

Korea: Bush pushes for new war in Asia

by Lydia Cherry

The Bush administration has started an ominous drumbeat toward a new war in Asia, using the "Iraq scenario" to threaten action against North Korea. North Korea's nuclear research, which may or may not include research for weapons production, has been declared by President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker a grave threat to peace in the region.

The notion that Third World nations have no right to technologies that may or may not be used for weapons development has become the cutting edge of the Bush "new world order" policy known as technological apartheid. The unpredictable and irrational dictatorship in North Korea has become a target of convenience for Bush and Baker, as a pawn to achieve their policy objectives in Asia.

Baker, in a tour of Asia this month, demanded a regional coalition under U.S. domination to function as the enforcer of the new world order, eliminating any semblance of the right of sovereignty of nations. Communist China, in particular, the only remaining friend and sponsor of the isolated communist regime in Pyongyang, is being told to join in this policeman role or face losing its special relationship with Bush. Meanwhile, North Korea, like Iraq, is threatened with being made into a horrible example, so that no Third World nation dare develop a nuclear program.

Allies put under the gun

During the first leg of his three-nation tour to Japan, South Korea, and China, Baker on Nov. 12 discussed elements of his envisioned regional security forum to deal with the North Korean problem. In meetings with Japanese Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe, Baker proposed a multilateral negotiating group on Korea, modeled on the present disastrous Mideast talks, to be composed of Japan, China, the United States, and the former U.S.S.R. He demanded that Japan join with Washington to remove the "threat" of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Baker reportedly, compared North Korea to Iraq, calling the Korean peninsula "one of the world's most dangerous flashpoints."

The next day, arriving in Seoul for the convening of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference—a largely U.S.-controlled regional economic group—Baker reiterated that North Korea's nuclear program is the "greatest one threat to regional peace," and must be stopped, regardless of the costs. Baker's speech followed by a few hours a



Stuart Lewis
Republic of Korea
President Noh Tae Woo:
economic development
plans thwarted.

presentation to the Asia Society by George Bush, in which he sounded the same refrain, namely that the "North must abandon its menacing nuclear weapons program, which is the greatest threat to regional peace."

The pressure on the China question was emphasized by a commentary in the *Washington Post* by David Scheffer of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who wrote that Baker must drag China "kicking and screaming into the new world order." He threatened that if China does not behave, the "major powers" should intervene to "save lives . . . and to enforce international law." China's response to the North Korea discussions in Seoul is not yet clear. According to Japanese sources cited by Reuters, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told his Japanese counterpart Watanabe, "It is not good for many nations to pressure one country into a corner," referring to the U.S. demands against North Korea. However, another Reuters wire quotes a high-level U.S. administration source saying that China "appears willing to cooperate in a new effort to persuade Pyongyang to halt its nuclear weapons program."

Danger, or exaggeration?

Earlier, U.S. Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Command Adm. Charles R. Larson outlined the administration's geopolitical thrust for the region, in the November issue of *Asian Defence Journal*. "As we conduct our forces draw-down globally, I would expect to see smaller drawn-downs in the Pacific, because of our shifting national strategy . . . of focusing more on regional issues. If you would ask me to list my flashpoints—North Korea and the Korean peninsula; that is the one that draws a great deal of my time and interest."

Asked how North Korea's nuclear program will be stopped, Admiral Larson responded almost euphorically:

"This is going to be very interesting to me because I think this will be another test of a political and diplomatic coalition coming together, as we came together in the Gulf. The way of the future is collective security." He said that already the collective grouping of the United States, Japan, and South Korea "have come together trying to influence that behavior," but that the other possibility would be for the United Nations to intervene to influence North Korea.

North Korea signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, but the country has not yet agreed to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This summer, the government hinted that it would finally accept inspection, but in September backed away from this, saying the United States had to remove its nuclear weapons from South Korea first.

In late October and early November, the message that "North Korea is more dangerous than Iraq was prior to the Gulf war," has been played on several continents. In South Korea, a slate of high-level North Korean defectors has appeared during this same time-frame to give crucial data on North Korean "underground nuclear facilities," and to insist, in direct opposition to the earlier thinking of South Korean government officials, that "no reformers exist in North Korea," and no rapprochement is possible between North and South Korea. The *New York Times*, in an extensive front-page scare story Nov. 10, "Data Raise Fears of Nuclear Moves by North Koreans," finally acknowledged that "the recent flood of disclosures, especially those emanating from South Korea, raise the possibility that the North's capabilities are being deliberately exaggerated."

South Korean President Noh Tae Woo has worked tirelessly since 1988 "to transform the North-South Korean relationship . . . so as to go on to develop our common land, by combining our human, technological, and financial resources," as he explained his Northern Policy at the United Nations that same year. The South's economic and other overtures, however, seem to have been put on a backburner, and President Noh appeared to read from the U.S. script in an interview with *Newsweek* Nov. 11: "For North Korea to have nuclear weapons in its possession would be more destabilizing . . . than for the government of Iraq [to have them]. I believe the most urgent problem is the elimination of that threat."

The Seoul daily *Korea Times* wrote Oct. 23: "The North Korean authorities, of late, have gone so far as to threaten that if the South or the United States takes any military action against its nuclear sites, it will launch a massive retaliatory strike against vital targets in the South, action amounting to the start of an all-out war against Seoul." The North Korean press, meanwhile, writes of "large-scale military exercises" being conducted by South Korea and the U.S. which began Nov. 1. The North Koreans also allege that the U.S. has transferred a "special warfare unit" to South Korea from the closed-down Clark Air base in the Philippines.

South Asia regional cooperation group on verge of collapse

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

The collapse of the heads of state meeting of the seven south Asian nations scheduled for early this month has given rise to accusations and counter-accusations. Sri Lanka, which was supposed to be the host of the aborted summit, and Pakistan have gone on record blaming India for the cancellation, and have resorted to making noises suggesting that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)—consisting of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives—is in deep trouble as a result of India's actions.

At a time when two new economic groupings in Asia—the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) and the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC)—are about to be launched, the quibbling of impoverished South Asian countries makes a poor spectacle. Despite making voluminous promises of regional cooperation and development, SAARC, formed in 1985 to replace its two-year-old predecessor, has delivered little in six years. Acrimony between India and Sri Lanka and between India and Pakistan has come to be the rule, not the exception. The forum's directionless foundering has resulted in cancellation of two summits already—Sri Lanka being the host on both occasions.

No clear purpose

The SAARC charter, practically a rehash of the declaration of its predecessor, the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC), had assured its members of intra-regional collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical, and scientific areas. It also provided for cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest, and with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Other provisions were more thorny, such as the taboo on raising bilateral issues at the forum and the blanket promise of "non-use of force" and "peaceful settlement of all disputes" among the member nations.

On might well expect that in a forum which constitutes some of the poorest countries of Asia, economic cooperation