

WORLD'S EYES ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

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As a Canadian admirer of Korea, I know that our two peoples share some history. For example, Canadian faith workers were among the first Westerners to settle in Korea and dedicate their lives to the country. They include Luther Young, the first Presbyterian who worked with Korean communities in Japan prior to the Second World War; John Scarth Gale, who created the Korean-English dictionary and translated numerous Western works into Korean; Malcolm Fenwick, who modernized agriculture and introduced apples; and Dr. Frank Schofield, whose support for the Korean independence movement is recognized throughout the Korean peninsula. These individuals represent the first pillars of a human bridge that now stands stronger than ever.



Dr. Frank Schofield



Malcom Fenwick



John Scarth Gale

Korean-Canadians have brought much to our country: entrepreneurship and a legendary work ethic, new businesses and employment, values and awareness and the energy to build strong secular and spiritual institutions.

I'm told that fully 80% of Koreans who immigrate here are in the "skilled category"; among these, six in ten have backgrounds in vital computer and engineering fields. Korean university students have also demonstrated a considerable interest in studying at Canadian schools and universities. There are about 5,000 Canadians teaching English in Korea now and they are also building long term relationships with all things Korean.

Economic bonds

The bonds run well beyond dollars and won. Our peoples are both committed to universal values. We are each committed to respecting the inherent dignity of every human being, to the rule of law and to the importance of the United Nations and other multilateral organizations in which we often share not only memberships, but similar goals. Canadians and Koreans both believe in representative democracy to create freedom and opportunity and work actively to promote it both domestically and abroad.



The late Kim Dae-Jung

At a meeting of the Community of Democracies held in Seoul in 2002, then President Kim Dae-Jung gave a gripping speech. Many of you know that the late president paid a high price for his life-long democratic convictions. There were several attempts on his life and he walked until the end of his life with a limp from beatings received in the '70s. It is not surprising then that our host told us that the greatest achievement of the 20th century was helping democracy to take root and spread across the planet. He noted, "Out of 200-odd countries in the world, 140 have adopted a multi-party system. This is significant progress, considering the fact that only about 30 countries were rated as democracies up until the mid-70s."

President Kim, who for me ranks with Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel and other human dignity icons, went on to say that in his mind democracy is necessary to achieve a "transparent, fair and viable market economy". It was partly because of the failure to establish a democratic market system that the Korean economy, which flourished for a time under authoritarian rule, entered the serious crisis in 1998. Thereafter, Korea launched a reform drive to promote a market economy in parallel with a full democracy, thereby overcoming the crisis in two years and leading in part to the success of today.

Ban Ki-moon

Another giant of the Republic is Ban, Ki-moon. Its national successes were perhaps recognized by his election and re-election as UN Secretary-General. In his acceptance speech, His Excellency noted, "My heart is overflowing with gratitude toward my country and people who have sent me here to serve. It has been a long journey from my youth in war torn and destitute Korea to this rostrum and these awesome responsibilities. I could make the journey because the UN was with my people in our darkest days..."

The three years of the Korean War were a continuous nightmare, taking the lives of almost three million persons on both sides, including 516 of the 30,000

Canadian soldiers fighting as peacemakers under the UN flag. Many communities were destroyed, in Seoul's case during several seizures and counter ones. Seoul restaurant owner, Nam Sang, told me quite recently that two of his siblings attempted to survive, but died from eating pine tree needles. There were doubtless myriad similar tragedies.

Earlier until August, 1945 came 35 painful and demeaning years as a colony of Imperial Japan.



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon



President Park Geun-hye

Korea Today

The government of Canada has proclaimed 2013 “The year of Korea in Canada”. So much is now going well in South Korea that it appears to be an example of rapid human development for the entire world. Its democracy, including the recent election of Ms. Park Geun-hye as its first woman president, governance in general, strong economy, education—helped by many highly committed parents, the rule of law, social programs, culture, the arts and sports—all seem today to be among the best internationally. Even the dance “Gangnam Style” attracted more than 1.5 billion YouTube views, the website’s most watched video ever.

Let me offer an instance of the legendary Korean work ethic, not from Samsung, Hyundai or other international brand, but from the domestic service sector. Nam Sang, mentioned earlier, now in his 80s, operates one of the largest restaurants in Seoul, with seating for 1200 and 120 employees. He began in it at the age of ten at the end of the Korean War, working from 4am until 1am daily for 20 years.

Current Crisis

When Korea was divided at the end of World War II, the North was administered by Moscow, the South by Washington. Authors Acemoglu and Robinson of *Why Nations Fail* (2012) note that what two generations of Kim family absolutism did to the residents of the North included:

- living standards by the late 1990's about one-tenth of ones in the South;
- life expectancy ten less years than in the South;
- recurring famines because of frequent collapses in agricultural production, and
- An educational system, much of which is propaganda intended to promote the legitimacy of the regime against self-created foreign enemies, after which students must then spend a full decade in their million-soldier army.

Nina Shea of Freedom House in New York wrote recently that the Kim dynasty has waged a 50-year war on religion. "In the early sixties, Buddhist shrines and temples and Christian churches were shuttered...Religious leaders were either executed or sent to concentration camps...Pyongyang was known in the 1950s as 'Asia's Jerusalem' for its robust Christian communities, but the five Christian churches that now exist, all in the capital, are state-operated for international propaganda purposes."

Prof. Ian Buruma of Bard College, New York, describes the regime as essentially "...a theocracy. Some elements are borrowed from Stalinism and Maoism, but much of the Kim cult owes more to indigenous forms of shamanism: human gods who promise salvation..." Buruma adds that the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s was a disaster for North Korea when its aid stopped, leaving it almost totally dependent on China. "China", he adds, "could crush North Korea in a day just by cutting off food and fuel".

From the very beginning in South Korea, economic institutions encouraged investment and trade. Its first elected president, Rhee Syngman, and his successor, General Park Chung-hee, were clearly autocratic, but both helped to build an export market economy. Full representative democracy did develop over the decades. The 50 million residents of South Korea today live in one of the world's most successful economies, which recently became its eighth-largest exporter.

Conclusion



How should the world respond to recent events on the Korean Peninsula?

It was my privilege to visit South Korea in October and last month as well.

The UN, NATO and the world's democracies must respond immediately if the North were insanely again to invade the South as in 1950. If Kim Jong-un and his group in Pyongyang are convinced that outsiders will respond in kind to any large scale violence, they are highly unlikely to risk their survival and privileges.

I agree with those who think that the likelihood of North Korea attacking South Korea remains small despite all the incendiary rhetoric coming from Kim Jong-un since January. He is no doubt seeking to convince North Koreans that he is defending them against aggression from foreign enemies. Without external foes, he lacks any legitimacy. But how many North Koreans, despite decades of similar propagandas from his father and grandfather, can believe that the new U.N. sanctions in response to Kim's mid-February underground test of a nuclear weapon is an act of aggression? Similarly, the joint South Korea-U.S. military exercises have been occurring for years and are hardly acts of war.

The larger danger is that the regime will implode, provoking unmanageable regional consequences, possibly including intervention from South Korea. That would greatly trouble Pyongyang's only important remaining ally in Beijing, which wants North Korea to remain a buffer against American military influence in the region and worries about millions of North Koreans refugees flooding into China.

The regime in the North is seeking to shake South Korean resolve--to bluff Seoul into concessions to appease the tantrums out of Pyongyang. Perhaps South Koreans should just "keep their powder dry"--be prepared for anything, but don't offer anything until there is agreement to abandon nuclear weapons- a return to the *status quo ante*.

Rod Mickleburgh in the Globe and Mail the other day listed some indicators that Beijing is considering distancing itself from Pyongyang, including its backing the new round of UN economic sanctions. He quoted Earl Drake, a former Canadian ambassador to China, saying that his contacts in Beijing, when North Korea comes up in conversation today, "...sigh and tell me, 'We simply don't know how to deal with them. They're wild men'". Former East Asia diplomat, Gordon Houlden, now of the China Institute at the University of Alberta, provided the list of indicators.

Allowing the North to slip further into isolation would result in an even greater threat on the peninsula and around the world. Erich Weingartner, one of Canada's best experts on North Korea, has suggested that beyond security concerns, South Korea's approach is driven by a desire to enable North Korea to develop its own economy to a point where reunification would make sense.

One reason why the temperature of recent events has escalated to its current level is because of a mutual lack of understanding among the key players. Are people misreading each others' signals in much the same way that occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War. Ultimate negotiating positions could be surprisingly compatible. Both countries are not really engaging, largely because of the history of hostility, deep mutual distrust and lack of communication and understanding that characterizes their relationship.

Among the many shared values between Canadians and Koreans, perhaps the strongest is our joint desire to see lasting peace, dignity and human security for all peoples. Our mutual respect has drawn us together in the past, and I have no doubt that through growing co-operation between our governments, nationals of both countries, and especially the people in this room - our ties will grow even stronger in the future.

It is the unpredictability of the new and young Kim Jong-un that is so worrisome. Wishing to avoid escalating tensions is no doubt why President Obama has not commented in public on the crisis for the past week, although he has assured South Korea that he would come to its defence. Secretary John Kerry, as you know, is optimistic from his three-nation visit in East Asia that Beijing will help to rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons. We all hope this proves sound.

It was troubling when Kim's government asked foreign countries to evacuate their diplomats from Pyongyang, telling Britain that it would not be able to guarantee the safety of foreign missions beginning April 10th if conflict erupted. None has moved their staffs. Both Seoul and Washington say they have seen no signs that the regime is preparing for an attack on South Korea. Marathon runners from 16 nations competed earlier this week in Pyongyang.

The world can only hope and pray that sanity in the region will prevail.
Thank you.