

Reunification on the Korean Peninsula: Toward a Peaceful Confederation

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What would a reunified Korea look like? Where would its capital be? Would it have a single unified military? What would happen to the North's nuclear weapons?

The election of pro-engagement Moon Jae-in ushers in a new era in North-South relations and makes these questions pertinent again. Moon is expected to resume the long delayed project of inter-Korean cooperation toward reconciliation and peaceful reunification—which began in 2000 after the historic summit between former leaders Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il and was resumed by the late President Roh Moo-hyun before it was halted by the subsequent conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye.

Permanent peace on the Korean peninsula requires a settlement of the ongoing state of war between the United States and North Korea by replacing the armistice (a temporary ceasefire) signed after the Korean War with a permanent peace treaty.

But it's never too soon to start imagining what a reunified Korea might look like. Dr. Moon J Pak, a long-time proponent of peaceful reunification, shares his vision.

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In any serious effort to peacefully unite the two Koreas in the future, there will be big hurdles of history and geopolitics to overcome.

Due mainly to its unique geopolitical location, surrounded by large, aggressive and ambitious neighbors, China, Japan, Russia, Mongolia, Manchuria and more recently the neighbor across the Pacific, the U.S., the 4,000-year-old history of Korea is tumultuous, to say the least.

The country was invaded, occupied, colonized by all of these neighbors. Although Korea fought back, it has never retaliated and invaded any neighboring countries. Despite thousands of years of troublesome and cruel foreign invasions, Korea has maintained its national, ethnic and cultural identity.

In the evolution of modern Korea, this ancient pattern of competing for dominance over Korea repeated itself. China, Russia and Japan struggled over the peninsula, which resulted in the colonialization of the country by Japan in 1910. Japan considered Korea to be its geopolitical stepping-stone to the continent.

Japan's ambition for domination over Asia was permanently thwarted in 1945 with the end

of the World War II. However, it brought to the peninsula the beginning of another international conflict, the cold war between the U.S. and Soviet Russia, which divided the country into North and South and launched the Korean War, a war of proxy between the two world powers.



The armistice was signed between the U.S. and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) in 1953, but the peace treaty promised never materialized. To this date, the enmity exists between the two countries, and no peace treaty has been executed, which has effectively kept the country of South Korea (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) under the military control of the U.S.

Over the past 63 years, since the armistice, or cease-fire agreement, was signed, numerous international efforts have been attempted to bring about the peace and re-unification of the Korean peninsula. Among these have been several committees of the United Nations, and the Six-Party Talks (the six parties being North and South Korea, Japan, Russia, China, and the U.S.). None of these efforts have been successful. This is primarily because none of the countries involved in the effort have been sincerely striving for a reunification agreement of the two Koreas. China wants a friendly North Korea dependent on its favor, and acting as a buffer state between China and allied countries of the U.S. The U.S. wants a friendly South Korea dependent on it, which will provide a force to counter China. Japan would rather have a divided Korea which will never become strong enough to be a threat to them.

Over the past half century, the two Koreas have recovered from the war and reestablished themselves as formidable entities.

✖ The South has become a thriving economic power with a population of 45 million, It has a cutting-edge high-tech industry, a strong information technology industry, along with ship-building, steel production, and auto manufacturing (in fifth place globally). South Korea is 11th in its level of gross domestic product (GDP), considered a measure of economic strength among developed countries. It has also established an armed force of 650,000, and has developed highly advanced armaments.

The North, with 25 million people, in spite of tremendous limitations imposed on it, primarily by U.S. sanctions, military threats and isolation, has developed into a formidable military power with a 1.2 million-armed force, including an air force, a coastal navy with 85 submarines (with some capable of ballistic missiles).

It also has developed a nuclear weapon system with more than 20 units, This include hydrogen bombs, a missile delivery system which is close to development of mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The North also has a long-range artillery system with more than 40,000 super gun units placed underground along the DMZ.

With their nuclear deterrence force, the North Koreans have embarked upon the so- called Parallel Plan, placing a strong emphasis on the nation's economic development, not just growth of the military. However, to this date, North Korea's GDP is estimated to be about \$30 billion, or 1/30th that of South Korea.

The combined population of North and South, more than 70 million, is larger than the population of Italy. If the military were combined, its 1.75 million troops would be the world's fourth-largest military, after China, India and the U.S.

Koreans are now faced with dealing with what is the ultimate Korean issue of modern times – “Peace and Reunification”. This ultimate issue can only be achieved by Koreans. Neighboring countries have their own strategic self-interests; none really have an interest in reunification of these two separate countries into one strong power.

Actually, the basic tenets of a reunification process are delineated in the so-called “6-15 Joint Agreement,” made June 15, 2000 between Jong-il Kim of North and Dae-jung Kim of South. The agreement calls for the formation of a confederation between the two governments; it specifies that each government should continue to maintain its own political and economic identity.

For the two Koreas to agree to be re-united, the most important issue must be to erase the enmity which has existed between the two countries since the Korean War (1950-53). Therefore, the first step would be the establishment of “Non-aggression Pact” between the two Koreas. Such an agreement would serve to relax the military stance and therefore the high cost of defense. Most importantly, it would eliminate the need for the U.S. military in the South.

It would lead to U.S. troop withdrawal, and return military control of the ROK army to the ROK government. It would also eliminate the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system, a U.S. weapons system which is intensely disliked and controversial in South Korea right now. It would also lead to the deactivation of the naval base in Jeju Island, and would make the idea of a U.S.-Japan-ROK alliance irrelevant.



The DPRK has used its nuclear weapons system as a way of deterring the U.S. from military action. Any use of nuclear weapon in the peninsula (South on North or the opposite) would mean mutual destruction. North Korea must make its good will toward South Korea clear by “Eliminating any Nuclear Threat to the South”, and even further by declaring that the two Koreas would have “Joint Ownership and Control of the Nuclear Force after Reunification”.

The two Koreas could begin to work together initially by meeting each other's humanitarian and economic needs. The South (ROK) should start providing unlimited, “Free Food to the North”, while the North (DPRK) ships “Free Mineral Resources to the South”, such as coal,

tungsten, lithium and many other rare earth products, directly by way of its Eastern Sea route.

Kaesong, a North Korean city immediately of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is an ancient place, but best-known in recent times as the location of a “North-South Joint Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperative Zone”. This cooperative North-South project was, until recent years, a successful collaboration of Southern technology with Northern labor. Once the idea of a confederation is realized, similar joint venture zones should be established in many other key cities, such as Wonsan, Nampo, Ulsan, Chulwon, and Incheon, among others.

Under a confederation, the military forces of South and North will eventually be united. This single national entity could be called the “No-Nong Minjokgun” (Agrono-Labor National Corps). It will be consisted of a fully-trained, conscripted military of one million men and women serving three-year terms. This force will contribute to the nation’s agriculture, industry, and other nation-building projects.

Under a confederation, “The Heads of the two Koreas will meet regularly, biannually and alternately at each other’s capital cities”- to supervise the re-unification issues, progression of the agreements and resolution of any contentious matters.

Eventually, the re-unified Korea will declare a “Permanently Neutrality”, which is a necessity, given its geopolitical importance. However, by arming itself formidably with a strong, high-tech defense force, its neutrality will be guaranteed by itself. Further, the neutrality of the nation will not depend on the will of its neighboring countries, as is the case with other neutral states, such as Austria or Switzerland. In this scenario, Korea will no longer be a country surrounded by four big powers; instead, it will be one of the five big powers. It will be a centrally-located nation, vigilantly watching its four neighbor nations.

To symbolize a new confederated Korea, I would also propose that a new city be created as a center for the confederation. The city, to be called “Koreana”, could be built on the area known as the “Iron Triangle,” located near the DMZ. This location reminds Koreans of the sad history of division, war, destruction and foreign control;

- Koreana will base Korea’s nuclear arsenal jointly owned and controlled,
- Koreana will house the Senate of the Confederate Korea elected by the representatives of the professional organizations from both Koreas, south and north,
- Koreana will house the President of the Confederate Korea, elected from and voted by the overseas Koreans,
- Koreana will house a graduate level university designed to produce nation’s elite intellectuals,
- Koreana will allow dual citizenship to any qualified foreigners.

By having a new city to represent the many joint ventures of the new Korea, Koreans will be able to negotiate the structures of a new confederation in a transparent manner, and move through its reunification plan methodically, one step at a time, to the goal of peaceful coexistence.

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