

The Korean Peace System after the Korean War: International Factors and the Current Significance

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A state of cease-fire has been maintained on the Korean Peninsula ever since the Korean War ended. Over the past 70 years, the debate on the peace system in the Korean Peninsula has been particularly acute on three distinguishable occasions, right after the Korean War, in the early 1970s, and from the end of the Cold War in the 1990s to the early 2000s. Interestingly, however, when discussions on the peace system on the Korean Peninsula were activated in the past, international political factors have influenced the discourse regarding the peace system. This paper explains in what context the discussion of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is linked to international political variables when it occasionally emerged in the past. Moon Jae-in administration's "Denuclearization & Peace Process" has revitalized discussions on institutionalizing peace. However, the contemporary discourse on the peace system is deeply influenced by one particular international political variable, the conflict between the U.S and China. It is indeed very difficult for the Korean government to achieve the goal while influenced by the U.S. and China - countries with much richer diplomatic assets than the two Koreas. Notwithstanding the diplomatic difficulties, however, President Moon Jae-in's "security-security trade-off" should be reviewed as a diplomatic breakthrough. Also, it should be noted that in the early stage of denuclearization, the strategic measures of countries with superiority in military security such as South Korea and the United States must be taken in advance.

Keywords: the Korean War, peace system, denuclearization, international factors, U.S.-China competition

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I. Introduction

Though the format of peace talks on the Korean Peninsula has varied over the decades, the purpose of such discussions has always been the same: to establish permanent and institutional peace on the Korean Peninsula, bringing an end to the state of armistice that has been maintained since 1953. Indeed, the main talking points raised during peace talks and the international political environment in which they have been conducted vary significantly. Although 70 years have passed since the outbreak of the Korean War, South Korean society still holds a strong desire to resolve the security situation on the Peninsula. As such, current President Moon Jae-in implemented a 'denuclearization and peace process' strategy with the aim of guaranteeing the North's security and therefore eliminating the unstable state's need for nuclear weapon development.¹ With the breakdown of talks between North Korea and the U.S., however, discussions between the two Koreas have also lost momentum.

By reviewing the various peace discussions held to end the Korean War, one can see the clear influence of changes in the international political environment. International political factors during the early Cold War, the detente in the 1970s, and the post-Soviet era influenced the peace talks to a large degree. These days, it is the competition between the U.S. and China that, along with other international factors, influences the Moon administration's approach to peace talks. Since the collapse of the North Korea-U.S. summit talks, however, there have been no meaningful achievements in terms of inter-Korean relations.² Despite the myriad obstacles, including North Korean nuclear weapons development, peace talks could be brought back on track with a strategy that focuses on addressing external political pressures from the

1 *The Moon Jae-in administration's National Security Strategy* (Seoul: The Office of National Security of the Republic of Korea, 2018), pp. 41-74.

2 After the collapse of the Hanoi summit between the U.S. and North Korea, there was working-level negotiations in Stockholm on October 2019. The negotiation turned out a failure as well. North Korea has also raised criticism and verbal provocation against South Korea after the beginning of 2020.

international environment.

This paper reviews the course of inter-Korean peace talks to the current era and analyzes the direction in which the Moon administration is pursuing such discussions.³ This paper starts by studying the peace talks that came just after the Korean War before examining efforts in the early 1970s and 1990s. Next, international political variables and their influence on peace talks are placed under the microscope. Following such analysis, this paper looks at the current South Korean government's North Korea policies and the background in which they were designed. This includes an examination of the Moon administration's logic behind addressing North Korea's nuclear development in terms of international politics, as well as a comparison with the efforts of past administrations. In conclusion, the paper suggests avenues for further study in order to reactivate the peace process.

II. Discussions of the Peace System after the Korean War

1. The Korean War and the Peace System

Peace talks first began at the end of the Korean War. It had taken 2 years for North Korea to be brought to the table for armistice talks but, when they did finally occur, negotiations progressed rapidly. This was, in part, due to the election of President Eisenhower and the death of Stalin in March 1953. As the armistice was signed between the United Nations Command, the Korean People's Army, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, South Korea was not technically a signatory to the armistice and so, when making future attempts at peace talks, faced

3 The discussion of the peace system on the Korean Peninsula includes many subjects such as peace treaty, ROK-U.S. alliance, divided family, North Korea-U.S. and North Korea-Japan diplomatic normalization, etc. This paper, however, only discusses the question on what the key international factors are behind the appearance of the peace talks between the two Koreas.

criticism from North Korea that it should not be allowed to participate in peace negotiations. This has represented an additional obstacle to South Korea's unification efforts.

The first peace discussions after the Armistice Agreement was signed were held at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Talks were held in Geneva as a stipulation of the original Armistice Agreement, in which it was agreed that peace discussions would be held within 3 months. Though representatives from South Korea, North Korea, and all other third parties to the conflict were in attendance at the conference, the talks ended without any declarations or joint proposals as no consensus could be reached.⁴ Despite this, the 1954 Geneva Conference is still worth studying as it sheds much light on the influence of the international political environment at the time. One such international factor that could be seen at the conference was the First Indochina War. France's earlier withdrawal from the Indochina region had resulted in a dichotomy of imperialism versus local liberation, which came to dominate discourse in the international arena.⁵ In light of what had happened in Indochina, North Korea insisted on the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from the Korean Peninsula as a precondition for the peace process. A peace process conducted in any other manner was construed by North Korean representatives as "imperialist vs. colonial."

The stalemate that characterized the 1954 Geneva Conference had an influence upon the wider international political environment as well. In fact, the Armistice Agreement and the failure of the 1954 Geneva Conference played a large part in solidifying the Cold War dynamic that would characterize international politics for decades to come. This dynamic was further solidified in the 1950s as the United States and the Soviet Union faced off in multiple crises around the world.⁶ During the

4 John L. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), Ch. 2 & 3.

5 *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

6 Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 72-90.

Cold War, the term “peace” meant little more than “not being at war.” There was no room for a real peace process to take place on the Korean Peninsula in this international environment, with both the United States and the Soviet Union using the Korean Peninsula as a strategic foothold in Asia.⁷ As South Korea, in turn, became dependent on its military alliance with the United States for much more than just its security, this Cold War framework came to govern South Korean domestic politics as well.

As opposed to governments of other divided nations at the time, such as West Germany under Konrad Adenauer, Taiwan under Chang Kai-shek, and South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem, South Korea under President Syngman Rhee was able to enjoy a much greater degree of autonomy.⁸ Following the end of the Korea War, President Rhee emphasized the Korean Peninsula’s role as the “frontline” of the Cold War in order to secure greater defense support from the United States and, at the same time, strengthen his grip on power domestically.⁹ During this time, President Rhee also forged relations with Japan and Taiwan. Using the Cold War dynamic to his advantage, President Rhee stretched the possibilities of South Korea’s autonomy, though this precluded any attempts at forging peace with North Korea.

2. Peace Discussions in the 1970s

Immediately following the Korean War, the Korea-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty was signed. Anti-communism was the hallmark of the

7 See Robert Jervis, “The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 24, no. 4 (December 1980), pp. 563-592; Chae-jin Lee, *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 25-63.

8 See Lorenz Luthi, *The Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia, and Middle East: Crucial Points and Turning Points* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe: The Politics of A Contested Continent* (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2014); Yuan Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decision of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

9 Victor Cha, “Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia,” *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Winter 2010), pp. 158-196.

South Korean liberal democracy while, in North Korea, Kim Il-sung established a single party dictatorship. Taking advantage of the centralized power and aid from Soviet bloc allies, North Korea achieved much greater economic progress than South Korea during this time, convincing many ethnic Koreans residing in Japan to be repatriated to the North, beginning in 1959. After a coup on May 16, 1961, Park Chung-hee came to power in South Korea. With such a political upheaval, it wouldn't be until the early 1970s that discussions regarding peace on the Korean Peninsula would be raised again.

Just as the early structure of the Cold War had influenced the peace talks at the end of the Korean War, the international political environment of the 1970s had a great influence upon the peace discussions held in Korea at the time. Internationally, this was a time of detente. A non-proliferation treaty (NPT) had been signed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1969, the Nixon Doctrine for American forces withdrawing from the Vietnam War was announced that same year, and, in 1972, Nixon visited Shanghai, establishing relations with China. In addition, with the withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula in 1971, there was some semblance of military balance between the two Koreas.¹⁰

Park Chung-hee's move to dissolve the country's constitution in order to allow himself to begin a third consecutive term in power generated much controversy domestically. However, the economic progress achieved during his rule had brought South Korea on par with North Korea. Meanwhile, Kim Il-sung had purged all his domestic opposition in the North and was strengthening the country's offensive military capabilities. The international atmosphere of detente, in fact, acted as an obstacle for the North Korean leader's military ambitions.

President Park Chung-hee declared a "peaceful unification initiative" at a ceremony on August 15, 1970. In the declaration, Park

10 Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), Ch. 1 & 2.

Chung-hee proposed friendly economic competition between South and North Korea and proposed creating conditions for peaceful unification through exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas. The week before, on August 6, 1971, in a welcoming speech for Cambodia's King Sihanouk in Pyongyang, Kim Il-sung announced that he would be willing to meet with South Korean officials without any strings attached.¹¹ Sometime later, dialogue between the two Koreas began in earnest. The two governments continued the talks through mediation by the Red Cross and through official channels as well. Through this cooperation came the historic "7.4 Joint Statement" announced simultaneously by the two Koreas in 1972. The statement agreed on the three principles of "independence, peace, and national unity" as a guide for inter-Korean relations as a whole, though these terms came to be interpreted far differently by both parties.¹²

By analyzing security on the Korean Peninsula under Park Chung-hee's regime, one can ascertain the context for the discussion of peace between the two Koreas in the 1970s and understand how it fit into the international political environment. For Park Chung-hee, inter-Korean dialogue and peace discussions were closely linked to the balance of power between Seoul and Washington.¹³ Judging that South Korea's strategic importance had declined from Nixon's point of view, Park Chung-hee attempted to realize a so-called "big" detente. By stressing the threat of North Korea to the United States, Park attempted to counter the changes that were unfolding in the international political environment, characterized by detente. By raising the North Korean

11 *Ibid*, Ch. 1.

12 Even though the two Koreas' interpretations on these three principals were different, they are the most critical part of the peace system of the Peninsula. "Independence, peace, and national unity" respectably mean a South-North centric approach, peaceful resolution without any military option, and national unification in the end.

13 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, Ch. 1 & 2; Ihn-hwi Park, (in Korean) "Park Chung-hee's and Kim Dae-jung's Idea on National Interest and the ROK-U.S. Relations: Segmentation or Integration between Alliance and Independence," *The Korean Journal of Area Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2013), pp. 23-46.

threat to the international level, Park was able to gain greater bargaining power in relations with the U.S.¹⁴

3. *The End of the Cold War and International Factors of the Peace System*

The third attempt at peace discussions on the Korean Peninsula occurred in the 1990s. As with the previous two attempts, international political factors played a huge role. These factors included: 1) the end of the Cold War in 1990; 2) the signing of the Geneva Agreement between the United States and North Korea in 1994; and 3) the declaration of the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement. These events, included in the post-Cold War period, had a huge influence upon Korean peace talks.

The forthcoming collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War was viewed in South Korea as a victory over communism on the Korean Peninsula. In South Korean President Roh Tae-woo's "July 7 Declaration" in 1988, North Korea was spoken to as if it were a defeated country. The declaration called for a summit between the leaders of the Koreas with no conditions to be met beforehand. In a speech to the UN General Assembly on October 18, 1988, President Roh vowed to bring an end to the confrontation and establish peace.¹⁵ Working through the UN was very important to inter-Korean peace efforts in the post-Cold War era and seen as vital, given the international impact of the Korean War.¹⁶

To understand the background of the 1994 Geneva Agreement, one must examine the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993. To begin with, North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons can be interpreted as the result of a collapsing balance between the two Koreas.¹⁷ First of all, the balance

14 *Ibid*, pp. 28-29.

15 President Rho Tae-woo's speech in the UN General Assembly of 1988 was the first speech at the UN as the Korean president since the beginning of the South Korean government in 1948.

16 Regarding the strategic importance of the international recognition, see Christoph Bluth, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Books, 2011), Ch. 4; Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: the U.S.-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

17 Kab-woo Koo, "The System of Division on the Korean Peninsula and Building a

between South Korean “economic growth and self-defense” and the North Korean “military-first” approach was falling away. Secondly, the “external balance” of the military alliance between South Korea and the United States and the alliance North Korea had with other socialist countries was falling away as well. Faced with this great imbalance, both globally and on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea placed its survival in the success of its nuclear weapons development program.¹⁸

In regards to the 1994 Geneva Agreement, however, it should be noted that the Geneva Agreement was carried out as a bilateral negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea. Considering the international political environment following the end of the Cold War, the U.S. excluded the South Korean government in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. After the sudden death of Kim Il-sung in July 1994, during the negotiation process for the Geneva Agreement, the North Korea-U.S. negotiations proceeded quickly, contrary to expectations. After coming to power, Kim Jong-il was guaranteed survival and economic aid by the U.S. in exchange for the destruction of his nuclear weapons program. Kim Jong-il’s option to rely on military forces is interpreted as a strategic choice to ensure the regime’s survival. The Geneva Agreement also included the normalization of ambassador-level relations between North Korea and the United States.¹⁹

Lastly, it is important to highlight the “9.19 Joint Statement” reached at the fourth round of the six-party talks in 2005. As is well known, paragraph 4 of the “September 19 Joint Statement” contains promises to establish a peace regime not only on the Korean Peninsula but also in Northeast Asia.²⁰ It seemed impossible for North Korea and the U.S. to

Peace State,” *Korea Journal*, vol. 46, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), pp. 11-48.

18 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, Ch. 13; Ihn-hwi Park, “Alliance Theory and Northeast Asia: Challenges on the 60th Anniversary of the Korea-U.S. Alliance,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2013), pp. 320-325.

19 For the specific details of the Geneva Agreed Framework of 1994 see, <<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infircs/1994/infirc457.pdf>> (date accessed May 1, 2020).

20 For the specific details of the September 19 Joint Statement see, <<http://www>

resume discussions on a peace regime since there had been tension and conflict between the two countries since the Bush administration in 2001. Again, however, international variables had an important impact on the revitalization of discussions. This time it was China that played an important role in bringing peace discussions to the table. Whereas the 1994 Agreed Framework was the product of bilateral negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea, the September 19 Joint Declaration in 2005 was the result of multilateral negotiations in which China's leadership played a prominent role. China was quickly incorporated into the global economic system since its entry into the WTO in 2001 and, at the same time, raised its voice on various international political issues. The Sept. 19 Joint Statement therefore reflects China's effort to dismantle the Cold War structure in Northeast Asia, with China making efforts to emphasize the potential diplomatic relationships between the U.S. and North Korea and North Korea and Japan. It also emphasizes concrete efforts to improve the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula as well as the peace regime in Northeast Asia, accurately recognizing peace regimes on a regional level.

III. Moon Jae-in Administration and the Peace System

1. Moon Jae-in Administration and the "Denuclearization-Peace Process"

With the advent of the Moon Jae-in administration in 2017, the "Denuclearization-Peace process" was promoted as the prominent North Korea policy. The rise of the Moon government with its engagement policy toward North Korea is interpreted as the result of the opposition of South Korean people against the principle-based North Korea policy implemented by the conservative party of the former governments. It is an indicator that shows South Koreans have formed a

mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_4079/view.do?seq=287161&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=&page=322 (date accessed May 1, 2020).

consensus that the North Korean issue should be resolved peacefully in the face of prolonged conflict with North Korea. At the center of Moon's strategy is the belief that functionalist approaches taken by former South Korean administrations are ineffective. In addition, the strategy places South Korea at the center of the peace process, rather than relying on the efforts of China or the United States.

The key characteristic of the 'functionalist' approaches taken by past South Korean administrations is that they have been highly transactional in their dealings with North Korea.²¹ The conservative approach labelled either as the "principled North Korea policy" or the "pressure and sanctions North Korea policy" is in a sense common to the progressive approaches, labelled either as the "engagement policy toward North Korea" or the "sunshine policy" in that they are both based upon the concept of trade-offs. This boiled down to providing economic rewards in exchange for nuclear disarmament. In the Geneva Agreement, such a trade-off was agreed to by the United States and North Korea, though the agreement was short-lived. South Korea followed the same transactional model in its dealings with North Korea. For example, liberal governments under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun called for inter-Korean economic cooperation, social and cultural exchange and cooperation, tours, and the Kaesong Industrial Complex and through this cooperation they expected a spill-over effect. The former conservative governments under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye presented such policies as the "Non-nuclear Opening 3,000 Policy," "Korean Unification Bonanza," "Dresden Manifesto" and the "Marshall Plan in Korea." These plans all expected North Korea to select economic development in return for giving up nuclear weapon development.

For North Korea to have cooperated with any of these plans, it would have had to have selected economic compensation over its security interests. This choice lies at the heart of all transactional policies

21 Regarding the theoretical discussion of 'functionalism' in international relations see, Ernst Hass, *Beyond the Nation State: Functionalism and International Organization* (Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, 2008).

taken towards the North by South Korea. Therefore, North Korea has traditionally sought ways to bypass South Korea as a negotiating partner in peace talks and responded relatively negatively to Seoul's overtures.

It was against this backdrop that Moon Jae-in introduced peace talks on the Korean Peninsula. Whenever there is an opportunity, North Korea stresses that its nuclear weapons development is a self-defense effort to protect itself from external threats such as the U.S., while also insisting that building trust and normalizing relations between Pyongyang and Washington is the top priority for establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula.²² President Moon Jae-in does seem to understand that the role of the United States is important. Seoul supports dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang, emphasizing its own so-called "mediator role" or "facilitator role" rather than solely pursuing a role at the forefront of negotiations on the North Korean nuclear issue.²³ The revitalization of the peace regime discussions can be seen as a sign that the South Korean government is well aware that the success of negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea is most important towards securing peace on the Korean Peninsula.

A massive obstacle to achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula has been the rivalry between the United States and China. It is therefore important to examine the different views of the U.S. and China on the Korean Peninsula issue. For the U.S., the issue has only become urgent since North Korea has developed the ability to strike the U.S. mainland with intercontinental ballistic missiles. Prior to that, the United States did not view the North Korean nuclear issue with quite as much urgency and implicitly accepted the Korean conflict as the status quo. At the same time, North Korea made efforts to demonstrate to the U.S. that

22 The outcome of the first summit between North and the U.S. in Singapore shows this point clearly. The first clause of the joint statement of the two countries says that "The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new *U.S.-DPRK relations* in accordance with the desire of the population of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity."

23 Min-hyung Lee, "Moon takes cautious approach as 'facilitator'," *The Korea Times*, October 10, 2019.

its military development was designed solely for the context of the Korean Peninsula, so as to not draw out full mobilization of the hegemonic power.²⁴

Though North Korea can damage Chinese national interests and be bothersome to China on the international stage, the Chinese government cannot deny the strategic value that North Korea's existence plays. China has always held that U.S. concessions are the only answer to the North Korean nuclear issue. At the same time, China has called for the United States to end its military threats against North Korea.²⁵ During the Park Geun-hye administration, the THAAD missile crisis led to a deterioration of South Korea-China relations. President Moon, though, seeing the value of China as a participant in Korean peace talks, has tried to improve South Korea-China relations.

In short, the U.S. and China have little motivation for solving the Korean conflict. Maintaining the status quo is favorable for the time being and increased tension over the Korean Peninsula would be seen as an undesirable addition to the U.S.-China rivalry.²⁶ Therefore, President Moon Jae-in has identified cooperation between the U.S. and China as a key external influence upon the Korean peace process.

2. Current Significance of the U.S.-China Rivalry

As can be witnessed in the examples previously discussed, international variables have often impacted Korean peace discussions.

24 Ihn-hwi Park, (in Korean) "Politics of Security and Insecurity on the Korean Peninsula: A Contradictory Connection between Korea-U.S. Relations and North-South Korean Relations," *Korean Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 229-249.

25 Under the name of 'Parallel-Track process,' the Chinese government has insisted the simultaneous stopping of the U.S. military pressures against North Korea and North Korean nuclear development for the constructive denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula.

26 Sung-han Kim, "Three Trilateral Dynamics in Northeast Asia: Korea-China-Japan, Korea-U.S.-Japan, and Korea-U.S.-China," *International Relations Theory*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 2015), pp. 71-86.

Recently, the aggravating competition between the U.S. and China is limiting the autonomy of the South Korean government in terms of pursuing peaceful inter-Korean relations. Some people may disagree that the current international relations are subject to U.S.-China competition, since there still should be a substantial gap between U.S. national competitiveness and that of China. At the same time it is true that even though there is a wide capability gap between the U.S. and China on a global scale, power competition between the two countries is quite meaningful on the East Asian scale.²⁷

For North Korea, however, tension between the U.S. and China serves to reinforce the country's security position, carving its long-term survival in an era of U.S.-China rivalry.²⁸ North Korea understood the rise of China and the related U.S.-China competition in East Asia as a very attractive security environment for its permanent survival. Intensification of the U.S.-China rivalry and Northeast Asian regional security condition is one of the most critical factors behind the current negotiation process of 2018. North Korea under Kim Jong-un's regime believes that U.S.-China competition in Northeast Asia provides a crucial opportunity for North Korea to strengthen its security position in the region. This is implied in both U.S.-North Korea relations and China-North Korea relations. Kim understands the current international

27 Robert S. Ross and Øystein Tunsjø, *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017). In particular, many scholars agree that the financial crisis in 2008 was an interesting moment to undertake the idea of G2 in which the U.S. and China began to share the global leadership: see, Joseph S. Nye, "American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Winter 2010), pp. 143-153.

28 Ihn-hwi Park, "Denuclearization and Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula and Neighboring Countries," *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Winter 2018), pp. 59-82. For the discussion on the impact of the U.S.-China competition to the countries in the East Asian region see, David Kang and Xinru Ma, "Power Transitions: Thucydides didn't live in East Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2018), pp. 137-154; David M. Edelstein, "Cooperation, Uncertainty, and the Rise of China: It's about time," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2018), pp. 155-171.

security environmental transition period, which is characterized by fierce competition between the U.S. and China, as an opportunity to enlarge its strategic space for permanent survival. Despite holding summit meetings with the U.S., Kim Jong-un has actively maintained relations with China and has held five recent summit meetings with Xi Jinping. For North Korea, summit meetings with the U.S. can be used as leverage against China and vice versa.

North Korea's military-first strategy may continue to draw the attention and ire of both China and the United States, making successful peace talks all the more unlikely. The North's nuclear development provides a justification for U.S. and Chinese involvement on the Korean Peninsula and will ensure that the Korean Peninsula remains an important sphere of influence for both superpowers. In the future steps of the Moon Jae-in administration's "denuclearization and peace process," both the U.S. and China should do their best to maximize each country's national interest, and in particular the way in which to define 'peace' on the Korean Peninsula could be done differently by the two countries. Playing President Trump and President Xi against each other even further, North Korea is finding a survival strategy through its own summit diplomacy.²⁹

IV. Future Prospects and Key Issues

At the moment, the peace process is stalling. President Moon had hoped to sign an agreement to end the war following the summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un in June 2018 but, since that time, no progress has been made towards a peace treaty. There are two key issues that will affect future progress:

29 Some people argue that the so-called "Trump Effect" is one of the critical effects for North Korea to see the U.S.-China rivalry as its strategic opportunity. See, David Ignatius, "Trump Gets the Headlines on North Korea. But Keep an Eye on South Korea," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2018.

1. The Problem with the Denuclearization-Peace Strategy

Many experts emphasize denuclearization as a precondition to peace in Korea. Though North Korea does not have a strong enough nuclear arsenal to guarantee its security through “mutually assured destruction,” its ICBM capacity, as demonstrated through the Hwasong 15 test in November 2017, proves problematic.³⁰ North Korea’s tests can be interpreted as political statements to South Korea, the U.S., and the international community. Therefore, President Moon’s responses must also be political in nature. As with all political responses, there must be flexibility. Rather than simply forcing denuclearization, the Moon administration must demonstrate its willingness to respond to North Korean provocations with various measures such as partial sanctions and support of normalized relations between the U.S. and North Korea.³¹ Definition of ‘denuclearization’ is easy to agree, but definition of ‘peace’ is hard to agree.

The U.S. and North Korea must also show similar flexibility for peace talks to succeed. Sanctions, while successful in grabbing the attention of the North Korean regime, have not been proven successful at forcing the regime to give up its nuclear weapons program. For peace talks to go ahead and denuclearization to be achieved, the U.S. must take a different, perhaps more drastic approach. For instance, sanctions against the North Korean economy center on the debate. Policy makers in the U.S. strongly believe that sanction is the most reliable policy option to bring the North to the negotiation table. At the same time, however, some people insist that sanction could keep the North to stay in the negotiation table but never stop the North’s nuclear weapons program.

30 For the discussion of MAD see, Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Ch. 2. For the objective analysis on the North Korea’s nuclear capability see Sigfried S. Hacker, Chaim Braun, and Chris Lawrence, “North Korea’s Stockpiles of Fissile Material,” *Korea Observer*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Winter 2016), pp. 721-749.

31 For the related discussion see, Jihwan Hwang, “Face-Saving, Reference Point and North Korea’s Strategic Assessment,” *Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2009).

2. A Competition between the United States and China regarding the Korean Peninsula

As previously explained, the Korean Peninsula can be viewed as a microcosm for global conflict, especially regarding Northeast Asian security. The peace process on the Korean Peninsula is inexorably linked to the U.S.-China rivalry and has the potential to upset the current regional balance of power. Changes to the U.S.-ROK alliance, establishment of diplomatic ties between North Korea and the U.S. or Japan, multilateral security dialogue, and rising U.S.-China tension all have the potential to significantly alter the course of regional security.

Would peace on the Korean Peninsula add to tension between the U.S. and China or deescalate the rivalry? U.S.-China competition can certainly be seen as the key factor in terms of Korean peace talks in the near future. If inter-Korean relations continue to deteriorate, the peace process could add to the tension between the U.S. and China. At the present course and with President Moon's accommodating diplomatic strategy, however, both countries are in favor of peace talks on the Peninsula. It is likely that Korean peace talks will depend upon the ability of China and the U.S. to reach a consensus on the issue. Though China and the U.S. may disagree in areas relating to energy and environmental issues and the South China Sea dispute, cooperation could be achieved in the realm of Korean peace talks.

On the other hand, the peace process on the Korean Peninsula could further fuel the U.S.-China rivalry. Though the tensions have been manageable up until now, a resolution to the Korean security crisis could intensify conflict between the U.S. and China. Disagreement could be had over the future of North Korea's economic growth, its opening, and its new relationships with the U.S. and China. Until now, conflict between the U.S. and China over the Korean peace process has been understated but, should the process progress, formal talks would be needed to resolve the superpowers' differences over the future of the Korean Peninsula.

V. Conclusion

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War. With the anniversary, sections of South Korean society have argued for a formal end to the war and the beginning of peace. The peace process, however, also may depend upon elements outside of South Korea's control. Besides the issues covered in this paper, there are other issues to contend with such as separated Korean families, the status of the US Forces Korea, U.S.-Japan cooperation, the Northern Limit Line demarcation, and management of the DMZ. All of these issues present obstacles to the progress of peace talks. Therefore, early and decisive political action must be taken by the United States in early negotiations with North Korea.

As explained in this paper, the success and the format of peace talks depends upon the international political environment. The wider international context had a massive impact upon the course of the 1954 Geneva Conference held after the Armistice Agreement as well the course of negotiations in the 1970s and in the 1990s. President Moon Jae-in's current efforts to denuclearize the Peninsula aim to guarantee North Korea's security through commitments by the international community. The current policy also keeps the wider international context in mind, as it factors in the influence of rising U.S.-China tension. Though the rivalry threatens to derail peace talks, it is important to consider it as the chief variable influencing the direction of future discussions.

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