

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Seoul Mayoral Election Campaign Spawns Odd Unificationist Rumors

Knut Holdhus
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23 Stone Pillars at Garden of Gratitude at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul. Illustration: Grok xAI



Pyeonghwa Namu (Peace Tree)



The Chosun Biz logo

On 19th May 2026, two South Korean media outlets - [Pyeonghwa Namu](#) (Peace Tree) and [ChosunBiz](#) - reported on escalating political controversy surrounding the "Garden of Gratitude" (감사의 정원) project at Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square and allegations linking the project to [Unificationism](#) (통일교), the name the Korean media generally use to refer to the religious movement officially called [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#).

While both articles focused on accusations raised by Democratic Party figures against conservative Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon (오세훈), each outlet emphasized different aspects of the dispute.

Observers see the new focus on the issue closely tied to the ongoing campaign for the 3rd June 2026 local elections, especially the highly competitive Seoul mayoral race. The controversy therefore functions as an electoral strategy aimed at weakening Mayor Oh politically before voters go to the polls.

In an article titled "[Controversy Over Alleged Ties Between Unificationism and the Gwanghwamun 'Garden of Gratitude' Project](#)", reporter Shin Bi-rom (신비롬) of [Pyeonghwa Namu](#) concentrated on claims of possible collusion between the Seoul Metropolitan Government and [Unificationism](#) through the project's contractor, Ilshin Stone (일신석재).

The article explained that Democratic Party lawmaker Seo Yeong-gyo (서영교) and Seoul City Council member Lim Gyu-ho (임규호) held a press conference on 17th May in which they questioned why Ilshin Stone had been awarded the contract to construct and install 23 stone pillars for the memorial-style project.

According to [Pyeonghwa Namu](#), the opposition politicians argued that Ilshin Stone's largest shareholder is affiliated with [Unificationism](#), and that the company won the bid despite reportedly submitting a proposal approximately 1 billion won (ca. 660,000 in US dollars) more expensive than a competing bidder. Lim Gyu-ho further criticized the use of an emergency bidding process, arguing that such procedures are normally reserved for urgent matters such as disaster prevention or recovery, whereas the Garden of Gratitude project allegedly lacked urgency and had not completed all administrative procedures. Seo Yeong-gyo additionally emphasized that Ilshin Stone was founded by [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명), the late co-founder of the [Family Federation](#), and questioned why a significantly more

expensive bid was selected.



Democratic Party lawmaker Seo Yeong-gyo



Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon, here in September 2023

The [Pyeonghwa Namu article](#) also revisited earlier controversy involving Oh Se-hoon and [Unificationism](#), noting that the mayor had previously drawn criticism in 2021 for sending congratulatory remarks to an event hosted by the religious organization. The report framed the current allegations within a broader narrative of possible political and institutional proximity between Oh and Unificationism-affiliated interests.

In South Korea's media landscape, [Pyeonghwa Namu](#) (Peace Tree) is generally viewed as progressive / reformist, critical of conservative evangelical political activism, advocating separation between church power and politics. The outlet frequently covers influence of religious groups on elections and controversies involving groups labeled "cults".

[ChosunBiz](#), in contrast, approached the issue of the Garden of Gratitude primarily as an ongoing political dispute during Seoul's mayoral campaign. In the article by reporter Hwang Chae-yeong (황채영), "[Democratic Party: 'The stone pillars in the Garden of Gratitude were made by a company tied to Unificationism' \[...\] Oh Se-hoon: 'They have extensive construction experience'](#)", the focus was placed on statements made during a Democratic Party (DPK) election committee meeting for Seoul mayoral candidate Jeong Weon-oh (정원오).

Like [Pyeonghwa Namu](#), [ChosunBiz](#) reported Seo Yeong-gyo's allegations that the contractor behind the Garden of Gratitude project had links to the [Family Federation](#) through its founders, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명) and [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), and through its ownership structure. The article also repeated claims that two companies competed for the contract, but that the more expensive 3.9 billion won (ca. 2,6 million US dollars) proposal submitted by the contractor was selected over a competing 2.9 billion won (ca. 1,9 million US dollars) bid.

However, [ChosunBiz](#) gave greater attention to conservative Mayor Oh Se-hoon's response. The article reported that the

mayor defended the selection of the contractor by arguing that the company possessed the strongest construction track record and most extensive experience in the relevant field in South Korea. Whereas [Pyeonghwa Namu](#) emphasized suspicions of improper ties and irregular bidding procedures, [ChosunBiz](#) presented the issue more as a political exchange between the Democratic Party (DPK) and the People Power Party (PPP) during an election campaign.

Together, the two reports illustrate how the same controversy was framed differently depending on editorial perspective: [Pyeonghwa Namu](#) highlighting alleged institutional and religious connections, and [ChosunBiz](#) focusing more narrowly on campaign rhetoric, procurement questions, and the mayor's defense of the contractor's qualifications.

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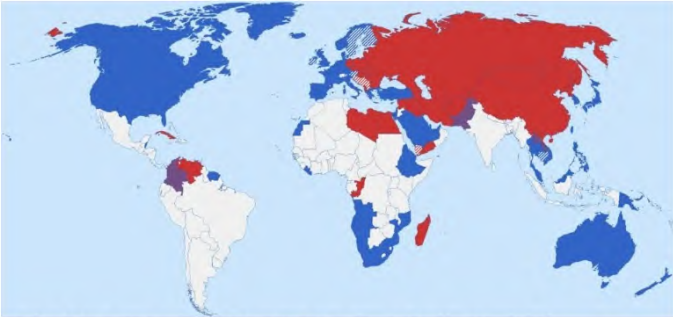
movements as manifestations of larger spiritual and historical patterns



Dr. David Carlson, here in 1997. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

In the [second installment](#) of his three-part opinion series, “[Are We Truly Prepared in Our Current World Situation?](#)”, Dr. David Carlson turns his attention to what he regards as one of the defining ideological and geopolitical developments of the modern era: the transformation and continued influence of

communism after the apparent end of the Cold War. Rather than treating communism as a defeated political system confined to the twentieth century, Carlson argues that its ideological spirit has not disappeared, but has instead re-emerged in new forms and in new geopolitical contexts. His discussion is framed through the teachings and prophetic statements of Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012), whose observations on the future trajectory of communism Carlson presents as remarkably prescient.



Cold War map in 1974. Illustration: [BulhyXwiki](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

Carlson begins by situating communism and democracy within the broader history of competing worldviews. According to his interpretation, these two systems developed out of fundamentally different understandings of human nature, society, and history, and their rivalry shaped much of the twentieth century. He recalls the atmosphere of the Cold War during his youth in the United States, particularly during the 1960s, when tensions between the democratic West and the communist bloc had reached alarming levels. At that time, many Americans feared the possibility of nuclear conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, to the extent that ordinary families discussed constructing bomb shelters in preparation for a potential war.

Although communism eventually lost much of its global influence with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of the Eastern Bloc, Carlson contends that the reasons behind this collapse are often oversimplified. While many in the West credit U.S. President Ronald Reagan with bringing about the fall of the Soviet system through strong anti-communist policies and military initiatives such as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Carlson argues that [Rev. Moon](#) also played a major and often overlooked role in the ideological defeat of communism.

Drawing on accounts from within [Unificationism](#) – a lecture in 2014 by Pak Bo-hi (박보희 – 1930-2019), an assistant to Rev. Moon – Dr. Carlson notes claims that the conceptual origins of SDI may have been influenced by [Rev. Moon’s](#) ideas and that both Reagan and [Rev. Moon](#)

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contributed to weakening the communist world. Regardless of the precise historical balance of influence, Carlson emphasizes what he sees as the key point: communism appeared to collapse as a dominant global force.

However, Carlson’s central argument is that **this collapse did not signify the permanent disappearance of communist ideology**. Instead, he points to a statement made by [Sun Myung Moon](#) in 1958, decades before the fall of the Soviet Union, in which [Rev. Moon](#) reportedly predicted not only the eventual collapse of communism but also its later revival through the Arab world, followed by renewed opposition to democratic nations. Dr. Carlson writes,

“There are three important ideas in this statement by [Rev. Moon](#): 1) communism will collapse; 2) it will revive through the Arab nations (basically Islamic, just as America is basically Christian); and 3) it will oppose the democratic world again.”

Carlson regards this statement as especially significant because, in 1958, communism appeared to be expanding rather than weakening. The Soviet Union was powerful, communist China had recently consolidated control, and much of the world viewed Marxism as an enduring force. For this reason, Carlson interprets the later collapse of communism as evidence supporting [Rev. Moon’s](#) prophetic insight.



Official logo of the People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran, founded by leftist Iranian students in 1965. Author: Iran MEK People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran. License: [CC ASA 2.0 Gen](#)

The more urgent aspect of the prophecy, in Carlson’s view, concerns **the idea that communism would later reappear in conjunction with radical movements in the Islamic world**. He argues that contemporary radical Islamic jihadism reflects a

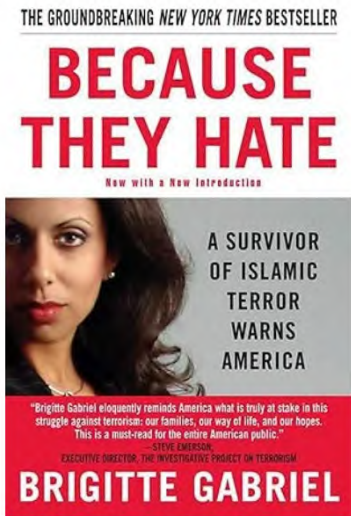
fusion of religious extremism and revolutionary political ideology that resembles certain aspects of twentieth-century communism. To support this interpretation, he cites discussions surrounding the *National Council for Resistance in Iran* (NCRI) and the *People’s Mujahedin of Iran* (MEK), organizations that have at various times been described as combining elements of Islamic theology with Marxist revolutionary thought.

Carlson acknowledges that such a combination may initially appear contradictory, since Marxism is traditionally atheistic and materialistic, whereas Islam is a theistic religion centered on belief in [God](#). Yet he argues that revolutionary movements are capable of blending ideological components in ways that transcend classical doctrinal boundaries. In his reading, this synthesis fulfills [Rev. Moon’s](#) warning that communism would not simply vanish, but would adapt itself within new cultural and religious contexts.

A major theme in Carlson’s discussion is the continuing confrontation between radical Islamist movements and democratic societies, especially the United States. He argues that just as communism once positioned itself in

opposition to Western liberal democracy, certain extremist Islamist groups now portray America and the West as enemies to be resisted and ultimately defeated. Carlson references anti-American rhetoric used by radical groups and points to terrorist attacks, including the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and later incidents in New York City, as evidence of this hostility.

To further develop this point, Carlson draws extensively on the writings of author and commentator Brigitte Gabriel, who was raised in Lebanon during periods of violent conflict involving militant Islamist groups. Gabriel's books "Because They Hate" and "They Must Be Stopped" are presented as warnings to Western nations about the dangers posed by radical Islamic extremism. Carlson highlights Gabriel's argument that understanding the historical roots of ideological conflict is essential for interpreting present events and preparing for future challenges.



The front cover page of Brigitte Gabriel's Because They Hate – A Survivor of Islamic Terror Warns America”, published by St. Martin's Griffin, 2004.

According to Gabriel's perspective, radical Islamist movements seek broad political and cultural domination beyond the Middle East, posing a threat not only to specific governments but also to the broader values and institutions of Western democratic societies.

Carlson sees a parallel between these ambitions and the global aspirations historically associated with communism. During the Cold War, communism presented itself not merely as a national political system but as a worldwide ideological movement seeking universal expansion. In Carlson's interpretation, radical Islamist extremism similarly advances a transnational vision that challenges democratic systems and Western influence on a global scale. Because of these perceived similarities, he notes that some commentators have even referred to militant Islamism as a form of “21st-century communism”.

Throughout this section, Carlson's purpose is not simply historical analysis but also moral and spiritual warning. He argues that democratic societies, and particularly the United States, should not assume that the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century have ended. Instead, he believes the struggle has entered a new phase in which old revolutionary impulses have taken on different forms and different cultural expressions. In this framework, vigilance, spiritual preparedness, and ideological clarity are necessary if democratic nations are to respond effectively to emerging global threats.

At the same time, Carlson's argument reflects a distinctly [providential](#) interpretation of history rooted in the teachings of [Sun Myung Moon](#) and the broader worldview of [Unificationism](#). Events such as the fall of communism, the rise of radical Islamist movements, and geopolitical tensions between East and West are understood not merely as political developments but as manifestations of larger spiritual and historical patterns. His analysis therefore combines political commentary, religious interpretation, and prophetic reflection into a

single narrative concerning the future direction of the modern world.

Section 3 of the [second part](#) of [Dr. Carlson's essay](#) presents the claim that **communism did not disappear with the end of the Cold War, but rather evolved into new ideological forms** that continue to challenge democratic societies. By linking radical Islamist movements with aspects of revolutionary Marxism and by framing contemporary global tensions through the prophetic statements of [Rev. Moon](#), Carlson argues that the world remains engaged in an ongoing ideological struggle whose implications are both political and spiritual. His discussion ultimately serves as a call for awareness and preparedness in the face of what he perceives to be continuing threats to democratic civilization and religious values.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the authors.

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