

For A People's Vision of Peace in North East Asia

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Today the struggle for peace has a new special meaning for all the living beings on earth. It is a common belief that peace is a fundamental condition for community of life, human and natural and that the true peace for life is based upon justice. However, the times have changed radically from the previous age.

The immediate factor of special significance is that the issue of peace should be viewed in *a mono-polar geo-political configuration and domination*. The Cold War era has passed away, dismantling the bi-polar geopolitical structure. One super state and its allies occupy the dominant position over the world to determine global power relations. One monopolar military power cannot afford to tolerate independent military powers of any kind, state or non-state. It seeks to integrate Asian nation states into one dominant hegemonic network of military system.

At this point of the accelerated technological advancement in weapon development the question of war and peace has *an omniscidal dimension*. This not only because there have been developed weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons, biological weapons, chemical weapons and other new technologically powerful ones. In this context, the notion of differentiation between the civilian and the military and between the human sphere and biosphere is meaning less.

It is also because the highly developed “technetronic” or cybernetic process of coordination and execution of wars and battles against the enemy. Acceleration of the speed, expansion and intensity of violent destruction have been achieved without limits through most efficient and sophisticated technological means.

The super power and its military networks have colonized and militarized the cosmic space with satellites and missiles together with communication and information technologies, razor, and telescopic technologies. Space war system is being perfected through such programs as Bush's National Missile Defense programs, which is sequel to Reagan's “space war” program.

The war in the context of the Cold War has become a total war, meaning that the war involves not only political struggle and military confrontation. It is also a cultural war of ideology; cultural action such as propaganda, education and communication and information as well as it is an economic war. Religion, race, and ethnicity have been mobilized or targeted in the war. Some view that the question of war and peace is a matter of civilizational confrontation and survival.

Current development of terrorism and the “state anti-terror terrorism” present a complex and new situation for the question of peace and war. This passes all the past understanding of war

and peace. This confrontation has no national boundaries. It has no definite military targets. It defies all rules that regulate wars. There is neither the beginning nor the end of the war. Indeed this is a very different situation. Today the world faces at a situation in which the mono-polar hegemonic power is organizing the totalistic network of war against the terrorist resistance of the people around the globe. The uprising resistance is not only a single group or one time organization. It is a condition of times, which the domination of the totalistic and hegemonic global power fosters.

In this situation the powers and the principalities (US-centered power configuration) that dominates the entire globe seek to impose a “universal peace,” based upon its ideology and power. United States calls this “real” peace, which is based upon the power. It is contrasted with a true peace, which is based upon justice and true vision of life.¹

People’s Vision for Peace in North East Asia

There has been a vision of peace among the North East Asian peoples. In Ancient Korea the people yearned for a utopian vision of peace and life, which was expressed in the story of the reign of Tangun - Shinsun (). Chinese people also had such a vision in ancient reign of Yao and Shun (). Japanese had a similar vision in the reign of Sun goddess. These stories of peace and life are partly mythical, and partly historical visions of peace and blissful life of peoples in North East Asia. These visions have become constant sources of visionary projection of peace and life.

These historical/mythical visions of the people are enriched and at the same time transformed through religious visions of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Tonghak in Korea, Shintoism in Japan and T’aiping in China. The East Asian people in modern times have been enriched through the Western religion, that is, Christianity and through secular social philosophies of democracy and socialism.

However, the “powers that be” have often used for the political aggrandizement, thus betraying the true visions of the people. Therefore, we must distinguish the true visions of the people from the ideological use of these visions for their regime or regimentation as kingdoms, empires and nation republics.

We want to affirm that any thinking and visioning for peace should begin with the people’s stories of struggle for peace and justice. The people’s vision for peace is a decisive factor. Peace is not true peace, when it is not for the people. The people’s vision for peace is a final criterion for any peace. Although the shape of people’s vision for peace may be various and different from each other, it is fundamental that the people are the subject of the peace, not the power.

Another important factor for peace in the 21st century is that it should be vision for the all living beings (whole creation) as well as the peoples everywhere, for all living beings are one

¹ Richard Nixon, *Real Peace*. American philosophy of political realism has been followed by the political leaders in the U.S. and around the world.

whole convivial reality in all the spheres of life, human, biological, ecological and cosmic. Thus, the people's vision is inclusive and universal.

Vision of the Korean People in North East Asia

In the modern history of North East Asia the Korean people suffered under the influences of the great powers of North East Asia. In the first stage, the power of Japan initiated and became triumphant over the Korean peninsula, imposing their colonial version of the North East Asian order. Sino-Japanese War (1894) and Russo-Japanese War (1904) made the victorious Japan to be the colonizer of the Korea and its people. At this juncture of East Asian history England and United States accepted the role of Japan. But the Korean people struggled against the Japanese imperialism, and projected their vision for peace, justice and freedom, that is, for their new life. This was most clearly expressed in their Independence Declaration in 1919. It is very significant to note that the vision rose out of deep aspirations of the Korean people, inspired from Korean religious traditions² and modern Western social philosophies, free of any political powers of the West.

The vision of peace contained in this declaration has been almost a sole source of inspiration for the Korean people. But this vision of peace is betrayed by the powers of the world, which divided the Korean people and their land as well as the whole world. The end of the World War II was the very beginning of the global political regime of the Cold War, which victimized the peoples around the world, especially the peoples in the divided nations. Korean War (1950-53) was one of the most brutal wars in the Cold War era along with the war in Vietnam.

This vision has emerged against historical background of the Great Peace of Chinese Imperial power, against the Japanese dream of the greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, against the Pax Russiana as well as against the Pax Americana. These powers have sought to impose their own vision of peace, their own political order upon the Korean people, usually setting up the friendly political regime in a direct or indirect way.

Thus, the vision of the peace of the Korean people has always been distinguished from that of the political regimes in Korea as well as from that imposed by the international powers. It is an independent, sovereign and self-reliant vision. It is a peace, realized through peaceful means. It is a vision of peace based upon justice, domestic and international. It is a vision of peace that is deeply rooted in the historic visions of our people. It is a vision of peace that will bring peace to all the people in the world.

East Asian Geopolitics in Transition

It has been regarded that the Korean peninsula is a strategic pivot for the geo-political situation in North East Asia. Korean peninsula is the only place, where still the political and military structures of the Cold War remain in tact and yet it is subtly changing. ROK-US defense treaty(1953) is still in tact. US-Japan security pact is in tact. Recent agreement of "Guidelines" has strengthened it. North Korea still maintains its agreements with China and

² Tonghak, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and indigenous religions, free of religious organizations and powers. Socialist philosophies and democratic ideals also played a great role.

Russia, although its military relationship with Russia has somewhat weakened. These two tripartite alliances have been facing each other throughout the Cold War period. In recent years, geo-political conditions of the Cold War around East Asia are in transition. And these transitional conditions make the situation unstable. One must be reminded that the Korean situation has been that of uneasy ceasefire since the Korean War.

Recently there has been developing alarming developments around Korean peninsula, which may be potentially dangerous. Especially in relationship between the North Korea and United States, there have been ups and downs; and there are those who are hawkish and then who are dovish in regard to how deal with the North Korea. Many times the situation has reached at the brink of the war.

However, there has been a hopeful development between North and South Korea due to the “Sunshine” policy of reconciliation, which may lead eventually to reunification of the Korean people and peace in Korean peninsula. The June 15 Summit between President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il in 2001 has been a historical moment. In spite of some difficulties, the Clinton administration sought to move toward a normalization of the relationship. There has been an unanimous support to the Sunshine policy of the President Kim around the world.

In spite of such development, the Bush administration has been negative toward the North Korea. Due to the negative attitude of the U.S. there has been no progress in N. S. Korea's relations until very recently. Bush's negative attitude toward North Korea was dramatically expressed after the 9.11 incident, especially including North Korea in “the axis of evil,” along with Iraq and Iran. This has been a dramatic down turn in the reconciliation process between two Koreas. This may lead to a very dangerous situation, depending upon domestic political situation in Korea as well as upon the US intentions.

1. Bush administration's War on Terrorism (WOT) has re-enforcing a strategic alliance between the South Korea and the United States as well as between the United States and Japan. The US military presence in North East Asia has become intensive and re-enforced, since the WOT declaration has been made.
2. As a result of agreement (“Agreed Framework-1994”) with US-North Korea of cooperation on the nuclear issue, North Korea has accepted an international inspection(IAEA) on their nuclear facility. They also declared a unilateral moratorium on the missile test. North Korea feels more vulnerable in their security.
3. However, there is still a possibility of a US pre-emptive strike, including nuclear strike, against North Korea. Then, there are too many nuclear reactors in the South Korea. The situation can easily turn to a “nuclear” war on the Korean peninsula.
4. Also US used the North Korean missile development as a factor of justification for the US National Missile Defense, including Theatre Missile Defense(TMD). This created a situation of missile race around Korean peninsula, by Japan, China, Taiwan as well as by the North and South Korea.

5. The current situation of re-enforcing the military network of WOT around Asia may increase tension between the United States and China. This will bring a situation where a tension between Japan and China will rise, as US-Japan strategic alliance will be intensified. The strategic alliance for WOT may bring about a eventual rearmament of Japan, even with the nuclear weapons.³

6. The WOT has a strategic consequence of encircling China by the military network of the U.S. and its allies. China is the only power that is outside the influence of the United States. This is clear in that the U.S. views China as a potential enemy.

7. The more the U.S. seeks the global military hegemony, the more China will feel the pressure from the United States. At the present time, China does not want any confrontation with the United States; and the U.S. cannot engage China militarily. However, many U.S. strategic thinkers feel that the year 2020 will be a crucial historical juncture at which the balance of power might shift in the world. For this reason the U.S. thinkers believe that China must be faced before that. The earlier it is, the better it will be.

8. The United States is seeking to realize a decisive global geo-political hegemony. The WOT is used as a process of forming a new military network or order for an absolute hegemony, not only over the state powers, but also over any force in the nation states. Such military development on the global scale will bring about the situation of violating the people's sovereignty, human rights and rights of living beings due to military intervention in the life of the people in the world as well as in the life of people in North East Asia.

A Concluding Word

While the Korean Peninsula is a strategic pivot for the great powers for their hegemonic ambitions, the peace and reunification of the Korean people is the landmark of the peace in North East Asia. The peace and reunification of the Korean people demands a radical transformation of the geo-political structure of the inter-Korean relations as well as international relations of at least four big powers, the United States, Japan, China and Russia. But this is very difficult process on the political level.

Under the current political situation the strong participation of the democratic people such as citizens' movements, NGOs' and other civic movements have a decisive significance. These movements must go beyond national boundaries to join to make peace in the world. In the North East Asia the participatory movements in Korea, Japan, United States, Russia, and China should work together for the peace in and around Korea, that is, in North East Asia. These movements must challenge these governments and their leaders on this issue of peace. It is our experience of Korean ecumenical movement to break the taboo to discuss publically the reunification of Korea in 1980's. We stated our vision of the Korean people for reunification and peace.⁴

³ There is an active debate on the constitutional revision and the role of Japanese military.

⁴ Declaration of Korean Churches for Peace on Korean Peninsula and Reunification of the Korean People, 1988. We declared the vision of the Korean jubilee for 1995, which is 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Korean people.

***The vision of the peoples in North East Asia must be clearly stated as a “Peoples’ Charter of Peace in North East Asia.” It should be the peoples’ charter, not any political parties or governments. Peoples’ charter must influence the policies of state governments and political parties through participatory movements in North East Asia and in the whole world.

***The People’s Charter for Peace should be in the paradigm of the life as a whole. The question of peace is not merely a geopolitical issue. It is to deal with questions of economic justice and well-being, people’s participation, security and shalom for life, cultural identity, values, and creativity, ecological sustainability, and religious pluralism and tolerance as well as spiritual deepening. Peace is fundamental condition for the convivial life of all living beings on earth. Peace is not a mere absence of wars and violence. The political economy of peace be established, overcoming the dominant process of globalization.

***Participatory movements must oppose the geo-political hegemony of any power, especially any big powers. In our case, most of all the U.S. mono-polar geopolitical hegemony, as it is being intensified in the process of the WOT.

***Participatory movements must work for the sovereignty of the peoples and international solidarity of the sovereign peoples. What this means is that we must work for global democracy in terms of participation and solidarity for peace and life.

***Participatory movements must work for universal disarming of nuclear weapons and bio-chemical and other high-tech weapons, especially in North East Asia.

***Participatory Movements must work to stop the military missile race and to promote demilitarisation of space. The military missile race makes all the parties vulnerable in terms of their security.

***Participatory movements should work for reduction of arms in the North East Asia and for disarmament in Korean peninsula. This presupposes that at least the four big powers and the United Nations recognize and guarantee the permanent neutrality of the reunified Korea.

***In order to build a peaceful order in the North East Asia there must be justice among the peoples. Participatory movements must promote peaceful way on the basis of justice to resolve conflicts among the people, groups and nations.

***Participation movements must promote human rights of the peoples and the rights of all living beings. This is the very foundation of the genuine peace.

***It is our proposal that there should be formed a permanent Peoples’ Forum for Peace and Life in the North East Asia or Asia as a whole. It is critically monitor the geo-political situation for the peacemaking. It will articulate the vision of the people’s peace as the People’s Charter for Peace and Life in North East Asia or in Asia. It will promote people’s participation and solidarity for peace in this area. It will actively engage with national governments and international organizations to influence policies and actions for peace. The forum could be organized through a joint effort of existing ecumenical organizations operating in Asia.