

Ban Ki-moon's Idea of Leadership or the Candlelight Model for More Democracy?

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The movement for more democracy continues in South Korea. Massive demonstration/festivals are occurring weekly despite having achieved the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye and the coming of cold winter weather. There is an understanding widespread among all sectors of the South Korean people. South Korean democracy must take new forms that will prevent the widespread corruption and the long-standing interweaving of the ROK government and the Korean corporations called chaebols. What new democratic forms this movement will give rise to are not clear. But it is unlikely the current party structure and electoral system can survive.

After ten years at the UN Ban Ki-moon will return to South Korea in January. There will likely be a test of his vision of personal leadership versus the mass demand that something different is needed to move South Korea toward more democracy.

Ronda looks at these developments in a post on her netizenblog,

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You can see it at: <http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2016/12/21/leadership-or-candlelight-democracy/>

I have pasted the text below.

We would welcome your thoughts and comments.

We hope your health and your spirits are good.

Take care.

Hello from Ronda.

Jay

Ban Ki-moon's Idea of Leadership or the Candlelight Model for More Democracy?

South Korea has reached a critical juncture. The National Assembly has voted to impeach the President, Park Geun-hye and the impeachment has gone to the Constitutional Court. Six of the nine judges must support the impeachment for Park to be removed from the presidency permanently.

In the midst of this turning point, Ban Ki-moon's 10 years as Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) will come to an end on December 31, 2016. He has indicated he will consider what to do about becoming a candidate for the presidency of South Korea after he leaves his office at the UN. He appears to be seriously considering running for the top political office in South Korea despite the provisions of a General Assembly Resolution passed on January 24, 1946, [GA Resolution 11(1)] which state that a Secretary General on leaving office should refrain from accepting such a political position and member nations of the UN should refrain from offering a recently retired Secretary General such a position, because of the privileged sources of information and social connections he has gathered during his period in the UN position.(1)

For a time, Ban Ki-moon was seen as leading the South Korean presidential polls as a potential candidate. He was being courted by the Saenuri Party, the Party of President Park Geun-hye.

But in the past few months there has been a significant change. What had seemed a promising new opportunity for Ban is now tied in with the corruption scandal that has engulfed the administration of Park Geun-hye. There were allegations that her administration was plagued by corruption over the past few years, and by October, 2016 various news media were revealing evidence of that corruption.

Interviews published in the South Korean newspaper Hankyoreh began to show how the Korean government practices were being directly influenced or even decided by forces outside of the government. Hankyoreh interviews described meetings with other people carried out by Choi Soon-sil, a long time friend of President Park, discussing the President's upcoming schedule and national policy issues. This was substantiated when a computer tablet was found by reporters connected with the JTBC cable media. The tablet's memory contained many files that have been alleged to prove that President Park subordinated her presidency to Choi Soon-sil, who had no official role in the South Korean government. The allegation is that Park turned to Choi for advice and decisions concerning government matters.

The involvement of Choi Soon-sil in government matters was linked to her role in creating foundations and using the President's name and influence to raise funds from the chaebols, the big corporations dominating the South Korean economy. It is alleged that some chaebol executives then expected and received favorable decisions in government matters relating to their businesses.

Other examples of government corruption have emerged in areas like culture and sports. There is evidence that government contracts were given to those recommended by Choi Soon-sil or officials who had been appointed based on her recommendation. The news of these activities

spread and the public came to understand what appeared to be serious systemic corruption involving the head of the South Korean government.

By the end of October, large weekly public demonstrations began to be held by South Korean citizens calling on President Park to resign. The demonstrations grew in size so that by December, 2016, over one million people of all ages and from many walks of life rallied in Seoul with almost 2 million people protesting nationwide. President Park made some attempts at what she claimed to be public apologies, but the public was dismayed by what appeared more as attempts at justifying her behavior.

Ban Ki moon was no longer leading in the polls. Other potential candidates swung ahead of him or tied with him.

By December 9, a vote was taken in the National Assembly to impeach the President. The result was 234 to support the impeachment resolution and 56 against. The number voting to impeach Park exceeded the 200 votes needed for the impeachment resolution to pass. As required by the Constitution, the impeachment resolution was taken to the Constitutional Court, which has up to 180 days to review the merits of the resolution.

When asked by journalists about his intentions with respect to a potential candidacy for the presidency, Ban has responded that he would return to South Korea only after his term as UN Secretary General ends on December 31, 2016. He plans to return in mid-January and then assess the situation after consulting with others. His spokesperson at the UN acknowledged that Ban knows about the UNGA Resolution asking him to refrain from taking a political position or his country from offering him a position. But Ban has not so far given any indication that this resolution would play any role in his decision.

Meanwhile commentary in the media by scholars, journalists and citizens seeks to analyze what is happening in South Korea. The article "A Historic Juncture" in the South Korean newspaper JoongAng Ilbo by Political Science Professor Jaung Hoon of Chung-An University proposed that South Korea was at a critical crossroads. (2) Describing this juncture, he wrote that this was "a decisive moment at which the god of history differentiates the fraying established power from the new force of the future."

He proposed that ending Park Geun-hye's presidency and finding a way to amend the constitution so no such corruption could be repeated was important, but that this was not what he called "the ultimate issues." What the people truly want, he explained, is a new form of civic politics and political platform that go beyond the representative democracy of the 20th century in order to allow continuous exchange and communication between the representative system and the general will of the people. Professor Hoon proposes the need to strengthen communication between the political system and the people.

Several other articles in the Korean media express a similar urgency, but they propose the need to change the political structures, not merely make them more responsive. For example, the editorial "Impeachment Means a New Dawn for South Korean Democracy" in the Korean newspaper Hankyoreh proposed the need for changing the political framework that allowed such

corruption to take place.

The Hankyoreh editorial argues (3):

“If representative democracy is unable to adequately express the demands of direct democracy, there is no reason for it to continue. Politics has been distorted by political interests that reject the will of the people, and it’s time for that to stop. We hope that the politicians will stop testing the protesters’ patience.”

This Hankyoreh editorial notes, “This is an opportunity not merely to remove the people who appropriated state resources for themselves but to replace the obsolete systems, conditions and structures that made such appropriation possible.” The impeachment motion is viewed as but “the first step on the long journey toward completing the civic revolution in the truest sense of that phrase.”

The editorial “Candlelight Revolution Mandates Rebuilding of Nation” in the newspaper The Korea Times, in a similar vein, explained that what was happening in South Korea was a “candlelight revolution” which mandates, “the rebuilding of the nation.” (4) The editorial reports that people involved in the protests “commonly pledged to support the fundamental reformation of society and continuously participate in decision making.”

The editorial explained that, “The incompetence of the political parties encouraged people to participate directly.” It quoted as an example, one demonstrator who said “We don’t have a clear plan yet, but we all share in the belief that we need more action for changes.”

The article “Three Points of the Constitutional Court ‘Impeachment Trial’,” in the Korean newspaper OhmyNews explained that what had happened in South Korea is that citizens took the lead and led political circles and the media. Although only 40 days earlier it was expected that the impeachment vote would be difficult, this writer observed how public anger skyrocketed in the Park Geun-hye-Choi Soon-sil gate scandal, endlessly revealing more, like the peeling of an onion. Citizens came out in the square and declared “we are the sovereigns.” The article argues that if it were not for these “sovereigns”, it would not have been possible to pass the impeachment resolution in the National Assembly on December 9, 2016. (5)

The author of this article argues that there is a need for citizens to remain strong. If the amazing power of candles does not remain as memories of winter, but continues, this author predicts, “Korea should become a country of strong citizens....The role of the parliamentary elite is important, but I dream of a society...in which ordinary people can discuss constitutional principles.” The article argues for the need for reflection and the involvement of the ordinary people to determine the vision for the constitutional change needed so as to lay the foundation for change. The article proposes favoring the presidential candidate who advocates many citizens discussing the constitutional principles to be proposed, rather than prematurely formulated constitutional amendments.

Other articles in the media and online caution against allowing politicians to quickly formulate and pass constitutional amendments that they claim deal with the problems, but which have

excluded citizens from the formulation process.

The editorial “To Go Beyond June of 1987” in the Korean newspaper Kyunghyang Shinmun explains how such a process happened in 1987 excluding those who had been the protesters from being part of formulating the mechanisms that would provide a continuing democratic process for them. Instead, a small group of politicians formulated the constitutional language to provide for direct election of the President, a process that did not provide for democracy for the people. (6)

Instead, the author explained now there is the “need to introduce and expand direct democracy and the participation of the citizens. What the National Assembly should be doing is not to discuss constitutional amendments but to enact a bill that will establish the constitutional procedures for citizen participation in (the process of) amending the constitution.”

The people protesting are concerned about the structural weakness of the South Korean political system where there are such weak safe guards against high level corruption. Therefore, there is a demand among the protesters for a structural means for their ongoing participation in the affairs of government.

Such concerns, however, are different from the views presented by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon about what is needed to resolve the crisis in South Korea. At his good-bye press conference for journalists held at the UN on Friday, December 16, the Secretary General was asked about his intentions with respect to becoming a candidate for the presidency of South Korea.(7)

Ban characterized the problem in South Korea as the need for better leadership. In his response to a question about whether he would run for the presidency of South Korea, he explained his view of the situation:

Ban: “As you know, the situation is very, very difficult, in a sense, in turmoil. I can understand and share the anxiety of people about the future of their country, as this is one of the biggest challenges the Korean people are encountering. I know that they don’t want to lose the hard-earned democracy and the economic development which, in fact, transformed [the Republic of] Korea from a recipient country to a global donor. That is one pride that the Korean people have. Koreans have been known as (an-ed) example to other nations in that regard. And I also understand the aspiration of people for a new type of inclusive leadership that can help them overcome the challenges ahead.”

“And there are many issues of how to reconcile the differences between their thinking, and differences of their income, and some regionalism. There are many, many issues which we have to think about. That means social integration, reconciliation and much more mature democratic institutions. At the same time, while all these seem to present great challenges for Koreans and the Korean Government, I’m confident that the Korean people, with their resilience and very mature democratic institutions, I’m sure that they will be able to overcome these difficulties soon. Thank you.”

Essentially what Ban is proposing is different from the kinds of proposals that come from people involved in the protests. The contrast is significant. People are expressing their recognition that the so called “democratic institutions” have demonstrated their weakness, and that there is a need for what they refer to as a 21st century politics. The “new type of leadership” that Ban is referring to is what they call 20th century government. While he refers to “social integration, reconciliation and much more mature democratic institutions,” among the Korean people, there is a recognition of the need to create new forms of democratic institutions which deal with the deficiencies of the current institutions and provide for a form of ongoing citizen participation in government processes and decision making.

South Korea has an important legacy that can help it to meet this challenge. It is a country that is first in the world in the spread of the Internet and the use of the Internet by people online. Many South Koreans are netizens, those seeking to utilize the empowerment made possible by the Net for a more democratic and participatory society. During the past two decades, netizens in South Korea have explored various forms of online participation so they have a rich experience to draw from towards creating the forms and structures needed for the civic revolution they realize is needed. Their mass participation in the candlelight activities to expose the corruption and failures of the current government demonstrates that they have been mastering the need for the civic participation of netizens and citizens in the affairs of the society. Hence they are not looking for better leadership, but for the participation of the citizens themselves as leadership. There is a discrepancy between what politicians like Ban Ki-moon have in mind and what citizens of South Korea who are acting to change the governmental model envision. How will this discrepancy play out when Ban returns to South Korea? The result of the struggle over such contending forces will be a sign of the future political direction for South Korea.

Ban Ki-moon’s 10 years at the UN appear not to have sensitized him to the demands from the much more informed public that public opinion is not just looking for a next ‘great leader’ but for a much enhanced participation of citizens in the determination and functioning of their political system.

Notes

(1) See Ronda Hauben, “Debate in South Korean Media Over Ban Ki-moon’s Intentions to Run for ROK Presidency”, taz netizenblog, May 31, 2016.

(2) Jaung Hoon, “A Historic Juncture”, Joong-Ang Ilbo, November 18, 2016, p. 31.

<http://mengnews.joins.com/view.aspx?aid=3026380>

[Korea Joongang Daily - mengnews.joins.com](http://mengnews.joins.com)

mengnews.joins.com

Critical juncture is a decisive moment at which the god of history differentiates the fraying, established power from the new force of the future.

(3) [Editorial] “Impeachment Means A New Dawn for South Korean Democracy”, Hankyoreh , December 9, 2016.

http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_editorial/e_editorial/773972.html



[Editorial] Impeachment means a new dawn for South Korean democracy

english.hani.co.kr

(4) Cho Jae-hyon, Choi Ha-young, “Candlelight Revolution Mandates Rebuilding of Nation,” The Korea Times, December 12, 2016.

http://m.koreatimes.co.kr/phone/news/view.jsp?req_newsidx=219894



Candlelight revolution mandates rebuilding of nation

m.koreatimes.co.kr

A protester holds a picket sign reading “Impeachment is just a start. Confiscate the fortunes collected wrongfully” at the rally in front of the National Assembly ...

(5) Kim, Ji – Hyun, “Three Points of the Constitutional Court ‘Impeachment Trial’, 16:12:12 09:51, OhmyNews, google translation of Korean.

See also Article 1 of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Constitution.

“The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea shall reside in the people, and all state authority shall emanate from the people.”

