpose is an illegitimate political objective, such as regime change. The Human Rights Council had adopted the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure, as an effort to counter such abuse and instead to treat all countries impartially. While many countries focus on the UPR procedure, a few nations continue to sponsor country-specific resolutions thus politically targeting other nations.

An example of such political motivation was provided by Choe Myong Nam in response to a question. He described how in 1993 after a breakdown in negotiations with the US led the DPRK to pull out of the IAEA, the US pressured the EU to bring a resolution against the DPRK for human rights violations.

A copy of the Report was distributed to those who attended the October 7 briefing.

Chapter I of the Report explores the general nature of human rights so that each nation can determine what the application will be in their situation. For the DPRK this entails making a critique of how the US and certain other nations are trying to impose their view of what the standards should be for other nations. "Nobody in the international community empowered them to establish the international 'human rights standards'," the Report notes. (p. 12) Instead, the Report maintains that human rights standards in a country are the prerogative of the people of that country. "In every country," the Report explains, "those who demand the human rights and campaign (for) them are the people...." (p. 12)

The Report refers to the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (COI) recently sponsored by the Human Rights Council. The content and framework of the Report provides background that is helpful toward grasping the underlying fallacy of the COI. The Report maintains that the 'COI' is an attempt "to bring down the DPRK by collecting prejudiced 'data' without any scientific accuracy and objectivity in the content...." (p. 12)

All of Korea has experienced the kind of human rights claims of an occupying power, notes the Report. This was during the period of the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945). "Each and every law manufactured by Japan in Korea in the past were...anti-human rights laws aimed at depriving Korean people of all political freedoms and rights, and forcing colonial slavery upon them." (p. 13) The Report explains that these anti-Korean laws created by the Japanese colonial rule had to be abolished and a new foundations established legally and politically in order to provide protection and empowerment for the Korean people, thus demonstrating that the DPRK is concerned with the question of human rights. (See p. 14-15)

The Report proposes that the protection of human rights in the DPRK requires putting the political development of the DPRK into its historical context. Throughout the Report historical background is provided to put current developments into such a perspective. The Report documents various forms of hostile actions by the US showing the effect such actions have had on the DPRK development after the end of WWII and the end of Japanese colonial rule over Korea. One such example that the Report provides is explaining that "sanctions were imposed on Korea after Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule."(p. 93) Even before the Korean War, the US imposed sanctions against the socialist countries including the DPRK as part of its Cold War politics. (p. 93)

The Report also documents recent hostile acts by the US against the DPRK. The DPRK puts

the anti-human rights campaign by the “US and its followers” in the context of the effort to “defame the image of the DPRK in the international arena and dismantle the socialist system under the pretext of ‘protection of human rights’.” (p. 98)

A question was raised during the briefing about what was the relationship between the fact the US is unwilling to negotiate a peace treaty with the DPRK to end the Korean War and the US led allegations of human rights abuse against the DPRK. This question is at the heart of the ability to understand the nature of the US campaign against the DPRK.

A recent journal article by Professor Christine Hong offers a helpful analysis toward understanding this relationship. Her article, “The Mirror of North Korean Human Rights,” published in *Critical Asian Studies*, captures the intimate connection between the US government’s unending war against the DPRK, and the US claims of gross human rights violations in the DPRK.(2)

The article explains that the US has been and is technically and in practice at war with the DPRK. There has been an unending set of economic, political and cultural sanctions imposed on the DPRK either by the US Congress or by the UN particularly the UNSC in the recent past. There have been massive military drills close to the DPRK by the US, Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan, and more recently including France, the UK, Canada and other US allies. Over 28,000 US troops are permanently stationed in the ROK.

In such a situation, the US claims of DPRK human rights violations provide a convenient and effective discourse to cloak the image of US war activities on the Korean Peninsula in a humanitarian sounding dress. Hong writes that the ‘axis of evil’ narrative introduced by the Bush administration against Iraq, Iran and the DPRK provided a means whereby “war politics proceeded under the mantle of rescue politics.” (Hong, p. 564)

Hong maintains that the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) narrative provides the means by which “would-be rescuers lay claim to a monopoly on the virtuous use of violence....”

Similarly, a fallacious WMD narrative which was provided to the US government by defectors and politicized intelligence was used to camouflage the US regime change invasion of Iraq. A similar false narrative using unverifiable claims of defectors and politicized intelligence is once again being dusted off for use against the DPRK.

Keeping in mind such recent examples as Iraq and Libya, Hong observes that the claims of noble goals provides a level of protection to the perpetrators of invasions using the mantle of R2P. Instead of being “viewed as human rights violations in themselves” when they engage in acts of war like aerial bombardment, military invasion, or an embargo on essential goods, they are provided with the appearance of acting as saviors.

Taken in such a context one can understand the reluctance of nations like the DPRK to take the claims of those promoting R2P and human rights as exhibiting any but aggressive intentions.

Hong goes on to point out that any legitimate US concerns over human rights violations regarding the people of the DPRK would have to begin by addressing the massive destruction against the civilian population and civilian infrastructure of the DPRK carried out by the US and its allies during the Korean War and since by its sanctions.

The Report the DPRK has produced refers not only to the anti-human rights activities against

the Korean people during the 35 years of Japanese occupation but also to the continuing saga of US hostile activities before and after the Korean War Armistice.

The US should welcome such reports and the airing of all views on every question at the UN.

Notes

(1) Such a strategy with Libya resulted in ICC cases against key Libyan officials weakening their fight against the NATO invasion that brought regime change and subsequently a state of serious instability to Libya.

Discussing the Libyan example of regime change, Joseph S. Nye, Jr explained that it is not the facts that matter in "the information age". Instead soft power, which includes how the narrative describing a situation is framed, is as important as, or even more important than military action, in gaining one's objectives. As he says in an online article, "In a global information age, success is not determined just by who has the biggest army, but also by who has the best story." See the article *On Libya, Soft Power, and the Protection of Civilians as Pretext*

http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2011/04/30/libya_and_protection_civilians_as_pretext/

(2) Christine Hong, "The Mirror of North Korean Human Rights," *Critical Asian Studies*, 45:4, 561-592.

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