

This column by PCI Board Member, Glyn Ford, appeared in the Korea Daily News on Thursday, March 2, 2023.

[Exclusive] Make Pyongyang's Day!

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by **Glyn Ford** / Former Member of the European Parliament (MEP)



Glyn Ford

For Pyongyang the South going nuclear would be a cause for celebration not consternation. The recent forewarning by President Yoon that Seoul might opt for unilateral nuclear armament was painted as a threat to Pyongyang that would force it to curb its enthusiasm for the continued development of bigger missiles and smaller nukes. This deterrent effect was to resonate with its deliberate conjuncture with Prime Minister Kishida's announced smashing of Tokyo's 1% glass ceiling on military spending with his plan to double the defense budget over the next five to ten years, thus supposedly delivering a pincer movement locking the North in the jaws of a Tokyo – Seoul vice.

US reaction was bipolar. Ignoring Article 9 of Japan's Peace Constitution – carelessly fettered on Tokyo by the US Occupation in 1947 – was welcome in Washington particularly with the Japanese Supreme Court's self-denying ordinance of non-interference. In contrast Seoul was put down and in its place. Yoon's was a step that put to the question Washington's commitment to the US – ROK alliance and extended deterrence.

There was no answer. Washington's enthusiasm for the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea is no existent, while completely off the table is any notion of dual key allowing Seoul a say in its own fate and future. The Pentagon's last best offer would be some sleight of hand where Washington deploys nuclear capable platforms to the South and a Clintonian 'don't ask, don't tell' closet policy on armament available. It's an unattractive answer to Seoul's search for sovereignty.

The North's ICBM program now serves a second purpose as demonstrated by the spectacle of Pyongyang's military parade earlier this month. Qualitatively there remain doubts about their ICBM's missile re-entry capacity, the number of warheads they are capable of carrying and

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the lack of anything but rudimentary targeting capacity, quantitatively the dozen Hwasong 17s that trundled through Kim Il Sung Square were enough to overwhelm US defenses. This punches a massive hole in US missile defense and security strategy with a vulnerability not there before.

The North is well aware this is a gamechanger. In any future crisis – that threatens to go nuclear – the US is now in the frontline. The battle will no longer be limited to foreign soil. It threatens to furl the umbrella of extended deterrence. When De Gaulle asked whether Washington would trade New York for Paris many believed they might. The question in North East Asia has been, until now, Tokyo for Seoul. The answer to that question was always yes. Now when Los Angeles, New York and other US cities are in play the US public would vote no with its politicians in train.

At best the US will tighten the leash on the South's military adventurism with all the talk of disproportional retaliation for Northern provocations. At worst, this prospect of asymmetrical deterrence will drive Yoon's unilateralism. He's being pushed by public, popularity and position. His grim popularity ratings would only be enhanced by a policy of unilateral nuclear armament. He would free the South from the iron discipline of seventy years of subordination. Bad enough with shared objectives, but less tolerable in a house divided. It would pander to Korea's growing self-confident nationalism.

The North's gain is to severely weaken or even break the US alliance with Seoul, while the second shoe drops when Japan in the face of such unilateral action follows. All handing Pyongyang its 'Get out of Jail Free' card. Denuclearization is dead, the North is a 'de facto' nuclear state and the future is arms control with CVID yesterday's acronym, not today's policy, while the shackles of necessity that bound Tokyo and Seoul to Washington fall away. Pyongyang sees little to fear from the prospect of any new ROK–Japan alternative.

Glyn Ford

Former Member of the European Parliament (MEP)

In over 25 years in the EP Glyn Ford developed an unrivaled expertise on East Asia as a Member of the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committees. This interest started even before his election to the European Parliament (EP), when he was a visiting Professor in 'Science and Technology Policy' at Tokyo University. Immediately after his Japanese experience, he was elected at the EP and became a member of the Delegation for Relations with Japan. His interest expanded over the years to South Korea (he was the Rapporteur on EU-Korea Science and Technology Agreement), China, and the rest of East Asia (he was rapporteur on the EU-ASEAN FTA). He was appointed by the Council of Ministers as the EU's Chief Election Observer in Indonesia (2004) and Aceh (2006/7).

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When he left the European Parliament in 2009, Glyn Ford founded the consulting company Polint, which he still leads today. However, in parallel, he continued his political and academic engagement with the DPRK and the East Asian region. These activities, which have always been conducted on a 'non-profit' basis, are now carried out in the framework of Track2Asia.