

## Online Series

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# Suggestion for Turning DMZ into Peace Zone

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The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), marred by scars and conflicts of war, should now become a space where ecology and peace can converge, and human and nature can coexist. To that end, measures should be devised to adopt a concept of an ecological peace belt encompassing the entire DMZ and to transform the DMZ into a historical site. It is necessary to consider developing the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> eco-friendly Kaesong Industrial Complex in the inter-Korean border near the DMZ. A vast size of border areas, upon full utilization of the DMZ, will become a new center of developments. To achieve such goal, efforts should primarily be made to improve fragile infrastructure in border areas, such as building roads, etc.

The DMZ has been a symbol of division on the Korean Peninsula since 1953. It has also witnessed military tensions and conflicts of small and large arising between the two Koreas. Although the Cold War has long been gone at the global level, the DMZ still remains as the only region in the world symbolizing national division and conflicts. However, acute military tensions in the DMZ are now treated as a theme of DMZ tourism.

Countless foreign tourists have flocked to the DMZ to see for themselves this bizarre scene.

The DMZ, with a very restricted human access, has been recognized by the world as a rare ecological treasure trove, paradoxically due to its development restrictions. However, the DMZ is different from the general ecosystem. Up until 1990, operations of attacking with fire were carried out in the DMZ on a regular basis to burn bushes for security purposes. Some areas have been artificially damaged for military purposes. Areas with bounty nature resources, commonly regarded as having primitive characteristics, are concentrated on the eastern part of the DMZ. The DMZ is posing a constant threat to humans and animals due to staggering numbers of mines buried under the ground. Although the DMZ ecosystem has been restored on its own by healing the scars of war, the very existence of the DMZ ecosystem paradoxically divides the ecosystem of the two Koreas.

In fact, the DMZ and its border areas have not been immune to anomalies of the division on the Korean Peninsula. Residents of the DMZ and its border have long been ignored from benefits of economic and other developments due to military confrontations between the two Koreas as well as security reasons. It is a reality that traveling from Seoul to Daegu is faster and easier than from Seoul to Cheorwon in North Korea. In addition, the northern region is mostly used as farmlands in contrast to large-scale residential areas and industrial facilities spreading along railroads and highways in southern part of Seoul. The northern end of South Korea is blocked by the DMZ. And young men from both Koreas are aiming a gun at each other, whose dream in their youth is held back by the duty of military service.

The DMZ divides the Korean Peninsula into two, thereby not being able to connect the Eurasian continent with the Pacific Ocean. The DMZ divides the Baekdudaegan ecosystem into two. Containers arriving at Busan Port across the Pacific Ocean cannot be delivered to the continent. Although the Korean Peninsula had long been a part of the continent for 5,000 years, it was reduced to an island after Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. As a result of that, South Korea had no choice but to solely depend on ocean for developments. The Korean Peninsula

has lost its identity of being part of the continent because of the DMZ.

The Panmunjom Declaration calls for joint efforts to ease military tensions and effectively alleviate a threat of war. In the DMZ areas, immediate military confidence-building measures can be taken between the two Koreas. Most urgent task is to demilitarize the DMZ so that it can live up to its name. In fact, the heavily fortified DMZ is a result of military distrust. And there is a danger in the DMZ that even minor incidents can easily escalate into military clashes. Demilitarization of the DMZ could be realized in a phased manner with measures, such as the lifting of heavy armament and phased reduction and complete demolition of guard post (GP). If the DMZ is fully demilitarized, the level of military tensions between the two Koreas could be significantly mitigated. That stage will mark the beginning of establishment of military trust between the two Koreas.

The DMZ, marred by scars and conflicts of war, should now become a space where ecology and peace can converge, and human and nature can coexist. Once the DMZ is literally reborn as a demilitarized zone, it could emerge as a global icon and new Korean model of ecology and peace. To that end, measures should be devised to adopt a concept of an ecological peace belt encompassing the entire DMZ area and to transform the DMZ into a historical site. It is necessary to apply a concept of a comprehensive eco-park throughout the DMZ, including the East and West Seas, and to integrate the concept with peace culture. In that regard, various measures need to be taken, such as hosing the DMZ Life Center, the DMZ Peace Park, the World Peace Forum, and related U.N. organizations. It should be noted that the DMZ, once reborn as a peace zone, can become a landmark of the world's ecology and peace culture and tourism.

The DMZ should be developed into a hub for inter-Korean cooperation on ecology and peace given that it is an area linking the two Koreas. This is why the belt along the inter-Korean border, including the DMZ, has become a part of three belts of the Korean New Economy Map. Furthermore, joint management of the Imjingang River basin is an urgent issue at hand in order to prevent floods. There is a window of opportunity of various inter-Korean cooperation on ecology and

environment through a medium of the DMZ. If the Geumgang River and Seorak are designated as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and can be linked to the Wonsang and Galma coastal tourism zones and a heritage of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, it could benefit both South and North Korea in terms of cooperative measures. Another option for consideration is to develop the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> eco-friendly Kaesong Industrial Complex in the inter-Korean border near the DMZ. If the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the East and West Seas is designated as a peace zone and shared by both Koreas, it will prevent military conflicts and allow the peaceful sharing of fish resources between the two. The DMZ should be reborn as a hub symbolizing ecology and peace connecting the two Koreas.

Considering regional characteristics, there needs to be consideration for utilizing eco-friendly environment of the DMZ and the inter-Korean border. The border areas have long remained underdeveloped and residents have often had to bear the high cost of division. That is why the eco-friendly concept should be actively applied with a basic principle of preservation across the DMZ at its core. By fully utilizing the DMZ, the vast border areas will be turned into a center of new developments. To achieve such goal, efforts should primarily be made to improve fragile infrastructure in the inter-Korean border, such as building roads, etc.

In addition, it is necessary to restore the identity of the Korean Peninsula of being part of the continent through a peaceful use of the DMZ. If the DMZ becomes transformed into a great corridor connecting the Eurasian continent and the Pacific Ocean, trains from Busan can run not only to China but also to Europe at one-go, significantly reducing logistics time and cost. A development in China's three northeastern provinces and in Russian Far East and Siberia and inter-Korean economic cooperation, once combined, will not only help inter-Korean development but also drive the economies of Northeast Asia and the world. Under that scenario, the Korean Peninsula will be reborn as a hub of the global economy and the Second Han River miracle and the Taedong River miracle will no longer be a pipe dream. It is what the DMZ has long dreamt of.

What is important is that the whole process of creating the DMZ ecological



peace belt should be a national festival and a ritual to resolve conflicts of the division. The DMZ, once reborn as a peace zone, could further develop into a cradle of South Korea's peace culture and a venue that would promote trust and prosperity between the two Koreas, thereby laying a foundation for unification. ©KINU 2018

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