

Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones
Response to Yonhap Questions
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The central theme of your questionnaire appears to be the Bush Administration's current approach to East Asia, particularly regarding the Korean Peninsula. I will answer accordingly.

The incumbent Bush Administration has significantly shifted the United States' foreign policy priorities, both geographical and strategically. Geographically, the Middle East now receives priority ahead of Europe, followed by East Asia, South America and Africa. Strategically, the Bush Administration's primary concern is confronting terrorism, and then countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In short, the so-called "Axis of Evil" accurately reflects the Bush Administration's priority concerns – first Iraq, and next Iran and North Korea. Libya's successful negotiations with the United Kingdom removed it from this list.

This re-ordering of foreign policy priorities has directly affected US policy toward the Korean Peninsula. There the priority concern is obviously North Korea because of its potential to proliferate WMD and possible support for terrorist activities. The Bush Administration's basic approach regarding North Korea is "strategic resolve combined with tactical flexibility." This means the Bush Administration is resolute in its determination to achieve "CVID" or the "complete, verifiably, irreversible dismantlement" of all of North Korea's nuclear programs, military and civilian alike.

In terms of tactics, its approach is flexible and has vacillated between Teddy Roosevelt's famous adage, "speak softly but carry a big stick." "Speaking softly" refers to the Six Party Talks and using diplomacy to achieve the peaceful diplomatic de-nuclearization of North Korea. But the Bush Administration is growing impatient with the slow pace of the Six Party Talks and since early October, 2005 has increasingly turned toward using its "big stick," the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). PSI is designed to intensify economic and multilateral diplomatic pressure on North Korea.

It is important to note that personalities are generally insignificant in formulating US foreign policy. Some observers, particularly in South Korea, believe that the new US chief negotiator to the Six Party Talks has played a key role in altering US tactics at the Six Party Talks. This is incorrect. He, like all professional diplomats must follow his government's instructions. His apparent "flexibility" was a reflection of the Bush Administration's willingness to emphasize diplomacy during the summer of 2005. But once diplomacy seems unable to achieve significant progress, President Bush in October 2005 reverted to increased emphasis on PSI and economic pressure. Ambassador Hill has responded loyalty to his president's instructions.

The Bush Administration's approach makes South Korea very uncomfortable. First, Seoul shares Washington's goal of de-nuclearizing North Korea, but Seoul is very uncomfortable with Washington's "big stick" tactics. Such tactics increase tensions on

the Korean Peninsula and run counter to Seoul's preference for patient diplomacy and economic engagement with North Korea to promote South-North reconciliation. Similarly, China and Russia prefers Seoul's approach over that of Washington for the same reasons. There are also some subtle indications that Tokyo likewise would prefer persistent patience over PSI.

Knowing this, Pyongyang has done its best to minimize the impact of Washington's diplomatic and economic pressure by cautiously offering to give Beijing, Moscow and Seoul what they want most – progress toward ending its nuclear weapons programs, but while retaining its hopes of developing a peace nuclear program. Pyongyang has been relatively successful until recently when it moved to demand that the United States end all its economic sanctions. This appears to have been a tactical error on Pyongyang's part. Participants in the Six Party talks want to concentrate on the central issue of ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program and believe that the issue of bilateral US-DPRK economic sanctions deflects attention away from that issue. In short, it has intensified concerns that Pyongyang may not be earnest in its offer to end its nuclear weapons programs and instead, is merely trying to prolong the negotiations, possibly so that it can further develop its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Tokyo increasingly shares Washington's concerns in this regard.

A second irritant in the US- ROK alliance is the future deployment of US forces in Northeast Asia. Reflecting its shifting strategic priorities, the United States is withdrawing 15,000 troops from South Korea and Japan. At the same time, it continues to encourage Japan to further build up its military capabilities. Both trends are serious concerns to South Korea. Given Washington's new priorities, however, Seoul cannot expect the United States to maintain much longer the status quo of its military deployment in Northeast Asia. Clearly, regardless of how Seoul expresses its concerns, the US withdrawal appears inevitable, albeit gradual. Similarly, Washington will most likely continue to encourage Japan to move toward full re-armament.

As for China, the United States primary concern now appears, at least for the Bush Administration, to continue facilitating the growing bilateral trade. This is what America's conservative business community expects of the Bush Administration. Concerns about China's military potency, appalling human rights record and authoritarian political system are secondary concerns. For the United States, the "rise of China" is not now a major concern because China's rise facilitates what American business wants most from China – prosperous bilateral trade and access to China domestic market.

Meanwhile, in the United States, concern about North Korea remains a marginal interest for the vast majority of Americans. They are focused on domestic concerns such as maintaining economic prosperity, winning the war in Iraq and countering global terrorism. In short, it would appear that the Korean Peninsula is gradually losing its importance to the United States. Once the nuclear issue is resolved, the importance of the Korean Peninsula to the US government will decline significantly.