

*NAKA 2015 Essay Competition:
"Roadmap Towards Peace in the Korean Peninsula"
Co-Winner*

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INTRODUCTION

“Money for housing, not for war! Peace treaty now! Peace treaty now! Money for jobs...schools...healthcare...” was the rallying cry in DC on July 26th. The Korean peninsula is technically in a state of war -- and has been since 1953. The temporary armistice agreement has yet to be replaced by a permanent peace treaty, despite talks of doing so between the two Korean presidents in October of 2007 (“Korean”). The small peninsula has seen more than its fair share of conflict and tension. In 2009, North Korea spent about a third of its national income on defense spending (“North Korea Spends”), a figure that has been reflected even in recent times by the research, development, and testing of military technologies such as ballistic missiles and nuclear devices (Ripley and Castillo, “North Korea’s”). South Korea spent 2.6% of its GDP on military expenditures from 2011-2014 (“Military”), a figure expected to rise as South Korea plans to pump in an extra \$200 billion dollars over the next five years on defense spending (Panda).

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Efforts have been made towards peace and reconciliation by both North and South Korea. In June of 2000, thanks to talks between President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea and Kim Jong Il of North Korea, a number of family members were reunited after years of separation due to the division of the peninsula. Many families remain on opposing sides of the border, unable to see each other due to the hostile relations. The talks also spanned topics such as peaceful reunification, humanitarian issues, and economic cooperation (“Peace”).

In 2009, South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun travelled to Pyongyang to meet with president Kim Jong Il. Once again, they talked about reunification, peace on the peninsula, humanitarian cooperation, and mutual respect. A result of these talks was the peace declaration, or the eight-point agreement, which emphasized cooperation between the two nations. These talks were results of South Korea’s Sunshine Policy, implemented by former president Kim Dae Jung. The policy has three guiding principles: no aggression, no absorption, and active work towards reconciliation (“Sunshine”). Under the policy, the two nations also fostered limited business explorations. Unfortunately, throughout the years, the policy underwent much stress, finally collapsing in 2010 (Narayana).

President Lee Myung Bak, inaugurated in 2008, headed a government that emphasized the denuclearization of North Korea over relations between the two countries. The administration also planned to increase humanitarian efforts (“An Overview”). Tensions ran high, and when

President Lee denounced North Korea's satellite launch in 2011, North Korea cut its interests in communication. Park Geun Hye became South Korea's eleventh president in 2013. Her policy toward North Korea is known as trustpolitik. Under her administration, the two governments resumed communication. However, although there have been talks of action, not much has come to fruition. The nations have come to some agreements, however, on certain topics. ("An Overview")

Dialogue between the US and North Korea has been spotty at best. The two nations are still technically at war, in the absence of a peace treaty. Historically, the US has been a strong ally of South Korea, distrustful of North Korea. For a number of years in the late 1990's, the US and North Korea operated under what was called the "U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework." Most of the agreements between the US and North Korea focused on freezing North Korea's nuclear capabilities, both energy and military related. A notable weakness in this relationship was the absence of relevant parties such as South Korea.

The relationship between the two countries became strained during George W. Bush's presidency. Including North Korea as an Axis of Evil during his 2002 State of the Union address was not helpful in mending or attempting to close the rift. General mistrust became apparent through accusations and allegations from both parties. The administration refused to talk privately with North Korea, only engaging when China threatened to publicly accuse the US of its refusal to talk ("North Korea-United").

Dialogue reopened through six-party talks in 2007-2008 including the US, North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. Once again, topics discussed involved denuclearization, building peace, and a replacement of the armistice for a peace treaty. As North Korea began its denuclearization process, the US lifted restrictions. In addition, the US removed North Korea from the list of "State Sponsors of Terrorism" following North Korea's promise to disclose information about its uranium program (Scanlon).

Relations soured once again when in 2009, two American journalists were sentenced to twelve years of hard labor for crossing into North Korea from China. In the first visit from a high-profile official since 2000, Bill Clinton discussed the matter with Kim Jong Il in August of 2009. The discussion was a success, resulting in the release of the two journalists and the restoration of communication ("North Korea-United").

Obama views the North Korea regime as one to be toppled not by military force or economic sanctions but from the information seeping through the cracks. He suggested that "over time...a regime like this [will] collapse" (Boyer). North Korea responded by calling him a loser (Jackson). The Obama administration blamed North Korea for the hacking of SONY over the controversial movie "The Interview," which North Korea has denied.

The information that Obama refers to is reaching North Korea in a variety of ways. Although most do not have access to an already restrictive internet, many have electronic devices such as netels, which have USB and SD reading capabilities (Greenberg, Andy). Activist groups are taking advantage of this and smuggling across memory chips with foreign media, political pamphlets, documentaries, and other educational media (Greenberg, Julia). Some listen to

foreign broadcasts on illegal pirate radios. North Korea's black market serves as a trading ground for illegal media. This kind of information can lead to questioning of the government, such as in the case of Yeonmi Park, who saw the movie "Titanic" as revolutionary. This kind of work would bring down the regime from the inside.

Outside efforts have ramped up as well. Recent years have seen a surge in the participation of the global community in its efforts to bring about peace on the peninsula. Across the US, people of all ages have organized "Korea Peace Days." Well-known feminist Gloria Steinem joined thirty other women in a march across the DMZ as a demonstration for peace (Borowiec). DC's lawns have filled with the sounds of rallies for peace. A letter writing campaign has been organized by the National Association for Korean Americans (NAKA). Senators have been receiving letters, pleas, and information concerning the call for the armistice to be scrapped in favor of a peace treaty.

IDEAS

Even though more and more people are participating, there are still many around the world who don't know what to do. I propose educating the masses on how they can take help the cause. One example would be to create a short video that has the potential to go viral. The target audience would be the young adults and adults who have recently brought about change, especially since they are the demographic with the best grasp of social media.

The video would introduce the viewer to basic information: North Korea and the United States have yet to sign a peace treaty, the armistice was signed 62 years ago, tension on the Korean peninsula provides propaganda for both governments to control or manipulate their citizens, etc. Different versions of the video could be circulated, with one version urging viewers to write to their senators, and another getting viewers to organize their own events. All videos would finish with links to informational websites, such as naka.org. This kind of grassroots movement does not require a large budget at all, and has the potential to increase awareness and participation from the global community.

Social media outreach could also be used. In all the time I have spent on Facebook, I have yet to see anything related to the issues on the Korean peninsula. NAKA does not seem to have a presence on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, platforms that are highly efficient in reaching a large audience. Periodic posts on information or updates could be used to get more people involved. In addition, sites such as change.org could be used to petition for the government to reach out to North Korea once again and try to open up talks.

In addition, there are sites that allow people to submit their own stories/articles, one of which is BuzzFeed. Stories about the situation can be submitted and potentially published, spreading to the site's vast reader base. Again, little to no budget is required.

Keeping the information flowing on the internet is one path, but keeping the information flow into North Korea is crucial as well, such as with the USB and SD cards being smuggled across. Another way of getting information into North Korea is through people. Celebrities have access to North Korea and Kim Jong Un that is nearly unparalleled. If more influential figures

could cross the border, more points of contact could be established with figures inside North Korea, including the regime's leader.

OBSTACLES

One major obstacle is North Korea's current unwillingness to cooperate. North Korea seems to act like a rebellious teenager. It says it wants to talk diplomatically one year, then changes its mind the next. Despite heavy criticism from the rest of the world, it continues its nuclear program. Unfortunately, dealing with this sort of attitude requires skill at playing the waiting game. We can try to influence how quickly North Korea decides to open up and agree to more talks, but we cannot force it to happen when we want it to. The Obama administration refers to this as "strategic patience" and claims to adopt this method.

Another obstacle is the US's self interest in the area. Asia is growing as another world powerhouse, and the benefit of tension on the peninsula is the high level of influence the United States has in Korea, a stronghold in an otherwise less-friendly region. The US has deployed stealth bombers and staged shows of military power in Korea, doing the exact opposite of alleviating tensions and fear of an all-out war. This is where the letters and public outreach could help, if the government faces enough public pressure and disapproval, ideally it would agree to discontinue displays of aggression and truly seek to use "strategic patience."

The western world and South Korea both have a habit of portraying North Korea as an evil entity that needs to be brought down with minimal contact. This is an obstacle for celebrities and activists who contact or come into association with North Korea. Dennis Rodham, a basketball player, came under fire for positive remarks on North Korea, and the women who marched across the DMZ faced harsh criticism as well.

North Korea's Juche ideology also poses a problem. Under that ideology, North Korea is a fully independent state with no reliance on any other country. The official website of DPRK states that "The realization of independence in politics, selfsufficiency [sic] in the economy and self-reliance in national defence is a principle the Government maintains consistently" ("Juche"). This ideology holds North Korean independence and dignity high, especially over imperialists and dominationists, names that the US might fall under. Reconciling with America might be the equivalent of admitting it can't cope with economic sanctions and global (or mostly global) disapproval, which goes against the Juche ideology.

CONCLUSION

Bringing about peace on the Korean Peninsula should not be taking over sixty years to happen. All parties involved have made mistakes, and will probably continue to do so in the future. Getting more people aware and educated will pressure lawmakers to push forward in pursuing peace on the peninsula. Information is key, rather than ramping up military presence, South Korea and the United States should engage in more diplomatic talks with North Korea. Social media and digestible videos can help the public raise the pressure for this to happen. Hopefully then the vision of peace on the peninsula will be realized and the two Koreas will be united.

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