

David Wang
STS.092

2 Approaches, 1 Problem

Note: This is written in the formatting of a high school Foreign Policy Extemporaneous speaking round. This is what I did in high school. If you like this formatting, tell me, and I'll try to write all my papers like this in the future. It lends to a few personal observations convoluted with a lot of evidence and published analysis.

The United States has long been a supporter of South Korea and its continuance as a democratic nation. At the conclusion of Powell's four day tour of East Asia, it was evident that the popular South Korean dissention of the US's aggressive anti-proliferation policies against North Korea had definitely not been swayed. On Tuesday, February 25th, 2003, 56 year old Roh Moo-hyun was sworn in as the new democratically elected leader of South Korea, displacing the affable Kim Dae-jung II. But, will Roh Moo-hyun, a former human rights lawyer, voted into office by the Korean protest generation, sponsor policies that will effectively interfere with the U.S's continued "aggressive policies" towards North Korea. The answer is a most definite NO. To see why, it will be important to understand Roh's stance and the belief of those who back him. Secondly, one must interpret North Korea's history of political action. Finally, one must look at the world's view.

Frist, Roh's Stance. Elected into office by the supporters of his predecessor, Roh is in no more of a position to oppose US power than Kim Dae-jung II. Although he wishes to continue Kim Dae-jung's former "sunshine policy," of continued dialogue and aid and

engagement with North Korea, he has certainly not gambled US support in his election promises. It is important to understand that Roh was not elected in reaction to the previous president, rather elected to continue policies otherwise strangled by a 5 year term limitation. This is evident from a February 24th, 2003 article from CNN in which his supporters held candlelight vigils to acquit two US servicemen of a road accident that killed two South Korean teenagers. This new generation doesn't see the US as an enemy. The students that survived the previous decade of military oppression have grown up and are now forming political beliefs based on the characteristically Western philosophy of an active pursuit of rights. Thus, Bush's adoption of a hard-line policy towards North Korea is not seen as provocation, but simply one country with beliefs different than the other.

It is along these lines that Roh continues to seek dialogue with the United States, hoping to bring South Korea's sunshine stance to a leveled bargaining table against US aggressive tactics. Seeing how 370,000 US troops are still stationed to protect the neutral territory, and his supporters still believe in the US as a whole, Roh has no cards to play against the United States. Thus, Roh's opinions are being effectively muted by the US's multilateral approach of bringing multiple larger countries to the currently stalled negotiations.

Second, we must address North Korea's past actions. On January 10th, 2003, North Korea formally withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, after deeming failures of the US to deliver on its last peace agreement (two light water reactors in trade for the halting of nuclear research and long-range missile tests) as an attempt to stifle the

country. Since that date the United States policy towards North Korea has grown colder. Though the country continues to push for bilateral negotiations with the US, the United States insists that talks only happen with multiple countries at the table. Perhaps this is Bush's tactic to regain US face in the UN or vice versa following the Iraqi engagement. It is in this environment of stalled dialogue that Roh has conceded to letting the US address the North bilaterally so long as dialogue continues. This gesture demonstrates Roh's acknowledgement of his inability to greatly effect North Korea's plans of Nuclear Proliferation.

Frankly, after 2 attempts by North Korea to threaten the United States with nuclear proliferation and 2 attempts by the US to prevent it., the consensus is that the North only intends to use proliferation as a tactic to gain influence in global politics. Another debate rages on as to whether high resolution satellite photos of 'reactivated' re-processing plants are fakes set up by North Korea to bring a chip to the table. Whether the reason for reactivating the plants is a rouse or not, North Korea's economy is drying up fast. With 1/3 of its people surviving of international food donations, North Korea must find some way to flood the civilian economy with money. The choices are to starve the people until the Koreans must fuse in order to survive or substitute the standing army of over 1 million with nuclear weapons in hopes that their reduction will provide the needed economic boost. Although the fusing of the two countries would be preferred, the economic drain on South Korea would be so devastating that neither countries would regain economic strength until 20 + years down the road, after Roh's term ended. If nuclear proliferation stops, a country must help North Korea's economy, since Roh is in

no position to do so, he must once again step away from the table to ensure continued US interest in North Korea.

Briefly, with the world in strong support of North Korea's bilateral talks with the United States, who is South Korea to oppose?

Alas, it looks like Roh's effectiveness in swaying US from its aggressive policies will be near nothing. Since sanctioning the North's economy would give them even a greater haste to create nuclear weapons to downsize their army, this could not be a US tactic. Since the US still wants to come out on top of this fiasco, the US will continue food aid (CNN, February 25th). Quite frankly, even if Roh doesn't have a full hand and any chips, the game will continue out of his control with the US in a position that requires some kindness towards the North.