

Eurasia Powers Losing Patience With Cheney's Korea Crisis

by Kathy Wolfe

Voices in Moscow, Beijing, Seoul, and even Tokyo are being raised against U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's policy of permanent confrontation with North Korea at the Six-Power nuclear talks, whose third round was in Beijing June 21-26. If the United States does not move to negotiate a compromise with Pyongyang soon, Eurasian nations "will find another method" to a separate peace, as they "have lost patience to delay negotiations until the U.S. Presidential elections," a Novosti wire from Moscow paraphrased Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on June 30. The regional powers have told the United States to deal seriously or "its partners will go their own way," the *New York Times* warned on June 28.

Lavrov visited South Korea July 3, and North Korea July 4-5, meeting both President Roh Moo-hyun and Chairman Kim Jong-il. He announced to the press in Pyongyang on July 5 that Russia is ready to bring the two Koreas together for a summit of Roh, Kim, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Should this be possible, it would be a diplomatic coup for Russia and the Koreans, and open the option of "finding another method" for a regional agreement with or without Washington. Lavrov gave North Korean Chairman Kim a letter from Putin, and another from South Korean President Roh. Roh is scheduled to visit Putin in Moscow in September.

Former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung proposed on June 15 the rapid convening of a North-South heads of state summit, to ensure momentum for peace against any "October surprise" before this Fall's U.S. election. Kim Dae-jung traveled to Beijing July 1-3 to discuss it, and was told that North Korea was seriously considering the idea. Lavrov, in a Seoul press conference on July 3, also renewed Russia's pivotal proposal that the other powers grant North Korea a security guarantee. This means Washington would have to drop the military option, which Cheney has refused to do. In Pyongyang, Lavrov told the press that Moscow backs compensation

to North Korea for a nuclear freeze, and said he had assured North Korea of its right to peaceful nuclear power if it rejoined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Energy and Rail Projects

Most important, Lavrov said Russia was ready to make peace a reality with economic projects to build the Iron Silk Road, and regional energy projects. The nuclear crisis "must not impede all the other trends of Korean policy," he told Novosti. "In particular, the Trans-Korean railway, which is almost united, and its connection to Russia's Trans-Siberian railway, which runs to Europe." North Korean Railway Ministry director Pak Jong Song, in talks with Lavrov, also endorsed Putin's plan for Russia to help rebuild North Korean railways and link both Koreas' rails with the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Russia is also preparing to supply energy to North Korea and to help rebuild its aging power plants. "Russia is moving to become a major supplier of electricity and gas to North Korea," the *New York Times* reported July 29 in an interview with Sergei Darkin, governor of Russia's Pacific Maritime region. "We are building transmission lines to the North Korean border," Darkin said, and if Putin "gives us the task of transmitting energy to North Korea next year, we will be ready." At a conference in June to discuss energy-sharing between Russia and the Korean peninsula, North Korean officials agreed to provide, by August, basic data on its electric power system to the South's Korea Electrotechnology Research Institute," the *Times* added.

Russia and South Korea are also proposing to extend a gas line 1,900 miles from Russia's Sakhalin Island to both North and South Korea. "Such a pipeline would not only mean royalty payments passing through for North Korea, but would also allow it to tap into the pipe for power stations and fertil-

izer,” former Clinton North Korea advisor Selig Harrison told the *Korea Times* June 21. Harrison is also the director of the “Project on Oil and Gas Cooperation in Northeast Asia” at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. He had published a 20-page study with maps of the plan in the December 2003 *Foreign Service Journal*. Lavrov told Novosti that South Korea and Japan would probably finance the construction.

This kind of serious regional cooperation has made itself felt in Washington. The pressure to deal was apparent at the Beijing talks June 21-26; the American delegation backed off Cheney’s prior insistence that “we do not negotiate with evil; we defeat evil” (i.e., Pyongyang). U.S. negotiator Assistant Secretary of State James Kelley presented a seven-page proposal which constitutes a mini-negotiation, the Bush Administration’s first ever with Pyongyang.

Kelly continued what Lyndon LaRouche called the “idiotic” demand that North Korea—a country without a drop of oil or gas supply—give up not only nuclear weapons, but also its nuclear electricity program. And he continued to insist that Pyongyang admit to a secret uranium bomb program, which not only North Korea, but also China, Russia, and dozens of U.S. experts say does not exist. These two demands, however, may now be part of a package up for negotiation. Kelley dropped the previous Washington mantra that North Korea must demonstrate the “complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement” (CVID) of all nuclear facilities before any compensation is considered, which Pyongyang has repeatedly rejected as a demand “that we come out with our hands up.” He adopted instead the South Korean idea to give the North three months to freeze (rather than fully dismantle) its nuclear program, during which its neighbors could resume oil shipments and other aid immediately.

LaRouche’s U.S. “dump Cheney” mobilization has also weakened the Vice President’s grip on the American negotiators. This was apparent June 24 when an anonymous Washington official, clearly a neo-con, told reporters that North Korea had threatened in Beijing to test a nuke, and that the talks had collapsed. This was trumpeted worldwide by the Associated Press—but then promptly denied by the U.S. delegation in Beijing, which called an emergency counter-press conference to clear up the problem. The whole affair was exposed, blow by blow, in Seoul’s leading daily, *Korea Times*, on June 25 as a “scheme by hard-liners to sabotage the talks.”

China, South Korea, and Japan

China is also playing tough. Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong June 8 confronted the claim that North Korea has a secret uranium bomb plan, in a Beijing interview. “The U.S. has not presented convincing evidence of this program,” Zhou said. Shockingly, Cheney was repeatedly named as the source of the problem. Zhou also said Washington must “stop using the allegations to hold up the talks.”

South and North Korea meanwhile opened a bilateral “peace offensive,” announcing major new economic agreements and dismantling Cold War structures in the DMZ. In a joint statement of June 5, they announced that a “test train” may travel across the DMZ on the Trans-Korean Railway (TKR) this Fall, a first since 1945. South and North railway officials agreed on July 2 to complete designs by September for the southernmost stations on the North’s side of the two cross-border railways. The South agreed to provide all materials such as lamp posts and road signs. South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon met his North Korean counterpart Paek Nam-sun July 1 in Indonesia—the first North-South Foreign Ministers’ meeting in some time—and issued a joint statement stressing economic cooperation, and collaboration to seek a peaceful resolution to the nuclear issue through the Six-Power talks.

Japan, with its industrial might and the world’s largest pot of cash, but a long leash to Washington, has been the swing factor in all this. Now Tokyo, too, is moving to deal with North Korea. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told Bush at the G-8 summit June 10 that he must negotiate with the North; Japan’s delegate at Beijing on June 25 made a wide offer of energy and financial aid to Pyongyang. Koizumi is reacting to polls which show increased anger at his sending Japanese troops to Iraq, and a swing from Cold War hysteria to sudden support for a peace settlement with North Korea. Such an organized shift in public opinion in Japan usually means the elite has reached a consensus to change policy.

Depending on July 11 parliamentary election results, Koizumi even faced replacement by Japan’s Democratic Party, which voters hope has more independence from Washington. So he is moving to rapidly normalize relations with Pyongyang, within a year, he announced on July 4. Partly as an election ploy, but also to remove obstacles to diplomatic ties, Koizumi arranged a dramatic reunion June 9 in Indonesia between Hitomi Soga, a Japanese woman abducted to North Korea in the 1970s, and her family still in Pyongyang. “Now that Ms. Soga can meet her family, the conditions have been met for resuming talks” between Tokyo and Pyongyang for full diplomatic relations, Deputy Cabinet Secretary Seiken Sugiura said June 6.

North Korea announced on July 5 that it will help four Japanese Red Army members who hijacked a plane to Pyongyang in 1970 to return home. The hijackers released a letter stating their wish to return for “improvement of Japan-North Korea relations.” The presence of the hijackers in Pyongyang is the most-cited reason for North Korea’s position on the U.S. State Department list of countries sponsoring terrorism, and all this is meant to allow Japan to join South and North Korea in requesting that Pyongyang be removed from the list.

If Japan does vote out Koizumi, it will likely join the countries in Northeast Asia that want the Cold War over with, and to build a “Eurasian New Deal.”