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Sunshine, Containment, War: Korean Options

by Gavan McCormack

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1. "Sunshine"

The recent outpourings of analysis and comment on the "Korean problem" around the world are characterized by righteous indignation and denunciation. They tend to be shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by an "imperial" frame of reference, insisting that Pyongyang submit to the will of the "international community" when what is really meant is the will of Washington. To the extent that one adopts an alternative, Korean, frame of reference, and a Seoul-centered approach, the problem begins to look different. Nobody understands North Korea better, is in the present climate more positive and encouraging about dealing with it, and has more to lose from getting it wrong, than the government and people of South Korea.

Years of "Sunshine" and multiple layers of contact and negotiation have begun to thaw the long-frozen "Demilitarized" line that divides North and South. The challenge for Seoul now is to build a buffer of protection and a bridge of communication linking Pyongyang to the world, while guaranteeing that international obligations are met and ensuring that Pyongyang's legitimate security concerns are fulfilled; the task ahead for the new Korean government is nothing less than internationalizing "sunshine." In the world empire currently under construction, however, "sunshine" is not only not a priority but it smacks of appeasement, and its exponents are to be restrained.

2. The Nuclear Prerogatives of Empire

The imperial realism of the emerging global system is nicely expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski's formula, which was evidently taken to heart by the Bush court:

"The three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together."

Throughout the developing Bush imperium, vassals ingratiate their way into imperial favor, tributaries nervously weigh options to retain some measure of autonomy, and barbarians sharpen their spears. Of its vassals the empire demands sycophantic dependence; of its tributaries; obedience; of its enemies, unconditional submission. In East Asia, the wishes of the imperial regime are echoed in Tokyo (the vassal), questioned in Seoul (the tributary), and contested in Pyongyang (the barbarian). The possibility of tributary Seoul and barbarian Pyongyang actually "coming together" is a nightmare scenario, for it would not only frustrate and weaken American imperial designs on the Korean peninsula. This empire, like all empires, stands or falls not on the military force it can project but on its ability to convince vassals, tributaries and barbarians alike of its invincibility.

President Bush's statement to Congress in September 2002 referred to only two "rogue states," meaning quintessentially barbarian states that brutalize their own people, ignore international law, strive to acquire weapons of mass destruction, sponsor terrorism, "reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands." Iraq and North Korea both constituted "a looming threat to all nations." War with the first is now imminent; with the second, it seems to be approaching rapidly.

In October 2002, North Korea admitted to possession of uranium enrichment centrifuge technology; in December it disconnected the International Atomic Energy Agency's monitor cameras and then sent home the inspectors from its mothballed graphite nuclear plant, and in January it withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Though it insisted that "at present" it was merely starting-up (for energy purposes) the reactors mothballed as part of the 1994 "Agreed Framework" deal with the United States, neighboring states were understandably nervous at the prospect of unregulated plutonium production, while the enrichment technology (of which it admitted only possession) has no known use other than for the production of Hiroshima-type weapons. An "outlaw" regime, it was reported, now defied the world and threatened regional and global order.

On February 13, the International Atomic Energy Agency referred the case of North Korea to the UN Security Council. Director-general Mohammad El Baradei declared that country to be "in chronic non-compliance with its safeguards agreement since 1993." The question now is whether North Korea will persist in rejecting the nuclear non-proliferation regime, with the Security Council moving gradually from appeal to pressure to sanctions, or whether a satisfactory formula can be found to permit its return to compliance. Sanctions, Pyongyang has insisted, would be tantamount to "a declaration of war."

In a fateful meeting in October 2002, presidential envoy James Kelly made a series of demands of the North Koreans: that Pyongyang abandon its WMD [read: nuclear] programs, cease the development and export of missiles, refrain from threatening its neighbors and supporting terrorism, and desist from "the deplorable treatment of the North Korean people." These were the kinds of demands that only regime change could satisfy. Washington then continued to insist that North Korea signal its unconditional acceptance of such demands, especially on the nuclear issue. In January 2003, when a bold "new proposal" was unveiled by the Bush administration, it still required Pyongyang to abandon all nuclear ambitions and accepted strict and intrusive inspections. Provided it did so, assistance could be given with thermal power generation and the provision of food aid, and a guarantee could be issued of some undefined sort against US attack.

However, the offer was predicated on a North Korean climb-down, made more unlikely by the increasingly hostile rhetoric that accompanied it. With an Iraq war looming, Donald Rumsfeld reiterated America's readiness to fight, and win, wars on two fronts, and North Korea was accused again of being a "terrorist regime" with "one or two nuclear weapons already in possession and sufficient material to construct six to eight more, and missile capacity to reach the continental United States." In his State of the Union address for 2003, President Bush also made a point of declaring his loathing for Pyongyang as "an oppressive regime [that] rules a

people living in fear and starvation," and whose "blackmail" would not be tolerated. Long-range bombers and an aircraft carrier were alerted for deployment to the peninsula. Pyongyang responded, not to the "new proposal" but to the threats, with its own threat of possible missile or weapon tests or even a preemptive counterstrike, involving "unlimited use of means [sic]."

The underlying thrust of US policy had not changed. The core sentiment remained one of fierce antipathy, what historian Bruce Cumings has described as an "exterminist hatred" rooted in the fact that North Korea fought the US to a standstill in the 1950s and has resisted its power ever since. The Bush administration's hatred for Kim Jong Il matches that for Saddam Hussein, and it seems that nothing short of regime change, in Pyongyang as in Baghdad, is likely to assuage it. According to New Yorker reporter Seymour Hersh, a participant in White House strategy meetings offered this assessment of the mood of the moment: "Bush and Cheney want that guy's head on a platter. Don't be distracted by all this talk about negotiations. There will be negotiations, but they have a plan, and they are going to get this guy after Iraq. He's their version of Hitler." The Nautilus Institute's Peter Hayes says: "What they really mean is this: after we force Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations, we'll focus fully on North Korea to burn another hole in the map." Defense Secretary Rumsfeld is reported to be drawing up plans for a preemptive strike and, ominously, Japanese Defense Agency head, Shigeru Ishiba, recently declared that Japan, although committed by its constitution to the non-use of force in the settlement of international disputes, would launch a preemptive attack on North Korea if it thought missiles were being readied for launch against it.

Given the extreme nature of North Korea's "Confucian-fascist" regime, Americans are scarcely aware that there might be a North Korean viewpoint on all this, nor do they acknowledge the degree to which the global hegemon puts itself above the law, reserving to itself the right to employ violence, virtually without restriction, in pursuit of its global interests, while labeling "terroristic" those who oppose it. Even as Washington demands that North Korea (and other) countries meet their various obligations, disavow any nuclear plans and substantially disarm their conventional forces, the US itself has for three decades ignored its own obligations under Article 6 of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty to "engage in good faith negotiations for nuclear disarmament" and is therefore itself in "material breach" of the treaty.

The US has also withdrawn from the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Convention on Global Warming. It signals its intent to pursue nuclear hegemony including the domination of space; deploys as "conventional weapons" newly developed weapons of terror and mass destruction including cluster bombs, "daisy cutters," and nuclear "bunker busters;" holds its enemies indefinitely without legal warrant, representation, or rights, not only in the "no-man's-land" of Guantanamo but in the United States itself; proclaims its right to assassinate its enemies or launch preemptive war against them, and refuses to recognize the jurisdiction of any international court to try its actions or those of its citizens. This is not, however, "roguish" or "evil" because it is covered by imperial prerogative.

From Pyongyang's point of view, the US was in breach of the 1994 Agreed Framework almost from its inception. It had been promised two light-water nuclear reactors (capacity: 2,000 MW) by a target date of 2003, half a million tons of heavy oil per year in the interim for power generation, moves towards "towards full normalization of political and economic relations," and a non-aggression pact. Pyongyang froze its nuclear development plans for a decade, hoping to hold the US to its word and secure its own removal from the American list of terror-supporting states. According to Colin Powell, addressing a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on February 5, 2002, the administration believed that Pyongyang was continuing to "comply with the [missile flight-test] moratorium they placed upon themselves and stay within the KEDO agreement [the Agreed Framework]." Whatever it then knew about the clandestine purchase of centrifuge technology, presumably from Pakistan, some time in the late 1990s, did not seem to affect this judgment, although much was to be made of it later.

After September 11, Pyongyang made every effort to associate itself with the mood of the international community by promptly signing the outstanding international conventions on terrorism and declaring its opposition to terrorism in the UN General Assembly. For all these gestures in the end it got nothing. The new Bush administration arrived in Washington convinced that the Agreed Framework should be a one-sided North Korean commitment to abandon its nuclear program. Even though the Department of State could find no North Korean connections to terror (other than the refuge it still offered to aging Japanese perpetrators of a 1970 hijacking), Bush nevertheless chose to describe it as part of the "axis of evil" and his government named it, along with other non-nuclear countries, a potential nuclear target in the Nuclear Posture Statement submitted to Congress in December 2001. The "2003" reactor pledge was never taken seriously. Delays were chronic and construction on the site, such as it was, only began in 2002, when a few large holes were dug and some foundations laid. Meanwhile, North Korea's energy sector steadily deteriorated. In November 2002, the US stopped the scheduled oil supplies, and in January 2003 canceled the entire deal, saying there would be no nuclear plant of any kind, ever.

As few Americans understand, starting with the Korean War in the early 1950s, when the US went so far as to dispatch solitary B-29 bombers to Pyongyang on simulated nuclear bombing missions designed to cause terror, Pyongyang has always viewed its nuclear program as a response to a perceived US nuclear threat. The North Korean government still takes the view, not unreasonably, that the only defense Washington respects is nuclear weapons -- a point made recently by the IAEA's Mohammad El Baradei who commented that the US seems bent on teaching the world that "if you really want to defend yourself, develop nuclear weapons, because then you get negotiations, and not military action." While Washington wrung its hands over, and vehemently denounced, Pyongyang's outlaw behavior, Congress was being pushed to authorize the development of small nuclear warheads, known as "Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator" weapons, or "bunker busters," specially tailored to attack North Korea's bunkers and underground complexes. Yet Pyongyang, the barbarian, not Washington is always the one accused of "intimidation."

The path Pyongyang seems to be taking has the potential to lead to a nuclearization of the Korean peninsula and possibly the region. It is therefore a disastrous path to set out on, and it allows Washington to label the North Koreans a "rogue" regime pursuing incomprehensible policies that threaten innocent neighbors; yet there's an alternative interpretation -- quite obvious to most South Koreans, if not to Americans -- that Pyongyang is seeking nothing so much as an end to the half-century of its own threatened nuclear annihilation. Its leaders have repeatedly stated that the country would submit to an international inspections regime provided only its security was guaranteed. However, it is not the fifty years of intimidation, but the call to end it, that is now treated as roguish.

The world is outraged at North Korean attempts to end the intimidation to which it has been subjected for a half-century, treating with something akin to derision what in a sane world would be seen as a just demand worthy of international support. The justice of the cause is ignored, while the shrillness with which it presents its case is cause for scorn. Pyongyang is recalcitrant, to say the least, but its recalcitrance, brutality, and incompetence at governing its people is matched by Washington's arrogance, preemptive unilateralism, and refusal to be bound by international law, treaty, or multinational institutions.

In much of the debate over "nuclear proliferation," the nuclear privilege of the acknowledged nuclear powers - US, Britain, France, Russia and China - passes without question. Yet it is increasingly clear that US attempts to combine nuclear privilege with deterrence and non-proliferation do not work. As Jonathan Schell writes, "Deterrence equals proliferation, for deterrence both causes proliferation and is the fruit of it." The call for non-proliferation, or abstinence, falls on deaf ears when issued by the addicted who cling to their own privilege. Only a global movement to achieve universal prohibition can have moral, and in the end political, credibility.

3. The Tributary and the Barbarian

South Korea, after 55 years of tragic confrontation with its northern compatriots, has in the past decade staked its future on a "Sunshine Policy." It has good reason to try to understand the complex crisis Pyongyang faces and is motivated by a desire to take whatever steps might be necessary to avert the North's political and social collapse. The disruption caused already by the steady stream of refugees across the Tumen and Yalu rivers into China would be nothing compared to the chaos that would ensue if the regime were actually to collapse, sending millions of desperate people fleeing by boat across the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea as well as on foot into China. A vast humanitarian catastrophe, exacerbated by the difficulty of controlling nuclear and other materials in the confusion, would be dumped in the South's lap. Its agenda is therefore fundamentally different from Washington's. It has little sense of threat from the North, and instead sees the need to help Pyongyang deal with its economic, security and diplomatic problems, even by dint of providing a security "guarantee," as incoming president Roh Moo-Hyun suggested during his campaign.

As a senior advisor to the South Korean president put it, the North Korean problem will only be resolved "when the country suspected of building nuclear weapons [North Korea] doesn't feel any security threats and builds relationships of trust with other countries." South Korea therefore aims to "create an environment in which North Korea will feel secure, without nuclear weapons. After all, that is the quickest way to have it give up nuclear development."

Following Kim Dae Jung's visit to Pyongyang in June 2000, South Korea engaged North Korea on a wide range of economic, cultural, sporting, and transport fronts. The Seoul-Pyongyang railway line, cleared of mines, now awaits only the completion of a narrow 300 meter strip of track to link North and South (and thereby create a through connection from South Korea to Russia, China and Europe). The service could be open in months, but is blocked by Washington's objections. The pipeline is full of joint South-North projects, including one to open the North Korean city of Gaesong, less than 100 kilometers from Seoul, as a special economic zone; that too is now frozen. Although Seoul has been slowly accomplishing something once thought impossible - the restoration of a measure of trust between north and south, one Korea and the other - its "sunshine" policy is dismissed in Washington as vain and worthless, or worse, dangerous appeasement. Delegations are entertained and contracts signed and implemented, mutual trust is engendered, fear diminishes and confidence grows, but from Washington's perspective Pyongyang is simply "evil" incarnate, a regime with which there can be no compromise.

The developing crisis not only pits Washington against Pyongyang but also potentially opens a rift between Washington and Seoul. The relationship with Seoul has been frosty since the advent of the Bush administration and its avowal of an explicitly imperial agenda. South Korea's Nobel Prize-winning president, Kim Dae Jung, was insulted by Bush on the occasion of their first meeting and has been treated highhandedly, occasionally contemptuously, ever since. Seoul was skeptical of the Kelly mission to Pyongyang in October 2002, believing the Americans misunderstood what Pyongyang was saying to them, perhaps deliberately. In February 2003, the South Korean Prime Minister pointedly rejected the official US position that North Korea was in possession of nuclear weapons. A few days later, CIA Director George Tenet insisted on the US's "very good judgment" that Pyongyang possessed one or two plutonium-based nuclear weapons, as well as the long-range missiles to deliver them. On this crucial issue, the world chooses to believe the CIA, not the South Korean Prime Minister.

As time goes on, the gap has only widened between the thinking of the global hyperpower, reliant on massive force projection capacity, and the small Asian country still struggling to achieve national unification, heal the wounds of civil war, and establish the modest goals of peace and development. A new president, Roh Moo-Hyun, takes over on February 25. Like Kim Dae Jung, Roh is a pragmatist, expected to continue the approach of his predecessor that, "love him or hate him, Kim Jong Il has been and will be in the foreseeable future the dictator with all the powers. You cannot exclude him or refuse dialogue with him." While Washington urges Tokyo, Moscow, Beijing, even Canberra, to pressure Pyongyang into nuclear disarmament, it is careful to avoid offering any central role in the diplomatic process to Seoul; in fact, the collective effort is designed to contain Seoul and rein in its "sunshine" fantasies.

Not only do the old and new presidents distance themselves from Washington's hard-line, but anti-American demonstrations now draw huge crowds and, in various recent opinion surveys, more than half of all South Koreans profess "dislike" for the US. Between 60% and 70% claim no longer to see North Korea as a threat, favor normalization, and oppose US attempts at "containment." Only 31% support cooperation with the US. On March 1, Seoul is to host, for the first time, a joint South-North ceremony to commemorate the 84th anniversary of the Samil movement, a peaceful uprising for national independence brutally crushed by Japan in 1919. The strengthening sense of a shared past and a common identity opens up the possibility of sharing dreams for the future. To Washington, these are ominous trends. The South Korean conservative, anti-communist and pro-American right-wing, shaken by defeat in the December presidential election, is now reorganizing. Pro-American demonstrators are beginning to take to the streets, undoubtedly with encouragement from the US.

4. Imagining Non-Imperial Futures

For the present in South Korea, however, the passions of war and of the Cold War are a thing of the past. While security is not neglected, both government and non-governmental think-tanks are focusing ever more of their efforts on economic challenges. The state-funded Korea Development Institute has a blueprint for generating a 7 per cent annual growth rate in the North to raise per capita income from its present pathetic $91 to $1,000 by 2008, to feed the population, and to attract the foreign capital necessary to rebuild the economic infrastructure. Outside government circles, a key figure responsible for hauling South Korea out of abject poverty only four decades ago now has offered suggestions to Pyongyang on how it might do likewise. Having played a key role in Cold War confrontation, O Wonchol, right-hand man of dictator Park Chung Hee in the 1960s and 1970s and one of the principal architects of South Korea's industrial transformation, now seeks ways to help Pyongyang 'normalize' and develop. Pragmatism and confidence that the North is not lunatic or beyond redemption characterize such an approach. None of these qualities are evident in current official US thinking on North Korea.

The challenge for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, writes O in the January issue of the monthly Wolgan Chosun, is to become a North Korean Deng Xiaoping. If Kim would learn from the experiences of both South Korea and China, adopt an export-oriented economic system in place of the current "Juche" policies of economic autarchy, and launch an all-out development drive, the prospects could be quite bright. O recommends that Kim do what Park Chung Hee did in the 1960s: empower the country's best technocratic brains to form a staff headquarters and lead an export revolution. The conditions for industrialization in North Korea, he points out, are favorable: all land is state-owned, labor cheap and of high quality, minerals abound, and educational levels are high.

A million engineers and technicians should be sent abroad (many to South Korea, as part of a necessary peninsula-wide division of labor and resources), thus generating immediate revenues and reducing the surplus agrarian population. Most existing industrial plant, already obsolete, should simply be scrapped. The Rajin-Sonbong area (a remote site near the borders of both Russia and China, developed under UN auspices in the 1980s but unsuccessful in attracting investment), should shift its focus from light to heavy and chemical-oriented industry, and a deep-water port dredged to service it. Plants in some sectors should simply be moved from South to North, one immediate candidate being the South's surplus briquette plants, thereby solving the North's heating

problems and arresting its chronic deforestation. However, O recognizes that the preconditions for success must be a normalization of relations with South Korea as well as with the US and Japan, opening the path to low-interest international development funds from the Asia Development Bank and World Bank.

However odd North Korea looks, its uniqueness lies not in its goose-stepping soldiers, mass game mobilizations, or bizarre messages to the world but in its experience of having lived out the nuclear age under constant threat of nuclear attack. No other nation has experienced anything like it. Even before that, the North Korean state was founded on the memories of guerrilla bands that fought desperately against Japanese fascism in the 1930s, and those memories, still awaiting the "closure" of formal settlement with Japan, remain sharp and close to the surface. If a kind of collective neurosis, even insanity, has overtaken the North that is not altogether surprising. Facing complex crises and society-wide exhaustion from decades of mobilization, war, mass campaigns, fear, tension and failure, it now gives strong indications of a desire for change. These were evident not only in the extraordinary apology its leader offered Japan, its former occupier and enemy, or in the admissions of possession of forbidden nuclear technology offered the US late in 2002, but in the sweeping economic reform policies adopted since 2001.

Taken together, these suggest that the North Korean monolith is cracking, and that powerful elements in that state wish to set aside the guerrilla model of secrecy, mobilization, absolute loyalty to the commander, priority to the military, and instead pursue Perestroika (for which in 2001 the Korean word kaegon was coined). However, economic reform is impossible to implement under conditions of continuing confrontation. According to Chinese sources close to Pyongyang, Kim Jong Il has determined that without security guarantees and access to international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF -- to which the US holds the keys -- further social chaos and possibly economic collapse loom. The nuclear imbroglio therefore cloaks a desperate cry for normalization.

After all the humiliating apologies and explanations that have borne only sour fruit, an even greater challenge faces Kim Jong Il: can he can bring himself to make a more important but far more difficult and potentially humiliating gesture to South Korea? Can he apologize, in however general terms, for the violent and tragic past, thank the South Korean government and people for having turned from containment to "sunshine," rule out any repeat of fratricidal violence, and begin charting the only possible course for survival - dï¿½tente leading towards reunification? The cold fact is that North Korea has no allies, few options, little time. Only South Korea today views it with any sign of understanding, even sympathy. Only South Korea, for that matter, does not seem to fear it.

Building on the trust that slowly accumulated during the Kim Dae Jung years, a recent Nautilus Institute paper by Alexandre Mansourov, a Russian-born Korea specialist now working in Honolulu, suggests:

"President-elect Roh Moo-hyun should use the current nuclear crisis as a unique historical opportunity to fundamentally reshape the inter-Korean relations and radically redefine the missions of the ROK-U.S. military security alliance in the future. President Roh needs to develop path-breaking strategic vision, which will guide the entire Korean nation in the South and North on the path toward national unification."

In response, North Korea would "invite a goodwill expert delegation from the ROK to tour the Yangbyun nuclear complex to see that all 8,017 spent fuel rods are still kept in place at the storage site and that the reprocessing plant is still shut down." Mansourov continues:

"Only the South has to take the North Korean demands seriously and, in turn, can guarantee the North's security and assist in economic development. The only sacrifice the North will have to make is to accept some practical limitations on its sovereignty, including in such strategic areas as WMD development ï¿½ After all, if Korea is indeed one, as Koreans like to stress, it is all one nation, one family business."

He goes on to suggest a South Korean "protectorate" over the North in the realm of national security and foreign policy as a possible first step in a multi-stage process of peaceful transition to a unified Korean state. The very word "protectorate" has negative and ill-omened historical associations in the Korean context, but the general thrust of his argument - the need, on the "Korea problem," to substitute a Seoul-Pyongyang framework of thinking for the present Washington-Pyongyang one - makes good sense. Koreans themselves, North, South and overseas, will have to come up with an alternative to "protectorate," some more historically sensitive formula that reflects legitimate concerns over face, history, and 'correct' relationships, so that through a deepening of North-South conversation and cooperation "Korea" can find a voice with which to address the world.

5. "1+1" in Korean Mathematics

The situation today on the Korean peninsula bears an uncanny resemblance to the situation of one hundred years ago. Modern Korean nationalism, frustrated by foreign intervention for over a century, remains a powerful force, and beneath the state structures of north and south lies a shared Korean-ness. From the Korean standpoint, whether in Pyongyang or Seoul, the issue is one of sadae (reliance on powerful friends and neighbors) versus juche, self-reliance. One hundred years ago, and at successive moments since, many thought it wisest to look to great and powerful neighbors. That mindset made possible a century of national division and catastrophic, internecine bloodshed. Facing unprecedented crisis now, South and North Korea have to find some way to trust each other more than they trust any of the great powers that surround them. The stakes are even higher than they were a century ago, for this time the peninsula itself, and all of its people, are at risk.

As the IAEA refers the North Korean nuclear issue to the UN Security Council, and as politicians, editorial writers and experts crank up their denunciations of Kim Jong Il's "evil empire," it would be well to remember the lesson of history: a desperate, impoverished but proud people, back against the wall, oil supplies cut off and sanctions threatened, is not necessarily a good candidate for surrender. The best hope for a way out of the impasse is not likely to be pressure exerted through some combination of "5+2" (the Security Council Five permanent members plus Japan and South Korea) or "5+5" (the Security Council Five plus South Korea, North Korea, Japan, Australia and the European Union), but a deepening of the accommodation between Pyongyang and Seoul, based on a simple formula of "1+1=1." However mathematically unorthodox, such a formula holds an essential truth that Koreans at least recognize. With such a connection, aversion to violence, fraternal trust, and the historical memory of the disastrous consequences caused by past decisions to rely on the intervention of powerful outsiders may still combine to point a path forward.

On February 25, Roh Moo-Hyun assumes the presidency in Seoul. The achievement of a non-violent solution to the growing crisis will depend on the initiatives he takes, the kind of consensus he can forge with Kim Jong Il's regime, and the kind of leverage he can exercise on both Washington and Pyongyang. As the region stands poised before a potential spiral into nuclear rivalry and war, he will need firm nerves and above all a clear strategic vision. His insistence on peace, negotiation, cooperation, and "sunshine" contrasts sharply with the ultimatum diplomacy of Washington. If Roh can play his cards well, however, the prize could be huge. If the tributary Korea and the barbarian Korea evolve into a single entity -- ultimately a united, peaceful, non-nuclear Korean state, located in the heartland of the world's most dynamic region -- it could become in time an economic powerhouse to rival Japan, a global center rather than the "hermit of Asia." Without the "North Korean threat" the justification for US bases in Japan and South Korea disappears, the case for the construction of an anti-missile system in Japan collapses, and the moves towards militarization and

even nuclearization of the region lose their momentum. The Bush version of empire could find itself confronting in East Asia the genesis of an alternative, non-imperial order.

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