

Neo-Cons Ignore Korean War Lessons, Risk New One

by Kathy Wolfe

The Six-Power Talks on North Korea's nuclear program have been hanging fire for all of December, after extremist Vice President Dick Cheney intervened on Dec. 12 to reject a Chinese compromise plan for the talks, previously set for Dec. 17-18 among the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and the two Koreas.

"I have been charged by the President to make sure that none of the tyrannies in the world are negotiated with. We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it," Cheney arrogantly declared to a Dec. 12 White House meeting, officials said.

Cheney and his spokesman, State Department Undersecretary John Bolton, demand that North Korea unilaterally disarm before it receives a guarantee of its security. In light of events in Iraq, this "does not make sense," Pyongyang spokesmen say repeatedly; it amounts to "a unilateral demand to come out with our hands up."

There is little chance North Korea will surrender in that way, despite American demands and hopes that it will follow the lead of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, who agreed on Dec. 19 with Britain and the United States to disarm all his country's weapons programs. On Dec. 27, North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok-ju warned that negotiations will collapse if the United States seeks only to disarm the North "without a change in its hostile policy toward Pyongyang."

As for Cheney, who personally rejected further talks in December, he has not learned the lessons of the 1950-53 Korean War, when Harry Truman blundered into conflict, thanks to the very doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear war Cheney reintroduced as U.S. policy after Sept. 11, 2001. In 1950, by threatening the U.S.S.R. in Turkey, the Baltic, and elsewhere, Truman's insane doctrine caused a reaction where he least expected it, when North Korean troops poured into the South. Truman's threats, which he thought would cow the communist bloc, instead resulted in millions of deaths.

Might Makes Right

On Dec. 2, Bolton announced suddenly that the United States won't sign a simultaneous deal, to grant Pyongyang security from attack as it disarms—although that simultaneity was the original basis for the talks. He demanded that unilateral North Korean disarmament come first, and only "in that context"—i.e., afterward—might there be a security guarantee.

The capture of Saddam Hussein on Dec. 14, and press hype on Libya's disarmament, pushed President Bush into bragging that his "Bush Doctrine" of "might makes right" is working. Now other nations must kowtow, or else.

Bush, at a Dec. 15 press conference, personally insulted North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, an act considered a threat in Asia. Asked what Saddam's capture means for Kim, Bush said that while he prefers diplomacy, and had used it a lot in Iraq, he does have other options "to convince Kim Jong-il to get rid of his nuclear weapons program. . . . And I hope, of course, he listens."

After the Libya publicity stunt, Bush phoned Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to express his hope it will "have influence on North Korea," Kyodo News reports. Bush said he "hopes North Korean leader Kim Jong-il will have the same thoughts as Colonel Qaddafi."

Libya's move "has put the United States and its allies on a bit of a roll," Secretary of State Colin Powell told radio host Michael Reagan: "We hope the North Koreans are watching all of this, and realizing that others are getting smart, and it's time for them to get smart too." Libya had been forced to concede by "the right mix of diplomatic, economic, and military pressure," Powell said, and vowed to keep using force on North Korea. "Diplomacy, force, and diplomacy—they have to be married up."

Talks Still Possible

Korea talks may proceed in January, as the five Eurasian partners are moving heaven and earth to forestall a war. After an emergency Pyongyang summit between Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his North Korean counterpart Kang Sok-ju, North Korea announced on Dec. 27 that it would attend a new round of talks without any written agreements beforehand.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Asia chief Fu Ying and her South Korean and Japanese counterparts, Lee Soo Hyuck and Mitoji Yabunaka, respectively, huddled in Seoul on Dec. 29-30, seeking compromise, but admitted that no dates have been set for the talks.

The Cheney-directed American approach to the talks now looks like trying to become "a little bit pregnant." Either the United States will agree to the original premise, and grant North Korea a security guarantee precisely as it disarms its nuclear capabilities, whatever they may be, or the United States won't do so. "Pyongyang has said all along that it would end its nuclear program only if the United States ended its policy of hostility," as an angry Japanese diplomat put it.

"The problem is not in Pyongyang," says Donald Gregg, once the elder Bush's Ambassador to Seoul; "the problem is in Washington."

Unless Cheney and Co. are removed, and the American position changes, further talks will break down even if and when they do occur. And that leaves the region on the edge of another war by utopian war doctrines, and miscalculation.