

Diplomacy the only option

By Dr. Han S. Park

"Where there is an army, there will be weapons; where there is weaponry, new weapons will be developed; and when they are developed, they will be tested. What is all the fuss about?"

This comment was made to me by a high-ranking government official in North Korea when I visited Pyongyang following the missile tests on July 4 that caused such a worldwide uproar.

The North Koreans do not see anything unusual about testing missiles by a sovereign state, especially when it is not illegal or unconventional. They attribute the commotion to the American imperialist scheme to dominate the world. In their thinking, the Bush administration will never change its desire to eliminate the Kim Jong-il regime, just as it removed the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

They are fully expecting to be attacked and invaded by America and its allies, and they believe that no one but themselves can ensure their survival. Furthermore, they believe that the capability to mobilize sophisticated missiles with nuclear warheads is the best deterrent.

To North Koreans, giving up nuclear capability in a hostile international environment is tantamount to conceding the survival of the regime itself to external aggression. They continue to believe that the military is and should be the engine of the country. Its absolute power position has resulted from a perpetual security threat since the inception of the country. More recently, the loss of the traditional allies of the Soviet bloc has been coupled with the heightened threat from the Bush administration that continues to consider North Korea part of the "axis of evil."

North Korea is believed to have a 1-million-strong army and 2 million militia fighters, equipped with several nuclear bombs, hundreds of precision-guided missiles, and stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons.

I heard so often in North Korea that American military aggression is being deterred because Pyongyang possesses weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear bombs of which they are proud.

The military officials and commanders told me on numerous occasions that they have been preparing for another Korean war in which the victorious North will unify the nation. For this, removing the American presence in the South is imperative. They have been preparing for war with the United States for 50 years, and they are tired of waiting.

When I suggested that there is no country in the world that can match American military might, they reminded me that they have enough bomb shelters for the entire population to hide from direct attack, and they have sufficient offensive capability to cripple America

and demolish its allies in Asia. When I further observed that North Korea then might not find itself on the future world map, they did not hesitate to say that they are prepared to die such an honorable and noble death on the field of battle.

I was struck by their resolve to die a martyr's death, very similar to a suicide bomber. As I concluded my five-day journey, I experienced a chilling sense of what could happen in the Middle East if groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah possessed weapons of mass destruction.

When President Bush took office, North Korea did not have a single nuclear bomb and the missile technology was still in its infancy.

Now, however, it is already too late to think of any other options but a diplomatic solution. A military confrontation is certain to bring destruction not only to South Korea and Japan but also to the 85,000 American ground troops that are within striking distance of North Korean missiles.

On the other hand, if we only continue the present course that includes no policy but verbal condemnations, legal resolutions, economic sanctions and political isolation, we will soon witness a truly giant military might in North Korea. This would likely trigger a regional arms race, beginning with Japanese rearmament, followed by the escalation of the Chinese military, joined by Taiwan and South Korea. This may enormously satisfy the appetite of the military industrialists but is certain to contribute to an irreversible and long-term deterioration of world peace.

Hence a diplomatic solution is not only the preferred choice, but has become the only viable instrument for effectively dealing with the North Korean crisis.

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