

TIME TO END THE KOREAN WAR

December 20, 2012

Thirty-eight years ago, just before Christmas, our lives as missionaries came to a sudden end when South Korea's military dictator, Park Chung-hee, deported my husband, George Ogle, because he prayed in public for eight innocent men who had been falsely accused of having Communist ties, tortured to confess, and sentenced to death by secret military court. Although George had been a missionary in Korea for twenty years and all four of our children had been born there, George's deportation served as an object lesson to President Park's detractors that no criticism would be tolerated. In the scheme of things and as the historical record bears out, deportation was one of the lighter consequences for challenging President Park's martial rule over the South Korean people.

We were nonetheless crushed. We had intended to spend the rest of our working years in Korea, a place we had come to regard as home. The course of our lives may have been altered, but the lives of the families of the eight men were changed forever. On April 9, 1975, these men were hanged without being allowed to make the appeal granted them by law, and their families were ostracized for decades. After these men were executed, it would take thirty-two more years of suffering, pain borne by their families, before a retrial cleared their names.

Fortunately, in 1987, South Koreans rose up all over the country and won a historic, hard-fought victory for democracy. Personally we have been able to return to South Korea many times and have received hospitality and honors beyond anything we could ever imagine. But George and I have also had the opportunity to visit North Korea. We have friends who are among the few of the ten million separated family members who have been reunited with family on the other side. We feel that the Koreans in the north and south are one people. The tragedy of the divided Korea weighs heavy on our hearts, and we daily pray that there will be a peace agreement ending the Korean War so that the Korean people can be reconciled.

Now, in this Christmas season, we have received the news that Park Geun-hye, the military dictator's daughter, has been elected the first woman president of South Korea in a close race against a human rights lawyer. Without question, she carries the baggage of being Park Chung-hee's daughter. Yet there is reason to hope. The recent North Korean rocket launch played no part in the South Korean election, and Park Geun-hye has sought to distance herself from the unpopular "Get tough on North Korea" policy of the current president. Moreover, Park has publicly apologized for the violence of her father's rule, and her presidency represents an opportunity for her to reckon with this legacy of the past.

Next year is the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the armistice that ended the hot war but left us technically and legally still at war. The armistice regime established unresolved war as the basis of relations not only between North and South Korea but also between North Korea and the United States. U.S. leaders have focused their efforts on causing economic collapse which has caused terrible suffering for the people of North Korea.

If Park, by contrast, makes good on her promise to heal relations with North Korea, will she likewise be able to help U.S. policy-makers understand that we must change our approach to North Korea if we wish to make any progress on issues that concern us? President George W. Bush developed a hostile policy toward North Korea at odds with that of his liberal South Korean counterparts during the

Sunshine era. President Obama has toed the line of Park's predecessor, the hardline South Korea president Lee Myung-bak. In neither instance have our leaders displayed any vision for much-needed peace, engagement, and reconciliation.

Why should we be surprised, then, that North Korea has launched a satellite or that they may test nuclear weapons? Why should we think that more sanctions might deter them from moving in that direction, when we have already tried sanctions for sixty years? Does anyone think that we have a military option in one of the most militarized places in the world? Can you imagine the destruction if active hostilities were to break out on the Korean peninsula which is only the size of Minnesota? Why should North Koreans trust us when we openly talk about regime change and regularly carry out military exercises right off the North Korean coast? Why would North Koreans think that we don't have a hostile attitude when they see our TV programs and movies such as *Red Dawn* and witness the mockery we make of their leaders? Serious, sober discussion—and a willingness to engage across differences—is an essential first step toward peace.

Do we remember that Korea was just one country until it was cavalierly divided by the United States and the Soviet Union at the end of World War II? Korea suffered under Japanese colonial rule but she, unlike Japan, was not an aggressor during World War II. Do we remember that South Korea (our ally) did not sign the armistice because they would not accept that Korea was still divided? Are we aware that the defense spending of South Korea equals the entire GNP of North Korea? Do we remember that we have rejected North Korea's many calls for negotiations for a peace treaty?

In our condemnation of North Korea's military priorities, do we remember that North Korea's nuclear program began when we had nuclear weapons pointed at them and threatened to use them? Do we remember that Kim Il Sung called for a nuclear-free zone in Korea, a request we disregarded? Do we remember that we violated the terms of the 1953 Armistice Agreement by deploying nuclear weapons to South Korea? Do we remember that there were international inspectors in North Korea from the time of the 1994 accords until President George W. Bush declared North Korea part of the "Axis of Evil"? When we negotiated, North Korea worked with us. International inspectors returned to North Korea and the nuclear reactor was dismantled, but these proceedings faltered when outgoing South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, in his inaugural address, announced his "Get tough on North Korea" policy.

A December 13 editorial in South Korea's *Hankyoreh* newspaper makes the obvious point that the most urgent order of business for the international community is to prevent North Korea from combining its nuclear weapons with its long-range rocket technology and that it is clear that North Korea will continue to step up its efforts to achieve this. "By Pyongyang's logic, combining its nuclear weapons with its long-range rocket technology is the only way to guard its regime against external threats and increase its negotiating power, using the abandonment of its weapons of mass destruction as a bargaining chip."

Yet the *Hankyoreh* editorial envisions, unlike our policy-makers, a way forward, recognizing in North Korea's actions a rationale: "a solution needs to be sought through negotiation rather than sanctions and hard-line policy alone, and that the fundamental reason North Korea tests nuclear weapons and rockets is to guarantee the stability and survival of its regime." What I would add is that North Koreans do not want to destroy themselves by using a nuclear weapon. They want a peace treaty that takes into consideration the security and economic concerns of both Koreas. We have not yet given

peace a chance, but there is still hope that the North Koreans may be willing to stop their expensive nuclear experiments if there is a genuine opportunity to negotiate a peace agreement ending the Korean War. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past by calling their launch “bad behavior,” an infantilizing assessment that gets us nowhere.

The burden of history is on Park Geun-hye who may be the first woman president in South Korea but who remains the daughter of the dictator. The burden of history is likewise upon us. We, whose government divided Korea, who fought a bloody war on Korean soil, who propped up a sequence of dictators in South Korea, and who have spent untold billions of dollars on military bases and war games on the peninsula, have our own second chance—a chance at peace and co-existence. The alternative is unthinkable. We must therefore negotiate a peace agreement to end the longest war in U.S. history. We owe this not only to the Korean people but also to ourselves.

Dorothy Ogle was a United Methodist missionary in South Korea, a member of American Friend Service Committee 1984 peace delegation to North Korea, and an activist for human rights and democracy and peace and reconciliation in Korea. She is the co-author of ***Our Lives in Korea and Korea in Our Lives***. She lives with her husband, George Ogle, in Lafayette, Colorado.

* If you want to end the U.S. and Korean useless spending to prepare for war, if you want to prevent nuclear disaster, and if you care about the suffering of the Korean people, join the National Campaign to End the Korean War. (<http://www.endthekoreanwar.org/>)

Dorothy Ogle
810 Robin Cove
Lafayette, Colorado 80026
720-890-8289
geogle@aol.com