

2021 Bikini Day Gensuikyo National Conference:
Workshop 2: For a Nuclear-Free and Peaceful Asia

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East Asian Anti-Nuclear Peace Movement and Korean Peninsula in the Age of Nuclear Weapons Prohibition

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22, 2021, ushering in the "era of nuclear weapons prohibition". In his article on the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry wrote, "The ban treaty rightly establishes abolition as the standard that all nations should be actively working to achieve, rather than an indeterminate future goal." It is a testament to the progress of our movement and a springboard for further progress.

On the other hand, the Corona pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the international order, leading to fears of the end of the liberal world order. The shaking of the liberal world order started long before the Corona pandemic, with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the global financial crisis in 2008, and the Trump phenomenon⁽¹⁾ being the historical moments of it.

It is fair to say that East Asia is a concentration of diverse phenomena brought about by international structural changes. In particular, the strategic competition between the U.S. and China has expanded from geopolitical battles to trade, economics, technology, and recently to issues of values. In East Asia, there are such flashpoints as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea. The conflicts between U.S. and China or China and U.S.-Japan alliance are developed with these flashpoints as background. The reappearance of Great Power Politics, represented by the U.S.-China competition, is intertwined with the postcolonial and post-Cold War challenges in the region, fueling instability and arms race in East Asia.

The Biden administration is expected to try to rebuild the liberal world order with democracy, rule of law, multilateral cooperation, free trade and market economy. But the future is uncertain. There is no vision of transformation "from military security to human security", "human-

environmental coexistence”, and a “just world order”, which the Corona pandemic reminded us. The new administration has declared or implemented a return to the nuclear deal with Iran, an extension of the New START (New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), and a review of Trump's nuclear weapons modernization program, including the development and deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons. But we remember that the Obama Administration, upholding the slogan to achieve a "world without nuclear weapons," actually promoted the modernization of nuclear weapons. Above all, the "nuclear cartel" of nuclear powers, a structural factor of nuclear proliferation, remains firm. Here, we can once again confirm the significance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Biden administration's call for "Democracy, multilateral cooperation and restoration of alliances" is working as an encirclement of China in the "Indo-Pacific" region, as embodied in such frameworks as “D10”⁽²⁾, “Quad” or “Quad+”. In fact, Kurt Campbell, the newly appointed Indo-Pacific Coordinator of the NSC at the White House, in a January 12, 2021 Foreign Affairs article, discussed "D10" and the "expansion of QUAD" as coalitions to curb China's rise.

As an extension of this, the demand for military and economic role-sharing among allies will inevitably intensify. Under the U.S. strategy, the "quasi-alliance" between South Korea and Japan may well be transformed into a "real alliance". In the end, it is easy to predict that the U.S. military intervention in the region will intensify and its confrontational structure with China will deteriorate further. China's military and external actions, seen as "provocations" by neighboring countries, will increase, exacerbating the instability and arms race in the region. Furthermore, it is clear that the strengthening of military alliances centered on nuclear weapons will hinder the resolution of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue and denuclearization, which can be described as a "deadlock caused by confrontation based on nuclear deterrence.”

Here, we can confirm the common challenges of civil society in Korea and Japan, which are bound by the alliance with the U.S. First of all, there is the importance of the struggle for peace and disarmament against the realignment and strengthening of the alliance and U.S. military bases, and the resulting deterioration of security policies and arms buildup in South Korea and Japan. It is also important to break away from the dependence on the military alliance for security, especially the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Breaking away from the U.S. nuclear umbrella has a great significance in the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Civil society in this region must also take the initiative in creating a framework for multilateral cooperation based on common security and human security. Human security is an issue that we have reaffirmed through the experience of the Corona pandemic. The politics of alliances and

bloc confrontation are still negatively affecting the Northeast Asian region. But if multilateral security cooperation frameworks such as a nuclear weapon-free zone can make progress in this region, combined with the historical achievements of ASEAN and Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, we can create a current for an alternative international order in the East Asian region.

While the peace process on the Korean Peninsula was in the stalemate, a new administration has come to power in the United States. And in January this year, the Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea was held in this context, following the peace phase of 2018, the breakdown of the U.S.-DPRK Summit in Hanoi and working-level meeting of 2019. The message sent out there by Kim Jong Un, President of the State Affairs Commission of North Korea, is complex.

While still emphasizing "self-reliance", he clearly stated that North Korea would strengthen its nuclear capability, referring to the enhancement of ICBM capabilities and the development of tactical nuclear weapons and nuclear submarines. He also reaffirmed the policy of strengthening national defense capabilities. At the same time, he clarified the principle of "strength vs strength and good vs good" toward the U.S., and called on South Korea to cancel the joint ROK-U.S. military exercises and the introduction of state-of-the-art weapons, saying, "Depending on the attitude of the South Korean authorities, it is possible to return to the relationship of three years ago." While it is generally believed that there will be no new policy shift, his reference to the buildup of nuclear capability means it is urgent to resume negotiations for denuclearization.

We already have answers for restarting and advancing the peace process on the Korean Peninsula: the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration and Pyongyang Joint Declaration, and the Joint Statement of U.S.-DPRK in Singapore in June of that year. In particular, in Singapore, the U.S. and North Korea reaffirmed that the U.S. would "provide security guarantees to the DPRK" and that North Korea "reaffirmed its commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula". They also agreed that building "new U.S.-DPRK relations" and "mutual confidence building" would contribute to the peace and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In other words, the process of denuclearization and the process of building a peace regime, including the end of the Korean War, peace agreements, and U.S.-North Korea relations, should be carried out in parallel.

The question is whether the Biden administration will be bold enough to fully recognize such historic achievements in the current state of the U.S, which, as we have seen again in the recent

presidential election, is sharply divided politically and socially. It is also a question of whether the new administration will be able to agree on such a gradual and simultaneous approach, which even the trump administration did not accept. Of course, some observers are hopeful that Secretary of State Blinken, who was involved in the nuclear deal with Iran, and many of the people selected for the Biden administration's diplomatic and security line have expertise in the issues on Korean Peninsula and East Asia. Will the Biden administration repeat the mistakes of the Obama administration, or will it follow the policy of the Clinton administration, which went so far as to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea?

Let me be clear about something here. This is about the effectiveness of sanctions against North Korea. Even within the Biden administration, the majority seems to be in favor of maintaining the sanctions. However, we should calmly review whether or not the sanctions are really contributing to peace on the Korean Peninsula. Also, we must recognize that peace is not a reward. The hardliners in the U.S., South Korea and Japan tend to see the peace talks and the peace agreement as rewards for North Korea's good behavior. But peace is a public good.

I believe that moving forward with the peace process on the Korean Peninsula is not only for the sake of peace on the Korean Peninsula, but will be a decisive trigger for a transformation toward a peaceful order in East Asia, given the possible effects at the East Asian level associated with the peace process on the Korean Peninsula. If you can imagine the future of East Asia where a peace agreement on the Korean Peninsula is concluded between South Korea, North Korea, the U.S. and China and the normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and North Korea, and also between Japan and North Korea is achieved, I am sure you can get a sense of the reality of this story.

Notes:

(1) The word “Trump phenomenon” refers not only to Trump’s presidency, but to the emergence of the global right wing populism in Europe, Latin America and Asia as a political phenomenon.

(2) British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s proposal to hold a Summit meeting with G7 states plus South Korea, Australia and India. D10 means “Democracy 10”.