

## Korean Stockholm Syndrome

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At the recent North Korean Workers' Party Congress, Chairman Kim Jong Un announced plans to develop an arsenal of new weaponry, including tactical nuclear weapons. In its recent report, Council on Foreign Relations has identified North Korean nuclear threat as Tier 1 threat along with Iranian military challenges and cyberattack. With six nuclear tests, North Korea has repeatedly threatened the Republic of Korea (ROK) without hesitation and the ROK has become a "nuclear hostage."

More worrisome than North Korea's nuclear armament is the fact that the ROK is entrapped in Stockholm syndrome. The term was coined in 1973 when an armed robber took four bank employees as hostage for six days in Stockholm, Sweden. With the kind treatment of their captor, such as putting a jacket on the shoulders of a shivering captive, the captives became delusional. The captives actually ended up defending their captor. One female captive said, "I felt more safe and peaceful with [the captor] than with the police or the state."

When the ROK special envoys visited Pyongyang in 2018, they reportedly received a commitment from Kim Jong Un that he would not use nuclear or conventional weapons against the South. If we were relieved to hear this, then we have fallen into Stockholm syndrome.

The Anti-Leaflet Law that bans sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets is an example of how the ROK has been entrapped in Stockholm syndrome. The government may advise individuals to restrain themselves from sending news of the free world to North Korea, which is ruled by a repressive and isolated regime. Criminalizing such activities, however, crosses the line from a liberal democracy's perspective. Some say that North Korea has a point in that the two Koreas could get along if people in the South do not send leaflets. To a certain degree, this is understandable because we are concerned about a growing friction on the Korean Peninsula; but, this is a Stockholm syndrome. Despite the fact that the Seoul Metropolitan area remains unprotected from North Korean missile attack, "Three No's" agreement between the ROK and China (e.g., no further deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems and no participation in a US-led missile defense network) is another example of Stockholm syndrome.

Stockholm syndrome is defined as a “contested illness that hostages develop psychological bond with their captors during captivity, and accordingly taking the side of their captor.” The wishful thinking that appeasement may one day lead to peace is the Korean version of Stockholm syndrome. Rather than trying to break free of captivity, the ROK is relying on the goodwill of its North Korean captor. North Korea’s political and military provocations are likely to become more brazen. Yet, the ROK may comply with the North’s coercion because it has no choice. This can be understandable if the goal is only to prevent the crisis from escalating further. The problem is that the longer the ROK remains hostage, the more it loses its spirit. Consequently, there is no ROK anymore.

While seeking North Korea’s denuclearization, the ROK must at the very least try to end its present state of captivity. This requires the entire country to acknowledge that we are hostages. The recognition that the 1991 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula has long been defunct due to North Korea’s nuclear armament is the first step to break free of the current hostage situation. The Joint Declaration was only made possible because U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of their tactical nuclear weapons in separate televised speeches in September and October 1991. On the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the largest territorial unit in the world, President Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of approximately 20,000 tactical nuclear weapons from its border regions such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in order to prevent nuclear catastrophe that might result from these weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. At the same time, President Bush announced that the United States would withdraw roughly 6,000 tactical nuclear weapons deployed in the Western Pacific, including 600 in South Korea. Although these decisions were made by Presidents Bush and Gorbachev for the sake of world peace, the Roh Tae-woo administration misled the Korean people at the time by pretending that it was his political achievement.

The Joint Declaration made people think that an era of nuclear free Korean Peninsula began, giving North Korea time to develop nuclear weapons. Thirty years having passed, yet some still refuse to acknowledge that the Declaration has been scrapped due to North Korea’s violations, insisting that South Korea should maintain the moral high ground. A hostage speaking of the moral high ground vis-à-vis its captor is delusional. North Korea seeks to be recognized as a nuclear weapon state, thereby taking the upper hand in inter-Korean relations and unifying the Korean Peninsula under communism. For North Korea, the very existence of a free and affluent ROK on its doorstep is an unbearable threat to the oppressive regime.

During his recent visit to the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Steve Biegun said that the ROK and Japan could go nuclear within a year unless North Korea

denuclearizes. This could be interpreted to mean that Washington may accept a nuclear-armed ROK and Japan if North Korea does not denuclearize. There is sufficient justification for the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons as a minimum step to protect the 50 million Korean citizens and 2.3 million foreign residents in South Korea.

During the Cold War, the United States had 30,000 nuclear weapons and the Soviet Union had 40,000, which resulted in a balance of power that allowed the Cold War to end cold. If the ROK is to free itself from being a hostage of North Korea's nuclear threats and achieve real peace, then it must seek a balance of power on the Korean Peninsula.

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