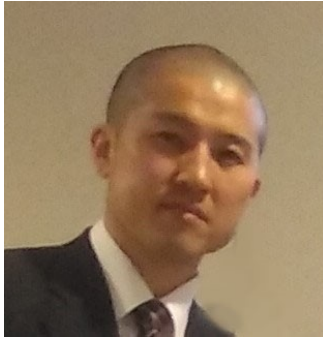


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What Does COVID-19 Imply for Nuclear-Armed North Korea?



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I would like to relate my thoughts on “COVID-19 in relation to nuclear-armed DPRK (North Korea)”. Thirty years have passed since the end of the Cold War, and a kind of paradigm shift or backlash from globalism to internationalism seems to have begun. Now, in 2020 we are in a different kind of war; COVID-19 has overwhelmed the world in 2020.

First of all, Coronavirus is similar to North Korea, hiding in the dark. An alleged report that Kim Jong Un had fallen into

a coma or even died was prevalent in western mass and social media in the first half of 2020. For example, during an interview on May 1, a South Korean politician reported that he had confirmed Kim Jong Un was dead. However, this turned out to be fake news because a subsequent broadcast from North Korea showed that Kim Jong Un was alive and well. Like COVID-19, the DPRK has been a “black box” and we can only collect small pieces of information about it nowadays by peeping at its surface from the eyes of satellites, or snooping into its domestic politics by hearing the testimonies of defectors, who are regarded as reliable inside informers.

Any scientific research including area studies on North Korea has to exclude subjectivity, and we are often misled by false information, as shown above, so we have to make efforts to remain scientifically objective. Otherwise, we will suffer from what is called “confirmation bias”; that is, we are all programmed to see what we want to.

Fighting against a coronavirus that we remain uncertain how to deal with should also be based on science. If other more subjective factors such as politics and the economy outweigh the scientific approach, which should play the leading role, human beings' efforts to survive it will suffer a disastrous failure.

Officially, the death toll from COVID-19 in North Korea is “zero”. The Russian Ambassador to DPRK recently stated that DPRK had succeeded in blocking the wave of coronavirus infections, but it is uncertain whether this is true. However, the North Korean preventive measures against the COVID-19 were rigorously harsh as all the borders were locked down and all of those seen as potentially infected with the virus, including diplomats from foreign countries were quarantined, even

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though this would have been viewed as a violation of Vienna Treaty.

While the North Korean blockade and quarantine must have gone too far from the view of democratic countries, it has been proved effective in preventing the occurrence of Coronavirus. Moreover, no one was wearing a face mask in the Fourth Enlarged Meeting of the Seventh Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held in May. Considering these facts, it may be possible that the DPRK quarantine measures have been as successful as those of Vietnam and Taiwan have been, whereas some of the watchers carefully observing North Korean events expected that COVID-19 would have devastated North Korea.

Meanwhile at the end of May in the US total deaths exceeded 100,000. This is equivalent to the combined total of all the fatalities in the Korean War (about 36,500), the Vietnam War (about 58,000), the Iraq War (about 4,500), and the Afghanistan War (about 2,000). In its wake, the warped social and economic disparity in the US has finally imploded.

It is interesting to note that the death toll and social impact on America in the case of nuclear bombs being detonated in US metropolitan cities would be much greater than the number of COVID-19 cases. The number killed by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima reached about 140,000 by the end of 1945, and about 300,000 as of now. In addition, Nukemap estimates "only one" 250kt nuclear bomb detonated on New York City would create fierce heatwaves and a blast that could take at least 950,000 precious lives. Under the same scenario in Tokyo and Seoul, the estimated death tolls could be 630,000 and 620,000 respectively. Either of these figures surpasses the approximately 420,000 lives the Coronavirus had taken

worldwide by June 12, 2020.

Furthermore, a nuclear war would not only kill millions of people but also shut down medical facilities and services more severely than COVID-19. Moreover, the lifelines which didn't malfunction during the first and second virus waves, could be paralyzed since nuclear weapons cause blackouts, the fear of which Japan already experienced in 2018 Hokkaido Eastern Iburi earthquake. Without a doubt, the economic loss would be incomparable. In fact, these social and economic malfunctions during a nuclear war could contribute to raising the death toll even higher, and if North Korea possessed and used other WMDs such as bacteriological weapons, it could become far worse.

Since 1948, Japan has allowed US troops to be stationed on its soil and has yet to normalize its relationship with the DPRK. Therefore a nuclear war initiated by North Korea, with the potential to escalate into World War III, would almost certainly devastate Japan. As a Korean living in Japan, I hope that this will never happen.

To sum up, waging nuclear war is completely irrational from a scientific perspective. The wise position that a nuclear war should never be allowed to occur should be firmly held on to during the new COVID era. I will dedicate myself to security studies in Northeast Asia focusing on the DPRK in order to contribute to the prevention of such a catastrophic war.

Author's Profile

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