

Leif-Eric Easley, "Nationalism a Cheap but Powerful Weapon: Measuring National Responses to North Korean Missiles," *Korea Herald*, August 24, 2006; (reprinted in *OMNI*).

The Roh Moo-hyun administration responded to the North Korean missile tests in July by criticizing Tokyo before Pyongyang. Mr. Kim Tae-kyung's recent article in *OhmyNews International* ("Strange Tempests Follow Missile Tests," July 16), supports the administration's largely nationalist response. Nationalism is a powerful political weapon which leaders can deploy when they find themselves in a difficult situation. Politically, it is much easier to drum up anti-Japanese sentiment based on Tokyo's historical aggression and atrocities than it is to deal with Pyongyang's lack of reciprocity for all of Seoul's sunshine and the continuing challenges to regional stability posed by North Korea.

What is at root of the current impasse with North Korea? United States foreign policy is part of the problem as the Bush administration has long been divided between those who want to pursue a policy of engagement with enforceable reciprocity and those who want to contain Kim Jung-il's regime and push it towards collapse. Moreover, there are inconsistencies in U.S. policy on nuclear nonproliferation, although it is clear that North Korea, Iran and India are very different cases warranting different initiatives.

Concerning China's role, charges have been made that Beijing is not sufficiently exercising its influence over Pyongyang, and many in Seoul are concerned about China's growing economic foothold in North Korea. But the July 15 resolution at the United Nations as well as China's financial sanctions against North Korea seem to indicate that Beijing has both interest and willingness to help address North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

It is important that Japan pursue a measured response to North Korea's actions. The Roh administration objected to Japan's push for a strongly worded UN resolution on North Korea. In addition, Tokyo has been criticized for demonizing Pyongyang with the kidnapping issue, using North Korea to justify elevating the role of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, and teaming up with the United States to isolate North Korea. But in fact, Prime Minister Koizumi visited Pyongyang twice and tried to make progress toward normalization of diplomatic relations. Tokyo's policy of diplomatically and economically engaging North Korea when Pyongyang acts in good faith and focusing on sanctions when Pyongyang makes military provocations appears measured. Japan's policies vis-à-vis Korea that could use improvement are not those in response to the missile tests, but instead those related to Tokyo's management of historical antagonisms (Yasukuni Shrine) and territorial disputes (Dokdo).

While it is important to address inconsistencies in American policy, uncertainty about China's intentions, and how measured a response Japan takes, the main causes of the current impasse with North Korea are Pyongyang's list of provocative and illegal activities. If we fail to recognize this, our debate will remain in the realm of psychology instead of the reality on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, in order to formulate more effective policies toward North Korea, it is necessary to consider the limited success with which South Korea's sunshine policy has been met. The current impasse over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs is a multifaceted

issue for which various parties must accept responsibility, both for their contributions to the problem, and to its future resolution.

It is thus misleading to label the recent DPRK missile tests as "an issue between North Korea and the U.S." To suggest that the missile tests are not an issue between China and DPRK is to fail to recognize those countries' complex relationship. To suggest that the missile tests are not an issue between Japan and DPRK is to disregard Tokyo's security concerns. And to suggest that the missile tests are not an issue between South Korea and DPRK is to suggest that Seoul shirk its responsibility in dealing with North Korea and abdicate provision of its national security to the United States. Clearly this does not make sense. North Korea's weapons programs are a concern for regional stability, and thus an issue for all regional actors with interests for stability, requiring multinational coordination and resumption of the Six Party Talks as soon as possible.

If South and North Korea want to someday unify into a single peaceful and prosperous nation, Pyongyang's provocative activities are very much Seoul's concern. Americans and Japanese need to be convinced that South Koreans agree with this, at which point Washington and Tokyo should be more supportive of Seoul's vision for peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. This process is not helped when Korean nationalism distorts the position of other countries. Mr. Kim's article states that "the draft [UN resolution] prepared by Japan urges the international community to take military action against North Korea." This statement is false as anyone can see by reading the draft resolution.

Mr. Kim goes on to write: "Japan's approach, claiming that preemptive attacks on North Korea are needed to protect its own citizens, may further promote broader attacks on the entire Korean peninsula." Japan has no plans to preemptively attack North Korea. The issue was raised hypothetically in Japan within the context of what forms of self-defense are permissible under the Japanese constitution. What made this Japanese domestic debate even more hypothetical is the fact that Japan does not possess the military capability to execute a preemptive strike against the North Korean missile capabilities that threaten Japan. Rather than being geared toward attacking anywhere on the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have been concerned with how to aid the defense of South Korea in the event the U.S.-Japan alliance is called to respond to a North Korean attack. The chances of such an attack by North Korea are fortunately low, but they are certainly higher than the likelihood of Japan repeating mistakes of the past by launching military aggression against Korea, an action to which most international observers attach a probability very close to zero.

History clearly teaches us, if we value peace, it is essential to understand and manage the interaction between nationalism and foreign policy. American scholars need to prevent national pride and one-sided interpretations of history from biasing our analyses. I believe the same goes for our Japanese and Korean friends.

Leif-Eric Easley is a Ph.D. candidate in Government and International Relations at Harvard University and a member of the Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders Program.