

# North Korea and South Korea Are Threatening to Seek Peace

Korean détente puts decades of failed, corrupt US policy at risk

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*A few gestures of mutual respect between North Korea and South Korea during the first week of January are a long way from a stable, enduring peace on the Korean peninsula, but these gestures are the best signs of sanity there in decades. On January 1, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called for immediate dialogue with South Korea ahead of next month's Winter Olympics there. On January 2, South Korea's President Moon Jae-in proposed that talks begin next week in Panmunjom (a border village where intermittent talks to end the Korean War have continued since 1953). On January 3, the two Koreas reopened a communications hotline that has been dysfunctional for almost two years (requiring South Korea to use a megaphone across the border in order to repatriate several North Korean fishermen). Talks on January 9 are expected to include North Korean participation in the Winter Olympics that begin February 9 in Pyeongchang, South Korea.*

Kim Jong-un's call for dialogue may or may not have surprised US officials, but reactions from the White House press secretary, the UN Ambassador, and the State Department were uniformly hostile and negative. The most civil was Heather Nauert at State, who said, with little nuance:

"Right now, if the two countries decide that they want to have talks, that would certainly be their choice."

She might as well have added "bless their little hearts." Patronize is what the US does when it's being polite. More typical bullying came from UN Ambassador Nikki Haley:

"We won't take any of the talks seriously if they don't do something to ban all nuclear weapons in North Korea."

US policy is hopelessly tone-deaf if it believes that bell can be un-rung. But that's the way the US has behaved for decades, tone-deaf and unilaterally demanding, insisting that the US and the US alone has the right to determine what at least some sovereign nations can and cannot do. In December, anticipating a North Korean satellite launch (not a missile test), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [told the United Nations](#) with straight-faced moral arrogance:

The North Korean regime's continuing unlawful missile launches and testing activities signal its contempt for the United States, its neighbors in Asia, and all members of the United Nations. In the face of such a threat, inaction is unacceptable for any nation.

Well, no, that's only true if you believe you rule the world. It's not true in any context where parties have equal rights. And the US secretary's covert urging of others to take aggressive action tiptoes toward a war crime, as does the implied US threat of aggressive war.

The obtuse inflexibility of US policy revealed itself yet again in the initial groupthink response to a different part of Kim Jong-un's January 1 speech where he indicated that he had a "nuclear button" on his desk and would not hesitate to use it if anyone attacked North Korea. Under constant threat from the US and its allies since 1953, North Korea has made the rational choice to become a nuclear power, to have a nuclear deterrent, to have some semblance of national security. The US, irrationally, has refused to accept this with North Korea even while supporting Israel's nuclear deterrent. Kim Jong-un's button reference elicited a reflexive US reiteration of failed policy in florid Trumpian form when the president tweeted on January 2:

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the "Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times." Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!

This twitter feed from the Great Disruptor got the twittering classes much atwitter over nothing more important than sexual innuendo, while fleeing from yet another presidential threat of nuclear destruction. And then came the firestorm of "Fire and Fury," and almost all thought of Korea was driven from public discourse, even though what happens in Korea is orders of magnitude more important than what Michael Wolff says Steve Bannon said about Trumpian treason.

But the facts on the ground in Korea have changed materially in the past year despite US bullying and interference. First, North Korea has become a nuclear power, no matter how puny, and it will continue to become more capable of defending itself unless the US thinks it would be better to do the unthinkable (what are the odds?). The second, more important change in Korea is that South Korea shed itself of a corrupt president beholden to US interests and, in May, inaugurated Moon Jae-in, who has actively sought reconciliation with the North for years before his election.

US policy has failed for more than six decades to achieve any resolution of the conflict, not even a formal end to the Korean War. The conventional wisdom, as posed by The New York Times, is [a dead end](#):

"The United States, the South's key ally, views the overture with deep suspicion."

In a rational world, the US would have good reason to support its ally, the president of South Korea, in re-thinking a stalemate. Even President Trump seems to think so, in a hilariously narcissistic tweet of January 4:

With all of the failed “experts” weighing in, does anybody really believe that talks and dialogue would be going on between North and South Korea right now if I wasn’t firm, strong and willing to commit our total “might” against the North. Fools, but talks are a good thing!

Talks are a good thing. One of North Korea’s chronic complaints, as well as a clearly legitimate grievance, has been the endless US/South Korean military exercises aimed at North Korea several times a year. In his January 1 speech, Kim Jong-un again called for South Korea to end joint military exercises with the US. On January 4, the Pentagon delayed the latest version of [that clear provocation](#) – scheduled to overlap with the Olympics. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis denied that the delay was a political gesture, saying its purpose was to provide logistical support to the Olympics (whatever that means). Whatever Mattis says, the gesture is a positive gesture and reinforces the drift toward peace, however slightly. Can it be possible that reality and sanity are getting traction? Who knows what’s really going on here? And who are the “fools” Trump refers to?

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