

The Korean People: We Are Desperately Afraid

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Tears sprung to my eyes upon reading internationally acclaimed author Han Kang's opinion piece in the New York Times. Never in my life have I been moved to tears by any article. Was it Han Kang's talent as a writer? No. It was because she had so perfectly expressed the anguish of the Korean people.

The past few weeks have been agitating. The president of a foreign nation speaks flippantly of the possibility of war in my homeland, stating it does not matter to him if thousands die. This nation loves to use the word "peace." It is a "benevolent" nation that concerns itself with the freedom and human rights of other countries, and backs foreign government and rebel forces in the name of "world peace." This nation regularly mentions war on the Korean peninsula as a war fought "over there."

The reason the words of this nation's president strike such fear in our hearts is because this nation is one of the major nuclear powers of the world. It is the only nation that has ever used nuclear weapons on another country. Even the mention of "war" conjures the immediate image of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, devastated by this nation's nuclear bombings. "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" obliterated half the population in these cities without even leaving a trace. People still suffer three or four generations down the line due to hereditary radiation poisoning, which has taken 700,000 lives since the bombing.

Radiation and nuclear warfare are terrifying scenarios, but equally as frightening is the carpet-bombing by U.S. warplanes. The nation with the current highest military defense budget in the world dropped more bombs on the tiny area of the Korean peninsula during the Korean War than all the bombs dropped by every country in World War II. One thousand bombs per square kilometer were dropped on Pyongyang during the Korean War, the destruction leaving only two buildings standing in the entire city.

General Curtis LeMay, who commanded the Strategic Air Force during the Korean War, said in 1984 that U.S. forces "killed off 20 percent of the population." Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who was highly influential in the United States' decision to be involved in the Korean War, said the U.S. bombed "everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another." In the second half of this war, U.S. bombers flew low and destroyed hydroelectric and irrigation to purposely flood and destroy the farmlands and crops of Korean people.

If a war like this broke out again, it would be the most terrible experience of my life. The thought of people dying and killed by war is horrible to even imagine.

I was unsure what to do in response to President Trump casually threatening war in Korea on Twitter a few weeks ago. Constituents I voted into my local districts, National Assembly, even the South Korean President could not reach Trump. Koreans are overwhelmed by this helplessness.

On September 19th, President Trump gave a speech to the United Nations calling to “totally destroy” North Korea. It was shocking. It felt like he would unleash “fire and fury” on the Korean peninsula as soon as tomorrow. I couldn’t stand it any longer. I knew that if I went on with my life and didn’t act now, I would be filled with remorse if the scenario I couldn’t bear to imagine actually came to pass.

I decided not to go on the average “trip to America,” but a “struggle to America” to stop Trump. Young people in their twenties and thirties willingly gave up a week of classes, work, and part time jobs to travel to Washington, D.C. to oppose war on the Korean peninsula. Our plan was to meet President Trump at the White House and use our “No War” dance performance to connect face-to-face with the American people.

However, four hours before our departure, American authorities denied our entry to the United States, singling us out among thousands of travelers at Incheon International that day. Why? We received no explanation.

One news outlet released a headline describing us as a foreign militant force that was refused entry to the United States.

Who could we possibly be to be denied entry to the United States? What is so threatening about a group of 15 youths? Are we viewed in the same classification as influential politicians or terrorist organizations? All we had packed were pickets, clothes, and musical instruments in our plain luggage trunks.

This did not stop us. Returning from the airport, we sat a mat down at the American flag fluttering in front of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. We announced,

“If Trump is uncomfortable with our entry to the United States, then we are uncomfortable with Trump’s entry to Korea!”

The activities we had planned for America – our press conference, candlelight rallies, and dance – we performed in front of the U.S. Embassy instead. We were joined by other brave Koreans who oppose Trump’s visit to Korea in November.

We fear a re-kindling of the unended Korean War in the name of “peace.” We fear more massacres on the Korean peninsula in the name of “peace.” We fear that the nation that enforces intense sanctions on North Korea in the name of “peace,” and the President who has denied our entry to the United States, may ultimately bring war to our Land of the Morning Calm.

We want to prevent another war on the Korean peninsula. The American flag flutters in front of the U.S. Embassy as we write. We do not want carpet-bombs to drop above our heads, with the same flag painted on the planes.

Translated by Sae Hee “Keshy” Jeong

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