

NAKA 2015 Essay Competition:

"Roadmap Towards Peace in the Korean Peninsula"

Co-Winner

Analysis and Solutions for the Situation on the Korean Peninsula

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In recent years, tensions within the Korean Peninsula have escalated as the pressure to progress military arms heightens, disparity between the divided countries widens, and political relations worsen. The main strategies used by the U.S. and South Korea include the progression of military weapons for preventive measures, and the imposition of economic sanctions. As a result, direct dialogue and diplomacy have been wrongly disregarded in exchange for more aggressive tactics such as imposing sanctions and pressuring North Korea. Using the current strategies to respond to North Korea has only been proven to provoke the country and further worsen relations. It is important for the U.S. and South Korea to change the existing paradigm on North Korean policies in order to provide permanent solutions.

As the more wealthy and liberal neighbor, responsibility is placed on the shoulders of South Korea to initiate healthy interaction with North Korea both politically and economically. Furthermore, the maintaining of good relations with North Korea is crucial to achieving cooperation. In particular, economic relations not only benefit both North and South Korea, but serve as a stepping stone towards building a positive relationship. Efforts should be made to encourage economic growth and interaction on the peninsula.

Throughout the years, the U.S. and South Korea have imposed economic sanctions and suspended humanitarian assistance. However, this attitude of forcing upon consequences in response to North Korea's actions have proven to only cause a negative effect. Economic sanctions exasperate the hardships of the North Korean people and further provoke the nation. The greater the sanctions, the greater the provocative actions and words responded back by North Korea. The ineffectiveness of economic sanctions was displayed in the Banco Delta Asia sanctions, which were imposed in condemnation for North Korea's illegal economic activities. However, North Korea soon retaliated, believing it to be a hostile policy, and pushed for nuclear tests. In response, the U.S. Department of State lifted the sanctions, understanding that the easing of sanctions was a necessary step towards solving the problem, which lead to North Korea's declaration of its nuclear programs and disablement of existing nuclear facilities. Through times of tension such as the Banco Delta Asia sanctions, it has been displayed that the imposition of sanctions further provokes North Korea, and in this case, compelled them to push for nuclear tests. It was only after the sanctions were lifted that tensions began to ease and cooperation was much more feasible.

The U.S. and South Korea have concentrated more on imposing economic sanctions and suspending humanitarian assistance rather than solving issues through peaceful dialogue. However, the last twenty years have demonstrated that the most effective strategy in attempting to change North Korea's attitude is not through coercion and sanctions, but through conversation and negotiation. For example, the Clinton administration successfully convinced North Korea to suspend its withdrawal from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) through several rounds of practical dialogue which led to the DPRK-U.S. joint statement on July 19th 1993. Additionally, the Bush administration's direct dialogue contributed to turning around the Banco Delta Asia sanctions crisis which led to agreements on February 13th 2007 and October 3rd 2007. Despite its image as simply talk and no action, direct diplomacy with North Korea is certainly not worthless and should not be omitted from the list of possible options. It must also be made apparent that South Korea and the U.S.'s continual sanctions only compelled North Korea to improve its nuclear capabilities, rather than abandoning them. Therefore, sanctions should not take precedence over peaceful tactics, and should not be utilized as a main strategy. Conversely, dialogue and negotiation must not be underestimated as they can be crucial methods for effectively handling situations regarding North Korea.

A current stance taken by South Korea and the U.S. is to maintain the current armistice system diplomatically, economically, and militarily with North Korea. They isolate North Korea diplomatically by demanding hefty preconditions for resuming talks, invest a great deal into imposing economic sanctions, and focus on progressing their military capabilities. However, this current model for simply maintaining the status quo on the peninsula is not realistic and leads to an unsustainable system that allows for conflict to possibly ensue.

Despite the chances of intentionally initiating another war are very slim, recurring military clashes and their escalation are increasing overtime. Also, the addition of South Korea's defense plan, which states that it will strike not only North Korea's origin of provocative action, but also supporting forces and headquarters, further worsens the situation and increases the probability of escalating conflict. Additionally, the probability has grown due to the U.S.'s position to conduct large scale nuclear delivery exercises.

The ROK-U.S. alliance's military capabilities are far superior to North Korea's. South Korea spends about 30 billion dollars on its annual military budget, more than half the GDP of North Korea and ten times its alleged military spending. Especially with recent statements made by South Korea to increase defense spending, the competition to acquire more weaponry heightens. However, furthering the arms race will only compel North Korea to progress its nuclear weapons, since its initial motivation is to counteract the military inferiority it has to the ROK-U.S. Alliance. Unfortunately, as North Korea further develops their nuclear weapons, the U.S. then feels a larger justification to condemn North Korea and develop its missile defense system as a preventive measure. This forms a vicious cycle which stymies any sort of peaceful progression. Investments into such an arms race should be discouraged, as it will cause each side to further feel necessity to gain more military capabilities, which only perpetuates the unhealthy tension and competition. Therefore, expansion of the missile defense system should not be utilized as one of the main strategies for responding to North Korea, and the proliferation of

deterrence and military capabilities should not become a main objective for the ROK-U.S. alliance.

In 2012, North Korea specified its title as a “nuclear state” in its constitution, further perpetuating the perception that the opportunity for denuclearization on the peninsula is slim. On June 16th 2013, the National Defense Commission of North Korea (NDC) suggested to hold DPRK-U.S. talks. Through this, it was specified that denuclearization cannot be a precondition for resuming dialogue, but instead should be a common goal to collaboratively be achieved. Past failures have not been solely North Korea’s fault, but also due to the U.S. attempting to solve the nuclear issue without changing current conditions. When regarding negotiations, denuclearization should not become a precondition before beginning talks, but rather should be seen as a goal to achieve together. By allowing talks to require no preconditions, it is much more possible for important discussions to be made in order to make way for collaboration.

One of the main obstacles for achieving peace is the nuclear situation in North Korea. In order to create new policies for denuclearization, agreements should be built upon and further developed, such as the Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1992, the U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué in 2000, the September 19th Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of Six-Party Talks in 2005, and the October 4th Joint Declaration of the Inter-Korean Summit in 2007. In particular, emphasis should be placed on the September 19th Joint Statement which thoroughly analyzes the North Korean nuclear issue. It identifies the need to solve the nuclear issue, improve the U.S.-DPRK and Japan-DPRK relations, and establish a permanent peace-security system in Northeast Asia through talks. Using the September 19th Joint Statement as a basic framework will give a clear and comprehensive outlook on the objectives needed to collaboratively achieve in order to resolve the nuclear issue.

South Korea, the U.S., China, and North Korea should have Four-Party Talks in order to discuss a peace treaty for establishing permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula while resuming Six-Party Talks to discuss the nuclear issue. The mutual agreement of a peace system is included as a goal in the September 19th Joint Statement in 2005. Therefore, Four-Party Talks should be regarded as fulfilling one of the goals of the Joint Statement and should consistently occur while resuming Six-Party Talks as well.

Maintaining healthy political relations is crucial towards achieving cooperation. The U.S. should maintain dialogue with North Korea regarding the improvement of diplomatic relations. This involves gradually discussing lifting economic sanctions in order to end hostile relations. Inter-Korean relations should also be restored as it is a necessity for making steps towards the denuclearization and establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula. For the sake of gaining cooperation, South Korea should not force North Korea to abandon its nuclear capabilities before interaction. The current attitude is not beneficial and only motivates North Korea to reinforce its nuclear capabilities and worsens inter-Korean relations. Therefore, in order to be readily available, peaceful interaction should not have any prerequisites such as surrendering weapons.

Various efforts should be made by South Korea to improve relations. Possible options include: resumption of humanitarian assistance, restarting Mt. Kumgang tours, and lifting existing sanctions. Tourism efforts, such as the reopening of Mt. Kumgang tours, and efforts to

reunify families, which almost happened in 2013 at Mt. Kumgang resort, should occur. Additionally, if disputes were to happen, it should be solved through dialogue and meetings. Regarding sanctions, in particular, the lifting of the May 24th sanctions should occur, which has stymied economic relations and is referred to by the North Korea National Defense Commission (NDC) as “a cancer-like entity, blocking the improved relations between the north and the south, spoiling the national concord and unity and escalating the confrontation and tension” (*North Korea Blasts May 24th Sanctions*). Also, South Korea should fully acknowledge previously agreed terms such as the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, the June 15th Joint Declaration of the Inter-Korean Summit in 2000, the October 4th Joint Declaration of the Inter-Korean summit in 2007, and also discuss restoration of peace in the Yellow Sea.

In order to establish mutual trust, it is essential that productive dialogue ensues. The South Korean government should initiate bilateral talks with North Korea discussing possible actions to rebuild inter-Korean relations. The two nations should be available to discuss and keep each other accountable for whether or not they abide by mutually agreed terms. Two-Party Talks, like the previous Six-Party Talks, should be made into a conscious effort to maintain such interaction on a consistent basis. Through practical dialogue, the two countries can mend past misunderstandings and gradually open opportunities for greater interaction.

Economic interactions are crucial for improving inter-Korean relations. Specifically, opening opportunities for economic prosperity through the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a key symbol of the cooperation between North and South Korea, could significantly improve the economic and political status of the two countries. South Korea’s economy currently remains stagnant partially due to its lack of valuable natural resources. On the other hand, North Korea possesses an abundance of profitable natural goods, such as coal, lead, and a wide array of metals. However, it lacks the proper mining capabilities to efficiently obtain such materials. Furthermore, North Korea’s opportunities to trade its resources have mostly been blocked by sanctions. Consequently, if South Korea opened its doors for economic trade, and provided North Korea with the proper tools required, the commencement of inter-Korean trade could potentially improve the situation for both countries.

As Park Geun Hye proposed in Dresden, Germany in 2014, a “unification bonanza” could greatly bring positive change to both North and South Korea overtime. She ideally wished that the two countries could eventually reconcile and recover as did Germany in the past when it was divided by the Berlin Wall for 28 years. Although the chances of complete reunification seem bleak as the divided nations grow further apart with time, it is not completely impossible, and is a hopeful vision for Koreans to achieve in the future. However, it is important that action ensues as soon as possible, and words become a reality. It can all start with changing the attitude of policymaking towards North Korea by adapting peaceful strategies such as consistent dialogue, and the maintaining of healthy diplomatic relations. Instead of playing the game of imposing sanctions and further progressing military capabilities in response to North Korea’s threatening actions, talks with the country should be made, such as resuming the Six-Party Talks in order to productively discuss relevant issues. Also, mutual agreements that were already established should be closely observed and carried out, such as the September 19th Joint Statement which calls for establishing peace through talks. Of course, what may be one of the most important objectives would be for South Korea to reconcile with North Korea. Inter-Korean

peace can gradually be achieved by opening doors for economic prosperity in both countries, such as further investing into the Kaesong Industrial Complex which remains one of the few economic connections between the two countries. By making conscious efforts calling for positive and beneficial interactions, we can make way for peace, and restore a sense of solidarity to the Korean Peninsula.

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