

The transition of Postwar regime in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula peace process

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The transition of Postwar regime in Northeast Asia

The postwar regime that has reigned over Northeast Asia over the last several decades is now at crossroads. What should have happened a long time ago as the Cold War order came crumbling down is happening today.

One of the distinct features of the postwar regime in Northeast Asia which is different from the postwar regime of Europe is the division of the Korean Peninsula. In Europe, Germany, which caused World War II, was divided. In East Asia, however, it was not the war-causing Japan, but Korea was divided instead. Then, the postwar regime was formed, and the Cold War began. From a Korean perspective, the Japanese Peace Constitution is a promise of peace in East Asia and the price of the division of the Korean peninsula. That constitution represented a promise that no ruthless wars of invasion should ever take place in the region. It also represented the aspiration of the Japanese people toward a genuine democracy.

Not only Japan, but also South Korean Constitution clearly states its duty to commit to international peace and non-aggression. Contrary to its intention to keep peace, the Korean war broke out in 1950 on the Korean peninsula. Koreans are as much responsible for it, as are the external parties. Sixteen countries, including the United States, sent their troops to aid South Koreans' war effort, while China also took part in the Korean War to aid North Korea. Seven decades have passed since its onset, but the war has yet to be ended until now.

The unstable armistice regime on the Korean Peninsula profoundly shapes the daily lives of not just Koreans but also the peoples of all the neighboring nations. The Korean War has influenced not just China which dispatched troops in Korea, but also the evolution of the postwar democracy in Japan. The contradiction between the Peace Constitution and the U.S.-Japan alliance and the contradiction between the exclusive defense article and Japan's position as the United States' outpost in Northeast Asia has consistently come into conflict with Japanese people's aspirations toward democracy and peace, both during and after the Cold War.

What would have happened to Northeast Asia, if Washington and Tokyo had established diplomatic relations with Pyongyang just as Seoul established diplomatic relations with Beijing and Moscow? How would things have been different today, if the relations between the nations involved had been restored and normalized during

the very brief Spring of the Korean Peninsula in June through October 2000? The short-lived *détente* ended abruptly after the election of the Bush administration and the war on terror. North Korea cannot be held solely accountable for the unstable state of affairs that has engulfed the Korean Peninsula and the surrounding region ever since.

Three decades have passed since the collapse of the Cold War. East Asia has since transformed itself into the center of global production and logistics, and economic dependence among countries has unprecedentedly increased. Military tension, however, has been escalating to new heights in the region as well. One of the reasons that trigger military tensions in the region is the Korean Peninsula, which has become more unstable and unbalanced. Another locus is the sea around Asia, the so-called 'Indo-Pacific', where tensions have risen over the past decade.

The rivalry between the United States and China continues to escalate in this region. The Japanese government has been fueling the tension by inviting and hosting the United States' cutting-edge weapons systems, with the goal of 'securing the right to collective self-defense. The South Korean government is also gradually following by providing the largest foreign base for the U.S. troops in the world.

Fundamental issues of the deadlock of the Korean Peninsula peace process and a new approach

After the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games in 2018 and the April 27 Panmunjeom Declaration by the leaders of the two Koreas, it was not only the residents of the Korean Peninsula but also people urging for peace in East Asia that desperately wanted a historical turning point. The establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula is a process of resolving the disputes, conflicts and distortions that have occurred during the colonial era and the cold war era, and one generation thereafter in East Asia. It is also to stop new conflicts and disputes that may occur again or are already starting in the 'Indo-Pacific Region.'

Since the 2019 North Korea–United States Hanoi Summit ended without an agreement because of a disagreement on the order of implementation of the said agreement and its corresponding measures, the Korean Peninsula peace process has retreated. As the 2019 North Korea–United States Hanoi Summit ended without reaching an agreement, the US lost the opportunity to freeze North Korea's production of nuclear materials, and North Korea lost the possibility of easing some sanctions connected to its people's livelihoods. The two sides may need to negotiate with more practical and step-by-step solutions. For the ultimate success of the process, however, it is necessary to narrow the gap in perception regarding a few fundamental issues that have been causing distrust and conflict and to prepare appropriate countermeasures.

The first issue is the substantial reduction of mutual threats. South Korea's defense spending in 2019 amounted to KRW46.7 trillion, which is 1.3 times North Korea's estimated total GNI (Bank of Korea estimate) KRW35.5 trillion. The Moon Jae-in administration has been increasing its defense spending by 5.4% - 8.2% each year during his presidency, and continues to develop nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers and satellite launch vehicles. Another issue is 'the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.' It is questionable whether it is possible to request North Korea to give up its military strategy dependent on nuclear deterrence while the Korean Peninsula strategy of South Korea and the US still depends on nuclear deterrence itself. The third issue is the transition to a new relationship. It is desirable that the US and South Korea, which have an overwhelming advantage in terms of military power and military spending, should take and lead with proactive measures to improve relationships, e.g., stop or refrain from military threats like military exercise. The last issue is about value-oriented diplomacy or human rights diplomacy. Putting forward 'values,' but forcing the choice of sides and reinforcing an exclusive military alliance may increase military tensions in the region and may not be effective in improving human rights.

The Korean Peninsula faces a typical security dilemma. For the past 70 years, North and South Korea and the international society have failed to resolve this dilemma. A new approach must be realistic and fundamental at the same time. Peace must be achieved in a peaceful way, not through military means. The parties who have suffered from division and war must become the main subjects and speak out their voices.

The <Peace Campaign to End the Korean War> is a global peace action that delivers the call for the end of the '70-year-old Korean War and to move from conflict to peace' beyond the Korean Peninsula throughout the world. The main calls of this campaign are to △end the Korean War and sign a peace agreement, △create the Korean peninsula and the world free from nuclear weapons and nuclear threats, △solve problems through a dialogue and cooperation, and △stop the arms race and invest in human security and environmental sustainability.

To achieve this goal, the campaign expects to collect 100 million signatures and to draw declaration from the civic societies, religious circles, governments and assemblies of the world from 2020, the 70th anniversary of the Korean War, till 2023, the 70th anniversary of the armistice agreement.

It is essential to prepare a tight international cooperation and support. Most of all, civil society and governments' support from the countries involved in the Korean War and around the Korean peninsula is essential. Fortunately, the minimum foundation for communication and cooperation related to peace on the Korean Peninsula at the level of civil societies is established, with information sharing and consultation on

activities targeting the governments and political circles of the US and Japan taking place frequently. However, to overcome the absolute limitations, and maximize the influence of the peace campaign, closer and more precise communication and cooperation will be necessary.

Meanwhile, cooperation with the civil societies and governments of China and Russia still remain a challenge. North Korean civil society's participation to this campaign will contribute greatly to the success of this campaign.

The roles of the participants in the Korean War and the neutral nations that supervised the armistice agreement are also as important as those of the major parties to the war. However, until now, the participants in the Korean War have been named only when the war is commemorated, not when establishing peace. Now, it is urgent that the civil societies, political circles, and governments of these countries should participate in ending the 70-year-old war. The cooperation with the civil societies and governments of the neutral nations, which served on the Armistice Agreement Oversight Committee, has not been spotlighted as much as its importance warrants. The most important partnership is that of the civil societies between South and North Korea.

After all, the success or failure of this campaign depends on how many people will show interest and take part in peace on the Korean Peninsula, and band together, for which we ask you earnestly to become Korea peacemakers.