

South Korea's NIS Arrest of Lawmaker Lee Seok-ki: “Risk of North Korea-U.S. Confrontation Turning into a War”

What was the content of the lawmaker Lee Seok-ki's lecture?

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1) Introduction

The reason why I wrote this article is as follows:

The “transcripts” of last May 12th meeting, in which lawmaker Lee Seok-ki gave a lecture, has become the key evidence provided by National Intelligence Service’s (hereafter, “NIS”) investigation, which was initiated with a sudden search and confiscation raid in August 28th. The transcripts, which NIS has illegally obtained and leaked to the press, were distorted and fabricated at NIS’s will. NIS slipped in a few provocative expressions into the transcripts and is attempting “a trial by newspaper.” I believe this will be unraveled one by one during future trials.

I was present at the May 12th lecture meeting organized by the Gyeong-gi branch of Unified Progressive Party (hereafter, “UPP”), and I want to offer an accurate understanding of lawmaker Lee Seok-ki’s lecture that day. This is intended to correct NIS’s distortion and fabrication.

A lecture is communicated with words; there is an intended audience. In this aspect, what may seem out of context in writing may be considered natural to the audience at the scene; some of the expressions that may be extreme to third person outside could have been an attempt in a light tone to provoke the audience’s response. In the following descriptions, I will try to accurately convey the key points that lawmaker Lee tried to make as far as my memory serves.

In a nutshell, the key messages of the lawmaker Lee’s lecture to the audience that day was that North Korea-U.S. confrontation bears high risk of turning into a war, and what we should do in this regard as the members of the UPP, which has been pursuing peace and reunification.

(2) Risk of North Korea-U.S. Confrontation Turning into a War

Every political lecture involves an analysis of the current situation. So was the lecture given by lawmaker Lee.

I, as a spokesperson of the UPP since mid-March, recall last April as a horrendous period. . It is not because of the political attack from the ruling Saenuri Party and the security agency. Habitual accusations and political attacks as such without any cause could be coped with reason and common sense.

What made me fearful was the strange situation where nobody advocated “peace” at the time military tensions between North and South Korea reached its peak since the Korean War. Instead, the Korean government, the ruling Saenuri Party and the conservative media were repeatedly talking about “willingness to go to war”. Back in April, we were heading towards a horrendous war which nobody can possibly take responsibility for. This was the reason why the officers of the UPP Gyeong-gi branch urgently hosted a “lecture on the current situation”.

At the lecture, lawmaker Lee took the note of the way North Korea and U.S. confronted each other at that time. He mentioned that important aspects which differentiated the North Korea-U.S. confrontation in the first half of 2013 from the past ones was the North Korea’s possession of rockets which could carry a satellite and nuclear weapons. The U.S. took this as a substantial threat.

It would be highly unlikely for the U.S. to simply approve North Korea’s nuclear armaments and missile capabilities. In fact, the U.S. increased the intensity of war games against North Korea; in that year strategic bombers and advanced fighter airplanes appeared on the air of the Korean Peninsula and nuclear submarines on the sea. All U.S. nuclear forces except for aircraft carriers entered into our land. Lawmaker Lee did not ruled out the possibility that these military confrontations may result in U.S. invasion into North Korea and an outbreak of the second Korean War. It was the context where the expression, “war,” was used multiple times in the lecture.

In my opinion, the war crisis in the spring of 2013 was quite serious, comparable to that of 1994.

While the U.S.’s plan to strike the nuclear facility in Yongbyun was canceled right before its execution during the crisis of 1994, the crisis of 2013 could be described as an actual war without gunfire between North Korea and U.S. This means both parties examined every possible war scenarios while actually operating its forces. They were at de facto state of war. According to foreign media reports, U.S. displaced its strategic weapons including B-2, B-52 and nuclear Submarines one by one in compliance with its “playbook” of 2012; North Korea reacted to this by mentioning preemptive attack. Fortunately, this crisis was gradually resolved as the U.S. kept postponing the trial launch of an ICBM scheduled to be launched in early May. You can read about these developments of the situation in foreign media reports in more detail, such as WSJ and Bloomberg.

In most cases, people rarely sensed threat of war even when it was imminent.

Frankly speaking, we were not aware of anything in the midst of 1994 crisis. According to the memoir written by former President Kim Young Sam, even the president of South Korea was not aware of the U.S. strike plan in advance. The former president stated that “the U.S. was about to pull back its citizens and to wage a war against North Korea” and stated that he stopped this by communicating this with then U.S. ambassador Laney and then president Clinton. If it was the case for the President of Korea, wouldn’t common people just walk right

into the calamity of war without having any knowledge of it?

Similarly, even among the civil society organizations, it was common to underestimate the crisis in the first half of 2013. People accepted an ill-founded optimistic view that a war is never going to happen as a scientific truth.

On this matter, lawmaker Lee used various expressions to describe the threat of war in the Korean Peninsula as realistic as possible; I thought his understanding of the situation was accurate. In his view, the current situation would remain same for quite some time. That is, even if the present crisis goes into a period of temporary tranquility, the systematic problem underneath would remain unchanged. As a matter of fact, current North Korea-U.S. relation remains the same as it has been in the past. Although U.S., South/North Korea and China are currently engaging in a dialogue, the current tranquility could easily turn into an extreme case of military confrontation by one small accidental trigger. Up until recently, didn't we fear that Joint South Korea-U.S. military exercise would bring the situation back to that of the last spring?

(3) Preparation of People Who Seek Peace and Reunification

Usually an analysis of the situation is followed by a discussion on practice. NIS exaggerated and fabricated the discussion among party members on "what to do", labeling the whole meeting as "conspiracy of rebellion" as if they were plotting an armed insurgency.

In fact, what lawmaker Lee told us right after he shared his understanding of the grave situation was hardship that the progressive people could face. He said "we should be determined to face hardship," many times.

History shows that, Rhee Syngman government organized the Bodo League(National Guard Alliance) and slaughtered 200,000 people who were considered left-wing around the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. It was to eliminate the so-called "enemies inside" as soon as the war broke out. As shown in the present case, the National Intelligence Service has defined members of the UPP as the "enemies" and conducted illegal surveillance and followed traced their activities. The NIS has also successfully branded the former pro-democracy and progressive activists as "followers of North Korea" by persistent media propaganda. Even though I hate to think about this, but if a war is to break out the government is now ready to brand us as "enemy inside". Haven't the members of the UPP already become victims of the white terrorism already?

Once we recognized the serious threats of war, it was only natural to discuss about the countermeasures for them. In fact, participants debated over issues of "survival" in various forms. Somebody suggested to put some money aside and another emphasized the importance of avoiding arrests. I think these kinds of preparations were what lawmaker Lee described as "material and technical preparations".

Early this year, I had a question in my mind; what should I do when the U.S. attacks North Korea despite of oppositions from the South Korean President as it did in 1994? My answer to that question is the non-cooperation to the war. Surely, what I wanted the most is, as lawmaker Lee put it, "bringing a new stage in reunification of our nation without a fight". However, if a war becomes the "reality", then we would have no option but to prepare for that. I am not quite sure what he meant by the "material and technical preparation" in detail.

However, I do not believe “knives” or “guns” as suggested by few members in the meeting were included in the preparation. In the lecture, lawmaker Lee also said “do not carry a knife,” and “do not carry a gun.” It was because that they might protect someone’s own body but would not be able to stop the war. So was the case for “a pressure cooker”. Terrorism is neither the line nor the tradition of the progressive camp by nature.

As I was listening to the lecture, I recalled the work of the Korean Cargo Transport Workers’ Union at the outbreak of the Iraq war in 2003. At that time, the Union issued a statement that they are not going to cooperate with transportation of war materials and the U.S. troops in South Korea to be dispatched to Iraq. That was the concrete action taken against the war in a stranger land on the opposite side of this planet. Then what action could I take if a horrific war which would take the future of our society away broke out in this very land?

Quite frankly, I still do not have definite answers for that question.

So far I have had various experiences in pro-democracy movement, labor union activities and election campaigns, but none in dealing with the situation of war; so does the progressive movement as a whole. What kind of activities would I need to carry out when a war breaks out? Without a plan, we would have to idly stand by it, or only would carry out helpless actions such as some sort of campaign. The key message of the lecture that day as to build a concrete anti-war movement in reality moving beyond the ambiguous slogans as suggested by the keywords “material and technology.”

At present, we need serious self-reflections and deep considerations more than any time in the past. We have to believe in people and make every effort to stop the war with power of people. I believe, the moment when we faced the threat of war was finally made us realize that we desperately needed creative thinking for the “preparation”.

I haven’t found all the answer to the questions raised that day.

There would be no harm in ignoring this question, if there are no more wars in this land, ever. However, we have already experienced two major crises in recent 20 years, respectively in 1994 and in 2013. There is no promise or substantial guarantee that this war crisis is completely resolved systematically. It is for that reason that I am still making every effort to find answers to the question raised in the May 12th lecture in Hapjeong-dong.

(4) Lecture Meeting Fabricated as Conspiracy of Rebellion: What the Park Geun-hye Government Wants

These days, I am spending most of my time in my hometown preparing to run in the October 30th supplemental election. I have met with various people during Chuseok, the Korean Full Moon Harvest Festival. An elder who’s been a long-time supporter of the opposition parties suggested that this may be a retaliation for excessive challenge of presidential candidate Lee Jung-hee against the president Park Geun-hye during last year’s presidential election campaign. I can’t say that his assumption is hundred percent correct, but still it is evident to everyone that this is a political retaliation and oppression against the dissenting group who’s been leading the candlelight protests.

What the Park Geun-hye government really wants is illustrated by series of events following the investigation of “Lee Seok-ki’s conspiracy of rebellion,” such as an investigation on Prosecutor General Chae Dong-wook and attempt to illegalize Korean Teachers and

Education Workers' Union. The Unified Progressive Party and I have been standing up against the ruling Saenuri Party and the Park Geun-hye government's sabotage of democracy, and will not stop to do so in the future. I understand that there are some sincere "hard-to-swallow advices" made to our Party. We will give a due consideration to those advices. We hope to respond to them with changes in our practices, and not with mere words.

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