

SUNSHINE THROUGH CLOUDY SKIES: PEACE AND SECURITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA

Author(s): Wendy R. Sherman

Source: *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2002), pp. 5-12

Published by: [Lynne Rienner Publishers](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704371>

Accessed: 10-06-2015 15:04 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Lynne Rienner Publishers is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Asian Perspective*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## SUNSHINE THROUGH CLOUDY SKIES: PEACE AND SECURITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA

*Wendy R. Sherman*

*The following article is the text of a speech by Ambassador Sherman to the conference in Seoul, Korea on "The Korean Peninsula after the Summit: Two Years of Developments and Prospects," May 22-25, 2002.*

I was privileged to be present—and hopefully helped to make a difference—during the period of time we are reviewing at this conference, so I appreciate the opportunity to offer some reflections on the past and prescriptions for the future.

Nearly two years ago, President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il shook hands on an airport tarmac on a bright sunny day when hope and possibility were high and many believed that there was no turning back. Today, the skies are cloudy, but many of us—though not everyone—are still seeking some sunshine.

Two years ago, South Korea, the United States, Japan, China, Russia, and the European Union (EU) all believed that engagement with North Korea was the best way forward to ensure peace and security. There was a set of shared principles—principles, quite frankly, that sound very similar to the principles professed by the U.S. administration of today. We

said that any approach to North Korea must be comprehensive and address all issues. We said that we should proceed carefully, step-by-step and be reciprocal, so that we held on to the reins of any negotiation. We said that we had to coordinate our sticks and carrots so that the North could not use its favorite negotiating tactic of trying to get as much as possible from any single negotiation. In other words, we could create a package deal, it just wouldn't come all at once. We agreed that we had to work closely with our allies, because their citizens would be most immediately and directly affected by a dangerous conflict and because, at the end of the day, where South Korea is concerned, the ROK should remain the center of any ultimate agreement for peace and stability.

We all agreed—particularly after the Perry process, led by former Secretary of Defense William Perry—that the North needed to be presented with two paths—a choice: a positive path where they would meet our concerns thus improving relations and accruing benefits that ultimately come from normalization and entry into the community of nations; or a downward path that would lead to further isolation and even greater deterrence. Meeting our concerns meant that over time we would engage on a comprehensive agenda, but that our highest priority would be a verifiable elimination of all non-MTCR (Missile Technology Control Regime) missile and missile related technology, cessation of export of such technology, and a verifiable elimination of the North's nuclear-weapons program. This priority was the clear consensus of a wide array of experts in the United States and around the world. In the United States, importantly, it also represented a strong bipartisan consensus. This priority was based on the premise that deploying long-range missiles capable of carrying a nuclear weapon were—and are—the most potentially destabilizing event for the peninsula and the world, leading to a potentially catastrophic conflict. The North's subsequent test-firing of a missile over Japan in August 1999 and the resultant reaction from capitals confirmed that view.

In May 1999, when Bill Perry led a small delegation to North Korea, we laid out this choice to the North. Perry did not have to say a great deal about the downward path. His very presence, having been the Defense Secretary who was moving to take necessary steps in 1993, was well known to the North who

had labeled him, at the time, a warmonger. The United States, at the time of our visit, was bombing Serbia so our military might was not in doubt. In fact, the member of the DPRK Defense Commission with whom we met, and others, declared that North Korea would not be Yugoslavia, that they needed missiles as defensive weapons against the hostile United States.

So it was clear to the North that we would be tough when America needed to be tough. When our and our allies' security was at stake we would do whatever it took to protect the lives of our citizens. Our action in Afghanistan, I am sure, reconfirmed this knowledge.

We did not know for some months after the Perry visit that the North not only understood the message but had already begun to make what appeared to be the choice for the positive path. Strongly motivated by President Kim Dae Jung's historic, profound, quiet diplomacy and public policy magnified by the Berlin speech; clear that a wedge could not be driven between the ROK, Japan and the United States; understanding the economic crisis in front of the North; and quite conscious of the legacy of his father, Kim Jong Il decided to begin slow but serious movements toward reconciliation. The positive path has never been straight, never been steady, sometimes has taken a serious detour. But in two years, we have seen the historic summit between the two leaders, a moratorium of missile flight testing, visits by Kim Jong Il to China and Russia, four family reunions, some discussions between ministers of North and South, joint economic projects, sports exchanges, and a visit by a high-level emissary to the United States and a visit by then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang.

The North has received food and fuel and, sometimes, even cash. And of course, the North has gained some legitimacy, albeit limited. For humanitarian reasons, the United States and others would probably have supplied food and fuel even without this limited progress, though actions on the part of North Korea constantly challenge this moral conviction. We are all clear, however—whatever our domestic politics—that we want more progress, more tangible results from the engagement.

In the past months, however, more voices have been raised to challenge some of the premises of our joint efforts. We are at risk of losing any momentum for change we might have once

had and turning cloudy skies into a fierce storm.

So let me briefly outline where we all agree and then where we don't and what we might do to find the sun amidst those cloudy skies.

First, we would all agree that North Korea is probably not where we would want to live. Little food, a harsh climate, no freedoms, virtually no contact with the outside world. Having witnessed the overwhelming stadium performance in which 250,000 people appearing out of nowhere on the often deserted streets of Pyongyang performed an extravaganza born of total control by an authoritarian regime, I can attest to a lack of desire to live in such circumstances.

Second, we would all agree that the North wants weapons of mass destruction and that this is a very bad thing—bad because we are uncertain about its intentions. If the North views weapons of mass destruction as a balancer against our military might or as a strategic deterrent, we need to ensure that its leaders understand that there are far better and far less dangerous ways to guarantee security. If the North views weapons of mass destruction as a commodity for sale, or as an offensive weapon, that is clearly even more dangerous. I think the former is more likely than the latter, but in any case, we must engage on the substance. Newspaper reports point to enough plutonium hidden away after the 1994 Agreed Framework closed down fissile material production, to perhaps produce one or two nuclear weapons. We expect that North Korea has chemical and biological weapons. And, we know that North Korea has and sells relatively sophisticated short- and mid-range—and perhaps long-range—missiles or missile-related technology capable of not only acting as a conventional weapon but as a carrier for more dangerous weapons.

Third, we would all agree that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists would far exceed even the overwhelming devastation of the September 11 airplane attacks on the United States. And, we would agree that although—as far as I know—there is no current evidence that North Korea has shared its “expertise” with terrorists, that it is not out of the realm of possibility that directly or indirectly, such a transfer could occur. Therefore, we would all agree that we need to do what we can to eliminate that possibility.

But there are also some disagreements. There are some who believe that we must be about regime change because the current regime is so terrible and so intent on having—and using—weapons of mass destruction that we must make regime change happen now. Having said that none of us likes this regime, the fact is that change probably cannot happen overnight and shouldn't happen overnight. If it did, it would bring devastating demands on South Korea and the region, even if one were to assume that regime change could happen peacefully and without another regressive and repressive regime replacing the current one—both very shaky premises.

Second, some believe that there is no such thing as a verifiable agreement with North Korea and that indeed, the Agreed Framework was terribly flawed. To those critics I would point to the recent agreement (the Treaty of Moscow) between Russia and the United States to be signed by Presidents Putin and Bush. This shows what can happen. Not perfect verification, not total, not mandatory dismantlement or destruction of weapons, but nonetheless, an important step. It is true that Russia is not the Soviet Union of the cold war and that we now have experience that has built some trust. But, all in this room know the bitter disputes over SALT I and SALT II and the heated debates over America's Nunn-Lugar program that provides funds—cash—for dismantlement of Russian nuclear weapons. Today we see positive proof of the courage of those agreements and we forget the doubters who almost stopped progress. Verification of any agreement with North Korea—with anyone—must be strong, clear, and transparent, but it is not impossible, even if it will never be perfect.

Third, there are those who say we must be able to do everything at once so that the North cannot choose the best benefits—cannot “cherry pick,” in English—and so that benefits actually reach people and help them to be free. I cannot think of any diplomacy where everything is done all at once. Even where military force is used as it was in Afghanistan, there is much work to be done and hard agreements to be reached to really win the peace. Thus, the Perry Report called for comprehensive but step-by-step and reciprocal arrangements, while knowing that reciprocity would not always be exact in any one moment. We looked at all that we hoped to accomplish from eliminating

weapons of mass destruction to conventional forces to terrorism to human rights and religious freedom to eliminating drug dealing and counterfeiting—and developed a road map, sequencing of sticks and carrots, and consultation with our allies to help ensure that at the end of the day we had met our comprehensive agenda even though we could not do it all at once.

The Bush administration is in the throes of deciding its next steps. Where a few days ago many of us expected a dialogue to have already begun again in Pyongyang, the timing is now less clear although the commitment remains. The South Koreans are already in the midst of presidential politics. The economic talks that might put the north-south railroad back on track were cancelled by the North, perhaps foreshadowing the stakes for the North's military in such a project. And other allies hope for progress but are pulled by domestic forces in other directions.

So where is the sunshine in the cloudy skies?

First, the United States, South Korea, and Japan must have a defensive strategy even as each contemplates steps for a more robust engagement. We must, first and foremost, keep the Agreed Framework intact. Although missiles are a conventional weapon we would rather the North not have, missiles armed with nuclear weapons are the real problem. The United States must continue to provide heavy fuel oil, work hard with our partners in KEDO (the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization) to support the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) in getting a historical record without precipitating an anticipatory crisis, continue construction of the reactors, and see the Agreed Framework as an opportunity for confidence-building with the North. None of us really understood how complicated it would be to implement the Agreed Framework. There is no other model like it where several countries work together to construct such a complicated facility overseen by an international regulatory agency. It is very hard, terribly difficult, but not impossible and absolutely essential to regional security. We too often forget 1993 and as a result risk edging onto the slope and over the edge into a horrific crisis. We should not forget where we were and how important it is that we not be there again.

Second, the United States must engage and engage soon. The White House announced that talks would begin again with the North. Ambassador Jack Pritchard, the U.S. special envoy,

would travel to Pyongyang soon. The engagement must be well prepared, but the bipartisan set of principles, long established, provide a template for beginning the dialogue. We must get underway again. Although there are things the North must do, and it is true that it takes two parties to have a negotiation, the United States must take the lead if we are to be in the lead.

Third, the United States should appoint a North Korea Policy Coordinator. Ambassador Pritchard is a very tough, skeptical, and able negotiator, but ultimately, the North will only have Kang Suk Ju, its senior North American negotiator, make any real progress at a higher level. And, as importantly, a high-level policy coordinator will ensure coordination within the U.S. government that will allow for that real progress to occur. However, talks with a high-level coordinator need to be prepared, in the way business is done with the North, and so I would encourage that Ambassador Pritchard be sent as soon as possible.

Fourth, I hope, that through whatever means—Russia, the EU, President Megawati of Indonesia, the Chinese, secret channels—messages are being delivered to the North that progress also rests in its hands. Chairman Kim Jong Il can make a reciprocal visit to Seoul; begin real work on the railroad; create a permanent site for reuniting families—all acts that would reinvigorate the South-North channel and create an incentive for us, the United States, to act more vigorously. Presidential envoy Lim Dong Won once again has helped to open the door, but North Korea must take action. There is no question that Chairman Kim is cautious. Regime survival is everything and moving too quickly might mean a loss of control that would be unacceptable to Kim. But if he takes no risks, sooner and certainly later he risks the very thing he dreads—annihilation. The North has it in its control to bring the United States and the international community to the table in a way that will make true progress.

Fifth, we must all do a better job of truly dealing with economic and political refugees. All of us have tread this issue carefully. We have not wanted to expose the many migrants, who travel back and forth across the Chinese border trying to feed their families, to a crackdown by the Chinese or death in North Korea. We have not wanted to create further tension between the South and North or increase the burden on South Korea. But, at least in the United States, this is an issue that captures the hearts,

minds, and sense of outrage of the American people and American politicians. It could quickly overwhelm our ability to manage this very important and difficult issue. Whether in the TCOG—the (U.S.-ROK-Japan) Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group—bilaterally, or by calling a special meeting of the affected parties, we must think about how we approach this concern.

There are of course many things others can do to reduce the risk of sliding off the slippery slope. Korea—and President Kim Dae Jung—will be remembered in history as having led the way to hope. But ultimately, we have all understood that the U.S.-DPRK relationship is the key since the North Korean regime believes that it will not be secure unless its relations are normalized with the United States. And so we, the Americans, must shoulder this responsibility, responsibly.

Some say that the world has changed after September 11 and that our approach to North Korea must, therefore, change. We must be tougher in our rhetoric, say it like it is, demand more in return, wait for North Korea to act responsibly before we take a next step. Some even believe we should further isolate the North and make them more of a pariah. As an American, I agree that the world has changed since September 11. We Americans understand in a tragic and deeply painful way that there are terrorists who wish to destroy us, and our way of life. It makes us cling to our freedoms even more strongly and be even more committed to eliminating weapons of mass destruction that in the hands of terrorists would make even September 11 pale. But I take that fight for freedom to a different place than some. We have to fight even harder to open the doors to the people of North Korea. We should do everything we can to support South Korea in its efforts at reconciliation so that separated families see each other before elders pass into the next life, and children can grow taller than malnourishment allows. We do not do this wide eyed and naive. We must be clear-eyed, disciplined, careful, ensure transparency, accountability and verification—but, I believe, we must engage, sooner rather than later. In a world in which there are calls for moral clarity, reaching out for the dreams and hopes of the Korean people is the moral act. The time, then, to act, is now. It is time to let the sunshine in.