Commentary

Building a Global Feminist Alliance for Peace in East Asia

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Women Peace Walk across the DMZ

We are enduring an era of vacillations between threats of a nuclear war and promises of peace breakthroughs in East Asia. Events in 2018, particularly the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula by President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on April 27, the Singapore Joint Statement by US President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim on June 12, and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration on denuclearization and cooperation by President Moon and Chairman Kim on September 19, have given the world long-yearned-for hopes for a definitive end to war and the formal signing of a peace treaty as well as complete denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

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Amid ups and downs on the path to peace, we were honored to be invited and participate in a thirty-woman international delegation that walked with more than a thousand Korean women across the Unification Bridge in the South Korean part of the DMZ on April 26, 2018. The walk was organized by two international women's groups, Women Cross DMZ and Nobel Women's Initiative. The peace campaign has worked with a coalition of more than thirty women's peace organizations in South Korea, including the National YWCA of Korea, Women Making Peace, Peace Mothers of Korea, Women Link, Gyeonggi Women's Network, Korean Women's Environmental Network, and Gangjeong Village of Jeju, among others. The marching women wore white, to mourn the lives lost to war and to express the wish for peace, but they also wore colorful scarves, to show symbolically a collective hope for the future. Apart from the peace walk, international and local women's groups co-organized various public activities: a women's peace candle march at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul; a Seoul International Women's Peace Symposium program titled "Ushering in a New Era of Peace and a Feminist Future" at the National Parliament Library; group visits to the US, Japanese, British, Canadian, and Norwegian embassies; and even protests in front of the US embassy, among others. The delegation used different media and social media strategies, including press briefings, individual interviews, blogging, uploading photos and videos to websites, and post-delegation media events.²

The WomenPeaceKorea delegation proposed the following points:

- 1. Drawing an official end to the Korean War and replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty. This should be the clear goal of the US-DPRK Summit and is a necessary first step to move forward.
- 2. A nuclear-free Korean peninsula, and for this to be extended globally to all states, including the nuclear weapon states of the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China.
- 3. The guarantee of full and equal participation of women in the Korean peace process as stated in UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
- 4. The DMZ to be converted into a truly demilitarized zone of peace by removing the 1.2 million landmines and the barbed wire fences that separate the Korean people.
- 5. An expedited civilian exchange between the two Koreas and the immediate reunion of separated families.

- 6. The enforcement of prohibitions against wartime violence toward women and girls in all countries and justice for the comfort women who survived sexual slavery during World War II.
- 7. An end to sanctions that harm innocent civilians and instead provide maximum diplomatic and humanitarian engagement that will improve ordinary people's lives.
- 8. A reduction in military budgets and an end to the arms race, and funds redirected to improving women's human security and environmental protection.

This proposal was an outcome of discussions and debates among and between different women's groups. In the following essay, we extend the positions that we understand to be the statement's foundation. Heavily implied in this position is feminist scholarship's responsibility to take an interdisciplinary approach and relate peace studies to cultural studies, political economy, and global geopolitics. Doing so requires examining the history and scope of the military-industrial complex, its relationship with finance capital, its bonds with governments and political parties, and its business patterns in relation to wars and conflicts in all parts of the world. Moreover, it is important to sow the seeds of reconciliation and peace in the daily life of ordinary people to counter rightist populism or nationalism. Thus, historians, cultural workers, educationists, writers, and scholar activists of different areas must undertake long-term sustained work to facilitate reconciliation and peace at the grassroots level as well as networking at the regional and global levels.

War Is Good for Business

If we look at history, there have been moments when the angel of peace almost descended on the Korean peninsula but was chased away. The Armistice Agreement signed on July 27, 1953, declared in Article IV that a political conference was to be held within three months "to ensure the peaceful settlement of the Korean question." When a conference was held after this deadline in Geneva in April 1954, the United States refused Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's effort to conclude a peace treaty. In 1975, the United Nations General Assembly again adopted resolutions endorsing the

desirability of replacing the Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty, but again the United States dodged it.

In 2000, President Kim Dae-Jung, having initiated the Sunshine Policy, flew to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Jong Il. This gave renewed hope for an end to hostilities, normalization of investment and trade, and a reunion of families separated by the war. However, then US President Bill Clinton declined to visit Pyongyang. As soon as US President George W. Bush took office in 2001, antagonism resumed. North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006.

Even after President Moon and Chairman Kim signed the April 27, 2018, Panmunjom Declaration, President Donald J. Trump's reckless cancellation of the June 12 Singapore summit talk and subsequent revocation of his decision demonstrated how fragile the peace process is. The vacillations of a vain and pompous leader consolidated visible and submerged, inert, special interests. The eventual June 12, 2018, summit talk was a relief and with certain promises. On February 28, 2019, however, the abrupt end of the Trump-Kim summit talk in Vietnam was a debacle. The road to concluding the war and complete denuclearization on the Korean peninsula remains rocky.

Essentially, the Korean question should not be a question of the will of a few leaders, basking in the limelight of the mass media. Initiated at the end of World War II, the arms race has steamed forward. With all its rhetoric about axis of evil and war on terrorism, the arms race has thrived under conditions of mutually assured destruction. Guaranteeing the elimination of the human species and sentient life on earth, its rationale leads to windfall profits for the gigantic military-industrial complex. The manufacture of missiles and nuclear weapons, the installation of military bases around the world (the United States has nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories in the world, and stations 62,500 troops in Japan and South Korea alone) (Price 2017), the provisions for the troops even during peace times form a tight net of lucrative business enjoyed by a very privileged elite of conglomerates. The United States accounts for 34 percent of all global arms sales or about \$100 billion per year (Bowler 2018). In 2017, US military spending was \$610 billion and took 35 percent of the world share (SIPRI 2018). In 2016, Lockheed Martin topped the list of top ten firms that accounted for

the 54 percent of defense revenues of \$364.8 billion for the top one hundred firms (Artillery 2017). These conglomerates emerged during World War II. According to historian Jacques Pauwels, between 1940 and 1945, the United States spent no less than \$185 billion on military equipment, and the military expenditures' share of the GNP rose between 1939 and 1945 from an insignificant 1.5 percent to approximately 40 percent. Between 1942 and 1945, writes the historian Stuart D. Brandes, the net profits of America's two thousand biggest firms were more than 40 percent higher than during the period 1936–1939. A total of less than sixty firms obtained 75 percent of all lucrative military and other state orders (Pauwels 2018).

The same way vampires need human blood the United States needs wars, conflicts, and enemies to keep alive its now eighty-year-old military-industrial complex. During the days following April 27 and June 12, 2018, the shares of the defense industry in the United States plunged. Here is one example of a news report:

American defense contractors were practically drooling over the prospect of all-out war with North Korea as President Donald Trump was recklessly flinging 'fire and fury,' but Tuesday's summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un appears to have dampened war profiteers' dreams of yet another catastrophic US-led military conflict—at least for now. Demonstrating that even the slightest whiff of peace is enough to scare investors in America's most profitable military contractors, *USA Today* reported on Tuesday that shares of Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, and General Dynamics all "took a dive" as Trump and Kim signed a vague, non-binding agreement that is merely the first step toward a lasting diplomatic solution. (Johnson 2018)

A Morgan Stanley analyst made reassuring remarks to investors, "With the threat environment unlikely to abate per a host of global tensions spanning China, the Mideast, North Korea, and Russia, we do not foresee any imminent fall-off in US military budgets" (Shen 2018). He was correct. On May 24, 2018, the Republicans and Democrats in the House of Representatives passed a \$717 billion defense bill for the Pentagon for 2019. This equals almost \$2 billion per day spent on the military budget. China is replacing North Korea as the imminent threat in both trade and military aggression,

and President Trump announced on June 18, 2018, that he would start a Space Force to confront threats from Russia and China. There is no lack of enemies to ensure military business as usual.

The most severe threat to peace-building efforts in East Asia, and in the world, is the US military-industrial complex, the biggest loser in case peace befalls any part of the world. Hence, in pushing for a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula, or in demanding the removal of US military bases from East Asia, and in formulating effective strategies and tactics for peace, peace movements need to take into serious account the business and financial interests that are the basis for warmongering endeavors from the United States. It is not only war politics but also war business.

Questioning the National Barriers

Reconciliation and peace pose difficult questions. Our adversary here is not just the military-industrial complex, but also its influence on popular consent in the name of defending democracy and combating terrorism. Usually, nationalism is used to justify conflicts and contentions. In our view, the question of individual and collective subjectivities must be mobilized to deal with divisions within peace movements and civilian populations.

Recently, in a world plunged deeper and deeper in crises, we have seen escalation of tensions in the seas of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Historically, disputes and contestations over territory have abounded, for example, the Huangyan Island/Scarborough Shoal between China and the Philippines; Spratly Islands between Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam; and Dokdo/Takeshima Island between South Korea and Japan. The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute between China and Japan is particularly worrying because China and Japan are backing up their claims by threatening the use of military force. Each government finds that striking aggressive poses wins popular support, and the consequences are growing economic warfare in the flammable context of global economic and financial implosion. Taking specific incidents cited next as our cue, we would like to offer an analysis of the stakes for peace building.

On its face, with nation-state claims over territory—territorial right to shipping lanes, oil and gas resources—the issue is not confined to simple

strategic or trade issues. It is never just between Japan and China. For instance, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta visited China on September 19, 2012, and reiterated that the United States would not take a position on either China or Japan's territorial claims to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Panetta urged the two countries to negotiate, adopting the neutral role of a mediator. Yet the United States also stressed that the islands in dispute are covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty. These statements are obviously contradictory, yet the latter one was backed up by actual moves: a largescale, joint military exercise between Japan and the United States enables the Japan Self-Defense Force to reach out beyond Japan's waters, causing widespread concerns over Japan's remilitarization and possible support or even US prompting. The Japanese Liberal Democratic Party government reinterpreted Article 9 of the Constitution in 2014 to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense and engage in military action if one of its allies were to be attacked, and Prime Minister Abe set 2020 as the deadline for revising Article 9 of the Constitution (Muto 2016). At the same time, the maneuvers of the United States to bolster its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region have stepped up since APEC 2011. In Rim of the Pacific 2018, the United States' largest global maritime warfare exercise, China was disinvited by the United States, although China had been a welcome participant observer in 2014 and 2016. The US Senate's annual defense policy bill of 2018 said China should continue to be barred from the RIMPAC military exercise until it withdrew from the disputed South Sea islands.

In what Samir Amin calls the "collective imperialism of the Triad—USA, Europe, and Japan" (Amin 2011), demagogue politicians such as Donald Trump and Shinzo Abe justify military moves in the name of aggressor countries being the victims. Slogans such as "Make America Great Again" form rhetorical axes in US maneuvers and strategies, rallying cries for retaining military bases, deploying the troops, and formulating military treaties and alliances.

What is most worrying is not only the belligerent national leaders making assertive statements but also the fervent sentiments of the people. While one may conveniently blame the mass media as a culprit in stirring estrangement among the peoples of different nations, these sentiments actually have deep historical and cultural roots. Nationalist sentiments are so much in

play that North Korea supports South Korea in the claim over the Dokdo Islands, and China stands with Taiwan to claim sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands. Confused allegiances such as these are not much help in reconciling the people; for example, will having Japan as a common enemy over the Dokdo Island issue help remove differences and conflicts between North and South Korea? Or can the Diaoyu Islands bring mainland China and Taiwan together for unification? If the answer is no, we have to investigate how nationalism actually works. And we already know that collective identities must be abstract to do their job across divides and bind together groups of different classes, genders, ages, cultures, and peoples in, as it were, a flash of light. And that magical flash always consists of adverse feelings—resentment, hatred, exclusion, xenophobia.

Adverse feelings mobilized against an object by means of rally calls in the name of an abstract collective identity never address actually existing targets. In everyday life most people never directly confront the object they hate. However, capacity for mobilization means that adverse feelings have already taken root in the people's daily lives. And because they absorb the capacity for hate in their immediate environment, we must excavate the roots of latent hate below the surfaces of manifested passions. Daily life discontent, frustration, helplessness, and animosities arise under violent, deceitful hierarchic structures that determine their conditions of existence. Seeing how latent antagonisms already exist to escalate conflicts, those of us searching for reconciliation and peace must gather our courage and try to confront the general situation, knowing full well that there is no easy solution, and the paths we build cannot be linear and straight; they will be meandering and winding, and demand creativity, open-mindedness, and, above all, patience and persistence—steps forward may well be haunted by steps backward.

Civil society peace groups have been making statements or exerting pressure to call for reconciliation among states and governments, knowing that these may have little effect, since state and government agendas largely follow the concerns and interests of elite minorities. We do not disparage state actions, and we earnestly hope that the state and its ruling elites find ways to transform themselves and repudiate the practices and decisions that fuel contradictions, polarizations, and antagonisms. However, civil society groups must explicitly recognize that achieving genuine reconciliation

among the people requires the participation of the people themselves. The people's own initiatives are a precious source of energy. But if the people are fraught with hatred and xenophobia, there cannot be reconciliation.

Hence, during the wildfire upsurges of nationalism or xenophobia, it is never a good time to act. It is too late then. Cynicism will prevail, and many of us are not unfamiliar with this feeling. What we must do is engage in persistent and patient work conducted over long periods of time—in daily lives, in cultures, in schools, and in the media—to endlessly combat xenophobia and nationalism. If we sprinkle water consistently to keep good humidity, even if there is a spark of fire here and there, it will not develop into a vast forest fire or devastate entire regions. How can we prevent territorial claims from becoming the priority and central issue, overshadowing or distracting from other paramount issues? We know that the island dispute is not a dispute over an island. No immediate solution to the dispute exists, and that is why the knots of histories, of antagonisms, and contradictions demand our scrutiny and unraveling. For example, if the question is about fishing rights, one proposal is that fisherfolk from the nearby regions, whatever their nationality, who have for generations been relying on these fishing grounds for their livelihood, continue sharing fishing grounds. And if we are indeed genuinely concerned for the interests of the fisherfolk, then the Fukushima (meaning Happiness Island) incident has much graver impact on the fisherfolk than the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, because the radioactive contamination has a deadly impact on the fish, the lives in the sea, the fisherfolk, the population of the Asia-Pacific region, and beyond. If the question is about inviolability of a national territory, we may wish to highlight how the land and life in Fukushima have been violated with nuclear plants, or the land and life in China transgressed with mining excavation and pollution. We call into question humankind's destruction of nature in the name of development and progress, rooted in the belief that the natural world is a form of property.

Tapping into people's initiatives means learning and creating paths that open an ecologically sound future different from the doomed future that we are now caught in, the future capitalism has determined. If this means parting with capitalism, so be it. Educational work to cultivate better ways of relating to other people and cherishing interdependence, sharing and

mutuality is extremely important. To be effective peace practices, however, people's conditions of existence must be transformed. The process of reconciliation must be a leaving behind of the enduring conflicts and antagonisms, parting with the world made in and through these histories. The crucial point is, meaningful reconciliation means that people must make their own histories, histories that refuse to institutionalize injustice, hierarchies that lend themselves to abuses, and polarizations that divide through methods of subjugation and deprivation—which are precisely the dynamics of capitalism.

Feminist Peace Movements beyond Nationalism

In this respect, many feminist movements are exemplary initiatives. They are aware that we are the 99 percent, the common people, and we are today faced with the greatest threat to the survival of humanity, because the 1 percent elite with vested interest livelihood can ignite the fuse of nuclear war. Common wealth, which should have been used for improving people's livelihood and well-being, has been deployed for destruction. The 1 percent minority prevails over the 99 percent majority by lies and blackmail: We are told to rally behind the warmongering elite, which professes to give us security through preventive or combative measures against the enemy. We are told to give up our judgment and give in to the security needs of our nation-states, accepting austerity measures, accepting the devastation of our environment, accepting to be sacrificed.

The logic of the arms race institutes a state of exception as the everyday reality in which the question of national security overrides questions of law, rights of the people, and democracy. Such a logic turns the question of security as a collective concern into a privatized concern, determined by selected elites through secretive decision-making mechanisms; we are expected to passively accept a fate thrust upon us.

Yet, in the face of the seemingly all-powerful military and political elites, we have seen how the people have acted to resist despair and authoritarianism. We have much to learn from the decades of struggle of the women's, students', and civil rights movements in South Korea. Two popular Korean movies, *A Taxi Driver* (2017) and 1987: When the Day Comes (2017), illustrate

how ordinary people persistently fight for social justice. Situated, respectively, in the background of the Kwangju Uprising of 1980, and the student mobilizations of 1987, both films take the perspective of ordinary citizens or students, prone to swallowing injustice and leading a humble life, yet forced by the circumstances to stand up to fight injustice and repression. They are stories of the most ordinary people, who, in defending the lives and livelihoods of their families, demonstrate immense courage to act, which becomes the primary political force for change. The people coming on to the stage of history resulted in the Kwangju Uprising being denounced, dictatorships brought down, and civil rights reintroduced. The Candlelight Revolution of 2016–2017 is a culmination of the heroic struggles, which in turn forms the popular support urging President Moon to seek reconciliation with North Korea.

To reject attempts coercing us into supporting the arms race and mutually assured destruction, we insist that the question of security is a collective concern, a matter of the people's well-being and agency. Socioeconomic and ecological sustainability are rooted in a logic of justice, wherein communities organize interdependence in productive and creative cooperation, defending their commons for livelihood and social bonding. We seek peaceful relations of cohabitation, which is the soil where trust and cooperation proliferate. The current encouraging steps demonstrate the people's rejection of the arms race and yearning for lasting peace, to insure humanity has a future, and life on earth can be sustained. In this articulation of peace movements and ecological and livelihood movements for a world that is possible, we can learn a lot from women's struggles for peace. The initiatives and efforts of feminist movements promoting peace and reconciliation at the regional and global level have a long history. Let us take a brief look at two of them, the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace, a grassroots women's museum in Tokyo, and PeaceWomen Across the Globe, a collective women's peace project.

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Matsui Yayori, founder of Asian Women in Solidarity in opposition to sex tourism in Asia, and Asia-Japan Women's Resource Centre and the Japanese branch of Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW-NET),

organized the Tokyo Women's War Crimes Tribunal in 1998–2000. Bringing the women together required major networking efforts so women's organizations could cooperate on the common project. The War Crimes Tribunal brought seventy-five victims, thirty-five of them former comfort women, to testify. They originated from China, East Timor, Indonesia, the Netherlands, North and South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Consequently the tribunal judges implicated the Japanese government and Emperor Hirohito in atrocities committed throughout the Japanese Empire against these women. Their crimes against humanity included kidnapping, rape, sexual abuse and assault, and murder, in the form of a military policy called the *comfort system* (Kazuyo 2010).

After Matsui's death in 2002, her work was continued in the initiative Women's Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM),³ a grassroots-supported, Tokyo-based museum. Japanese feminist activists Nishino Rumiko and Watanabe Mina lead the project proclaiming that as women of the perpetrating state they should shoulder peace responsibility. WAM was opened in August 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II. The museum is supported by donations from people in Japan and abroad, and focuses on violence against women in war and conflict situations (Nishino 2007; Watanabe 2017).

In a situation where the perpetrating country, Japan, continues to deny even basic facts about the comfort women and erases them from history textbooks, WAM preserves and passes on women's stories hidden from history for fifty years after the war. WAM also serves as a center of peace activism in the Asia-Pacific region, organizing thematic exhibitions that illuminate sexual violence globally. A focus on East Timor revealed sexual violence perpetrated by the Indonesian army during East Timor's independence struggle. "The Military Does Not Protect Women" spotlighted showing how both the Japanese and the US militaries abused Okinawan women. WAM also helps to curate comfort women museums in South Korea, China, and the Philippines (Watanabe 2017).

On a global level, we have been deeply involved in PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG).⁴ The project began with the nomination of one thousand women from one hundred and fifty countries working on peace at grassroots, regional, national, and international levels to collectively receive

the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. What this actually achieved was to make visible women's everyday efforts to live for peace. Our work involved helping PeaceWomen connect and plan necessary steps for articulation and connection. The ultimate goal has been to negotiate with violence and promote everyday peace. We have worked for more than ten years, and the friendships and understandings nurtured through direct encounters, especially at the grassroots levels, have laid the basis for rejecting xenophobia and aggression. We have brought together women from various countries in Asia in a common space for dialogue with one another on the crucial themes of ecology and livelihood. These practices have nurtured empathy and mutual support. We believe such efforts can bring us to a deeper understanding of how our lives are affected by the logic of capitalism and of violence, hence improving and actualizing the conditions of possibility for peace and reconciliation (Lau 2011; Sit 2011).

We knew in advance we would not be chosen, so even before the awards were announced, we produced a 2,200-page book and an exhibition featuring the one thousand women and their stories (1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize, 2005). Within five years, more than one thousand similar exhibitions in various languages had been staged across the globe.

In the following decade, the project has pursued two key themes: (1) promote UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to enable women to be engaged in peace processes, and (2) promote the interconnectedness between livelihood and ecology concerns. Projects that were taken up included peace dialogues in Egypt; dozens of peace roundtables in different continents; interregional learning of women from Argentina, Brazil, and Indonesia to combat violence; women peace mediator courses; engagement in the #WomenSeriously campaign and One Billion Rising campaign; and exchanges among women farmers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In 2015, to celebrate the tenth anniversary, PWAG launched a visibility-connectivity-expertise project, the WikiPeaceWomen project. It aims to expand bodies of knowledge and skills not just for PWAG, but millions of PeaceWomen working in all fields of human security, conflict resolution, ecological security, environmental justice, health, education, legislation, and others. This campaign aims not just to recognize and make their work visible but also to disseminate their expertise outside their current spheres of

influence, and contribute it everywhere possible, from communities to the global arena.⁵ We already know from experience that women's initiatives and resistances from the margins, made visible, inspire imaginings of different modes of relating and becoming, and different modes for producing life and subjectivities. We know it encourages peoples' initiatives to converse with one another. PWAG is a global project of hope, an alliance of hope.

Today the hopeful processes on the Korean peninsula continue to carry on the momentum of people's cooperation and solidarity. The Fifth South-South Forum on Sustainability, which was organized by the Global University for Sustainability and Lingnan University, was held in Hong Kong on June 13–18, 2018. The participants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America issued a joint statement in which we, being scholar activists, committed ourselves to work that eradicates and dismantles the legacy of the Cold War regime, which has been deeply embedded in legal, institutional, cultural, and educational systems. We also committed ourselves to work that makes advances toward a nuclear weapon—free zone in East Asia and other wartorn areas of the world.⁶

In the name of our children, let us work together to build a world free from nuclear weapons and free from fear, greed, and hatred. A world of justice, peace, and love.

Notes

- I See www.womencrossdmz.org/womenpeacekorea/.
- 2 See www.womencrossdmz.org/category/in-the-news/.
- 3 See www.wam-peace.org/en/.
- 4 The activities of PeaceWomen Across the Globe (www.1000peacewomen.org) focus on strengthening links between women peace activists, supporting their work by providing them with practical tools and making their commitment visible.
- 5 See the visibility-connectivity-expertise mission at wikipeacewomen.org/wpworg/.
- 6 See our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-fifth-south-forum-on-sustainability-june-2018/.

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