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THE CONTINUING KOREAN WAR
LITERATURE OF MEMORY STRUGGLE
Hyun Ki-young | April 3, 2020

Many writers have unbearably painful or tragic memories of their youth and choose to become writers as if ordained by fate. Such memories lingering in the writer’s mind, as a residue of oppression and resulting chronic depression, likely had a decisive influence in their choice of occupation. Literature is freeing or liberating. The writer creates novels to liberate the oppressed self by escaping and transforming into one of the characters in the novel. If, for example, our psyche is distorted through oppressed concepts of sex, it may be liberated through the figuration of sex in novels. The memory of a tragic incident which I experienced as a child was suppressed within me. It was the memory of the Massacre which occurred in response to the April 3rd insurrection [on Jeju Island] in 1948. The brutality of the experience had made me stutter and I suffer still to this day from chronic depression. The pain of the Massacre persists among all Jeju Islanders, including myself. The collective inferiority complex suffered by most Jeju islanders and myself simply had to be relieved through literature. I felt that I had to somehow break away from the bondage of the Massacre to pursue my career in literary circles – my literary spirit could be released only when my spirit was free from all forms of subordination.

I decided to write a novel on that very subject, to relieve myself from the oppression I felt and to pay my debt to the victims of the Massacre. I had been away from my hometown since I left to attend college in Seoul. There, I was able to gain a better view of my hometown, just as one gets a better view of the forest only when away from the trees. For nearly thirty years, the Massacre was the worst taboo in Korean modern history. Only when I was able to gain distance from the source of the oppression was I able to witness my feelings surface from the obscurity of my subconscious. The Massacre, a taboo that no one dared to speak of, took the form of a gray cloud on a gloomy winter day, just like the clouds that weighed down heavily from the skies of my homeland Jeju. Sometimes, Jeju would look like a dark spot blotted out of the map, just like the 130 villages and hamlets burned to the ground and turned into ashes after being raided by the military and police. I felt sorrow and wrath stirring inside me and coming to life. I could not disassociate my homeland Jeju from the hurt that I felt. My homeland was a huge prison floating on a dark sea at the end of the world. A brutal massacre of an unseen and unheard-of scale was taking place on an island isolated from the world by the sea. Islanders were dying under the false charge of being insurgents or communists.

Those who barely survived became blinded by fear. The Massacre was a taboo no one was to speak of. Their lips froze at the mention of the incident. They were victimized so severely that the incident was internalized, taking root as second nature. The islanders
developed a sense of inferiority, defeatism, and self-deprecation as well as a blind terror towards authority and ironically an absolute envy towards the central government. I myself felt similarly oppressed. In my short story “Tale of the Sea Dragon,” I write:

The scene of the nightmare, the years of haunting dreams, those were his hometown. It represented everything he yearned to forget and discard. It was understood as the direct opposite to happiness or making his way to the world.

Once I set my mind on the subject, it seemed like a crime to write about something else. I planned to write four or five short or medium-length stories on the Massacre before I returned to “pure literature.” I thus looked back to my homeland with a different perspective and I realized that it was not that different from assessing myself in an objective manner. To focus on my homeland and the tragic incident which occurred there as my subject matter was none other than to place myself, a particle of the scene, under intense scrutiny. It was a whole new way of looking at my homeland as well as myself.

I finally situated myself in the realm of taboo. Having been only a child of only six or seven years when the Massacre occurred, I had limited memory of the incident. I had my work cut out for me. I needed to conduct extensive research, which I found quite challenging. I looked for data at the National Library only to find records that were either unreliable or severely geared to the extreme right. I could not repress the sadness I felt when one day I found two years’ worth of newspaper articles omitted from the *Jeju Daily* rack. It seems that the Massacre was brutally deleted from modern history. Korean modern history was written by the winners. They recorded memories that pleased them, while stifling or crossing out those of the losers.

I concentrated on collecting eyewitness accounts in search of the truth [of the April 3rd Jeju Uprising] which was distorted as a pro-communist revolt. This was not as easy as I had thought. The collective memory of the people seemed to have been ruthlessly shattered by the policy to obliterate the memory of the incident from the people’s minds. Nearly three decades of policies to deliberately crush memories of the Massacre by successive dictatorships have frozen the lips of the islanders. The majority voluntarily killed the memories themselves since it was virtually impossible to live on without trying to erase the brutal scenes from mind.

I was working as a high school teacher at the time and visited Jeju Island every vacation for two years. I had such a hard time gathering information from the witnesses (survivors) who obstinately refused to recount their memories. Even my close relatives chided me for opening an old wound and hesitated to cooperate with my research. One
old lady couldn’t stop shedding tears as she held my hand, telling me how I resembled her son who had died in the Massacre. However, she also would not disclose her story, keeping it buried deep in her heart until the end. I had no other choice but to go back, sharing the tears with her. As I worked on my story, I hoped that I could express the inconsolable resentment, wrath, and fear of the survivors who lowered their voices, stammered, sighed, and cried. In the process of writing their heartbeats, blood, and sweat, I had a peculiar feeling of being able to identify with them, as if the tribulations endured by the protagonist in my story were mine. Many times I sat at my desk at night alone writing with tears flowing. I realized firsthand that literature is the only way one can indirectly obtain experience.

There was a photograph taken during the Cambodian civil war in which a young boy is staring into the camera at the top of a staircase by the front door. The house is half destroyed with bodies lying on the ground. Roland Barthes annotated this photograph, stating that the look in the eyes of the boy is what the dead had endowed him with to share with outsiders who have no idea what it is like to be at the scene. Through the eyes of the boy, the outsiders are able to witness the tragedy and the dead. I was the boy. It is the obligation of the survivors to tell the story on behalf of the dead. As a survivor of the Massacre, I was obliged to look at the world with the same expression of the boy in the photograph.

To my surprise, my first work addressing the Massacre, *Sun-i Samch’on* (*Aunt Sun-i*), published in the summer of 1978, was well received. Writers are affected not only by the works of others but also by their own work. This is because the statement made through one’s work cannot be taken back and thus that exerts a firm grip on the author. A writer who has made a strong impression on the reader can seldom be free of the expectations or demand of his or her readers. Readers rooted for me and my efforts, and I answered by producing three more short stories on the subject. Then came the unbearable anxiety. Would I be able to remain unscathed after having written so provocative a message? I thought I was ready to face whatever it took, but the fear became real after the stories were out. I secretly prayed that the authorities would let my writing pass just this once, and I’d never write about that topic again.

But they did not. The publication of *Sun-i Samch’on*, a compilation of short stories on the subject seemed to have been the last straw and I was snatched away by the military secret service and taken to the basement of their headquarters. I was treated no different from a dog. The caning turned my body black and blue. My heart still beats at the haunting memory of torture. My body still recalls the fear and pain. The torture made it clear that the Massacre which took place thirty years before was still an important issue.
and I felt like the last victim of the incident. The bruise from the caning disappeared about two weeks later but the mental scar still lives on, victimizing me until this day.

I was tortured for three days, day and night, incarcerated, and released after 25 days. I was arrested again several months later, this time by the police. About twenty days before the arrest, I knew I was being watched. Until the arrest, I felt like a sitting duck waiting to be caught. I was so anxious and fearful that I lost almost 8 kilograms. It seemed the police originally planned to press formal charges against me. However, the Massacre was no small issue and they feared they might attract unwanted attention by presenting the case in front of the court. So I was released and my book was banned from circulation.

After the incident, I became depressed and unsure of myself. I stopped writing for more than a year, relying on alcohol to soothe my pain and despair. Then one night I had a dream. A woman in mourning clothes appeared, admonishing me to get up and rise above the weight of my despair and continue the mission I was ordained to complete. The woman was none other than the protagonist in my own creation, Sun-i Samch’on. I realized that this fictional figure was alive within me. She had already been transformed into an entity in reality. Amazingly I was able to regain the strength to write again after I awoke from that dream.

The Massacre was not limited to the armed uprising which took place on April 3, 1948 in protest of the establishment of a separate government in South Korea, excluding the north. It included the process of suppressing the uprising and the resulting massacre of at least 30,000 civilians by the military police. The foremost and imminent goal of the nation, at the time, was the abolishment of the demarcation line (separating Korea into north and south) and the clearing away of the evil legacies of Japanese colonial rule. Liberation from the Japanese, however, brought about another kind of occupation. The general sentiment among the people was that a new nation should be established by a united government, not by separate governments founded in South and North Korea. If Jeju Island was ever in any way culpable, it was perhaps that it was the most aggressive in expressing its opposition to a separate government.

One year before the Massacre struck, the islanders held a March First protest. This was, in a way, a precursor to the Massacre. On March 1, 1947, people organized an outdoor rally demanding the pull-out of American and Russian troops from the peninsula in order to achieve true independence. The (Korean) police under U.S. control fired at the protesters, killing six people and hurting ten others. The general strike subsequently launched by the islanders in protest of this atrocity was met not by an apology, but by brutal oppression. The entire island was accused of being pro-communist. It is well
known that the police roundups, terror, and torture committed by the police under the auspices of the American Military Government resulted in many deaths, triggering the April 3, 1948 uprising.

The general strike in which almost all islanders joined speaks volumes of the communal nature of the island. The cohesiveness of the island community stems from a long history of fighting against outside forces that harmed the community. Jeju is a rocky island formed in the middle of the ocean from the ashes of volcanic eruptions. Its inhabitants are as strong and willful as the deep root of the weeds. Its barren soil forced all residents, including the upper class and the literate to labor in the fields in order to have three square meals a day. It was a poor community but the members were equal. This is how the islanders had developed a strong sense of community: their consciousness that they were in the same boat. The islanders who lived in a tight-knit society like the weeds intertwined in the barren soil faced two kinds of outside intrusions. One was the foreigners that invaded the island — the Mongolians, Japanese pirate raiders, Imperial France, and Japan. The other was the central government which had nothing to provide the islanders, but seized every opportunity to take away from the island. The politicians in exile, banished from the central government also played a role in this anti-central government sentiment. The Island was the disposal site for fallen politicians whom the central government wished to banish. So the island has had a long history of small and large-scale resistance against the central royal government which exercised severe discriminatory policies against the island while exacting an inordinate amount of tribute and harsh military obligations from the islanders.

Those who are oppressed and exploited tend to resort to Messianism. They long for a savior or a hero who will come to their rescue with a vision of new life and save them from misery. Islanders referred to such a hero as Jin-in, or “true man.” The crying lips of at least 10,000 aggrieved subjects were thought to be necessary for the far-away royal government to hear them out. This required extraordinary bravery since leaders of such insurgencies were invariably decapitated. The birth of a hero in the remote island suffering from discrimination amounted to nothing more than an insurrection that always ended in the execution of the hero accused of treason. The heroes whose lives ended in death were “true men” (Jin-in, 貫人) who sought to save the people by sacrificing themselves.

The uprising, therefore, was an extension of a tradition of resistance characteristic of the island’s history, not, as the ultra-rightists claim, a communist proletariat insurrection. The island, painted red by the extreme right-wingers, became the stage of indiscriminate massacre. What the islanders thought of as resistance in the traditional sense produced a totally different result from what it had in the past. Unlike the past in
which the heroes’ lives were sacrificed in return for the deliverance of the people, the leaders in the April 3rd uprising faced a tragic situation in which they not only found themselves but also the people killed. The islanders were in a state of total shock as they unsuccessfully tried to make sense of the unfamiliar scene of massacre unfolding before them. At the time the Massacre was under way, the president of the United States was Truman and Korea’s ruling elite tried to deceive the people into thinking of Truman as the Messiah by translating literally his name as Jin-in (眞人).

The impact of the incident seemed as grave as the atomic bomb explosions on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The magnitude of the violence was such that at least 30,000 civilians, or one-ninth of the total population, were brutally murdered and 130 villages scorched. The Massacre took place as part of the strategic framework of U.S. policy. Can the United States profess innocence simply because it didn’t bloody its hands? The fact that the scene of genocide was void of U.S. presence and committed by Korean soldiers in American military uniforms and boots does not excuse the United States of the crime. War inevitably makes humans act more impulsively and instinctively. The United States took full advantage of such human nature and granted a so-called ‘license to kill’ even to the lowest-ranking snipers, bringing out human savageness to its maximum. Under the cloak of the Military Advisory Council, the United States remained invisible throughout the Massacre, hidden inside the warships that formed a blockade around the island, inside the landing ship tanks, and the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) offices in Jeju County. They understood perfectly well that the most efficient way for the occupiers to quell an insurrection is to create a war among those under subjugation and to refrain from direct involvement in the bloodshed. The following is an excerpt from my short story “Steel and Flesh”:

Whose crime is this? The machine gun? The shooter pulling the trigger? The officer making the orders? The battalion commander who handed down the decision through the walkie-talkie? The regimental commander? Or the U.S. Military Advisory Council? Someone in the higher ranks? Who stands at the top of the commanding pyramid? Was Truman really a “True man”?

Orders from the top were mechanically delivered to the lowest level. Mechanical thinking was void of any human element and everything was alarmingly simple — the mid-mountain areas were the base camp for the human and resource flow for the guerrillas. Therefore, everything, including human lives, had to be completely destroyed. Cold harsh steel machines automatically moved at the press of a button. The fingers that press the button need not bloody their hands. To them, the death toll is merely a statistic with hardly any scent of blood involved.
On the battlefield, it is impossible to disobey orders from the top. Under the circumstances that even innocent people such as children, old men, and women were the target of indiscriminate killing, the solders might console their guilty consciences by saying to themselves: “Exactly so, they are reds. They are but reds.”

It was actually quite simple — the Massacre, which killed at least 30,000 innocent civilians, erupted in the process of eliminating 200 or so young men who revolted (on April 3, 1948) without any proper weapons, armed only with their insuppressible wrath. There was at the time a saying “kill a hundred with one culprit” which meant if you killed one hundred civilians, there was bound to be at least one guerrilla among them. So is it the case that 30,000 civilians were brutally murdered to get rid of 200 guerrillas?

The United States and the ruling government colored eighty percent of the island red and called it the “Red Island.” Red at the time meant death. When I was tortured by the military secret service, they too called me a “red writer,” trying to frame me as pro-communist. But the only red they saw was the blood clot in my middle finger crushed by their torture. Had such an incident taken place in 1948, I would surely have been shot.

So many civilians were killed, branded as pro-communist during the Massacre which was dubbed the “Red Hunt.” This wasn’t necessarily limited to “hunting down the communist.” As was the case in the Massacre, “Red Hunt” is a somewhat ironic term which refers to the historical practice of framing innocent people as communists. The term borrows its form from the “witch hunt” of medieval times during which a huge number of women were branded as evil witches or deemed to have communicated with witches and were sacrificed in the name of religion. Modern times saw history repeating itself by once again sacrificing numerous civilians in name of ideology, falsely charging innocent people as communists.

Truman was head of the U.S. administration both in 1948, the year of the Massacre, and in 1950, the year of 6.25 War (Korean War). It was also in 1950 that “McCarthy’s tornado” took place in the United States. It seems that the term “Red Hunt” was frequently mentioned during the period of intense anticommunism called McCarthyism. Hundreds of government servants lost their jobs, while writers, artists and intellectuals were branded as communist sympathizers by ultra-rightists. But how different the “Red Hunt” in the United States was from that which had unfolded in Jeju — indiscriminate massacre of innocent lives.
“Hunt” is a term used for animals not for humans. “Rabbit hunt” or even “witch hunt” might make sense because a witch is not human. “Red hunt” must operate under the premise that communists are not human. When Spaniards ruined Mayan civilization in the 16th century and slaughtered the Mayan people, the Catholics granted themselves an indulgence in the heinous killings by deciding that the indigenous peoples were non-human — that they were closer to animals than humankind. To kill without any sense of guilt, the target must be either an animal or an inferior human, in other words, a savage. Such logic was behind the carnage perpetrated against Native Americans by the pioneers during the westward expansion of the United States to the Pacific coast.

The equation that communists were non-human was behind the Massacre. Communists were not “people of leftist ideology,” but inferior beings, or savages. Those who killed such “savages” were exonerated of any sin. The problem was, however, that out of the 30,000 victims, only a small number were pro-Communists while the majority were innocent civilians. Atrocity was committed under the name of civilization. In my short story “Steel and Flesh,” the following appears:

Oh, how mysterious, unbelievable, incomprehensible. It is truly a tragedy, unseen and unheard of. How can humans so brutally crush fellow humans? Animals are rarely slaughtered in such manner…. To destroy evidence, they poured gasoline and burned the bodies which, they said, smelled much like burning pork. So did the murderers, through the familiar scent of burning meat, confirm once again that what they had slaughtered were indeed not human but animal? No, not at all. They left the scene in haste, covering their noses with queasiness.

I had employed harsh terms to describe the cruelty of the Massacre. The beauty of camellias fallen upon the snow, for example, is used, in a distorted manner, to portray the image of decapitated heads soaked in blood tossed on the snow. Narratives used in documentaries were used instead of traditional methods of writing novels. I hoped to share with my readers the utmost sense of urgency of the indirect experience I acquired while conducting research and during the compilation process.

I continued my exploration of the Massacre, which started with the production of literary works, by participating in organizations and campaigns. The quest for truth with regard to the Massacre was part of the democratization movement during the 1980s. The quest, which continued under intense fear [of repression], was a struggle against the conspiracy of concealment, denial, and distortion committed by the ruling government, and against indifference and cynicism by the general public. The democratization movement finally claimed victory in the 1990s after a long and difficult struggle. The campaign to shed light on the truth of the Massacre also bore fruit — the
Special Law on the April 3rd Massacre was ratified by the National Assembly five years ago [on December 16, 1999]. It was truly a feat, a miracle for Jeju residents.

This is, however, just the beginning. Although discussing the memory of the losers and victims is now to some extent allowed, it will take much longer to quell opposition from the ultra-rightists and to replace the official memory with the truth. It is one thing to accommodate the memory of the innocent victim, but quite another to reinstate the memory of the loser [as the prevailing social memory]. It is perhaps impossible for the time being. This is precisely why the struggle to remember the Massacre must continue. Unfortunately, the Massacre is too quickly fading away from the psyche of the general public. No sooner had the incident recovered its shine from the darkness than it lost its glitter. Just as the buzzwords of the 1980s such as “history,” “the people,” and “the populace” faded away, the Massacre also faces the danger of disappearing from people’s minds, caught up in a short-circuited materialistic society. The atrocity committed during the incident has yet to be identified before fading into oblivion.

The entrance at Auschwitz still bears the following message: “There is one thing more fearful than Auschwitz. It is that mankind might forget.” It is an epigram warning of the possibility of history repeating itself, whether it be for individuals or for the entire society that chooses to forget. In Beloved by Toni Morrison, the term “rememory” appears. Rememory is a word to emphasize the meaning of memory, or the behavior of continuously trying to remember. Sethe, an escaped slave and mother, lives with the ghost of her dead baby daughter. Beloved signifies the importance of re-remembering the painful past, racial discrimination, and cruelty. The ghost and its character enable such an intense subject matter to be presented in artistic form. I remain envious of Morrison for possessing such extraordinary powers of artistry.

In retrospect, the sorrow of the Massacre was far from the delicate and profound sadness often expressed through “pure literature,” but rather a fierce and painful sorrow amid heaps of bodies, blood, and crying. One can easily understand why Theodor Adorno argued that “writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Literature has a bad tendency of evading social issues and harsh reality in favor of fantasy, romance, and fiction. Literature favors melancholic sadness which humans can tolerate. It is therefore difficult to find literature that deals with dead bodies, blood, screaming, cries, or formidable pain. Readers also instinctively shun such novels. Sorrow and misfortune are allowed only when they are part of overall happiness in a novel. Daniel Defoe shied away from the plague and the dead bodies he witnessed and wrote fictional tales such as Robinson Crusoe, as did Montaigne who was able to concentrate on his Essais without uttering a word on the religious wars which entailed merciless slaughter. Then again isn’t it human nature to try to look at the bright side? Who wants
to deal with a world of dead bodies anyway? Isn’t it a fact that the survivors of the Massacre themselves keep trying to forget the dreadful memory?

Even if this is the case, it would be impossible not to mention such horrific incidents in literature. As Roland Barthes put it, this is because the living are endowed with the inevitable responsibility to reveal the truth for the dead, no matter how painful and fearsome the experience is. The living owe it to the dead to enable the dead to declare their bitter grief. The responsibility lies especially heavy on writers. Literature should not look the other way from blood, crying, dead bodies, or sheer hell simply because they represent a world totally different from that which we call art and beauty. So what if our work becomes non-literature, even anti-literature? If we as writers embrace the view that the pen is an obligation as well as a right, the survivor of a horrible incident and outsiders observing the scene alike shall not hesitate to speak their minds and show interest in the hidden truth.

Hyun Ki-young is a Korean novelist who was born in Jeju Island. He made his literary debut in 1975 when his short story “Father” received the top award in the Dong-a-Ilbo Spring Literary Contest. His works include his celebrated story Sun-i Samch’on, originally published in 1978 and republished in a new English translation as Aunt Suni by Asia Publishers in 2012; Byeonbang-e Wooljineun Sae (Howling Crows on the Border, 1983); Majimak Taewoori (The Last Horse Herder, 1994), a collection of short stories that was awarded the Oh Yeong-su Literary Prize in 1994; Asphalt, a collection of short stories that received the Shin Dong-yeop Literary Award in 1986; Baram-taneun Seom (Windy Island, 1989), a novel that received the Manhae Prize in 1990; and Jisang-e Sootgarak Hana (One Spoon on this Earth, 1999), a novel that was distinguished with the Hankook Ilbo Literature Prize in 1999. He served as the chairperson of the National Literary Writers Association and as the president of the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation. He was the first director of the Jeju 4.3 Institute and a representative on the committees that organized the fiftieth, sixtieth, and seventieth anniversaries of the 4.3 incident. In recognition of his critical and courageous role in unveiling the truth about the 4.3 incident through his fiction during the military dictatorship era as well as his tireless efforts to ensure that this history is not forgotten, he was awarded the third Jeju 4.3 Peace Prize in 2019.
A KPI Interview with physical anthropologist Park Sun-joo.

On December 27, 2019, the Korea Policy Institute (KPI) executive board spoke with Park Sun-joo, a physical anthropologist who has spent the past two decades excavating the remains of the Korean War dead, including unarmed civilians massacred by the South Korean police, military, and right-wing villagers. Since the establishment of South Korea’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005 and its shutdown by the Lee Myung-bak administration five years later, Park, as one of the sole osteologists in South Korea, has continuously been at the forefront of efforts, both government-driven and nongovernmental, to illuminate the truth of wartime atrocities perpetrated against civilians, weathering the shifts from liberal to conservative administrations and back again. His current archival work is almost entirely donor-driven.

KPI: Could you tell us about the kinds of projects you are working on now?

Park Sun-joo (PSJ): To answer this question, I feel that you need to understand what projects have been worked on. Things started in 2000 when the government actually gave us funds to excavate the remains of soldiers. In South Korea, these soldiers are described as having been “killed in action” whereas in the United States, I believe the term used to describe them is “missing in action.” I was the investigation committee leader from 2000 to 2008, and this project is still ongoing. In 2008, the South Korean president authorized a nongovernmental noncombatant excavation project.

The second project started in 2005 when a truth-and-reconciliation law was passed. After that law passed, from 2007 to 2010, the government conducted an initial survey to register all the victims of massacres or civilian victims. During the initial registration period, 168 [massacre] sites were identified, and the government selected 30 sites to investigate the mass killings that occurred there. During that three-year period, however, they only investigated 11 sites. They were able to identify about 1,700 remains.

The law then expired and did not get extended. Although people repeatedly petitioned and undertook actions to get the timeline extended or make it permanent, these efforts were not successful. In 2014, many civil-society organizations gathered to organize support for a second phase of the truth-and-reconciliation process. But the Legislation and Judiciary Committee of the National Assembly hasn’t passed the law authorizing a second phase yet. The National Assembly right now is a bit chaotic. The law was supposed to be passed or examined this year [2019], but this year is almost over.
So, in the meantime, until this gets nationally funded, civil-society organizations have formed joint investigative teams, with volunteers coming from all fields. These teams have conducted the seventh investigation at the sites. The findings from these investigations were used to put more public pressure on the National Assembly to pass a law that would formalize it as a national project.

Each local government has its own legislative body and ordinance-making power. Locally, Asan City and North Chungcheong Province have funded three separate excavation projects. Last year, in 2018, in Asan City, as you might have seen in The New York Times article, 208 people’s remains were discovered at an abandoned gold mine site. They were able to identify 58 victims between the ages 2 and 12, and 85% of the remains were identified as female. They are guessing that these were families of “communist sympathizers” who worked for the People’s Army at the time of the great retreat on January 4, 1951. During the Korean War, some of the most excruciatingly painful incidents occurred during the January 4 retreat. But these incidents are not broadly known by the public. Based on findings from the Asan investigation, I presented at a public event in January 2019 in New York.

The New York Times article mentioned another excavation in Asan City. Although investigators didn’t find many remains, the bones yielded a lot of DNA, which they were able to match to family members.

In North Chungcheong Province, with funding of this project continuing until 2022, they are hoping in March to excavate remains from another site.

The government has a plan to create a facility for memorial services. In and around Daejon City, they are trying to create a public park for all the civilian victims. There will be a contest for the park design, under the title, “Memory and Remembrance.” They plan to move all the remains to this memorial park, which is supposed to be finished by 2022.

My third project focuses on Korean conscripted labor in Japan and in the Pacific during the Japanese colonial period. Geographically this extends beyond Japan to the Pacific, including sites like Saipan. From 1997 to 2005, people from civil-society organizations volunteered at an excavation in Hokkaido where they found 150 people’s remains. In 2016, they moved these remains first to Shimonoseki and then to Seoul. They were able to inter all of the remains in Baekje Public Cemetery. The Korean government, by the end of the Moon Jae-in administration, intends to repatriate between 700 and 800 remains.
The fourth project I am working on is identifying the remains of the people who were killed during the colonial-era independence movement. We have been trying to find Ahn Jung-geun, the martyr who killed the Resident-General of Korea, Ito Hirobumi. We now know the whereabouts of his burial. From 2006 to 2008, we collaborated with North Korea on an excavation in Yosoon (Lüshun District, Dalian), China. We did not succeed in identifying Ahn’s remains, but we were able to narrow down where he might be buried. The South Korean government continues to support this project. One of the one hundred promises Moon Jae-in made was to find Ahn Jung-geun’s remains.

One of my most recent projects is locating the remains of the Sewol Ferry victims. In Mokpo, they were only able to find 5 people’s remains out of 9.

I have briefly gone over the five major excavation projects, both national and private, that have taken place after the liberation [Korea’s 1945 liberation from Japan].

People ask why we do these excavations. Our answer is that it is really important, first of all, to establish national identity and, second of all, to uplift human rights within the country. In my personal opinion, I believe that without the firm establishment of national identity and human rights, Korea cannot become a developed country. In Korean society, civilian deaths during the Korean War are not well known. In fact, these deaths have been subjected to the greatest historical distortion. Because Korean history, especially around the Korean War, has been distorted so much, we are trying to correct what has been distorted with truth. The remains that have been excavated are proof of what happened. They testify to past wrongs. They also hold meaning for rites for the dead. For the surviving families, the excavation of massacred civilians begins to redress the mistreatment they suffered. For the last 70 years, they have been treated by the entire community as families of “Reds,” or similar labels.
A separate issue is what the government should do for the families of the massacred. First of all, the truth has to be investigated and illuminated. Secondly, what has been lost must be restored. Thirdly, the dead must be memorialized. Fourthly, there must be compensation. Fifth and last of all, there must be broad education about human rights. These are what we demand from the government.

What’s absolutely necessary is a specialist, an expert who can oversee excavations, forensic testing, and memorial services. Because I have expertise and experience in these three areas, I have been at the forefront of these activities for the last 20 years. I am also the chairperson of the preparatory committee for memorial services. Regrettably, not too many young scholars are interested in this kind of work, but the continuation of these projects requires young blood.

The biggest problem is that there are no professors who can teach forensic anthropology in college. This is why new scholars are not emerging. Culturally, Koreans regard it as a taboo to touch a dead person’s bones and remains. However, there are too many surviving families in the Korean population, and too much unresolved han remains. For this reason, this discipline really needs great attention and support.

**KPI:** How do you organize memorial services, especially in situations in which surviving families have been living side by side for the last 70 years in the same communities with those who perpetrated the massacres?

**PSJ:** For the last 70 years, the families of the massacred have been labeled as communists or communist sympathizers and thus were not able to participate in public life or assume any public position. Guilt by association precluded them from becoming officers in the army, municipal employees, national government officials, or judges. They could not serve in any legislative body, and they were regularly surveilled by the police. Members of these families were not able to get a better education, and even if they were educated properly, they were not able to get good jobs. As a result, they became disgruntled or voices of dissent against the government.

Furthermore, most of these people were not able to get out of Korea, go overseas, or travel. Given their similar situation, these people got together often, and then created family associations of the victims of massacre during the Korean War. There are about twenty such associations throughout South Korea, and they are housed under an umbrella organization, the management of which is, of course, very hard. There’s a lot of infighting within these associations. Financially speaking, they are not very well off either, so they represent a really unhappy demographic in Korean society. Conservative administrations found it difficult to embrace these people. Yet even the Moon Jae-in
administration has similarly struggled to satisfy survivors and families of massacred civilians.

People who were living—and still live—in the same villages, often in rural, underdeveloped areas, know who the aggressors and victims were. Because the sense of victimization is still very strong and persists into the present, reconciliation won’t be easy. Ten years ago, when we were conducting an investigation in Asan City, we relied on the testimony of people who perpetrated the massacre. Our hope was to narrow down the possible burial ground so we inquired with people who were still alive. When we returned, they refused to answer our questions. They were saying, “I don’t remember,” or “I don’t know.” Most refused to talk because after they first testified, they were given the cold shoulder by the rest of the village. During the Korean War, four Hong families were killed by the rest of the village, and no one really talked about it for 70 years.

In another instance, when I came to the United States, I learned there was a survivor of a massacre at an abandoned gold mine who was 6 years old at the time. The survivor was later able to immigrate to the United States and now is living in the DC area, yet he still regards Asan City as his hometown. He came to the excavation site at Asan City, and when we found the bones of a one-and-a-half year old, he actively participated in a DNA test. It wasn’t a match, but what this survivor shared of his recollections was illuminating. As a child survivor, he was struck by the fact that the wealth and property of the people who were killed were taken away and shared among the villagers. That’s why no one wanted to talk—why no one came forward to talk about these cases.

It’s well-known that in 1996, the U.S. government released a trove of declassified documents, some of which were about Daejeon Sanrae Village. During the Korean War, about 1,800 to 7,000 people were estimated to have been executed in that city. One of the declassified photographs showed an ROK army officer whom people were able to identify. In 1996, this person was a really famous conservative figure. He was the chairperson of the board of directors of a private university, his daughter was a dean of a college of the university, and his son-in-law was a three-star general in the ROK army. In South Korea, there are still aggressors in society. Some of these war criminals are still in power. This makes it hard to find the truth.

KPI: How much national media coverage has there been about the kind of work you’re doing and related to this, how much popular awareness? Is your work beginning to make an impact on public thinking about the Korean War? Or is the violence of the war still an issue neglected by big media, even as it remains important to communities and those most affected?
PSJ: The major media outlets are The Choson Daily, The Joongang Daily, and The Dong A Daily. Unless the story concerns ROK army forces or Ahn Jung-keun, the independence fighter, these newspapers do not cover our excavation work. Their indifference is intentional. Only small papers like The Kyong-an Daily, Hankyoreh, or The Seoul Daily cover the massacres, and they only reach a certain target audience, not the general population. This is not a popular topic that most people are keenly aware of.

Among those people who are reading about this, though, there is a generational gap in understanding and looking at this issue. Older people usually say, “It was inevitable—all the communists were executed” or “Because it was during the war, executions without due process were justified.” The more democracy-minded younger people usually state, “These massacres were not inevitable. They could have been avoided, and now must be revisited. The truth has to come out.” However, since the excavations are not covered by the national media, popular media, or major media, few people are aware of these projects. Maybe one day popular major media outlets will cover these projects.

KPI: In talking to villagers, have you uncovered any evidence of U.S. involvement in these atrocities or at least knowledge by the U.S. government of what was going on?

PSJ: I offer a cautious answer. People on the left tend to believe that everyone in the ROK army knew that the police and ROK army killed civilians. I would rather say that there were a few political soldiers or a few special agencies within the ROK army that were responsible for these massacres.

A few years ago, I was involved in the No Gun Ri excavation. Many people had concluded that American soldiers killed No Gun Ri people. Yes, the killing may have been carried out by American soldiers. But it might not have been intentional because the location of the shooting suggests they were trying to prevent people from coming out of the tunnel, not trying to kill everyone in the tunnel. Further investigation might be needed. Factually speaking, I can just state that a few declassified photos indicate that U.S. officers were present at the No Gun Ri site, and there are also stories and testimonies that corroborate what these photos reveal.

KPI: Because we are in the United States, we are concerned about U.S. intervention in the Korean War.

PSJ: As a physical anthropologist, I cannot arrive at the conclusions that need to be made by other scholars and other experts. For example, at the No Gun Ri excavation,
people remember different stories and rumors—the latter mostly because they didn’t really see what was happening. Let’s say there was a lot of bombing or shooting targeting the people along the railroad where they were walking. During the excavation, we should have been able to find shells by the railroad. We did find one, which enabled me to conclude that there was bombing or shooting along the railroad. But was it intentional, and was it aimed at the people? My field doesn’t enable me to say, “Yes” or “No.” At No Gun Ri, when we were excavating, we found so many bullets around the walls of the tunnel at the entrance. This suggests that they weren’t really trying to target the people inside but maybe trying to prevent them from coming out. Uncovering the truth requires the involvement of more experts.

KPI: Could you speak further about what’s holding the National Assembly Legislation and Judiciary Committee up in terms of funding for excavation of these Korean War massacre sites? Is the Moon Jae-in administration supportive or are these excavations a low priority?

PSJ: Initially, we believed that after Moon Jae-in entered into office, the law extending the truth-and-reconciliation process would pass right away. The work we are doing is very important but it doesn’t appear to be a priority for his administration. The current government plan is to finish the establishment of memorial service facilities on a national level by 2021. After that, the goal is to embark on major excavations at 360 identified sites. The latter, however, requires funding, manpower, and the creation of an agency that will oversee the process. For the last decade, National Assembly members have been preoccupied with the question of how to form this agency. Should it have six or nine people on the steering committee? Such matters are not of any importance to people in the field, but they constitute the main debate in the National Assembly right now. At issue seems to be some kind of political back-and-forth between the conservative and the democratic parties.

KPI: Do you know of any excavation projects taking place in North Korea? Have you collaborated on any excavation projects with North Korea?

PSJ: There are remains in South Korea of Chinese or Korean soldiers or combatants that are identified as “enemy” forces. About three years ago, there was a control room in the South Korean Ministry of Defense that communicated with the Chinese Ministry of National Defense and shipped all the remains identified as Chinese to Shenyang. However, if the remains were identified as North Korean, they are still interred in the Cemetery for North Korean and Chinese Soldiers in Paju. I have demanded that the repatriation of North Korean remains be an agenda item during the joint South and
North summits. This would enable us to ship the remains to the North and in turn to receive what North Korea has identified as South Korean soldiers to us.

This year, at the Arrowhead Mountain former combat site near the DMZ, the North and the South were supposed to embark on a joint excavation project. But when it started, the North Korea team did not show up. The South Koreans did a little work and then North Korea also did its own excavation. I’m not aware of any other collaborations between the North and the South.

If remains are identified as American, North Korea sends those to the United States because of political or financial reasons. The incentive is mostly financial. There was a rumor in the field that for each set of remains, North Korea received $50,000 or $80,000 or something like that.

**KPI:** How have Koreans living in the United States responded to your work? Are they drawn to it or do they want to keep distance from this history, as well? How have they responded when you’ve shared your work?

**PSJ:** I presented on my work twice in the United States, once in New York and once in Washington, DC, as well as later in Osaka and Okinawa in Japan. People who were directly impacted tend to take polarized views. Either it was all done by the government, thus sole accountability resides with the government, or they are very critical about the excavation projects, align with the wartime government, and refuse to listen to the other side. What’s needed is a more balanced view, an objective perspective that concedes that atrocities in war can happen. To adhere just to one side makes it hard to hear the other side of the story. This applies not just to overseas Koreans but also to the government and people in South Korea. In light of the widespread lack of knowledge about civilian massacres during the Korean War, those of us who disclose the facts also need to have more balanced presentations so that people will believe what they are told.

**KPI:** What are your sabbatical plans? What will you be working on while you’re here and when will you be returning to Korea?

**PSJ:** I retired in 2013, but I had to get back to the field, once the excavation projects started. I don’t teach anymore, but I would like to retire from fieldwork, as well. It looks likely, however, that I’ll be able to hand over these projects only when the governmental agency that oversees the project is installed. Until then, I have to keep working. My family lives in the United States. I’m the only one living in Korea. I’m currently in DC to visit my family during winter vacation and will be here until the end of January [2020].
Once the excavation starts in Asan City in March, I will have to be there. The law extending the truth-and-reconciliation process has to be passed very soon.

**KPI:** Do you have any thoughts about what an institute like ours can do to support your work?

**PSJ:** People in Korea and overseas Koreans really need education and information so that we can create a better society where people can live and come together as a unifying force. I ask you to join in this work.

We really need the truth-and-reconciliation extension law to pass. If overseas Koreans write or contact National Assembly members, that might draw some positive attention. Alternatively, you can send volunteers to aid in the excavations. Three-to-four days—or a week—would be good. We need a lot of people. Being there at the site and feeling what really is happening is educational and meaningful.

**KPI:** We can work on those things, and after you go back to Korea, we would like to follow your work and publicize it too.
THE KOREAN WAR AT 60-NOW 70: NO EXIT
Bruce Cumings | June 25, 2020

This op-ed column, originally submitted for the 60th anniversary of the Korean War start, was killed at the last minute by a prominent newspaper on June 24, 2010, despite having been commissioned by that newspaper. KPI runs it now, in 2020, on the seventieth anniversary of the start of the Korean War, as it is controversially periodized. While the incidents specified in the op-ed are now a decade old, the stalemate it laments is unfortunately current. Despite the 2018-19 burst of summits between the United States, North Korea, and South Korea that led to joint declarations of impending peace and rapprochement and despite an upsurge in citizen activism such as the 2015 visit to North Korea organized by Women Cross DMZ, peace on the Korean peninsula remains maddeningly elusive.

The Korean War at 60: No Exit

In July 1987 I arrived in London to work on a documentary film. When I went through customs the officer asked me what the film was about: “the Korean War,” I said. “The old one, or the new one?” he asked, since tens of thousands of protesters had just clogged the streets of Seoul. He might ask the same question today, given the crisis over the Cheonan, the South Korean warship that was blown out of the water in March (2010). Or at one of any number of points in the past 65 years: Korea is the best example in the modern world of how easy it is to get into a war, and how desperately hard it is to get out. 25,000 American soldiers landed on this peninsula in September 1945, shortly after Dean Rusk drew a line no one had ever noticed before at 38 degrees north latitude. Today 28,000 remain, and the war has never ended. Those troops arrived, ostensibly, to hold off guerrillas under the command of Kim Il Sung; today our troops hold off his son—and his grandson. No exit might be the best epitaph for Korea, “the forgotten war.”

Today (in 2010) is the 60th anniversary of the conventional start of this war, and in August (2010) will come the centennial of Japan’s colonization of Korea. Both events are inextricably related; the Kim regime traces its legitimacy back to guerrilla struggles that began when Japan established its third major colony in 1932, the puppet state of Manchukuo. Surviving guerrillas and their offspring formed the core leadership of North Korea in 1948, and ever since. Meanwhile 80,000 U.S. troops in Japan and Korea stand in for the strong Japanese military that existed before 1945, so even today we don’t know what an independent Japan would look like, and our occupation of Okinawa still rankles enough to have brought down the Hatoyama government earlier this month (June 2010).
The North inhabits its own time machine, beating against a strong tide they call American imperialism. Its generals prepare not just to fight the last war, but structure their entire society as a fighting machine determined, sooner or later, to win a victory that was palpable for a moment in 1950 but has exceeded their grasp ever since. The result is a garrison state, perhaps the most amazing one the world has ever seen, with well over one million in the military and another six or seven million in the reserves—in a population of 23 million. They drape a totalized shroud over their people to keep them from being tainted by their American nemesis, yet in so doing they endow their eternal enemy with an enormous weight.

American diplomacy has its own recalcitrant timelessness, its own default positions that last decades and get nowhere: those nasty, incorrigible North Koreans really have to be punished for—seizing the spy ship Pueblo in 1968, trimming a poplar tree in the DMZ in 1976, blowing up the South Korean cabinet in 1983, dumping 8000 plutonium rods out of their reactor in 1994, launching a long-range missile in 1998, another one in 2006 (on our Independence Day), a first atomic bomb in 2006 and a second one in 2009 (on our Memorial Day), and finally the Cheonan. But the punishment doesn’t bite or just further isolates a regime inured to seclusion. North Korean provocation is intrinsic to and perfectly situated within the unchanging logic of conflict since the armistice in 1953: they create an incident to get our attention; we can only respond haltingly and ineffectively, because to aggravate or escalate the problem might lead to a new war, and that invokes another default position: there is no military solution in Korea, a truth we learned the hard way in 1953, and still valid today.

Another default principle in Washington: North Korea stands for nothing, has no support from its people, and will soon collapse. Since the Berlin Wall fell a bipartisan consensus has adhered to the axiom that North Korea will soon “explode or implode,” the current expression being Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s mantra that a power struggle is going on in Pyongyang since Kim Jong Il’s alleged stroke in 2008; this has now led to the absurd proposition that the Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa must ready itself to swoop into the North and corral any and all “loose nukes” if the regime collapses. Monarchical succession is one of the few things Pyongyang does well, because Koreans have been doing it for centuries; when Kim Il Sung died in 1994 there was barely a perturbation in the top leadership. (Loose nukes, though, might be rattling around any one of the 15,000+ underground facilities in the North—and good luck to the Marines).

A third Beltway default says the U.S. is always better off with the conservatives in power in Seoul. These days American diplomats applaud the revival of a close alliance with the current administration of Lee Myong Bak, after years of estrangement under
Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyon. But those two presidents were the products of Korea’s democratic revolution, whereas Lee harks back to his halcyon days as a favored businessman under dictator Park Chung Hee. Along came the June 2nd elections, on the heels of the Cheonan tragedy, and voters broadly repudiated Lee’s ruling party. Presidents Kim and Roh planted the seeds of reconciliation with the North, and they have taken deep root regardless of what we may think.

The party of long memory in Pyongyang has braced itself against the pressures of past, present and future since 1945, up against the greatest military power in world history. Americans think they know this story, of a vain, feckless, profligate, cruel and dangerous leadership, symbolized by Kim Jong Il, soon to be history. But American leaders know neither the nature of this war nor the resilient qualities of their enemy (give the North another decade, and the regime will have been in power as long as the Soviet Union). This blindness is not a matter of forgetting; it is a never-knowing, a species of unwilled ignorance and willed incuriosity, which causes us time and again to underestimate the adversary—and thereby confer priceless advantage upon him. Finally, there is the evil, grinning specter of the war itself, reaper of millions of lives and all for naught, because it grinds on, it endures, it never ends. It returns in myriad forms—memory, repression, trauma, ghosts, the deaths of 46 more Koreans on the Cheonan—to taunt the living, as the odds-on survivor of Korea’s tragedies since the thoughtless division of this ancient country.

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THE UNC’S TIME IS UP: DMZ JURISDICTION SHOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO S. KOREA
Lee Jang-hie  |  May 24, 2020

Originally published in Hankyoreh

In his New Year’s address for 2020, South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced plans for an independent inter-Korean cooperation effort to usher in an era of “individual tours” to North Korea in a bid to achieve a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations amid UN Security Council sanctions against the North. This was then fully contradicted by US Ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris, who said in a talk with the foreign press that Seoul’s policies for individual tours in the North needed to be discussed within the South Korea-US working group framework. To date, the UN Command and the US have obstructed South Korea’s efforts on numerous occasions to enter the DMZ to conduct inspections for the linkage of South and North Korean railways and roads or for other non-military purposes.

These kinds of remarks from the US ambassador and obstructions of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation efforts by UNC have been enough to infuriate South Koreans. The public has begun to catch on to the fact that the main reason inter-Korean agreements have not been implemented has to do with UNC and the US.

What are the legal issues surrounding UNC, and what sort of exit strategy might be developed for the future? To answer this question, we should first consider UNC’s history and legal standing.

After the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 84 (S/1588) on July 7 of that year. This resolution assigned the name of “unified command” to the unit commanding armed forces deployed from 21 countries to aid South Korea, with the US government appointing its commander and permission granted to use the UN flag alongside the flags of the participating countries. The unified command was also required to report all of its activities to the UNSC. The unified command unit was formed the following July 24 in Tokyo. Without consulting with the UN, the US government changed its name to “United Nations Command” (UNC) and appointed Douglas MacArthur as its commander. The result was to give the appearance that the unified command represented the UN’s armed forces.

As the UNC headquarters were relocated to Seoul on July 1, 1957, the commander assumed the concurrent roles of USFK commander and commander of the South Korea-US Joint Chiefs of Staff Command. Seven UNC branches are currently in Tokyo, where
they are to provide logistical support alongside the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in the event of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula.

After the Korean War ended, then-South Korean President Rhee Syng-man refused to sign the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, leaving UNC as the only signatory on the South Korean side. On July 14, 1950 – 10 days before UNC was established — Rhee transferred operational control for the South Korean military to the unified command (UNC). When the South Korea-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) was established on Nov. 17, 1978, the UNC’s operational command was transferred once again to the CFC, where it remains to this day.

A DMZ guard post with the UN and South Korean flags flying over it. (Republic of Korea Army website)

**UNC’s purpose is to cooperate toward peace agreement, not prevent it**

As the only signatory from the South Korean side to the Korean Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953, the UNC’s duties involve managing that agreement, preventing military clashes and acts of hostility, and spearheading a peace agreement. This is why the UNC holds authority to approve passage over the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and entry to the DMZ. But now these duties of the UNC are posing a major obstacle to the effort of linking inter-Korean railways and roads. Rather than cooperating toward a peace agreement — which should be its biggest responsibility following the Apr. 27 Panmunjom Declaration in 2018 — it is instead finding faults with and hamstringing inter-Korean exchange and cooperation efforts. The same is true about its overzealous micromanagement of the DMZ.

The UNC’s reluctance to cooperate with inter-Korean exchange and cooperation efforts and its stringent controls on access to the region have their legal basis in the UNC and the US State Department’s refusal — based on a UN resolution from Oct. 12, 1950 — to recognize South Korea’s jurisdiction over the region north of the 38th parallel, and their sole recognition of the transfer of administrative authority on Nov. 17, 1954.

But in terms of the legal nature of the UNC, the official stance of the UN Secretariat is that it is unrelated to the UN, as it does not report any of its activities to the UN and is not subject to any UN controls. In an official response to a question about the UNC’s legal nature in 1994, the then UN secretary-general replied that it was not a lower-level UN institution, but an institution subject to US controls. Indeed, it is US military
authorities who appoint officials in the command. This means that the US is wearing the “cap” of the UN Command, making use of it to sustain its vested interests.

The UNC is a multinational armed force under US leadership. The seven UNC branches in Japan provide an avenue for a renewed invasion of the Korean Peninsula by the JSDF in the event of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula. This is why the UNC should not be intervening excessively in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation efforts in non-military areas, even within the framework of UN sanctions.

Already, the dismantling of the UNC is being discussed at the international level. The command took a major hit to its prestige with the simultaneous passage of a North Korean resolution for its dismantling and a Western resolution opposing its dismantling at the 30th UN General Assembly on Nov. 18, 1975. Centrally, the first resolution proposing the UNC’s dismantling stressed the importance of replacing the armistice agreement with a peace agreement.

The key role of the UNC now is not to deter the North, but to aid the Korean Peninsula peace progress through its preservation and management of the armistice agreement.

In that sense, some are suggesting that one way out of the complex tangle of legal issues described above would be to replace the “UN Command” with “Republic of Korea” as a signatory to the armistice agreement, in keeping with the spirit of autonomy and peace in the Apr. 27 Declaration and contingent upon adequate discussions with the North. If the UNC does continue to hamper inter-Korean exchange and cooperation in the future, the most realistic approach may be for the UNC to shut down, assigning its duties as the armistice agreement signatory to the Republic of Korea.

As a first step, South Korea and the US should officially establish a working group of experts to seriously examine this issue.

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This past July marked the 65th anniversary of the armistice that halted the Korean War. In addition to leaving nearly 5 million dead, injured, or missing, this bloody conflict forcibly separated nearly 10 million Korean families on either side of the 38th parallel.

Since the 1980s, a mere 20 face-to-face reunions have been held under tightly controlled conditions, with the last such event occurring in 2015. These reunions are infrequent one-time events—no one has ever been given a second chance to see their relatives on the other side of the border. Family members who have been separated since the war are given a single opportunity to see long-lost loved ones for a few short hours, after which they must once again separate. In South Korea, the majority of the over 132,000 separated family members are 80 or older, and more than half of those applying for reunions between 1988 and 2018 have died without ever having had the chance to see their loved ones in the across the border. At this point, in order for all surviving separated family members to be able to see their relatives in the North at least once before they perish, a minimum of 7,300 reunions must occur per year.

As a result of the 2018 Panmunjom declaration, North and South Korea agreed to hold an additional reunion in August of this year. South Korea uses a lottery system to randomly select a small number of surviving family members for reunion events, and this year’s event will include only 98 elderly survivors from South. A journalist who was in attendance during the public screening for the initial participant pool described the Red Cross office where the event was held as “a sea of tears” echoing with the cries of grief-stricken elderly survivors who did not make the list. One 95-year old man, recognizing this as his final opportunity to see his loved ones, begged the government to open the demilitarized zone for a single month so that all separated family members would have the chance to see their loved ones at least once. “I don’t remember how many times I applied. President Moon and Chairman Kim can meet. Why can’t I meet my family in the North?” A 90-year-old woman refused to leave the building, pleading to be allowed to see the 3-year old daughter she left in North Korea over 68 years ago.

When I visited South Korea in May as part of an international peace delegation, I met a female peace activist whose elderly mother, a farmer in a South Korean border town, was separated from her family during the war. She gave me a special gift: a handmade scarf upon which was inscribed a poem written by her mother. While working the fields, her mother would gaze at her hometown across the border—easily visible on a
clear day—wondering ceaselessly about the family she left behind more than six decades ago.

_The Thousand-Mile River_
Lee Bum-og

The narrow river separating us may as well be a thousand miles wide
I can see a home to which I cannot return

The Han River that meets the Imjin and the Yaesung flows to the ocean
It is said that humans are highest order of creation
But we are more wretched than any beast
Birds fly to their homes and return
To my eyes, birds scorn humans.

How can there be a half-century of separation between brothers and sisters, between parents and children?

Amid the rain of bombs,
I fled to save my life
The friends who fled have all dispersed here and there
With silvery hair they are soon to depart this world.
Can those who still live ever feel the soil of home beneath their feet?

Her searing poem depicts her life in a divided Korea as a state of permanent longing that is coming to a bitter end. For her and tens of thousands like her, every day counts. It is absolutely essential that we work to prioritize the regularization of North-South family reunions and the establishment of permanent venues in both North and South Korea for this purpose.

_Dr. Simone Chun serves on the Steering Committee of the Alliance of Scholars Concerned About Korea and is a Korea Policy Institute Associate and a member of the Korea Peace Network._
THE COSTS OF U.S. SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA
MORE US PRESSURE ON NORTH KOREA IS NOT THE PATH TO DENUCLEARIZATION
Christine Ahn | May 23, 2019

On Friday, when the news broke of North Korea’s missile test, two dominant myths immediately circulated in both mainstream and social media. One was that U.S. diplomacy with North Korea was failing, because North Korea had once again proved that it couldn’t be trusted to keep its promise. The other was that more pressure was needed to force North Korea’s denuclearization. But these narratives — which cut across partisan lines — fail to address an obvious fact: The U.S. policy of maximum pressure has not achieved its desired aim to denuclearize North Korea. To the contrary, U.S. policies of aggressive sanctions, military posturing and political isolation have only further emboldened the Kim regime to pursue nuclear weapons as a defense against U.S. regime change. As a recent U.N. study reveals, these types of aggressive policies are driving a devastating humanitarian disaster in North Korea.

The Failure of U.S. Maximum Pressure

Following North Korea’s Friday test, many were quick to chastise Trump and the limitations of his personal diplomacy with Kim. Instead of fixating on the failure of Trump’s diplomacy with Kim, we should point to the decades-long failed U.S. approach to force North Korea’s denuclearization, including Trump’s maximum pressure campaign, or its predecessor, Obama’s strategic patience.

North Korea didn’t test missiles for over 400 days while engagement was underway with both Washington and Seoul. Weeks ahead of the Hanoi summit, U.S. Special Representative Stephen Biegun outlined the Trump administration’s pragmatic approach, a departure from his administration’s previous maximum pressure strategy, saying the president was “ready to end this war.”

Yet in what can only be described as diplomatic whiplash, the talks in Hanoi collapsed because Trump revived Bolton’s Libyan Model, demanding that North Korea unilaterally disarm before improving relations between the two countries as promised under the Singapore Declaration, a clear nonstarter for Kim. Reuters verified that “U.S. President Donald Trump handed North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a piece of paper that included a blunt call for the transfer of Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons and bomb fuel to the United States.”
While the U.S. media was singularly obsessed with Pyongyang’s test, it failed to cover the Trump administration’s military provocations. Trump reneged on his promise to Kim in Singapore to cancel the war drills with South Korea: U.S.-R.O.K. joint military exercises are still underway. This time the military exercises involved the highly controversial Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, which prompted North Korea to denounce as “destroy[ing] peace and stability in the Korean peninsula.” On May 1, the United States tested an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile off the Vandenberg Air Force base in California. Context matters.

**Sanctions: War by Other Means**

The other narrative that cuts across partisan lines is that sanctions are succeeding in applying pressure on Kim who is feeling the domestic heat as the North Korean economy suffers. Also last Friday, the UN World Food Program and Food and Agriculture Organization released a joint report signaling the alarm that 40 percent of North Koreans — 10 million people — are in dire need of food aid following the worst harvest in a decade. Following the U.N. findings on the food crisis in North Korea, Washington analysts quickly pointed the finger at the Kim regime, which “spends obscenely on its military while its people starve.”

U.N. Security Council (UNSC) sanctions “are not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences for the civilian population of the DPRK,” according to the 2017 UNSC Resolution 2375, particularly on economic activities and humanitarian assistance. However, the May 2019 U.N. report found that sanctions are in fact harming North Korea’s agricultural production, preventing the import of necessities like fuel, fertilizers, machinery and spare parts.

In addition to impacting North Korea’s food production, sanctions are impacting the livelihoods of ordinary North Koreans, such as those working in fisheries and textiles. Sanctions specifically impact the garment industry because UNSC sanctions now ban the export of North Korean textiles. Who do we think works in those garment factories? Of the estimated hundreds of thousands of North Koreans employed in the textile industry, 98 percent are women.

The international community has long known that sanctions are hampering humanitarian aid operations. In October 2017, the UN Humanitarian Resident Coordinator in Pyongyang cited 42 examples of direct and indirect occasions where sanctions have impeded and prevented humanitarian work inside the country.
Yet in the U.S., across partisan lines, the humanitarian crisis in North Korea is solely placed on the government with no mention of the potential or actual impact of international sanctions.

On CNN’s “State of the Union,” presidential candidate Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota criticized the administration’s lack of “a plan” or a “real negotiating tactic.” She suggested Trump “should listen to Otto Warmbier’s mother who said we should be upping sanctions.” Even progressive presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders told ABC News the North Koreans are a “threat to the planet” and that the right approach was more “pressure on North Korea.”

Tim Shorrock, veteran Korea journalist at The Nation quickly offered Sanders a corrective on Twitter: “It’s not North Korea that’s a ‘threat to the planet.’ It’s the 70 year-old confrontation between the US and North Korea that’s the threat to the planet – not to mention Korea itself. The US has a responsibility here, sir. You know that talking to peace activists.”

In fact, in March, I was among those peace activists when I traveled to Washington with the Korea Peace Now!, a global campaign of women mobilizing to end the Korean War. We organized a delegation of South Korean women parliamentarian and peace activists to meet with several U.S. Members of Congress, including Senator Sanders. During our meeting, Sanders seemed genuinely concerned about what can be done to address the stalemate with North Korea. The South Korean delegation, which included Lee Jae-Jung, the only woman on the Moon administration’s elite inter-Korean economic cooperation policy team, urged easing U.S. sanctions impeding progress between the two Koreas. Sanders also heard from Esther Lee, a North Korean defector, who talked at length of the counterproductive effect of sanctions on ordinary people in North Korea. “What will improve the ordinary North Korean people’s situation is more engagement with people from the outside world, not less,” Lee explained. After our visit, Sanders released this video and tweeted that a peace agreement is “the best path for American security and for the security of the region.”

Though Sanders doesn’t currently have executive decision-making power, he can introduce the Senate version of a Congressional House Resolution calling for an end to the Korean War, H-Res 152, which now has dozens of sponsors including progressive champions, such as Ro Khanna, Barbara Lee, Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Pramila Jayapal and the first Korean-American Democrat, Andy Kim.

Fortunately, after Friday’s missile test, the White House did not immediately jump into attack mode. After a 35-minute call on Tuesday between President Trump and South
Seeking Peace on the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Policy Institute Reader

Korean President Moon on how to keep channels open with Kim Jong Un, Trump agreed to support South Korea’s food aid to the north, noting that such humanitarian assistance would be very timely and a positive step, “according to Seoul’s Blue House. What would be timely and positive is lifting some of the sanctions that are harming ordinary civilians, especially those impacting inter-Korean cooperation.

Last month, South Korean farmers purchased 30 tractors to send to North Korean farmers in a show of their solidarity and to challenge the harsh sanctions. Five of them are now in Gwanghwamun Square near the U.S. Embassy in Seoul awaiting approval to cross the DMZ. The farmers are calling for the lifting of sanctions, which are impeding inter-Korean cooperation, such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex and tourism in Mt. Kumgang. In a statement released by the farmers, they said “it is the right of the Korean people to determine their own destiny, citing the Panmunjom Declaration,” the joint declaration signed by Moon and Kim on April 27, 2018.

While Trump’s response to North Korea’s Friday test was measured, unless Trump can recognize the futility of maximum pressure, we may see a dangerous return to the era of “fire and fury.” In his April speech to the Supreme People’s Assembly, Kim Jong Un gave Washington until the end of 2019 to “quit its current calculation method and approach us with a new one.” The short-range test is a message to Trump: The clock has started.

While there is no guarantee that North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons, it is more likely to do so if it no longer perceives a threat to its security, which Russian President Vladimir Putin affirmed following his meeting with Kim last month in Vladivostok. Putin said that Kim was willing to disarm but needed international “security guarantees.”

In other words, peace is key to achieving denuclearization. We should heed advice from two U.S. leaders who succeeded in freezing North Korea’s nuclear program, President Jimmy Carter and President Clinton’s former Defense Secretary William Perry. In his endorsement of Congressional Resolution H-Res 152, Carter said ending the Korean War is “the only way to ensure true security for both Korean and American people.” And Perry argues that “normalization is essential in achieving denuclearization. They go together hand in hand.”

On April 27, on the anniversary of the first summit between Kim and Moon, 500,000 South Koreans and peace-loving friends in cities across the world held hands in a “DMZ Human Chain for Peace.” I traveled to Cheorwan, South Korea, and held hands with thousands who gathered in this city divided by the demilitarized zone (DMZ),
while many of my colleagues joined hands with 200 people in New York City from the North Korean to South Korean Missions at the U.N. Ultimately, it will be the Korean people who will end the Korean War, but it will take all of our solidarity and pressure on the United States to negotiate a peace settlement with North Korea.

Christine Ahn is the international coordinator of Women Cross DMZ, a global movement of women mobilizing for peace on the Korean Peninsula.
THE HUMAN COSTS AND GENDERED IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Korea Peace Now! | November 23, 2019

On October 30th, The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea was released by Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War, a global campaign to educate, organize, and advocate for a Korea peace agreement, led by Women Cross DMZ, Nobel Women’s Initiative, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and Korean Women’s Movement for Peace.

Executive Summary

North Korea is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world. While sanctions used to target mostly the country’s military and elite, they have evolved in recent years into an almost total ban on North Korea-related trade, investments, and financial transactions. Several UN agencies have raised alarm at the impact on the population, with growing calls for humanitarian and human rights impact assessments.
To better assess this issue, the Korea Peace Now! campaign commissioned the present report from an international and multidisciplinary panel of independent experts, including some with extensive humanitarian field experience in North Korea. The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea represents the first comprehensive assessment of the adverse consequences of these sanctions, drawing on often neglected information from UN agencies on the ground as well as the authors’ combined expertise in public health, law, economics, history, and gender studies. In particular, the report highlights the case of women as one of the vulnerable groups differentially affected by the sanctions. The authors examined the humanitarian, developmental, and gendered impact of sanctions.

Key Findings:

- Sanctions are impeding the ability of the country and of international aid organizations to meet the urgent and long-standing humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable parts of the Although the UN Security Council has repeatedly stated that the sanctions are not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences, its case-by-case exemptions mechanism is insufficient to prevent this outcome in practice. Life-saving aid is being fatally obstructed by delays, red tape, and overcompliance with financial sanctions.
- Sanctions are also impeding the economic development of the UN and unilateral sanctions have resulted in the collapse of the country’s trade and
engagement with the rest of the world, thereby undermining and reversing
the progress that North Korea had made in overcoming the economic crisis
and famine of the 1990s.

- Sanctions destabilize North Korean society in ways that have a
disproportionate impact on women, resonating with patterns observed in
other sanctioned countries. The resulting economic pressure tends to
exacerbate rates of domestic violence, sexual violence, and the trafficking and
prostitution of women. Sanctions also affect North Korean women
differentially due to the dual social expectation that they be the primary
caretakers of their families and communities, and workers fully integrated
into the economy. Thus, sanctions doubly burden women through their
adverse humanitarian and developmental consequences, especially when
they impact their livelihood by targeting industries that have high ratios of
female workers.

The report concludes by raising concerns that the sanctions in their current form may
not be reconcilable with international law, especially humanitarian and human rights
norms.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Resolve the security crisis that led to the current situation in accordance with
  international law.
- Lift all sanctions that are in violation of international law, in particular of the
  UN Charter and of applicable human rights and humanitarian norms.
- Adopt urgently, in interim, all measures available to mitigate and eliminate
  the adverse consequences of sanctions on the humanitarian and human
  rights situation in North Korea.
- Conduct gender-sensitive humanitarian and human rights impact
  assessments of sanctions currently in place.
- Ensure women’s equal and meaningful participation in peace and security
  negotiations and processes, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1325 on
  Women, Peace, and Take into account gender considerations and the rights of
  women in all deliberations concerning sanctions on the DPRK.

Kee B. Park, MD, MPH, is a lecturer on Global Health and Social Medicine and Director of the Korea Health Policy Project at Harvard Medical School. He also serves as Director of the North Korea Programs at the Korean American Medical Association, and has led over 20 delegations to North Korea since 2007 to work alongside and collaborate with North Korean doctors in the DPRK. Dr. Park obtained his medical degree from Rutgers University, trained in neurosurgery at the Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and earned a Master of Public Health from Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Korea Policy Institute (KPI) Executive Board Member Haeyoung Kim spoke with Dr. Kee Park on December 9, 2019 about his work in the DPRK, the unique features of the North Korean health system, and how geopolitics impact public health and human security in North Korea.

[Haeyoung Kim] Dr. Park, can you begin by sharing with us a bit about your personal background and how you came to be one of the few American doctors providing health care in North Korea?

[Dr. Kee Park] I’m a neurosurgeon by trade. Right out of residency, I went into private practice in a small town south of St. Louis, Missouri, and I loved being a community-based neurosurgeon. But, a few years into it, I and a few Korean American neurosurgeon friends who had been in practice for some time found ourselves wondering if there was something else we could do to help others. After some discussion, we settled on the question: how could we help North Korean neurosurgeons? Not really knowing if they needed help or not, we made some assumptions and wanted to reach out to them. This was in 2006.

American Physicians Medical Exchange With North Korea

[Haeyoung Kim] What led you to decide that it was important for you, an American doctor, to reach out to North Korea?

[Dr. Kee Park] My state of mind in 2006 was not like it is today. I’ve had 12 years now to familiarize myself with North Koreans and the country, especially their health and things that effect their health. In 2006, I knew nothing about what was happening inside North Korea, but I suspected that things were difficult. Later on, I found out how difficult things actually were. But, in 2006, I only had an inkling. Being Korean with an
ability to help, I felt a sense of responsibility. It’s like helping a family member. If a family member were struggling, you would go help them first before you stand by and watch strangers offer help. It was that kind of feeling. Koreans are of one country; we share the same culture. Because I’m Korean, I felt and feel this sense of oneness, so it was up to me to do what I could.

[Haeyoung Kim] How did your engagement with North Korean doctors begin?

[Dr. Kee Park] In 2007, we were introduced to and met with North Korea’s diplomats at the DPRK mission to the United Nations (UN) in New York. We started discussing the prospect of working with North Korean neurosurgeons and came up with the idea to invite a delegation of North Korean neurosurgeons to the US. This was during the Bush administration. We—the Korean American Neurosurgical Society—contacted the Korea Desk at the State Department and said that we wanted to invite a delegation. We had a nice series of communications, they eventually sent us the application, the North Koreans filled everything out, we submitted it all, and we waited. It wasn’t until one week before their proposed scheduled travel date out of Pyongyang that we received notice from the State Department saying their visas had been approved. They also had conditions on their visas, including one that said all meetings in the US with the North Korean delegation must be closed. The press could not be notified. We all accepted the terms, and we were able to host the three-member delegation in the US in 2008. Two were neurosurgeons and one was not in the medical field, but later became a counselor at the DPRK mission in New York. During their visit, they met with physicians in Missouri and New York, and attended an annual meeting of neurosurgeons in Chicago. We also held a private reception and a number of Korean American neurosurgeons attended to meet with them. Also, just before the delegation arrived, the DPRK mission in New York asked if we wanted to go to Pyongyang. Of course, I jumped at the chance. September of 2007 was my first trip to North Korea, and I’ve been going back twice a year since.

[Haeyoung Kim] How large have your delegations to North Korea been and who are the participants? Has the 2017 US ban on American citizens traveling to North Korea greatly impacted your efforts to practice in the DPRK?

[Dr. Kee Park] At one point, over the course of the twenty plus trips we have now taken, our group was as large as 25. It has fluctuated, and the group has gone down to 2 or 3 at the most including myself since the travel ban. It’s difficult to get people to go through all the trouble that you need to go through these days to get there, and you might not be able to go. The State Department can deny our passports, and they sometimes have. Since the travel ban, we have requested to go 4 times. We were denied
once and granted permission the other three times. Our groups have been composed of
doctors with various specialties. The way it works, we set them up with their
counterparts in North Korea. If they are ophthalmologists, we pair them up with North
Korean ophthalmologists. If they’re cancer surgeons, we pair them up with North
Korean cancer surgeons. Then, the doctors can figure out where North Korea is at and
what kind of support they’re able to provide.

[Haeyoung Kim] In 2010, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General
Margaret Chan made a visit to North Korea and reported that the health system has
things that the developing world would envy. These comments were a dramatic
departure from the 2001 remarks offered by her predecessor, Gro Harlem Brundtland,
who reported that North Korea’s health system was near collapse. How can we make
sense of these dramatically different takes? If these statements are accurate in any way,
what happened in the intervening years to impact the health system?

[Dr. Kee Park] In 1995, things crumbled in North Korean because of the famine.
Everything fell apart. They abandoned the public distribution system. People were
dying of starvation. The health system suffered. North Korea has been on a recovery
track since the late 1990s. So, in 2001, being “near collapse” is not an unreasonable
description. The mid-to late-90s is also the period when the North Korean government
issued an official appeal for international assistance. They opened up to receive
international aid including from the UN and a number of countries that had fought the
DPRK in the Korean War, which was historic. UN agencies started entering North
Korea, and American NGOs went in. A number of agencies and international
organizations said they would of course help, and began establishing offices inside of
Pyongyang. Many are still there.

The North Korean Health Care System

[Haeyoung Kim] How would you assess North’s Korea’s health care system today?
What sorts of challenges do doctors in North Korea face?

[Dr. Kee Park] Let me qualify my statement. I’m someone who sees things periodically
in North Korea, and I try to patch things together much like the parable of a blind man
feeling an elephant from different places. With a patchwork of data points, I can say I
think this is what things look like. What I can deduce is that North Korea’s health care
system is highly organized and centralized. They have a section doctor system, which
assigns one doctor to an area containing several hundred individuals for whom that
doctor is responsible. They also have ri-clinics (rural community or village clinics),
district hospitals, regional hospitals, and specialty hospitals. They have one of the
highest densities of doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers that I’m aware of. They certainly have plenty of doctors and nurses, meaning that the government is investing in and spending money on pre-service education. Education is free in North Korea, so the government is investing money to insure that every nurse and doctor gets trained and educated. The government is also paying their salaries. So, the government spends quite a bit of money on the health workforce.

Costly supplies, though, are posing big problems. North Korea just doesn’t have ready access to certain things. So, supplies get reused and North Korean healthcare workers find ways to cut costs. Single-use scalpels, gloves, and gauze, for instance, are cleaned and sterilized and reused. Because of this, doctors and hospitals are having a difficult time. Medical equipment like x-ray machines are hard to repair once they break because it’s difficult to import necessary parts.

At the same time, North Korea is trying to invest where it can. I’ve seen North Koreans invest in renovating operating rooms at Pyongyang Medical College over the last year or so. They are also investing in new technologies. I have seen an artificial knee joint they have developed, which they are manufacturing and implanting in patients. They have a domestic ultrasound machine that they’re producing for use in local hospitals.
I would also characterize North Korea’s health system as highly efficient, if not one of the most efficient health care systems. With the sanctions, they have limited resources and face challenges. But, it’s a highly efficient and cost-effective health system. I can give you an example: North Korea wanted to do a public health campaign for tuberculosis detection and treatment. With the Global Fund grants that UNICEF and the WHO offices in Pyongyang received, the Ministry of Public Health was able to achieve one of the largest reductions in mortality from TB at half the cost of other countries. This gives you an idea. Also, consider their maternal mortality ratio, which is a Sustainable Development Goal target for health. The target for developing countries is to reduce mortality below 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by year 2030. North Korea has already hit that target. In fact, they’re below that number.

People have asked if I believe these numbers. In the 1990s, a fair argument could be made that the numbers coming out of North Korea were not reliable. But, UN agencies have been inside the country, working with the National Bureau of Statistics, and verifying these figures such that most people agree that the numbers are pretty accurate. It has been a function of time, and I think the numbers are now much more accurate. So when people question these numbers, I think it’s because they don’t understand the evolution of the data. It’s much better than it was, and I find it credible.

US Sanctions on North Korea

[Haeyoung Kim] The US has imposed sanctions on North Korea since the Korean War, and the United Nations began imposing sanctions in 2006. In what ways has the sanctions regime against North Korea impacted your work?

[Dr. Kee Park] We knew that the US had executive orders and embargoes in place when we were working in 2007 and 2008. We also understood back then that there was general license given to humanitarian aid workers like us when we went there. We were able to work with a certain amount of latitude. Based on this, we were able to provide equipment and sent a container of surgical equipment in the early 2010s. But, then the sanctions started to be ramped up. I would say the inflection point was 2016-2017, which of course coincided with North Korea’s nuclear weapons development program. They went from “smart” sanctions to “total” sanctions and started blocking the importation of fuel—an almost complete embargo. How do you operate a hospital, how do you drive ambulances, how do you move patients around without fuel? Also, consider farm machinery. How do you power farm machinery without fuel? When fuel imports are reduced this drastically—with only one-tenth of what formerly entered the country now coming in—there will inevitably be a rationing system and prioritization of how available fuel is used.
Then, of course, all major imports and exports were banned. And, compounding the issue, there are those individuals who are employed by these industries, and it’s reasonable to assume that their incomes were markedly impacted. Since most North Koreans supplement their food rations provided by the state’s central distribution system with food purchased from the markets, this inevitably resulted in greater food insecurity.

So sanctions were ratcheted up in 2016-2017, and then the travel ban on US citizens traveling to North Korea was imposed in 2017. Around that time, we started to hear stories from UN agencies about how they couldn’t conduct their work anymore and that they were unable to send money into the country.

[Haeyoung Kim] The UN Security Council makes case-by-case exemptions for humanitarian-related items. Is this sufficient to allow humanitarian organizations to deliver aid?

[Dr. Kee Park] Yes, there is an exemption process, but it doesn’t work very well. Before the more rigid sanctions were launched, aid was getting in. Then, it came to a trickle—not a standstill, but a trickle. Then, one by one, case by case, the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee would approve or deny shipments. And, it’s not just the UN
Security Council sanctions resolutions aid workers have to face. The US has its own unilateral sanctions, which involve the Bureau of Industry and the US Treasury. The Bureau of Industry issues import and export licenses, and you have to obtain their permission to bring anything into North Korea. Then, to use US money on North Korean goods, you have to get a license from the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the US Treasury. They give you a time-bound license, maybe two years or so, and you have to reapply thereafter. But, they’re very specific about the kinds of activities and transactions you’re allowed to conduct. And each agency applies its own criteria for what it will and will not approve. It’s not standardized. In fact, the criteria are not really known, and I think it’s intentional, so the agencies can ratchet up or down the restrictions and apply pressure when politically opportune.

Because of the bureaucratic red tape, we basically abandoned the idea of bringing in anything of value to North Korea. The Korean American Medical Association is not an NGO; we’re a professional society. We don’t have the resources to navigate these kinds of bureaucratic hurdles. Only large groups like World Vision and the UN agencies, organizations with deeper pockets, can hire the necessary lawyers and administrative staff to handle the paperwork and go through the lengthy process to acquire licenses.

The Human Cost of US and International Sanctions
Joy Yoon, whom I worked with to co-author the report commissioned by the Korea Peace Now! campaign titled *The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea*, has gone into detail about what the small NGO she co-founded, Ignis Community, has experienced throughout this process. She has shared how long it has taken to jump through the bureaucratic hoops and her fears that the delays experienced by her organization because of the barriers imposed by myriad sanctions have led to deaths among patients they have been treating. In fact, I think one did recently die.

To the UN’s credit, though, the Security Council Sanctions Committee is reviewing requests and making decisions within 2 weeks of requests to provide aid. They’ve sped the process up. It used to take longer. But, we shouldn’t have to ask for every case. The fact that humanitarian organizations have to ask for permission to provide aid to the vulnerable and the marginalized people of North Korea is a travesty.

[Haeyoung Kim] According to the United Nations, the measures imposed by UN resolutions are “not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences for the civilian population of the DPRK.” Sanctions should not aim to negatively impact or restrict “the work of international and non-governmental organizations carrying out assistance and relief activities in the DPRK.” As a practitioner on the ground in North Korea, can you help our readers make sense of how these stated intentions don’t reflect the practice of implementing sanctions?

*Dr. Kee Park and members of the Korean American Medical Association performing surgery alongside their North Korean counterparts in Pyongyang, May 2017*
[Dr. Kee Park] Yes, all of these sanctions include that line: adverse humanitarian consequences are not intended. In reality, though, they undoubtedly do have adverse humanitarian consequences. It calls into question the sincerity of the sanctions writers. Can they really mean that given the fact that it’s pretty clear from the ground that sanctions adversely impact the humanitarian conditions in North Korea? Perhaps that line provides political cover. I cannot imagine that those who impose sanctions don’t know how sanctions play out, especially since they have been through this recently with the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Joy Gordon has written the definitive book on Iraqi sanctions, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. When you think about this coverage in the context of understanding the North Korean sanctions, it’s mind-boggling. It’s the same playbook. For instance, sanctions have blocked vaccines from going into Iraq. We all know the impact that would have. But, the senders of sanctions always turn it around and say it’s the government’s responsibility to provide these things. When the sanctions boot is on a government’s neck, applying a great deal of pressure, there’s a certain amount of dishonesty to expect that a sanctioned state can fully help its people.

As an academic who does research, I know there are ways to estimate potential deaths related to sanctions without having to actually count the number of deaths. As a response, some may say we must discount certain figures if they’re just estimates. But, if what they’re saying is “Tell us how many people have actually died?” It’s too late if that’s the question being asked. These are children and women, and we should be counting how many people have died? Then, after having a death count, sanctions writers can then say, “Oh, you’re right, we’ve harmed innocent people and we should change our policies”? It’s way too late at that point.

[Haeyoung Kim] You mention children and women. Are these the demographic groups hardest hit by sanctions? Your recent co-authored report on the human impact of sanctions against North Korea, titled *The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea*, notes that sanctions have “differential consequences for women’s security as well as their social and political rights.” Can you explain to our readers why sanctions have a disproportionate impact on women and children?

[Dr. Kee Park] Sanctions are worsening humanitarian conditions inside North Korea. This we know. Food costs have gone up, for instance, and international aid agencies working to provide clean water have faced delays or their efforts have been hampered significantly. These things directly affect the health of the people. If we look at water, we know that a lack of clean water causes illnesses. Children are hit the hardest. If you look
at the cause of death of children under the age of 5, it’s infections like pneumonia and diarrhea. After the age of 5, it’s injuries and accidents. So, if clean water interventions are blocked or delayed through sanctions, the number of children that develop diarrhea will go up. And who are the primary caretakers of children when they get sick? It’s the mothers. Women are also the primary gatherers of water in North Korea. If no clean water sources are readily available, women have to go further to find it.

Food security is also getting worse, which we know. Which parent wouldn’t give food to their children first before they feed themselves? Both mom and dad, of course, would feed their children before themselves. But, women tend to be primary caretakers of children in North Korea. If you’re the primary caretaker, you’re feeding your child first. So, from a caretaker standpoint, women bear a disproportionate amount of the burden.

If you look at farming, more than half of North Korean farmers are women. Women now farm by hand, because there’s no fuel for farming machinery and broken machinery can’t be repaired because sanctions prohibit the importation of necessary parts. So, women have to work harder to get the same yield, bearing a disproportionate burden.

And, there are industries that are impacted by sanctions. One industry particularly impacted is the garment industry, which is a leading export industry. Textiles now can no longer be exported from North Korea. The majority of workers in the garment industry are women, and all of a sudden they are without an income. For someone who is already poor, making them poorer puts them at a higher risk of all kinds of social dangers.

Let me share a case from last year about UN agency programming that directly impacted mothers. The UNFPA—the United Nations Fund for Population Activities—works inside North Korea and they provide emergency reproductive kits to women. These kits contain critical treatments if there are any complications during delivery. You want to have these kits ready. They treat postpartum hemorrhages, eclampsia, and other kinds of emergency situations. We know that access to these kits reduces mortality. They save lives. Last year, in 2018, the UNFPA intended to provide these kits to 400,000 pregnant mothers in North Korea, which is great. However, what they were able to achieve was the delivery of just 4,000 kits. My colleagues and I have looked at the number of complications that could arise within that population and the expected mortality of not having these kits, and I think we calculated that 72 mothers would die if these kits were not available when complications arose. As a doctor, I’m outraged. Is this something that we as human beings can accept? Whether you’re a security person
or not, it’s universally deplorable that we allow mothers to die. We have interventions and we have ways to save them. But, we can’t do much because of international security concerns, the global sanctions regime, and the sanctions process. But, that’s just a part of the problem. The other part is that the donors of these agencies are also facing diplomatic and political pressure from certain countries, and they are being asked to not donate. So, these programs face funding shortages.

[Haeyoung Kim] Speaking of second- and third-order consequences that result from sanctions, how about North Korea’s economic development, which they have been trying to recalibrate since the 1990s? Is the financial system impacted by sanctions?

[Dr. Kee Park] How do you develop an economy when you don’t have access to the global financial transaction system? When you can’t get any fuel? How do you develop an economy when exports are blocked? I think it’s clearly the intent of these sanctions to interfere with North Korea’s economic development. Let me talk about the financial aspect. There have been political and diplomatic efforts by the US and Japan to put pressure on countries that have typically donated to support humanitarian aid to North Korea. They’ve been asked to not donate anymore, which has been very effective. The UN every year comes up with a needs and priorities list of what’s urgently needed in North Korea and how much humanitarian aid is going to cost. Last year they appealed for 111 million US dollars, which would cover urgently needed clean water, food, and basic medical needs for 6 million people in North Korea. Donors are to provide funds for this, but in 2018 they only raised 24 million US dollars. That’s just not enough to cover programming costs. It may pay for the overhead and maybe some programming, but it’s not enough. In short, donors are being asked to not provide funding for humanitarian programming inside North Korea.

The US has also been using unilateral sanctions to block any financial transactions dealing with North Korea. For instance, the World Health Organization has an office in Pyongyang and they have money to operate this office. The money, though, is in a bank account in India. So, to pay their rent and salaries to their local staff, they had to send the cash from India to North Korea. Then, the bank in India asked where the cash was going, and when they found out that the cash would be brought to North Korea, they refused to allow the transaction. They didn’t want to risk having the US Treasury shut them down because they’re allowing money to go into North Korea, they wouldn’t let the World Health Organization withdraw money if it was going to North Korea. Now, there’s no way to send money from India into North Korea because the banking channels have been closed. This is the same reason that FIDA—the Finnish International Development Agency—pulled out of North Korea after working in the country for 20 years. Restricted financial channels and banking channels were making
operations impossible. Most recently Handicap International—a very important organization that’s been working inside North Korea helping the disabled—decided to pull out. Handicap International is a European organization and they made a lot of progress in helping disabled people in North Korea. I’ve seen it firsthand. They’ve pulled out. We have to do something. Something needs to change. International organizations that seek to help ordinary people to survive in North Korea or anywhere else should not have to experience operational barriers.

Do No Harm

[Haeyoung Kim] What specifically do you think could change? If you could offer a recommendation to the international community to improve humanitarian conditions in North Korea, what would it be?

[Dr. Kee Park] Consider international humanitarian law in times of conflict. The Geneva Conventions is the perfect example. There are certain things that we as members of humanity have agreed on as being barbaric, including not harming civilians in times of armed conflict. It’s immoral and wrong to hurt civilians. We also have codes of conduct to define how we treat enemy combatants. For physicians, this means we don’t make distinctions between enemy combatants and our own. A patient is a patient is a patient. We first do no harm, and we treat the patient regardless. I think these norms are the best of what humanity has to offer. I mean, we shouldn’t have wars at all if possible but conflicts are a reality. But, we need to have codes of conduct, and not ones that only apply in times of armed conflict. We need codes of conduct for times when there is no active gunfire, as in the case of North Korea, but there may be security concerns. No one can rationalize harming the ordinary people of North Korea, but no laws are currently in place to hold sanctions accountable. This all really speaks to a need for the international community to develop something like the Geneva Conventions that apply when sanctions are being imposed.

[Haeyoung Kim] Is there anything thing you wish more Americans knew about North Korea? What could Americans and the Korean American community do to support your work in North Korea?

[Dr. Kee Park] I’m currently visiting the University of Oregon and gave a talk last night with Ambassador Kathleen Stephens, the former US Ambassador to South Korea. The questions and comments we got from the audience are windows into how people see things and how they understand the issues. There’s a fair amount of demonization happening. So, people say things like North Korea is not trustworthy and ask why we are negotiating with them. We hear that a lot. But that kind of thinking prevents any
kind of progress. The work that KPI is doing—providing analysis and education—is what is necessary. I wish the education around and views on US-North Korea relations could be more balanced. As of now, it’s very one-sided. They’re bad and we’re good. The truth is we’ve done a lot of things to create a level of paranoia for the North Koreans. I think most Americans just don’t understand how complicit we are in all of this. That’s a big concern.

[Haeyoung Kim] What can we expect to see from you and your work in the foreseeable future, Dr. Park?

[Dr. Kee Park] I’m a global health practitioner working in the field of global surgery at Harvard Medical School. I feel fortunate to have found the intersection between North Korea and global surgery, which allows me to engage more with policymakers and conduct research that would be more focused on the needs of the population. I would like to continue studying the health of North Korean people and the impact of geopolitics on health.

My immediate plans are to start a health policy project on North Korea within the medical school, which would enlarge the work I’ve been doing. The project is going to sit within the Global Health Department at Harvard Medical School. For now, we’re thinking of calling it the Korea Health Policy Project. We’re going to bring in researchers and form a faculty, and keep looking at the current standoff on the Korean peninsula from the global health standpoint. How does the failure to achieve peace impact the health of the North Korean people? What does that mean as far as what we should be standing for and what positions we should be taking as health advocates?

Peace is a prerequisite to health, and in no place is that clearer than in North Korea.

_Haeyoung Kim is on the Korea Policy Institute Board of Directors._
TRUMP’S BROAD-BASED SANCTIONS FAILED IN IRAN AND WILL FAIL IN NORTH KOREA
Hyun Lee | January 20, 2020

Originally published by Truthout

In both Iran and North Korea, the Trump administration has pursued an aggressive policy of “maximum pressure” — crushing economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation and military threats — in order to thwart their nuclear ambitions. In both cases, “maximum pressure” has not only failed to achieve the desired goal but has had the opposite effect: ramping up tensions and hardening both countries’ resolve to obtain nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, sanctions are having devastating consequences for ordinary citizens in both countries.

Despite summit meetings and the exchange of what Trump described as “love letters” between him and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, peace between the two countries seems as out of reach as ever. At the end of 2019, Kim declared that as long as “the U.S. persists in its hostile policy towards the [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea], there will never be the denuclearization on the Korean peninsula” and warned that the world will soon witness their “new strategic weapon.”

Maximum pressure took us to the brink of war with Iran. If we don’t change course, we will find ourselves in the same place with North Korea. It’s time for Washington, with its entanglements around the world testing the limits of its military and alliances, to reconsider its security objectives and course-shift away from endless wars.

How Did We Get Here?

In the last year, it seemed as if the U.S. and North Korea were poised to make a historic breakthrough toward peace. If you ask U.S. officials, North Korea is entirely to blame for the lack of progress in negotiations. But by refusing to abandon the maximum pressure policy — the same failed approach we just saw result in disaster with Iran — the Trump administration may have botched its last opportunity to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

In a dramatic turnaround from threatening “fire and fury” in 2017, Trump took a decidedly friendlier route when he began meeting with Kim Jong Un in 2018. Engagement worked. North Korea took steps to build trust, including by voluntarily freezing its nuclear and long-range missile tests, beginning to dismantle a rocket launch
site and a nuclear test site, and returning 55 boxes of remains of U.S. servicemen. The U.S., for its part, scaled down joint military exercises with South Korea, but the exercises continued nonetheless. The U.S. also stymied South Korea’s efforts to re-engage the North at every step.

At Trump and Kim’s second summit in Hanoi in February 2019, Kim reportedly offered to completely dismantle the Yongbyon nuclear complex in exchange for the partial lifting of UN sanctions — a “big, big deal” that would eliminate the “heart of their nuclear program,” according to leading nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker. But Trump rejected the proposal and instead bluntly proposed that Pyongyang basically give up its entire weapons arsenal — a plan which North Korea had previously rejected.

Kim announced he would wait until the end of 2019 for the U.S. to come to the table with a different offer. But when the two countries’ negotiators finally met in Stockholm in October 2019, the North Koreans walked out, saying the U.S. brought “nothing to the negotiation table.”

North Korea repeatedly made clear that it will only resume negotiations when the U.S. has removed all threats to its security and development. North Korea closed out 2019 reiterating that point. At a meeting of the Central Committee of its Workers’ Party at the end of 2019, Kim criticized the U.S., saying its “true intention is to seek its own political and diplomatic interests while maintaining the sanctions to gradually deplete and weaken our strength.” He announced that his country “will steadily develop necessary and prerequisite strategic weapons for the security of the state until the U.S. rolls back its hostile policy towards the [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea].”

The U.S. military intervention in Libya led Pyongyang to vow it would never follow the “Libya model” of denuclearization. Now the assassination of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani will likely only reinforce its resolve. After all, the Pentagon has already deployed attack drones in South Korea and worked out a plot to decapitate North Korea’s leadership. Not only has Pyongyang decided to tighten its hold on its nuclear weapons as a guarantee of its survival, it is also strengthening its alliances with Beijing and Moscow to tip the balance of power in its favor in a region that is vital to U.S.’s economic and political interests.

The pattern is obvious: when the U.S. is willing to engage in diplomacy and take reciprocal steps toward peace, it moves forward with North Korea. When it doubles down on sanctions and military exercises, talks fail. Just as it has in Iran, maximum pressure on North Korea will inevitably backfire.
Seeking Peace on the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Policy Institute Reader

The Human Toll of “Maximum Pressure”

“Maximum pressure” has also taken significant tolls on the ordinary citizens of Iran and North Korea. According to two recently released reports, sanctions are impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid in both Iran and North Korea. What’s more, sanctions against North Korea disproportionately impact women by targeting the industries in which they are heavily represented, such as textiles (82 percent of workers), by producing greater social disorder (which leads to increased gender discrimination and violence), and by harming their access to food, water and health care.

If broad-based sanctions are intended to result in policy changes, there are no signs of such a scenario playing out in Iran or North Korea. As the authors of “The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea” state, “studies suggest that sanctions are particularly prone to failure in this respect when they aim to force major policy changes, when they target authoritarian countries, and when they are tightened over an extended period of time. It has also been observed that sanctions can be counterproductive by actually cementing political unity — the so-called ‘rally around the flag’ effect.”

The Choice Before Trump, and Peace as the Way Forward

Now that North Korea has clarified that it will resume its nuclear weapons and missile development until the U.S. drops its “hostile policy,” the choice before the Trump administration is also plain: either prepare a political and military response to North Korea’s “new path” or end all hostile relations.

As long as the U.S. refused to drop its maximum pressure policy, Pyongyang has been honing its missile technology and strengthening its relationships with China and Russia. North Korea now has the ability to hit the U.S.’s largest overseas military base in South Korea with a missile that can evade the U.S.’s missile defense system. Russia recently announced that it put into service a hypersonic nuclear-capable missile system that can strike the United States at 20 times the speed of sound. China also unveiled the world’s longest-range intercontinental nuclear-capable missile, believed to be able to reach the U.S. in 30 minutes. Currently, the U.S. does not have a defense against either weapon. An alliance of China, Russia and North Korea poses a considerable challenge to U.S. supremacy in the region, especially if the current crisis with Iran further mires the U.S. in the Middle East.

The U.S.’s reflexive response to the tipping balance of power in the region is to rally South Korea and Japan into a trilateral alliance that cements Cold War divisions against
China, Russia and North Korea. But this requires considerable arm-twisting of its allies. The Trump administration exerted unparalleled pressure on South Korea’s Moon Jae-in government to reverse its decision to terminate an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan — a key to the trilateral alliance. What’s more, the Trump administration recently demanded that South Korea pay $5 billion — five times more than in the past — for the cost of stationing U.S. troops there. This has sown growing resentment among South Koreans against the U.S.’s authority over their country’s affairs and could lead to irreparable fissures in the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

There is a more sensible option: make peace with North Korea. U.S.-North Korea relations have been governed by a fragile armistice for the past seven decades. In order to transition to a permanent peace regime, both sides need to pledge to not attack each other, agree on measures to eliminate the risk of future wars and discuss a plan for gradual arms reduction by all parties. To that end, the U.S. Congress can and should help forge that new path by passing H.Res.152, which calls for a formal end to this war that was supposed to be resolved more than a half-century ago.

Replacing the armistice with a peace agreement can also be the catalyst for a shift toward a multilateral peace and security system that facilitates cooperation between the U.S., China and Russia to gradually diminish the threat level — constructive for both Northeast Asia and the Middle East.

It’s time for the U.S. to reconsider its failed policy of maximum pressure and endless wars. It may have avoided escalation with Iran, for now, but it is most certainly headed back to collision with North Korea. And 2020, which marks the 70th year of the unended Korean War, may be Washington’s last chance to change course.

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TRUMP’S NORTH KOREA LEGACY: FAILED U.S.-DPRK SUMMITS
REAL DENUCLEARIZATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LASTING PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA ARE UP TO US
Korea Public Service and Transport Workers’ Union | June 14, 2018

On June 12 Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of the Korea and Donald Trump, President of the United States of America held the first ever summit between leaders of the two countries at the Capella Hotel in Singapore. Following the meeting, the two leaders signed a joint statement containing commitments to (1) establishment of a new U.S.-DPRK relationship for peace and prosperity, (2) joint efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, (3) North Korean reaffirmation of the Panmunjom Agreement and efforts to achieve complete denuclearisation, and (4) joint work to recover POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

The very fact that the top leaders of North Korea and the U.S., two countries whose relationship has been laced with hostility and mutual threats for the last seventy years, sat together in one place and shared dialogue is historic and signals a new era in which peace on the Korean Peninsula is possible. We therefore welcome the North Korea-U.S. Summit and joint statement.

Nonetheless, we cannot help but feel some disappointment and anxiety about the fact that the joint statement does not contain an agreement on concrete measures towards the establishment of a peace regime and the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. This is because this failure signals that many unresolved issues remain between the two countries. Up until the Summit the U.S. continued to assert the need for ‘Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Destruction’ (CVID) of North Korean nuclear weapons, while North Korea demanded concrete security assurances and a staged action-for-action approach. Despite three months of negotiations prior to the Summit it appears the two governments were not able to reach a concrete agreement about how to bring their positions into alignment.

We must be careful not to adopt the overly optimistic attitude of the Blue House, which is already talking about the ‘end of the Cold War era’ and a ‘great victory’ for the U.S. and the two Koreas. Nor should we give credence to the extreme pessimism of the militaristic conservatives, who are disparaging the Summit for failing to achieve CVID as if in attempt to send us back to the era of open hostility. Through the Summit today we learned that leaving the fate of the Korean Peninsula up to President Trump’s calculations ahead of the mid-term elections, or the goodwill of the governments of the countries in the region is not enough to build a real peace regime. We must understand
the U.S.-North Korea agreement as a starting point and continue to work for advancement towards real peace.

As we made clear during the Candlelight Rally for Peace on June 9, a real plan for denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula has to include withdrawal of the U.S.’ policies of nuclear pre-emptive strike and extended deterrence against North Korea. Conclusion of a peace treaty by all relevant sides and a non-aggression pact between the U.S. and North Korea are needed as steps towards creating a Korean peace regime. In addition, a reduction of conventional weapons by all sides and withdrawal of the U.S. troops station in South Korea are needed to remove the material conditions of war and overcome the roots causes of the nuclear conflict. All of these tasks remain before us.

During the press conference that followed the signing of the joint statement, President Trump reference measures North Korea is already taking towards denuclearisation, declared intention to end joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises and referred to the possibility of a declaration to the end of the Korean War. We take this opportunity to stress once again to the Trump and Moon Jae-in administrations that any continued joint military exercises go against the spirit of peace talks and must not go on. In addition, the U.S. and South Korea should respond in kind to North Korea’s early steps towards denuclearisation with the removal of the THAAD missile defence system being illegally operated in the Soseongri village.

We must also state our concerns about the ‘prosperity’ mentioned in the joint statement. As was clear in Trump’s comments about the development of North Korea during his press conference, this ‘prosperity’ is predicated on private investment and the capitalist opening of the North Korean economy. We are concerned that this process, which does not involve workers’ participation, has the potential to lead to the expansion of labour rights violations and increase in economic and other forms of inequality. The labour movement must now seriously discuss a plan for peace and unification that furthers the living conditions and rights of all Korean workers and common people.

According to the joint statement, high level talks will be held very soon to discuss the concrete implementation of the commitments made. Given that many unresolved issues remain, it is likely that future negotiations will run up against many difficulties. We will continue to respond proactively to this process based on our desire and vision for a peaceful and equal Korean Peninsula.

2018. 6. 12
Korean Public Service and Transport Workers’ Union
RIP TO THE LIBERAL ORDER: AMERICAN MOURNING AFTER THE US-NORTH KOREA JUNE SUMMIT
Suzy Kim | August 19, 2018

This article originally appeared in Perspectives Daily, the American Historical Association’s online newsmagazine.

The June 12 summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un was a historic moment—for the first time a sitting US president met with the leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, since its founding in 1948. It was remarkable to see the Stars and Stripes standing next to the DPRK flag, and to see the two leaders shake hands in acknowledgement of each other as equals rather than as sworn enemies. Reactions in the United States to this history-in-the-making have ranged from cautious optimism to cynical skepticism. But what these apprehensions indicate is the crumbling of the so-called liberal order under the weight of its own contradictions.

Nicholas Kristof, regular columnist for the New York Times, represents the spectrum of reactions well, concluding that Trump was “outranked” and “hoodwinked” by Kim. Explaining why the summit made him uncomfortable despite his preference for diplomacy, Kristof wrote, “There was also something frankly weird about an American president savaging Canada’s prime minister one day and then embracing the leader of the most totalitarian country in the world.” In fact, there’s been an odd convergence of reactions that have united hardline Republican hawks like John Bolton with liberal Democrats like Chuck Schumer, who signed a letter warning Trump against any deal that did not include concessions from North Korea regarding its nuclear program. The letter insisted on “anywhere, anytime” inspections of all suspected sites of weapons of mass destruction, a probable nonstarter for a North Korea already wary of American threats and encroachment to its sovereignty.

For liberals siding with Bolton, their position has much to do with Roger Cohen’s argument that Trump is envious of Kim Jong Un and his absolute authority as dictator. Trump’s failings as a leader, they say, are similar to Neville Chamberlain’s—the British prime minister who tried to negotiate with Hitler to thwart World War II. In making this anachronistic comparison, they, like Cohen, believe that Trump has “saluted evil” and gone back on “more than seven decades of American stewardship of the world after the defeat of evil in 1945.”

For many, including Kori Schake of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Trump’s rapprochement with North Korea signals “a turning point in world history: the
end of the liberal order.” The liberal order, according to Schake, began at the conclusion of World War II when “America established a set of global norms that solidified its position atop a rules-based international system . . . promoting democracy, making enduring commitments to countries that share its values, protecting allies, advancing free trade and building institutions and patterns of behavior that legitimize American power by giving less powerful countries a say.” Even while acknowledging that “America doesn’t always get it right,” Schake claims that “the results speak for themselves” since it’s been over 70 years without great-power conflict.

Without any hint of irony or contradiction, she describes the numerous wars that have been waged by “democracies” since World War II as “enlarging the perimeter of security and prosperity, expanding and consolidating the liberal order.” Drawing on aggregate data in the abstract such as growth in the global economy, she neglects to define what “security and prosperity” mean or scrutinize on whom these are bestowed and at whose expense. Schake is oblivious to the harm done in the name of maintaining the liberal order, not only domestically in terms of racist, sexist, and classist exclusionary policies, but also internationally, least of which include the millions of lives lost in Asia, upward of 70 percent civilian deaths during the Korean War, not to mention the Vietnam War (and most recently the Iraq War).

Tellingly, the NBC television show *Saturday Night Live* ran a comedy sketch soon after Trump’s election in which a group of New Yorkers watching the election results respond in markedly contrasting ways. White liberals reacted with utter horror that the election was a “nightmare scenario” and “the most shameful thing America has ever done,” while African Americans were hardly surprised, shaking their heads at the utter lack of historical awareness of institutional racism, structural inequalities, and foreign interventionism. Asia Institute founder and director Emanuel Pastreich argues that US foreign policy has been unequivocally a form of gunboat diplomacy in which US military power is used to benefit multinational corporations. While previously there was at least an attempt to hide the government-corporation nexus, this collusion has now become blatant under Trump’s presidency. These are the foundations upon which the liberal order stands.

What the majority of liberals fail to acknowledge is just how similar Trump’s message of unilateralism and America First (what one White House official recently characterized as the “We’re America, Bitch” doctrine) is to the idea of American exceptionalism that has defined American identity since the end of World War II. The “indifference to democracy and human rights and cultivation of dictators” is not a “new world” Trump is creating, as Schake claims; it has undergirded the United States’ superpower status since 1945. While Schake raises alarm bells that “America will be seen as—and may
even become—no different from Russia and China,” it is this very idea of American
exceptionalism that has led to the Trump Doctrine.

While leadership does matter for both people in the United States and elsewhere,
reactions to the summit have overwhelmingly concentrated on the individual
personalities of Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un. This focus on the individual is one of
the very tenets of liberalism, and in that sense, Trump—despite criticisms to the
contrary—is the very product of the liberal order. By contrast, Kim Jong Un’s first words
at the summit—that few in America noticed—focused on the collective past despite the
infamous personality cult in North Korea. He said: “It was not an easy path to get here.
The past held us back, and the mistaken biases and habits shielded our eyes and ears,
but we have overcome all of these to come here” (emphasis mine). Kim Jong Un is
having to end a war that was fought by his grandfather; it has taken three generations
to get here.

Reactions to the summit in the United States are a kind of mourning at the
disintegration of the Pax Americana and the pride of American exceptionalism with it.
But this feeling of loss at the end of the liberal order should be put into proper
perspective. The last 70 years hold a very different significance for Korea, which was
divided into two separate states in 1948 precisely to uphold that liberal order. The
Republic of Korea as the bulwark against the Communist North was founded exactly 70
years ago on August 15, 1948, followed by the DPRK the following month. It’s long
overdue for Korea to be able to chart its own future. It’s time to bid farewell to the
liberal order.

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WHY ARE DEMOCRATS TRYING TO TORPEDO THE KOREA PEACE TALKS?
Tim Shorrock | March 4, 2019

Originally published in The Nation

South Koreans are learning the hard truths expressed in the protest music of Phil Ochs from the darkest days of the Cold War. “When it comes to times like Korea, there’s no one more red, white, and blue” than the American liberal, he sang in one of his most biting verses.

Decades later, with the two Koreas on the brink of ending a war that ripped their country apart and triggered the massive US military intervention of 1950, the liberals and Democrats who earned Ochs’s derision may be undermining the best chance for peace on the peninsula in a generation.

As US diplomats prepare for the second summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un next week in Hanoi, senior Democrats in the House and Senate, joined by a few Republicans, have been sounding alarm bells, warning that South Korean President Moon Jae-in is moving too fast in reconciling with North Korea by seeking a premature lifting of sanctions on the nuclear-armed state.

They are also expressing strong reservations about the US and South Korean negotiations with Kim and warning Trump not to budge on his “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign until Kim has completely dismantled North Korea’s nuclear-weapons and missile program. Kim temporarily halted the program nearly 500 days ago by suspending all testing of his “nuclear force.”

The congressional actions have been fueled by a steady stream of pessimistic and often misleading studies from Washington think tanks, eagerly embraced by US media hostile to the peace process, alleging that Kim is “playing” Trump and that both Moon and Trump may stop short of demanding North Korea’s immediate denuclearization by embracing a more incremental approach.

In recent days, word has been circulating in Washington that Trump’s team in Hanoi, led by State Department special envoy Stephen Biegun, may loosen some US sanctions in return for North Korea’s closing down of its huge nuclear complex at Yongbyon, which South Korea’s Hankyoreh newspaper describes as “the center and symbol of North Korea’s nuclear development program.”
Other reports claim that the two countries may set up liaison offices in their respective capitals as the bilateral talks move forward. Those attempts at a compromise, in turn, have set up an internecine battle inside the Trump administration, with hard-liners like John Bolton, who is visiting South Korea this weekend, trying to head off Biegun’s diplomacy.

But Trump is sticking to his guns. “I’m in no particular rush” as long as the North’s test suspension remains in place, Trump told reporters at the White House on February 19. That same day, President Moon told Trump in a 35-minute phone call that South Korea was ready to use economic incentives, including connecting inter-Korean roads and railroads and other projects, to “reduce the burden” on the United States in forging an agreement with North Korea. “Seoul is ready to reboot inter-Korean exchanges with an early resumption of joint economic projects,” a presidential official at the Blue House told reporters.

Top Democrats, however, oppose such moves. Last week, Senator Bob Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the powerful Foreign Relations Committee, joined Republican Ted Cruz in sending a strongly worded letter to Trump that directly attacked President Moon’s push for closer economic ties with North Korea. They urged the White House to rein in the US ally by committing “the full weight of the U.S. government to ensuring the integrity of the sanctions regime.”

Senator Menendez is also the author of a resolution, now under consideration in the Senate and House, promoting the trilateral military alliance between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, which is highly unpopular among Koreans. It comes as Tokyo and Seoul are locked in a bitter dispute over Japan’s use of “comfort women” as sex slaves during World War II and its refusal to provide restitution to thousands of Koreans forced to labor in Japanese mines and factories during that time. The resolution, which was introduced in the House by Democratic Representative Eliot Engel, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, is widely seen in Seoul as a way to pressure President Moon to back off and settle the dispute.

The most dramatic moment of congressional impatience with South Korea came last week, when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met with a high-level delegation of South Korean lawmakers from both the ruling and opposition parties.

The group, which was led by Representative Moon Hee-sang, the speaker of South Korea’s National Assembly, came to Washington to seek support for the inter-Korean peace process started by President Moon during the “Olympic Truce” of January 2018.
According to Korean reporters who were briefed on the meeting, the session was uncomfortable from the start and had to be extended “as the talks grew intense.”

Pelosi, citing her own visit to Pyongyang in 1997, reportedly told her visitors not to trust the North and asserted (apparently with prodding from Representative Na Kyung-won, the floor leader of the right-wing opposition Liberty Korea Party) that North Korea’s “real goal isn’t its own denuclearization but South Korea’s demilitarization.” At one point, Pelosi insisted that last June’s summit in Singapore—the first-ever meeting between a US president and a North Korean leader—was “nothing but show.”

The implication was that the South Koreans, who have had extensive discussions on economic, political, and military issues with their Northern counterparts over the past year, are naive and don’t understand the threat to their own country. Representative Moon, in an interview with Fox 11 in Los Angeles, said he responded to Pelosi that the second summit in Hanoi “is of great importance to the Korean people and it will determine the fate of our country. That’s how important it is.”

The US congressional pressure on South Korea to end its dispute with Japan also contributed to the tension. The issue of Japan’s wartime crimes is particularly sensitive for Representative Moon, who recently suggested that the Japanese emperor apologize to his country for its war crimes against Koreans. Later, he called Japan a “brazen thief” for demanding that he retract his comments.

After hearing Pelosi express her concern about the dispute between South Korea and Japan, Speaker Moon told Korean reporters that the House speaker was essentially lobbying for Shinzo Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party government in Tokyo. “I think Japan told her to have a word with [us] before the meeting, or in other words, scold us,” he said, according to the Joongang Daily. Pelosi’s press office did not return phone calls or e-mails seeking comment and clarification.

Still, Pelosi’s comments rattled many Koreans, who are hoping for a successful summit so they can proceed with their plans to eliminate tensions with the North. “Reconciliation and peace between North and South Korea is a gravely historic matter that should be for the Korean people to decide,” Simone Chun, a Korean scholar and activist who has spoken to congressional staffer about the peace process, told The Nation. “It cannot be allowed to be reduced to a bargaining chip in the struggle for one-upmanship between Republicans and Democrats.”

Chun was also critical of Representative Na of the Korean opposition party for raising fears during her visit to Washington about a North Korean nuclear attack and opposing
Seeking Peace on the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Policy Institute Reader

an end-of-war declaration at the upcoming summit. “What Pelosi did was to legitimize the ultra-right-wing views expressed by Na,” she said.

Hwang Joon-bum, the Washington correspondent for Hankyoreh, South Korea’s largest progressive daily, wrote an op-ed about the House speaker’s remarks. “Pelosi is just one person who reflects the dominant viewpoint in the American political establishment, the mainstream media and think tanks,” he said. “There was never any chance” that the lawmakers’ tour “would reverse the deep-rooted distrust of North Korea and the antipathy to Trump both inside and outside of the US political establishment.”

The US critics, he added, “aren’t impressed by North Korea’s suspension of nuclear and missile testing since Nov. 2017, its willingness to demolish its Yongbyon nuclear facility and [Kim Jong-un’s] focus on an economic line.”

Daniel Jasper, the public-education-and-advocacy coordinator for Asia of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), said in an interview that he hoped Democrats would start seeing the Trump-Kim talks through Korean eyes.

“We are urging Democratic leadership to see the peace process for what it is—a Korean-led effort to end a 70-year-old war,” Jasper told The Nation. “Changing from the view that the current situation is a nuclear standoff to the view that this situation is the result of an un-ended war is essential to understanding what types of reciprocal actions are pragmatic and necessary, as well as why diplomacy is needed in the first place. We remain hopeful that the Democrats will rise above partisanship and political calculations to support the overall goal of peace.” AFSC, which established its first operations in North Korea in 1980, works with four cooperative farms in the country to raise productivity and implement sustainable agricultural practices, Jasper said.

But the Menendez letter showed little appreciation for South Korea’s efforts to help the North improve its economy. Menendez and Cruz listed a series of South Korean actions they consider troublesome, including moves by Korean banks to “pursue investments and operations” in the North and the participation of “multiple business executives” in President Moon’s summit in Pyongyang last September to discuss reopening the Kaesong Industrial Zone just north of the DMZ and tours of Mount Kumgang, a tourist site beloved by South Koreans.

They also complained about President Moon’s recent calls to lift sanctions on the North “as soon as possible” and plans by both Koreas to break ground on a new cross-border rail project “within this year.” They added that North Korea’s “opacity” and its “well-documented efforts of evading sanctions” makes it impossible to ensure “that economic
engagement with the North—regardless of intent to contribute to positive diplomatic progress on denuclearization—would not violate U.N. Security Council resolutions or be used for illicit activities prohibited by U.S. sanctions.”

Meanwhile, in another move that could constrain both South Korea and the United States in their negotiations with the North, Representative Tom Malinowski, a newly elected Democratic congressman from New Jersey, joined Republican Representative Mike Gallagher in introducing a bill that would restrict the US government and the Pentagon from reducing US troops in South Korea from their current level of about 28,000 to 22,000 or less unless the secretary of defense could assure Congress it would not have an “adverse” impact on US security.

The bill, H.R. 889, states that a “withdrawal or significant reduction” of US forces, which could happen eventually if a peace deal is reached, “may risk upsetting the military balance” in the Asia region. It also uses language similar to the Menendez letter concerning the US alliance with Japan, saying that the trilateral ties between the United States, Japan, and South Korea “form the bedrock of regional stability.”

Malinowski, a former director of Human Rights Watch, was the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor during the Obama administration. In 2017, he wrote an article for Politico titled “How to Take Down Kim Jong Un” that essentially called for a campaign that would “lead to the end” of the North Korean regime “and its reason to exist as a country.”

The Democratic Party’s current approach was established last June, one week before the Singapore summit, in a letter to Trump from Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer and signed by Senators Menendez, Dick Durbin, Dianne Feinstein, Sherrod Brown, Mark Warner, and Patrick Leahy. It laid out a series of demands, including North Korea’s “dismantlement and removal” of its chemical and biological weapons, which are not currently part of the talks, and urged the White House to “maintain a tough approach to China” throughout the peace process. The Schumer letter also rejected any incremental steps by the US government in its dealings with Kim.

“Any deal that explicitly or implicitly gives North Korea sanctions relief for anything other than the verifiable performance of its obligations to dismantle its nuclear and missile arsenal is a bad deal,” the Democratic senators declared.

Chun, the scholar-activist, said in a recent e-mail to peace activists that the Schumer letter “completely overlooked the recent progress toward peace evinced by the inter-Korean summit and the Panmunjom Declaration and discounted the overwhelming
support for the peace process by Koreans. It also offers no alternative vision for peace on the Korean Peninsula and considers Korean interests only insofar as they serve the narrow political agenda of the Democratic Party.”

After the Schumer letter went out, according to activists who spend time on Capitol Hill, Representative Pelosi and other House Democratic leaders told their caucus “not to speak supportively” of the Singapore summit, which happened to coincide with a week of advocacy on Korea by peace groups. “Many of our folks lobbying on the Hill were stunned at how hostile many Dems were,” one activist told The Nation.

But now, with the Trump-Kim negotiations in full swing, a few Democrats are ready to take a new approach. A group of lawmakers from the Congressional Progressive Caucus plan to announce an action next week to express support for the Korea peace process and call on the United States to finally end the Korean War through a peace agreement. That would be most welcome, said Kevin Martin, president of Peace Action and national coordinator of the Korea Peace Network.

“Democrats should support diplomacy, and remember the most important president in this process is Moon Jae-in, not Donald Trump,” Martin said. “Moon’s persistent leadership toward reconciliation and diplomacy with North Korea represents the fervent desire of the Korean and Korean-American people for peace. Members of Congress from both parties should understand that and support it, skepticism about Trump and Kim notwithstanding.”

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A bipartisan consensus seems to be forming that President Trump was right to walk away from the deal offered by Kim Jong Un at the two leaders’ summit in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The consensus is a strange one, given that the deal itself was exactly the same as what had been reported to be North Korea’s position heading into the negotiation, a position that many commentators had praised. North Korea would offer to shut down facilities at its Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center that were involved in making plutonium and highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. In exchange, North Korea asked the United States to lift sanctions that had been imposed on its civilian economy since 2016.

Of course, North Korea would retain its nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and many other facilities after such an agreement. And the United States and other countries would also retain many sanctions on North Korea. The agreement on offer was hardly the disarmament that the president had hoped for, but it would have been another step away from the taunts and threats of 2017 and toward some other future. That was the deal the U.S. should have taken.

For the North Koreans, the logic of the offer was obvious. The United Nations had tightened existing sanctions in 2016 in response to a series of tests of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. North Korea has now stopped such tests, closed its nuclear test site, partially dismantled a rocket-engine test stand and offered to dismantle some of the facilities at Yongbyon. Surely an adjustment in sanctions was warranted.

Trump and his team disagreed. One State Department official explained that North Korea must not merely end testing but also give up all the weapons developed on the basis of those tests.

“Testing was part of a process of developing nuclear weapons, and the weapons themselves need to be on the table,” the official explained. “It’s not the testing of the weapons; it’s the actual presence of the nuclear weapons — and, by the way, likewise in the case of missile testing, the ICBMs as well that are central to this discussion.”
The U.S. position — that North Korea must unilaterally abandon its nuclear capabilities in exchange for promises of some different future — is a kind of American fantasy about power that is more suited to an action movie than the reality of international negotiations.

Let’s be clear: During 2017, North Korea tested a series of new missiles, including two different intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that can reach the United States. One of those missiles, the Hwasong-15, can deliver a nuclear-weapon-size payload all the way to Mar-a-Lago.

North Korea also tested a thermonuclear weapon that exploded with a force 10 times stronger than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By any measure, North Korea’s leverage over the course of 2017 increased dramatically as it acquired the ability to grievously harm the United States. We can be angry about this, but our rage is impotent. Attempting to remove Kim from power as we did with Saddam Hussein or Moammar Gadhafi would be sheer madness.

And so, why would the United States expect North Korea to willingly trade away that advantage in its entirety? Why would North Korea, having completed the development of a nuclear deterrent that puts it in a class with countries like China, India, Pakistan and Israel, simply apologize and turn over these capabilities in exchange for a couple of McDonald’s and a Trump Tower Pyongyang?

It is obvious, or it should be, that North Korea has a strong hand to play. Why is that so hard to see from inside the Beltway?

I suspect that part of the problem has to do with a kind of embarrassment. Time and again, the United States has walked away from diplomatic agreements with North Korea. In fairness, the North Koreans have been no angels. But the U.S. has seldom stuck around long enough to work through the difficulties and differences.

Each time, North Korea has increased its nuclear capability. In 2002, the United States walked away from the 1994 Agreed Framework that froze North Korea’s plutonium production, only to see North Korea conduct its first nuclear test in 2006. The United States tried again but abandoned Six-Party Talks in 2008 over concerns about verification, only to watch North Korea conduct more nuclear tests. And in 2012, the U.S. walked away from another tentative deal over a North Korean rocket launch, only to see Pyongyang spend the past few years testing ever more weapons, including its ICBM and thermonuclear weapon to arm it.
Each time the United States walked, a lot of people in Washington promised that patience and pressure would produce a better deal than the one squandered. And each time they were wrong. Like a gambler racking up debt, the U.S. foreign policy community has consistently taken its chances at the roulette table rather than cutting its losses and admitting the obvious: North Korea has the bomb.

But that’s apparently the one thing that remains taboo in Washington. Even now, the United States cannot recognize what seems pretty obvious.

We can’t admit failure because it requires not merely changing our policy but admitting that we’ve been wrong. It’s far easier to pretend that a better deal is just around the corner. It isn’t.

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THE LIMITS TO NORTH KOREA’S PATIENCE
Paul Liem | March 4, 2019

Rarely, if ever, has the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) succeeded in commandeering the narrative when it comes to past setbacks in its negotiations with the United States. Washington, with China and Russia on occasion weighing in, has typically had the final word. But after the Hanoi Summit last week, that has all changed.

As expected, in Hanoi, the United States called a press conference to make its case to the “global community” that the talks had stalled due to unreasonable demands by the DPRK. But in an unprecedented move for North Korean diplomats, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho and Vice Foreign Minister Choi Son Hui went directly to the international press to share their views, and likely the views of Chairman Kim Jong Un, on where the talks went awry, challenging the U.S. team to account for its omissions.

Last Thursday, President Trump told the press that Chairman Kim wanted the United States to lift sanctions “in their entirety” in exchange for partial denuclearization:

They were willing to denuke a large portion of the areas that we wanted, but we couldn’t give up all of the sanctions for that…. I mean, they wanted sanctions lifted but they weren’t willing to do an area that we wanted. They were willing to give us areas but not the ones we wanted.

Shortly after midnight, 3/1/2019, Foreign Minister Ri told the press:

We aren’t asking for all the sanctions to be lifted, but only some of them. We’re asking for relief from five of the UN Security Council’s 11 sanctions resolutions, the ones adopted between 2016 and 2017, and in particular the aspects of those sanctions that interfere with the civilian economy and the people’s livelihood.

Ri went on to explain in detail what the D.P.R.K. was offering in exchange for a partial lifting of sanctions, and why:

Our proposal was that, if the US lifts some of the UN sanctions, or in other words those aspects of the sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people’s livelihood, we will completely and permanently dismantle the production facilities of all nuclear materials, including plutonium and uranium, in the Yongbyon complex, through a joint project by technicians from our two countries,
in the presence of American experts.

Even though the security guarantee is more important to us, as we take denuclearization measures, we understood that it could be more difficult for the United States to take measures in the military field. That is why we proposed the removal of partial sanctions, as corresponding measures. Our proposal was that, if the US lifts some of the UN sanctions, or in other words those aspects of the sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people’s livelihood, we will completely and permanently dismantle the production facilities of all nuclear materials, including plutonium and uranium, in the Yongbyon complex, through a joint project by technicians from our two countries, in the presence of American experts.

Ri also stated that the DPRK would commit in writing to a “permanent halt to nuclear testing and long-range rocket testing.” Emphasizing North Korea’s insistence on a measure-for-measure process, Ri reasoned, “If we go through this level of trust building measures then we’ll be able to accelerate the process of denuclearization.” The talks foundered, he pointed out, when “the U.S. insisted we should take one more step besides the dismantlement of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon areas.” “It became crystal clear that the U.S. was not able to accept our proposal,” he stated.

Madame Choi underscored Ri’s frustration. UPI reported that “she accused the Trump administration of having moved the goal posts, saying it initially talked about dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear complex and is now taking issue with other sites as well.” Madame Choi also stated that Chairman Kim “may have lost the will to negotiate” and that Trump and the United States were “missing an opportunity that comes once in a thousand years” and claimed “our Chairman had a difficult time understanding the U.S. system of measuring,” according to CNN.

Ri and Choi’s press conference had the effect of holding the Trump administration accountable to a set of facts that President Trump and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, had omitted from their account of the latest U.S.-DPRK summit. A senior U.S. official clarified the administration’s account to the media on condition that he remain unnamed, according to Eric Talmadge, AP Bureau Chief in Pyongyang.

Although the official stated that the North Koreans “basically asked for the lifting of all sanctions,” he conceded that “the North’s demand was only for Washington to back the lifting of United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed since March 2016 and didn’t include the other resolutions going back a decade more. What Pyongyang was
seeking, he said, was the lifting of sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people’s livelihood – as Ri had claimed,” Talmadge reported.

Lifting the post 2016 sanctions would be worth billions of dollars which the North could use to fund their nuclear and missile programs, the official explained. “So, it was definitely a robust demand. But it wasn’t, as Trump claimed, all the sanctions. It also didn’t come as a surprise. He said the North had been pushing that demand for weeks in lower-level talks,” according to Talmadge.

Up until the last-minute cancellation of the closing ceremony scheduled for last Thursday, during which President Trump and Chairman Kim were expected to sign a joint statement, hopes were running high in South Korea and the Korean diaspora that the two leaders would declare an end to the Korean War and a pathway to denuclearization. Why this did not occur can be understood from the two press conferences and statements by U.S. officials responding to the DPRK’s account.

Ri explains that they proposed a partial lifting of sanctions in exchange for shuttering the Yongbyon nuclear facilities because they understood that that security guarantees would be more difficult for the United States to offer. But the closure of Yongbyon was not sufficient for the U.S. team. Statements by Trump, Pompeo, and a senior State Department official indicate that the U.S. team sought a comprehensive disarmament agreement including closure of a “second uranium enrichment” and furthermore, a freeze on production of any “weapons of mass destruction.”

In reply to questions from the New York Times reporter, David Sanger, President Trump revealed that the United States demanded that a “second uranium enrichment plant” be closed. “But remember, too, even the Yongbyon facility and all of its scope — which is important, for sure — still leaves missiles, still leaves warheads and weapons systems,” Pompeo added. A senior state department official put it this way, “the dilemma that we were confronted with is that the North Koreans at this point are unwilling to impose a complete freeze on their weapons of mass destruction programs,” the Hankyoreh reported. The official continued, “So to give many, many billions of dollars in sanctions relief would in effect put us in a position of subsidizing the ongoing development of weapons of mass destruction in North Korea,” the report continued.

In retrospect, the DPRK team was prepared to forgo a peace declaration in favor of offering the closure of Yongbyon in exchange for a partial, albeit “robust,” lifting of sanctions, as a trust-building measure. The U.S. team upped the ante to a freeze on the DPRK’s production of “weapons of mass destruction.” For a day and a half of talks, this goal was so farfetched that one has to wonder whether the Trump entourage arrived in
Hanoi with any intention to seal a deal or with the goal of simply pushing back on criticism at home that President Trump had been “duped” by Chairman Kim at the first summit, by proving to his detractors that he could “walk.” After all, the North Korean counterpoint to the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” regime of sanctions is that it is now focusing on the mass production of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, asserting that they have no need for further testing. Why would they give them up before sanctions are likewise given up, and before a peace regime is in place, let alone freeze production of weapons programs not yet on the table?

“When we saw the table and John Bolton sitting at the table and Stephen Biegun sitting behind when he had done all this work to do all this preparation, it just seemed for us, ‘Oh my gosh, something fishy is going on here,’” exclaimed Christine Ahn, founder of Women Cross DMZ, *Newsweek* reported. Indeed, a “former South Korean Unification Minister, Jeong Se-hyun, attributed the failure to a last-minute stipulation proposed by Bolton that would mandate North Korea not only report on its nuclear weapons but its chemical and biological stockpiles too,” the report also said.

Ultimately, at the Hanoi Summit, the parties came to an impasse, they walked away from the table on cordial terms with a clearer view of the distance between their positions, they shared their separate accounts of the talks with the international press, and they declared their intentions to return. But momentum towards implementing the pledges of the Singapore Summit last June has been lost, and reconnecting will be challenging.

Early last September, South Korean President Moon Jae-in helped lay the groundwork for the Hanoi Summit when he obtained an agreement with Chairman Kim in Pyongyang, in which “The North expressed its willingness to continue to take additional measures, such as the permanent dismantlement of the nuclear facilities in Yeongbyeon, as the United States takes corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement.” In the triangulated relationship between the two Koreas and the United States, how will President Moon intercede on behalf of U.S. proposals now demanding full disarmament of not just nuclear weapons programs, but also non-nuclear programs, before any sanctions are lifted?

At Stanford University in January, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, shared a vision with the audience of a “perfect outcome moment where the last nuclear weapon leaves North Korea, the sanctions are lifted, the flag goes up in the embassy and the (peace) treaty is signed in the same hour.” He won the trust of his counterparts in Pyongyang with his positive outlook. But after being sidelined by his own team in Hanoi, will Biegun continue to have the same influence in Pyongyang?
Koreans in both Koreas and in the diaspora have long awaited peace on the Korean peninsula, but is U.S. society ready for a major culture shift in policy towards the DPRK? Is President Trump capable of preparing the American public to lay aside its reservations and make peace with the DPRK, a U.S. nemesis for the past 70 years?

As for the DPRK, in his 2019 New Year’s address, Chairman Kim indicated his desire to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with the United States but cautioned that he would seek other options as needed:

I am ready to meet the US president again anytime, and will make efforts to obtain without fail results which can be welcomed by the international community. But if the United States does not keep the promise it made in the eyes of the world, and out of miscalculation of our people’s patience, it attempts to unilaterally enforce something upon us and persists in imposing sanctions and pressure against our Republic, we may be compelled to find a new way for defending the sovereignty of the country and the supreme interests of the state and for achieving peace and stability of the Korean peninsula.

What are the limits to North Korea’s “patience,” and what might be the “new way” forward for North Korea at this point? These are only a few of the daunting challenges and questions generated by the ambivalent outcome of the Hanoi Summit.

Paul Liem is chair of the Korea Policy Institute Board of Directors.
TIME FOR A PEOPLE’S POLICY TOWARD KOREA
HOW REAL IS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S NEW FLEXIBILITY WITH NORTH KOREA?
Gregory Elich | July 13, 2019

Originally published in Counterpunch

Although widely derided by the Washington Establishment as an empty photo opportunity, the recent meeting between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un at Panmunjom produced an agreement to resume working-level talks in the near future. According to the North Korean news agency KCNA, the two leaders discussed stumbling blocks in improving relations and easing tensions, and agreed to work towards a “breakthrough in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and in the bilateral relations.”

The resumption of working-level talks comes as welcome relief after months of stalled progress since Trump pulled the plug on the Hanoi Summit due to North Korea’s failure to accede to the demand that it unilaterally disarm. At Hanoi, U.S. negotiators presented a plan that called for North Korea to denuclearize, while promising nothing in exchange. Nothing, that is, other than punishment in the form of “maximum pressure” sanctions. All that was on offer to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, the official name for North Korea) was the vague mention of unspecified economic benefits after it had fully denuclearized.

In addition to denuclearization, the U.S. side widened the scope of talks at Hanoi by delivering a document to the North Koreans that demanded the dismantlement of chemical and biological warfare programs, as well as ballistic missiles and facilities. U.S. negotiators also wanted a detailed accounting of nuclear facilities, subject to intrusive U.S. inspections. For the North Koreans, to implement such a proposal would allow inspectors to map the bombing coordinates of its nuclear facilities, an obvious non-starter when the U.S. has yet to provide any semblance of a security guarantee.

In essence, what the U.S. offered at Hanoi was the Libya Model of denuclearization, in which obligations are loaded solely on its negotiating partner. That is not an approach that is going to work with North Korea, as among other reasons, its nuclear program is far more advanced than was the case with Libya’s. The DPRK has something substantial to trade, and it is not going to relinquish it for free.

The sanctions against the DPRK are designed to strangle its economy. The North Koreans regard sanctions relief as an essential element in the trade-off for denuclearization. The fate of small nations that the United States has attacked, such as Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya, did not go unnoticed in the DPRK. Those object lessons led the North Koreans to draw the logical conclusion that the only way for a small targeted nation to ensure its survival would be to develop a nuclear deterrent.

There has been much talk in the U.S. media about the Trump administration’s apparent intent to adopt a more flexible approach to negotiations. This has resulted in much hand-wringing among the Washington Establishment, panicked over a potential reduction in tensions, which it fears could have knock-on effects in sales of military hardware to Asian allies like South Korea and...
Japan. New pretexts would need to be developed to explain the military buildup in the Asia-Pacific that is aimed at China.

How real is this new flexibility? In a widely misread report in the *New York Times*, it is suggested that Trump may “settle” for a nuclear freeze, leaving the DPRK as a nuclear power. A careful reading of the article indicates, however, that the Trump administration does not envision a nuclear freeze as an end state, but rather as a “foundation for a new round of negotiations.” Talks “would begin with a significant – but limited – first step.” From there, U.S. negotiators would seek to persuade Kim to expand the range of nuclear facilities that would be dismantled.

On Trump’s return flight from South Korea, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun talked about U.S. plans for the next summit between Trump and Kim. Biegun said that the U.S. wanted a complete freeze on the DPRK’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs while negotiations are underway. This is not different than what was stated in the *New York Times* report, leaving aside the misleading use of the word “settle” and the fretful comments the *Times* quoted from Establishment analysts.

Biegun’s choice of words is significant: ‘WMD,’ rather than ‘nuclear.’ John Bolton’s insistence on including chemical and biological weapons programs in any negotiated settlement remains very much to the fore. North Korea denies having any such operations and U.S. belief in their existence is predicated primarily on supposition, backed by weak and inconclusive indications. If the DPRK does not have a chemical or biological weapons program, then it cannot freeze what it does not have, and it cannot provide details on programs that remain a fantasy in the minds of Washington. It requires little imagination to anticipate how hawks in the Trump administration would seize upon North Korean denials as a means of sabotaging negotiations.

Whether North Korea has chemical and biological programs or not, it is likely to have misgivings about the United States adding demands while at the same time offering no concessions. When Libya denuclearized, it too faced an ever-expanding array of conditions, including visits by John Bolton and other U.S. officials, telling it how to vote at the United Nations and ordering it to cut military ties with Syria, Iran, and North Korea.

It is notable that at no time has any U.S. official mentioned what kind of security guarantee it could offer to the DPRK. Given the record of U.S. militarism in recent decades, it is difficult to conceive of any assurance the U.S. would provide that could be trusted. Whatever the U.S. may offer will need to be supplemented, and protection will have to come from elsewhere. Chinese President Xi Jinping alluded to the same during his recent visit to Pyongyang, when he stated, “China will take an active role in resolving North Korea’s security concerns.” In May, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that security guarantees are an “absolutely mandatory” component of any negotiated agreement with the DPRK. “Russia and China are prepared to work on such guarantees,” he added.

In his meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on May 14, Lavrov stressed the importance of providing security guarantees to the DPRK, but all Pompeo wanted to talk about was hitting North Korea as hard as possible with sanctions, without letup.
Much has been made of Stephen Biegun’s claim that the United States plans on a more flexible “simultaneous and parallel” approach to negotiations. When examined, there is less change than many suppose. Biegun is in line with the rest of the Trump administration, emphasizing that “in the abstract, we have no interest in sanctions relief before denuclearization.”

Since sanctions relief and security guarantees are off the negotiating table as far as U.S. officials are concerned, what are they ready to offer? According to Biegun, flexibility means the U.S. would consider agreeing to the two nations opening liaison offices in each other’s capitals, permitting some people-to-people talks, and humanitarian aid. That last point may mean that the United States would consider stopping its efforts to block humanitarian assistance. Or it could indicate a willingness by the U.S. to directly provide a token amount of aid while continuing to shut down independent aid operations in the DPRK.

To the North Koreans, this “flexibility” is a distinction without a difference. It remains the Libya Model. As such, it is a recipe for failure if the U.S. rigidly adheres to this strategy.

Complicating matters further is the rider the U.S. Senate attached to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. If the rider makes it into the House version, then once the defense budget is signed into law, it would mandate secondary sanctions on any financial institution that does business with the DPRK. Current sanctions leave it to the discretion of the Treasury Department as to which firms to sanction. The Senate bill aims to cut off the North Korean economy from what little international trade it still has after sanctions, so as to inflict further harm on the population. Certainly, this also signals the Senate’s opposition to any negotiated settlement.

The North Koreans need two things in exchange for denuclearization: the lifting of sanctions and a security guarantee. What that security guarantee would look like is difficult to discern. A piece of paper is not going to do it. The DPRK needs a reliable means of assuring its security if it is going to denuclearize.

Across the entire U.S. Establishment, both within and outside the Trump administration, there is an unwavering belief that every action the DPRK takes towards denuclearization should be rewarded with “maximum pressure” sanctions.

It is a curious notion, this expectation that nothing need be offered to North Korea in exchange for meeting U.S. demands. Odder still is the conviction that the DPRK ought to be satisfied with being tormented by crippling sanctions for each concession it makes. But then, imperialism and arrogance go hand-in-hand. There is no reason, however, to expect the North Koreans to be servile. “North Korea wants actions, not words,” observes Christopher Green of the International Crisis Group. “I’m not sure the U.S. is mentally ready for it, even now.”

Whether or not North Korea denuclearizes depends entirely on the United States. If the Trump administration believes it can bully the DPRK into unilateral disarmament, then it is sadly mistaken. If on the other hand, it eventually comes to recognize that the only way to achieve its objective is to offer some measure of reciprocity, then denuclearization becomes an achievable
goal. At this point, there is little indication that the U.S. is prepared to move beyond the former position.

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MOST DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE ATTACKING TRUMP’S KOREA POLICY—FROM THE RIGHT
Tim Shorrock | July 29, 2019

Originally published in The Nation

Led by former vice president Joe Biden, the leading Democratic candidates for president in 2020 have focused on President Trump’s friendly (though presently shaky) relationship with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un as a prime example of a foreign policy that’s gone off the establishment tracks and left traditional US allies in the dust. With their next televised debate set for next week, Biden and most of his competitors hope to convince voters—especially those who voted Republican in 2016—that Trump’s personalized style of US power projection presents an existential danger not only to the United States but also to its friends around the world.

“We need allies,” Biden told CNN’s Chris Cuomo on July 5, five days after Trump revived his once-stalled negotiations with Kim in a historic meeting on the North Korean side of the demilitarized zone arranged with the support of South Korean President Moon Jae-in. Yet Trump “is absolutely dising them,” the Democratic front-runner continued, and is instead “embracing thugs. He’s embracing Kim Jong-un, who is a thug.”

Even as Trump and Kim announced at the DMZ that their new negotiating teams would soon begin a new round of talks, Biden continued his line of attack, declaring on Twitter and in the CNN interview that the conversation at the border was merely a “photo op” that “gave Kim everything that he wanted: legitimacy.” Since then, of course, those talks have been delayed by continued disputes between Washington and Pyongyang, most lately about an upcoming series of US–South Korean military exercises and the North’s latest test, on Wednesday, of two short-range missiles.

Yet, given all that’s happened in Korea over the past 18 months, it’s hard to see how Biden’s tough line toward Kim—or a return to the confrontational days of 2017, when all-out war seemed a distinct possibility—could win over the swing voters the Democrats need to defeat Trump. On most issues, particularly immigration, the president’s racist stands and outrageous tweets give the party plenty of ammunition, no manner who the nominee is. But on Korea and Kim, not so much.

Since the first Trump-Kim summit, in June 2018, North Korea has refrained from testing any long-range strategic weapons, and the United States and South Korea has stopped the massive military exercises that so angered the North in years past (the ones coming up in August will be much smaller). And despite an onslaught of media stories about North Korea’s still-formidable military capabilities, the two Koreas have taken advantage of the first major diplomatic opening since the early 2000s to make enormous strides in scaling down tensions on the border, including destroying dozens of front-line guard posts and getting rid of mines.

“If Biden tries to make North Korea a campaign issue and tries to say that Trump is appeasing the Kim regime, he is wasting his time,” said Harry Kazianis, a prominent conservative and senior director of Korean Studies at the Center for the National Interest, a think tank founded by
former president Richard Nixon. “The 2020 election will come down to economics, not nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula,” he told *The Nation* in an interview.

Still, Biden’s competitors have kept up the political offensive. At the first Democratic debate, on June 27, Senator Kamala Harris called North Korea “a real threat in terms of its nuclear arsenal” and said Trump “embraces” Kim, “a dictator, for the sake of a photo op.” Senator Elizabeth Warren continued the attack in a tweet a few days later, saying that instead of “squandering American influence on photo ops,” the United States “should be dealing with North Korea through principled diplomacy that promotes US security, defends our allies, and upholds human rights.”

Senator Bernie Sanders, in contrast, has been more nuanced. “I have no problem with [Trump’s] sitting down with Kim Jong-un,” he told ABC’s *This Week*. But in his view, he said, Trump has badly damaged the State Department and its ability to manage foreign affairs. “We need to move forward diplomatically, not just do photo opportunities,” he added.

It’s a close race for the Democratic nomination: In a poll released July 19 by NBC News, Biden led the pack with 25 percent, with Sanders and Warren holding steady at 16 percent and Harris just behind at 14 percent. This week, a CBS poll had it even closer, with Biden still at 25 percent, but with Warren at 20, Harris at 16 and Sanders at 15. The next three—Pete Buttigieg, Beto O’Rourke, and Julián Castro—came in at 6, 4, and 2 percent, respectively. A total of 20 candidates will square off next Tuesday and Wednesday on CNN.

When it comes to foreign policy, Biden has been by far the most outspoken. He outlined his philosophy in a major speech on July 11, in which he castigated Trump as an “extreme” threat to US national security and again criticized his “cozy” relationship with Kim. (Writing in *The Washington Post*, neocon columnist Josh Rogin said that Biden views the 2020 election “as the last chance to save what’s left of the United States’ moral and international credibility and respect.”)

But the former vice president’s alternative policy on Korea, spelled out in his earlier interview with Cuomo on CNN, was a throwback to his days in the Obama administration, which (contrary to a ludicrous claim by Trump at the DMZ) rejected the idea of direct talks with North Korea unless Pyongyang gave up its nuclear weapons first.

Trump, Biden told CNN, “ended our relationship, as a practical matter, with South Korea and Japan as a united front and let China off the hook.” He accused Kim of doing nothing in return. “And what have we done? We’ve suspended exercises.” Asked what he’d do differently, Biden offered a taste of the militarism that Trump tried in 2017. “I make it clear that we’re going to move our defenses up, as we did before, and we’re going to make sure we have the capacity to deal with it near term. I’m going to let South Korea and Japan know we’re there for them. We are their nuclear umbrella. We’re there for them. And China understands, if you don’t want us in your throat here, if you don’t want us in your face, do something.”

Biden’s approach reflects a basic misunderstanding of the peace process in Korea. His overwhelming focus on Trump’s relationship with Kim—shared by the other candidates—
obscures Korea’s agency in the peace process and the real issues at stake for Washington, Seoul, and Pyongyang. “This is a rare moment in history where US and Korean interests are aligned,” said Hyun Lee, US national organizer for Women Cross DMZ and the Korea Peace Treaty Campaign, in a talk in Washington on July 16.

In a discussion at the Center for International Policy, Lee identified the “greater motivating factors” behind the US talks with North and South Korea as Trump’s need to show a win before the 2020 election; Kim’s need to lift sanctions as part of his drive to improve North Korea’s beleaguered economy; and Moon’s need to make progress in inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation before his own term is up in 2022. The organizations she works with, Lee added, are working in Washington and in Congress “to create a political space in DC to prepare for peace in Korea.”

Any discussion of the peace process, in fact, must begin in South Korea. The talks between Trump and Kim only came about because of the encouragement of President Moon, who began the current wave of diplomacy in January 2018 when he invited Kim to send emissaries to the Winter Olympics in the South. Even Shinzo Abe, Japan’s right-wing prime minister and Trump’s closest ally in Asia, has jumped on the bandwagon, offering his own direct talks with Kim (he’s also now embroiled in a bitter economic and diplomatic dispute with Moon over Japan’s World War II–era conscription of Korean laborers).

Biden’s emphasis on the nuclear umbrella—under which the United States has pledged to defend non-nuclear South Korea and Japan with its own weapons—also shows an appalling lack of understanding about the North and its motives. Those weapons, which are carried on US ships and planes in the Pacific region, are part of the arsenal that Kim Jong-un would like to see directed elsewhere, and they explain why he has insisted on the wording “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” in any joint statements with Trump. It’s also a key issue for South Korean peace activists.

“There’s been a lack of discussion about what South Korea and the US should give up to help North Korea give up its nuclear weapons,” Tae-ho Lee, an activist with People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, one of the largest and most influential NGOs in South Korea, said during a recent visit to Washington. “Security assurances to North Korea are impossible without removal of the nuclear umbrella.” He also said the combination of the US and South Korean militaries, linked in an alliance since 1954, are an “overwhelming power.” For the past 30 years, he pointed out, South Korea’s military spending alone has been higher than North Korea’s entire GDP.

Sanders, alone among the Democratic candidates, has been paying attention to and meeting with peace activists and has incorporated into his platform some of their ideas for engagement. He recently used a campaign video that featured an interview with Christine Ahn, executive director of Women Cross DMZ, to argue that Trump’s insistence on tough sanctions until an agreement is reached is threatening progress. “Peace is the best path for American security,” he says. Sanders’s stance is winning support from other progressives within Democratic ranks, such as Representative Ro Khanna of California, a Sanders backer who was the primary author of a bill that passed the full House on July 11 calling for a “binding peace agreement” to bring a formal
end to the Korean War. Khanna’s bill, an amendment to a National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020, marked the first time that Congress had taken a stand on ending the 70-year-old war.

The vote was the result of intense lobbying by an array of peace groups, including Ploughshares, Win Without War, and Peace Action. In a statement, Ahn called the vote on the Khanna amendment a “game-changer.” She added: “It’s a clear sign that the American people want an end to the oldest U.S. conflict, and that ending decades of hostilities with a peace agreement is the only way to resolve the nuclear crisis.” In a sign that civil society groups may be having an impact on the Trump administration, Ahn and Hyun Lee recently met with Stephen Biegun, Trump’s chief negotiator, to discuss the prospects for peace.

In the weeks after Trump’s meeting with Kim at the DMZ, close analysts of the Korea situation, and the South Korean officials who have been in discussion with the White House, predicted that the next step in US–North Korean talks will involve North Korea’s giving up a major chunk of its nuclear program in return for a partial lifting of US and UN sanctions that are crippling the most vulnerable parts of the North’s economy. That would move both sides past the disastrous summit in Hanoi in late February, when Trump walked out after unsuccessfully pressing Kim to accept a deal that would have involved the North giving up its entire weapons program before obtaining any sanctions relief whatsoever. This was seen in Pyongyang as a demand for surrender or capitulation—something they have said they will never do.

Biegun expressed the new US flexibility a day before Trump’s meeting at the DMZ, when he informed his South Korea counterpart, Lee Do-hoon, that the US government was prepared to move the US–North Korean negotiations forward “simultaneously and in a parallel” manner. Biegun, whose role was eclipsed in Hanoi by John Bolton, Trump’s hardline national security adviser, added in a speech to the conservative Atlantic Council on June 19 that “the door is wide open” for negotiations, and said he and his North Korean partner were committed to “regain our momentum” by returning to the basic areas of agreement—including establishing new US–North Korean political relations and building a “lasting and stable peace regime”—that came out of the first summit in Singapore in June 2018. Bolton, as many observers noted, was nowhere to be seen at Trump’s meeting at the DMZ.

Despite Biegun’s signaling and Trump’s insistence that he’s in “no hurry” to get an agreement, North Korea recently complained about new, albeit small, US military exercises with South Korea, and said they make it hard to trust the United States. In statements carried on its official news agency, KCNA, the North Korean foreign ministry said the upcoming “19-2 Dong Maeng (Alliance)” drills scheduled for August are “clearly a breach of the main spirit” of the June 12 statement in Singapore, where Trump canceled large-scale military drills and—to the shock of many—called them “provocative.” Underscoring its concerns, on Monday KCNA broadcast photographs of Kim examining a new submarine that experts cited by The Wall Street Journal “believe could carry multiple missiles, including those with nuclear capabilities.” And then came this week’s launch of what South Korea called a “new kind of short-range ballistic missile,” one that is similar to two projectiles fired last May. North Korea, in a KCNA dispatch, said the test was a message to South Korean “warmongers who are running high fever in their moves to introduce the ultramodern offensive weapons into South Korea and hold
military exercise in defiance of the repeated warnings from” the North. Recently, the South began deploying the first of 40 F-35A advanced fighter jets made by Lockheed Martin.

The North Korean statements and actions alarmed Kazianis, of the Center for the National Interest. “If the situation remains unaddressed” and US and North Korean diplomats can’t return to “dialogue and compromise…we could very well go back to the days of North Korean nuclear testing, ICBM launches, and President Trump calling out ‘little rocket man,’” he warned Monday in The American Conservative. Yet even after Pyongyang’s angry statements, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has assured reporters that a new round of talks will start soon. On Tuesday, he said the United States is prepared to “provide a set of security arrangements” that would guarantee to North Koreans that “if they disband their nuclear program,” the United States “won’t attack them.” The next round of negotiations, he added, “will begin in a couple of weeks.” Later, he downplayed the latest test, telling reporters that “lots of countries posture before they come to the table.”

Still, if personalities matter, Biden is unlikely to shake his disdain for Kim and the North Koreans. Last May, responding to Biden’s initial criticisms of Trump’s relationship with Kim, KCNA called him “reckless and senseless, seized by ambition for power.” In an echo of its denunciation of Trump in 2017 as a “dotard,” KCNA said that what Biden uttered “is just sophism of an imbecile bereft of elementary quality as a human being, let alone a politician.”

If the Democrats are smart, they will realize that words like that, like North Korea’s latest missile salvos, are often a prelude—even an invitation—to dialogue.

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DEMOCRATS MUST STOP DISMISSING DIPLOMACY WITH NORTH KOREA
Minju Bae and Ju-Hyun Park | September 21, 2019

Originally published in *Truthout*

On September 11, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted a screenshot of CNN’s headline ticker and highlighted “Trump Sides with Kim Jong Un,” assessing “That’s it. That’s the headline.” She continued, “Obviously [Former National Security Advisor John] Bolton leaving is good — it was an enormous mistake to appoint him in the first place. One doesn’t need to boost authoritarians to make the point.” And then, two minutes later, Rep. Ilhan Omar retweeted Ocasio-Cortez, “Trump sides with yet another dictator.”

To their credit, both congresswomen voted for House Resolution 152 (introduced by Rep. Ro Khanna) earlier this year, which calls for the formal end to the Korean War. However, it was disappointing but unsurprising to watch two of the most progressive members of Congress discuss Korea in this light. After all, the sentiments that Representatives Ocasio-Cortez and Omar expressed are common among Democrats writ large. In the Democratic debate on September 12, presidential candidates Julián Castro and Sen. Kamala Harris made similar points.

The problem with reflexively dismissing U.S. diplomatic engagement with North Korea is that it depends on a narrative that is disconnected from facts. For more than 70 years, Koreans have lived with division and the horrific consequences of war. The last two years of Korean-led intergovernmental cooperation have laid the groundwork toward peace and reunification. U.S. progressives ought to be supportive of that process — it’s their obligation to history and morality.

The origins of the Korean War are directly linked to the surrender of Japan in World War II, which ended two generations of violent colonial rule in Korea. The movement for Korean liberation was just as long. Liberation activists quickly organized a unified, democratically established government called the Korean People’s Republic (KPR) under the leadership of lifelong liberation activist Yeo Un-hyeong.

But just weeks after Japan’s surrender in 1945, the U.S. military began to occupy southern Korea and outlawed the nascent KPR, establishing a military government staffed by many former Japanese colonial officials. Koreans resisted U.S. occupation in numerous uprisings. U.S. and pro-U.S. forces responded with retaliatory massacres. In 1948, the U.S. military — in collusion with the newly formed United Nations — installed the conservative, pro-U.S. Republic of Korea (ROK) through a sham election. One of the first acts of the U.S.-installed “democracy” was to suppress an uprising on the island of Jeju by slaughtering tens of thousands of people. It was only after the ROK’s formation that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), commonly known as North Korea, was founded.

Since then, the U.S. has done everything in its power to destroy the DPRK, from carpet bombing more than 90 percent of the country from 1950-1953, to modern-day bipartisan economic sanctions, which deprive North Koreans of life-saving necessities like fuel, medicine and access to international trade for their livelihoods. As part of its decades-long war against North Korea, the U.S. aided and abetted South Korean dictators Rhee Syngman, Park Chung-hee
and Chun Doo-hwan in brutally crushing reunification and democratization movements, like the Gwangju Uprising of 1980.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries also collaborated in creating systems of institutionalized sexual assault of Korean and migrant women, including medical torture and forced sterilization of sex workers who serviced U.S. military personnel. Decades of worker, student and rural organizing eventually made South Korea a democracy in the 1990s, but the U.S. military occupation continues.

It’s no wonder the dead — our dead — never make it into the U.S. narrative of freedom and democracy. This narrative attempts to justify U.S. militarism in the Pacific as it disciplines an inherently untrustworthy and illegitimate regime. Five million people died in the Korean War, and it’s hard to say how many more have been killed (and are still being killed) by U.S. policies since.

This is the status quo Democrats uphold when they diminish the complexity of contemporary Korean politics to a false binary of siding with or not siding with “a dictator.” What about denuclearization? What about human rights? And indeed, what about them?

The U.S. has no moral authority to enforce denuclearization or human rights on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. has bombed civilian targets in Korea and installed nuclear missiles in the south. It still has the largest nuclear arsenal of any nation on Earth and has military infrastructure, including missile sites, throughout the Pacific. Americans cannot be moral and political arbiters for places they do not live in and people they do not know. The greatest threat to human rights in Korea isn’t reunification; it’s the war, which the U.S. must end.

The Trump administration may entertain direct talks with North Korea. But the same administration also blocked joint economic projects like the inter-Korean railway and refused to end sanctions as a precondition to an eventual peace treaty. Progressives can do better by pushing to end sanctions and sign a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War. That’s the choice the U.S. faces: cooperate with the peace process in full, or perpetuate a forever war that exacts a bloody toll on both sides of the Korean Demilitarized Zone.

In spite of everything, Koreans have created resilient communities throughout the peninsula. Whether in North Korea, South Korea, or elsewhere, we have cared for each other, shaped our own destinies amid extraordinary violence and most importantly, survived. And for decades, we’ve built across borders toward reunification. A just and lasting peace is possible in Korea but only if we build it ourselves, not on the U.S.’s terms.

For Koreans around the globe, Friday’s full moon marked the beginning of Chuseok. Some have characterized Chuseok as the “Korean Thanksgiving.” This is inaccurate. Unlike Thanksgiving, Chuseok is not a celebration of genocide. Instead, it is a holiday for family reunion, communion with our ancestors, and commemoration of our past, present and future. For Koreans with separated families, it is a time to mourn our separation. May this be the last Chuseok that this is the case.
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NORTH KOREA ISSUE IS NOT DE-NUCLEARIZATION BUT DE-COLONIZATION
Ajamu Baraka | September 30, 2018

Originally published in Black Agenda Report

The critics had already signaled their strategy for derailing any meaningful move toward normalizing relations between the United States and North Korea. Right-wing neoliberals from CNN, MSNBC and NPR are in perfect alignment with the talking points issued by U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and the Democrat Party that took the position that anything short of the North Koreans surrendering their national interests and national dignity to the United States was a win for North Korea.

For much of the foreign policy community, corporate media pundits and leaders of the two imperialist parties, the issue is North Korean de-nuclearization. But for the people in Korea and throughout the global South, the real issue has always been the unfinished business of ending the war and beginning the de-colonization of the Korean peninsula.

The interrelated issues of respecting the dignity and sovereignty of the North Korean nation and engaging in an authentic process of de-colonization are precisely why the U.S.-North Korean initiative will fail without a major intervention on the part of the people in the United States demanding that their leaders commit to diplomacy and peace.

There should be no illusions about U.S. intentions. If U.S. policymakers were really concerned with putting a brake on the North Korean nuclear-weapons program, they would have pursued a different set of policies. Such policies would have created the necessary security conditions to convince the North Koreans that a nuclear deterrence to the United States was unnecessary.

The fact that those conditions were not created were less a result of the evil intentions of the North Koreans than it reflected the need to maintain the justification for continued U.S. military deployment in South Korea and in the region. Being able to point to North Korea as a threat to regional security has provided the justifications for U.S. power projection in the region and the ever-expanding U.S. military budget.

With the growing power of China over the last few decades, the threat of North Korea allowed the United States to continue a physical presence right at the underbelly of China. That is why the “agreed framework” under Clinton was not implemented and then jettisoned by the Bush administration. It is also why the Obama administration’s so-called strategic patience was really about a series of increasingly provocative military exercises and no negotiations.

Full Spectrum Dominance and the Psychopathology of White Supremacy

Korea has historically played a significant role for the U.S. imperial project since the end of the Second World War. The emergent forces U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower identified as the military/industrial/complex are still present, but are now exercising hegemonic power, along with the financial sector within the U.S. state. Those forces are not interested in a diplomatic resolution of the Korean colonial question because their interests are more focused on China and
maintaining U.S. regional hegemony in East Asia. The tensions in Korea have not only provided them the rationale for increased expenditures for various missile defense systems but also for bolstering public support for the obscene military budgets that are largely transferred straight to their pockets.

That is why the historic record is replete with the United States sabotaging negotiated settlements with the North, but then pointing to North Korean responses to those efforts as evidence of North Korean duplicity.

In addition to the material interests and hegemonic geopolitical objectives, the social-psychological phenomenon of inculcated white supremacy is also a factor and has buttressed imperial policies toward that nation for years.

For example, the psychopathology of white supremacy invisibilizes the absurdity and illegitimacy of the United States being in a position to negotiate the fate of millions of Koreans. The great “white father” and savior complex is not even a point of contestation because it is not even perceived—the rule of whiteness through the dominance of the Western capitalist elite has been naturalized.

Therefore, it is quite understandable that for many, the summit is the space where the North Koreans are essentially supposed to surrender to the United States. It is beyond the comprehension of most policymakers and large sectors of the public that North Koreans would have ever concluded it is not in their national interest to give up their defenses to a reckless and dangerously violent rogue state that sees itself beyond the law.

And it is that strange white-supremacist consciousness that buys into the racist trope that it was Trump’s pressure that brought North Korea to the table. The white-supremacist colonial mentality believes the natives will only respond to force and violence.

As U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the good old boy from South Carolina, argues “The only way North Korea will give up their nuclear program is if they believe military option is real.”

But as Kim Kye Gwan, North Korea’s first vice minister for foreign affairs and former nuclear-program negotiator pointed out in relationship to the reasons why North Korea stayed with the process:

“The U.S. is miscalculating the magnanimity and broad-minded initiatives of the DPRK as signs of weakness and trying to embellish and advertise as if these are the product of its sanctions and pressure.”

Unfortunately, the white-supremacist world-view renders it almost impossible to apprehend reality in any other way. That is why it is inevitable that the Trump administration—like the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations—will mis-read the North Koreans.

The North Korea issue is a classic example of why it is impossible to separate a pro-peace, anti-war position from the issue of anti-imperialism. The concrete, geopolitical objectives of U.S.
Seeking Peace on the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Policy Institute Reader

imperialist interests in the region drives the logic of regional dominance, which means peace, de-
colonization and national reconciliation for Korea are counter to U.S. interests. And while we
must support the U.S. state’s decision to halt military exercises, we must recognize that without
vigorous pressure from the people to support an honest process, the possibility of conflict might
be ever more alive now as a result of the purported attempt at diplomacy.

The nature of the North Korean state is not the issue. What is the issue is a process has begun
between the two Korean nations that should be respected. Therefore, de-nuclearization should
not be the focus—self-determination of the Korean peoples must be the center of our
discussions. On that issue, it is time for activists in the United States to demand the United States
get out of Korea. The peace and anti-war movement must support a process that will lead to the
closure of U.S. military bases, the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the elimination of the nuclear
threat.

In short, U.S. based activists must support an end to the Korean war and the start of the de-
colonization of South Korea.

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