

## **The US-North Korea Relations and Implications for China**

**Speaker:** Prof. Edward J. Baker

**Chair:** Prof. Alka Acharya

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Prof. Edward J. Baker's view on the US-North Korea relations is based on his longstanding experience with varied institutions linked to North Korea, from working in the Peace Corps to being a staff member in the Fraser Committee during its investigation of Korean-American relations. Having lived in Korea for more than 10 years and being deeply involved in the struggle for democracy in South Korea, his presentation focused on the current situation of US-North Korea relations with its implications for China.

At the outset, he mentioned about the confrontation of US and North Korean policy and how the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has failed to secure peace in the peninsula. Using the map of Asia and Korea, he showed how India and Korea must be concerned about China. The speaker strongly iterated that it was time for both the US and North Korea to make a serious commitment to negotiate a permanent and peaceful end to the Korean War. The US and the USSR must shoulder a lot of blame for North and South division during the cold war.

The failure to negotiate a peace treaty leaves the Korean peninsula, China, Japan and all of North-East Asia to face the possibility of a war. Prof. Baker talked about the relations of China and Korea in the past. Korea was a small self-governing Confucius tributary state of China and the Korean king gained his legitimacy by being recognized by the Chinese emperor.

Prof. Baker spoke on the importance of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel with the help of the map and his visits to the UN headquarters in Seoul. The speaker then elaborated the current situation of relations between North Korea and the US. North Korea keeps complaining that the

US threatens them with nuclear conditions and these tensions have emerged from the nuclear developments partaken by North Korea.

The Clinton administration assigned Ashton Carter, now Secretary of Defense to determine whether to bomb North Korea nuclear facilities. The Agreed Framework between the USA and the DPRK was signed on October 21, 1994. The objective of the agreement was the freezing and replacement of North Korea's indigenous nuclear power plant program with more nuclear proliferation resistant light water reactor power plants, and the step-by-step normalisation of relations between the U.S. and the DPRK.

The speaker mentioned about the introduction of the famous 'Sunshine Policy'. He elaborated the importance of the Kaesong industrial complex which improved North-South relations but failed later. He was skeptical that North Korea admitted to having a secret uranium enrichment project to the US officials.

North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) after President Bush decided to end the Agreed Framework. Bush then introduced the six party talks which were chaired by China. North Korea agreed to the six party talks. Prof. Baker stressed on President Kim Jong-un's efforts to resolve the confrontation between the US and North Korea to secure peace in the peninsula. The six party talks reached an excellent agreement in 2005 when North Korea agreed to return to NPT and South Korea and US were to formally declare that they had no intentions to attack North Korea. At the same time the US treasury department designated North Korea as a primary laundering concern. The speaker mentioned that the US wanted to treat the financial and nuclear issue separately but North Korea would not agree.

The speaker spoke on North Korea's attempt to launch a satellite despite international opposition. North Korea launched satellites in 2012, 2013 and in early 2016. North Korea has been criticized on the ground that the recent test counts as a ballistic missile test. North Korea later declared that it would not take part in the six party talks and would not be bound by any agreement reached at the talks. The speaker elaborately spoke on president Obama's willingness to negotiate with North Korea and Kim Jong-un's bitter

disappointment over Obama's failure to work on a better approach that would be agreeable to North Korea.

The US and South Korea reacted to the launching of satellites by North Korea by announcing tougher sanctions and North Korea reacted by expelling South Korean workers. Based on recent news, the speaker discussed about the US pressure on South Korea to accept the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD). He stressed on China's opposition to this and South Korea's discomfort and reluctance.

The presentation also focused on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reactions to North Korea's nuclear tests. The UNSC has increased sanctions on North Korea. China though a close ally to North Korea voted in favour of these sanctions and did not even veto. Whether the sanctions will work, depends on China but China seems unhappy with North Korea. According to the speaker, China keeps urging US and North Korea to reopen the six party talks.

In the last section of his presentation, the speaker stated that if the US keeps threatening North Korea with nuclear conditions, North Korea might keep feeling the need of conducting more nuclear test. The speaker ended with the question of why the US continued to do what it was doing when it had never worked.

## **Discussion**

In the ensuing discussion, there were questions about Pakistan's aid to North Korea for its nuclear policy and lessons learnt from the Indian perspective and India's experience with Pakistan, related to the NPT on North Korea. In the case of Pakistan, he responded by saying that North Korea receives Uranium from Pakistan. A debate was held on China and US support to Pakistan's nuclear test. On a question related to scientific research in Korean Universities and scientific institutions for an advance in nuclear weapons, he remarked that the literacy rate in North Korea is 99% and students are achieving more on scientific research than on social science. Another question sought the speaker's viewpoint on whether North Korea was being unfairly treated. The speaker was of the view that there was no complete unfairness. North Korea invites harsh reactions by its behavior. The interest of the US and six party talks is to find out a peaceful way out of

this situation. The speaker mentioned that North Korea is not completely poor and repressed. North Korea is changing slowly.

*Report prepared by Debashree Nath, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies*

### **About the Speaker**

Prof. Edward J. Baker was the Associate Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute for 25 years. Baker is now a Member of the Committee of Special Advisors of the Harvard Korea Institute and an Associate of the HYI. Prof. Baker's interest in Korea began with Peace Corps service as an English teacher at the College of Education of SNU 1966-68. He has lived in Korea for more than 10 years and has travelled widely in East Asia. He has degrees from Colby College (1964 B.A. in history), Yale Law School (1971 J.D.) and Harvard (1973 M.A. in Regional Studies-East Asia). He was on the staff of the Subcommittee on International Organizations (the so-called "Fraser committee") of the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations during its Investigation of Korean-American Relations in 1977-78. Prof. Baker has been a close observer of political, economic, social and cultural developments in South Korea and East Asia since the 1960s. He was deeply involved in the struggle for democracy in South Korea in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in particular working to make that struggle known in the US.

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