



# SEEKING PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

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A KOREA POLICY INSTITUTE READER

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## TIME FOR A PEOPLE'S POLICY TOWARD KOREA

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## **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 dissing 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 matter 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.

## Seeking Peace on the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Policy Institute Reader

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## **NORTH KOREA ISSUE IS NOT DE-NUCLEARIZATION BUT DE-COLONIZATION**

Ajamu Baraka | September 30, 2018

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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.

imperialist interests in the region drives the logic of regional dominance, which means peace, decolonization 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 decolonization of South Korea.

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