

## The “Korea Question” and problems of nuclear-proliferation in East Asia

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### **Introduction**

It is 50 years since the Korean War began and technically, it has not ended yet. Although it was one of the by products of the Cold War, the global political and diplomatic struggle between the Communist and non-Communist systems following World War II, it was the first attempt by the two Koreas to solve their division by military means. Although the limited international war was halted with the truce agreement in 1953, the two Koreas are not living in peace and still view each other as the main security threat. The war failed to reunite the country but instead deepened the division of the ethnically homogeneous nation with its distinct culture and long history.

Shortly after the end of the Cold War between East and West, the situation on the Korean peninsula also began to improve and the two Koreas attempted to reduce tension through high-level talks. Both Koreas even gave up their claim to be the sole representative of Korea and joined the UN separately in September 1991 as internationally recognised sovereign states. Now over 120 countries have diplomatic relations with both Koreas.

As the two Koreas agreed to accommodate each other and to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula, suspicion about North Korea's nuclear program emerged and almost led to a military conflict. Although the crisis was peacefully defused through the Geneva Framework Agreement, the Cold War between the two states persists and is endangering peace and security in the region. Most attempts in the past to change this situation and de-escalate the conflict failed, mainly because of mutual distrust and fear. Only after the political transition in South Korea two years ago has another attempt to end confrontation been initiated, with the two Koreas now approaching each other anew, working for a breakthrough. The upcoming summit meeting between the two Koreas can be a first step towards ending the war and bringing progress in the South-North dialogue. A peaceful settlement of the Korea question is urgent and is the key to a nuclear-weapons-free Korea.

### **Historical background of the problem**

The origin of the conflict is to be found in the artificial division of Korea after World War II and in the failure to reach an agreement on the method to be used for giving independence to Korea by the occupying powers, the USA and the Soviet Union. The main aim in temporarily dividing Korea militarily along the 38th parallel was to co-ordinate the withdrawal of Japanese troops from China and Korea. However, because of the emerging Cold War between the two major powers, two contrasting political systems were established in the two zones, with each side refusing to recognise the other and claiming sole jurisdiction and legitimacy for the whole of Korea. Each claimed to be the sole representative of the divided nation.

The desire to unify the country was and still is equally strong in both parts of the country. After the total withdrawal of the US and Soviet troops from Korea in 1949, the North was economically and militarily much better off than the South. The North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, decided to solve the problem of non-recognition and of the division by force. Kim Il-sung went to Moscow in April to convince Stalin and in May 1950 to China in order to obtain the approval of Mao, too. In Moscow he could secure Stalin's support in return

for political as well as some material gains from Korea.<sup>1</sup> Stalin was cautious and was against the adventure at the beginning but was convinced by Kim Il-sung that the war could be won easily.

The motives behind North Korea's decision to attack South Korea, however, had as much to do with internal Korean politics north and south of the 38th parallel as with the Cold War itself. Considerable civil strife and growing opposition to South Korea's president, Rhee Syng-man, and the US decision to exclude South Korea from the defence line in early 1950, persuaded the North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, that he would be welcomed by many South Koreans as a liberator reuniting the two Koreas and overthrowing the Rhee government. Kim Il-sung was right in that the government in the South was losing the support of the people and was militarily weakened after the US refusal to give military aid. However, he failed to recognise that the nuclear explosion of the Soviet Union and the establishment of a Communist regime in China in October 1949 had changed the strategic thinking of the US and accordingly the importance of Korea. In addition, the South Korean President Rhee Syng-man knew how to deal with the US Government and General Douglas MacArthur, who at that time was the supreme commander of the US troops in Japan.

As the North Korean troops launched a surprise attack against the South early on the morning of June 25, 1950, President Truman responded quickly by sending troops from Japan to Korea and mobilised the UN to undertake its first ever international military action. Unfortunately for the North, the Soviet Union was not present at the UN Security Council at that time, as a protest against the non-recognition of Communist China in the UN, so it was unable to veto the action against the North. On the same day the UN Security Council condemned the invasion as a breach of peace and an act of aggression and called for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal to the 38th parallel. With the refusal of North Korea to withdraw from the South, President Truman decided to help Korea, and the Security Council on June 27th, 1950 called for members to help South Korea.

The Security Council decided on July 7th to establish a Unified Command for the UN Forces in Korea and mandated a joint military action to repel the troops from the North and to restore the status quo in Korea. General MacArthur was designated by the US government as the supreme commander of the UN forces in Korea, and South Korean President Rhee Syng-man put the South Korean military under his command.<sup>2</sup> The UN military action in Korea, grouped in the US Eighth Army under General MacArthur, was able to accomplish its mission in Korea by October 7, 1950 by restoring the status quo in Korea. The war could have ended here after restoring the status quo.

However, sensing an opportunity not only to stop but also to roll back Communist expansion and to unify the country by force, General MacArthur and President Rhee Syng-man decided to march forward to the North. President Truman approved orders for UN forces to cross the 38th parallel and to push the enemy above the Yalu River, although China had warned repeatedly against such an action. By October 25 some advance units had reached the Yalu river and victory was close, but they were confronted with an unexpected enemy, the Chinese "volunteers". The Chinese began to move into North Korea in massive numbers and together with North Korean troops started an offensive. They pushed back UN forces to below the 38th parallel, and recaptured Seoul in January 1951. The conflict had developed into a limited international war involving the United States and 19 other nations on one side and China and North Korea on the other.

As the military situation developed unfavourably for the Allied forces, General MacArthur asked President Truman to authorise the use of nuclear weapons against China and North Korea. The Chinese and North Korean leaders were aware of this possibility at the time. Fortunately, although some US military leaders favoured the

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<sup>1</sup> 16 Secret Soviet documents which Russian President Boris Yeltsin presented to South Korean President Kim Young-sam on June 1994 reveal that Kim Il-sung could not start a war without Soviet approval. Stalin was interested in getting 25,000 tons of lead per year. See, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nr. 5, Spring 1995, p. 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> American forces, those of South Korea, and combat contingents from Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey, with medical units from Denmark, India, and Sweden, were placed under a unified UN command headed by the U.S. commander in chief in the Far East, General Douglas MacArthur.

nuclear option, President Truman decided not to use the weapons for a number of reasons.<sup>3</sup> President Truman discharged General MacArthur over this issue and redefined American policy by abandoning his objective of military reunification of Korea. He wanted to limit the war quickly and decided to leave the reunification of Korea for a future political settlement. His aim was now a return to the status quo ante bellum, even as the Chinese and North Koreans were advancing southward. Truman was unwilling to engage in an all-out war which could have led to a world war involving the Soviet Union.

As the war reached a new phase with massive intervention of Chinese "volunteers", the UN General Assembly formally proposed a cease-fire and in a resolution in December 1950. Following some preparatory talks, representatives of the UN and Communist commands began formal truce negotiations in July 1951 at Kaesong, North Korea. Although conducted in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust, more than two years of hard negotiations finally resulted in settlement of major issues. The death of Stalin, along with the arrival of President Eisenhower in the White House, brought an end to the three years of bitter fighting with heavy casualties in both sides. An armistice agreement between the UN forces, represented by the US, and China and North Korea was drawn up and signed.<sup>4</sup>

South Korean President Rhee Syng-man, however, wanting to unify the country by force with the help of the US, refused to sign the truce agreement.<sup>5</sup> Instead, he signed a mutual defence treaty with the US in October 1953 and arranged for the continued presence of US forces in South Korea.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent Geneva Conference on Korea in April 1954, with major powers and all conflicting parties participating, failed to find a political solution to the Korea question.

The failure of the two attempts to unify the nation by force by the two Koreas only deepened the division, making any contact with each other impossible. To make the situation even more complicated, another historical mistake was made by the North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, in 1961. He misinterpreted the military coup by General Park Chung-hee and young officers in South Korea on May 16th, 1961 as an attempt by the US and South Korea to invade North Korea. Within two weeks after the military coup in the South, Kim Il-sung rushed to Moscow and Peking, and signed security treaties with these socialist countries.<sup>7</sup> These moves, however, were viewed in South Korea as a renewed North Korean determination to invade and communise the South by force.

The result of the consequent mutual fear and mistrust was an arms build-up and closed societies under the primacy of national security, albeit with slight difference, in both Koreas. Each blaming the other side for the partition and failure of national unity, as well as the threat of invasion. For the political leaders of each side it was useful to talk about unification, because it was not only feasible but undesirable. Accordingly, the people on

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<sup>3</sup> General MacArthur was strongly in favor of using nuclear weapons on Korea and on China. For the political and military considerations of employment of nuclear weapons during the Korean War, see Daniel Calingaert, "Nuclear Weapons and the Korean War", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, June 1988, p. 177-207.

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. suffered 157,530 casualties; deaths from all causes totaled 33,629, of which 23,300 occurred in combat. South Korea sustained 1,312,836 military casualties, including 415,004 dead; casualties among other UN allies totaled 16,532, including 3094 dead. Chinese casualties were for some time exaggerated and believed to be around two million. For the first time, Chinese leader Hu Yao-bang revealed to East German leader Erich Honecker in October 1986 in Peking that China sent over one million "volunteers" to Korea but had suffered 390,000 casualties. Furthermore, China spent five billion rubles to buy arms and ammunition from the USSR. Mao's only son was killed during the war in Korea. It took 30 years to normalise relations between the US and China.

<sup>5</sup> For the role of the US in Korea and President Rhee Syng-man's refusal to sign the truce agreement, see Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960*. Seoul: Panmun Book Co., 1978.

<sup>6</sup> For the text of the treaty, see Se-jin Kim (ed.), *Korean Unification: Source Materials with an Introduction*. Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1978, p. 183-184.

<sup>7</sup> This was revealed in the confidential documents of the former East German government. East German intelligence reported to East Berlin that Kim Il-sung was overreacting to the domestic development in South Korea.

each side had to suffer from special types of dictatorships based on pseudo-nationalism and on a perceived constant threat of a divided nation. This seed of distrust and insecurity is still the major stumbling block to normal relations between the two opposing states of a divided nation.

### **Proliferation attempts of the two Koreas**

Even though, Koreans, next to the Japanese, suffered the most in the nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki,<sup>8</sup> the two Koreas have ambivalent feelings about nuclear weapons and have lived in the past in the constant danger of a nuclear war. Because of the delicate political situation since the Korean War, the Korean Peninsula has the highest risk of nuclear proliferation in the world.

#### **South Korea**

After barely surviving the Korean war, in 1953 South Korea entered into a Mutual Defence Treaty with the USA which established a number of US military bases in Korea. In addition to the deployment of nuclear weapons, the US reserved the right of first use of nuclear weapons, not only to deter but also to repel any attack on South Korea. As a small country surrounded by hostile neighbours armed with nuclear weapons, South Korea believed it necessary to have the US nuclear umbrella to survive. Thus it disregarded North Korea's allegations that the US nuclear weapons in South Korea were a constant threat to its existence.

Shortly after a group of North Korean commandos nearly succeeded in mounting a sneak attack on the presidential palace on January 21, 1968, President Park Chung-hee announced his determination to seek a "self-reliant national defence." His determination was strengthened by the announcement by US President-elect Richard Nixon in Guam (the Guam Doctrine), 1969 of his decision to disengage from Asia including Korea which created a shock wave throughout Asia. To make the situation worse, after learning of the decision to withdraw the US 7th Infantry Division of the US from South Korea in 1971, President Park Chung-hee decided to start a nuclear weapons program.<sup>9</sup> Although he was forced to put it on hold by the US, he continued to seek technical aid from France.

President Park Chung-hee again made it known openly in 1975 that South Korea would begin with the development of nuclear weapons if the US removed its nuclear umbrella from the Korean Peninsula. He indicated that South Korea was only refraining from developing nuclear weapons in conformity with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Subsequently, South Korea signed a one-billion-dollar contract with France to purchase a reprocessing plant in conformity with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. However, under the US pressure, President Park had to cancel the deal in early 1976. Nevertheless, he kept the option by continuing independent research by a secret South Korean nuclear research team.

As US President Jimmy Carter decided in 1977 to reduce the US ground forces in South Korea, President Park threatened again that if North Korea went nuclear and if the USA pulled out its troops from Korea, South

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<sup>8</sup> Until 1945 Korea was part of Japan and therefore many Koreans lived in those two cities. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Koreans died in or suffered severely from the blasts.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed report on this issue, see Robert Gillette, "US Squelched Apparent S. Korea A-Bomb Drive", *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 4, 1978, p. 1, 14-15; Young-Sun Song, "North Korea's Potential to Develop Nuclear Weapons", *Vantage Point*, Volume 14, No. 8, August 1991, p. 2; Won-Chol Oh, "Nuclear Development in Korea in the 1970s", *Pacific Research*, November 1994, pp. 11-18; Mark B.M. Suh, "Nuclear Policy of the Republic of Korea: Non-Proliferation and Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula", in Carin A. Wedar et. al (eds.), *Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World*. Stockholm: Swedish Initiatives, 1993, pp. 215-222.

Korea would reconsider its own nuclear option.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, this threat represented an attempt by President Park to pressure the US government to remain in South Korea as long as the tension on the Korean peninsula existed. President Carter put pressure on South Korea to stop the nuclear program, and in return cancelled the plan to withdraw US troops from Korea in mid-1979. President Park, however, maintained a secret nuclear program and it was only after his assassination that President Chun Doo-hwan, immediately after taking over the power through a military coup in 1980, stopped the project and disbanded the nuclear research group.

South Korea was kept from developing nuclear weapons in the past not by heavy pressure but mainly by the continued military presence of the US, including the nuclear umbrella.<sup>11</sup>

### North Korea

North Korea was openly threatened with the use of nuclear weapons by the US during the war and was barely saved by the Chinese. It perceived the presence of the US forces in South Korea as a constant threat to its existence, and only from 1961 on did it feel secure through the military alliances with the Soviet Union and China. But with the détente between the US and the Soviet Union, as well as China, since the early 1970s, it felt its allies were no longer reliable.

North Korea started its nuclear program in the early '60s primarily with the help of the Soviet Union. Since the 1970s North Korea repeatedly proposed a nuclear weapon-free zone on the Korean peninsula. These proposals were ignored by the US and South Korea as an attempt to force the withdrawal of the US tactical nuclear weapons deployed in South Korea and abandoned of the military strategy of nuclear deterrence.

Although North Korea signed the NPT in 1985, it refused to conclude a safeguard agreement with the IAEA within the time limit prescribed by the Treaty, arguing that the US tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea would have to be withdrawn in return. Nevertheless, because of its economic weakness, outsiders did not suspect North Korean intention to develop nuclear weapons until the late '80s. Beginning in 1989 there was a rumor that North Korea was working on an ambitious nuclear weapons program.<sup>12</sup> North Korea dismissed the allegation and stated that it was working on peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Responding to the end of the Soviet threat and fearing inadequate control and custody of Soviet nuclear weapons, the US announced the withdrawal of all US land-based, air-borne and sea-based non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe and Asia in September 1991, and urged the Soviet Union to do the same with its nuclear deployment abroad. Following the decision of the US to withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from Korea, the South Korean President Roh Tae-woo announced in November 1991 that there were no nuclear weapons in Korea. North Korea finally signed the full-scale safeguards agreement with IAEA in 1992. Accordingly, North Korea agreed to give IAEA inspectors access to its nuclear facilities. It seemed that one of the most serious proliferation threats was about to be defused.

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<sup>10</sup> See Joachim Glaubitz, *Zur Frage des Abzugs der amerikanischen Landesstreitkräfte aus Südkorea: Beweggründe, Konzepte und Revision einer asienpolitischen Entscheidung*. Ebenhausen: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 1980, pp. 61-63.

<sup>11</sup> South Korea felt treated unfairly in the US policy of nonproliferation, as Japan could acquire these technologies. See Taewoo Kim, "South Korea's Nuclear Dilemmas", *Korea and World Affairs*, Volume 16, No. 2, Summer 1992, pp. 274-280.

<sup>12</sup> North Korea is believed to have achieved significant progress in its nuclear-weapons development program and is seen as one of the key proliferating states. See for example Jane E. Nolan, "Proliferation and International Security: An Overview", in W. Thomas Wander and Eric H. Arnett (eds.), *The Proliferation of Advanced Weaponry: Technology, Motivations, and Responses*. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1992, pp. 6 and 10; B. Sanders, "North Korea, South Africa ready to tell all?", *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Volume 47, No. 7, September 1991; George D. Moffett III, "Last Remaining Hot Spot of the Cold War Asked to Cool Its Desire for Nuclear Weapons", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 February 1992, p. 3.

The two Koreas even signed the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in January 1992. The two sides not only committed themselves not to test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons, but also not to possess sensitive enrichment and reprocessing facilities. They committed themselves to peaceful uses only of nuclear energy. The stated aim of this declaration was to eliminate the danger of nuclear war and to create an environment and conditions favourable for peace and peaceful unification of the divided country. The declaration entered into force in February 1992, after the exchange of instruments signed by the two presidents. To implement the declaration, a South-North Joint Nuclear Control Commission was established, and negotiation of compliance measure was begun. It was also agreed that each side could conduct inspection of the objects agreed upon by both sides.

Just as the situation was improving, US intelligence analysts came to suspect that North Korea had already produced enough weapons-grade plutonium to make one or two nuclear devices.<sup>13</sup> The IAEA conducted 6 ad hoc inspections of the declared nuclear sites from June 1992 to February 1993. These inspections did not clear up the suspicion, however, but further hardened the claim. To help clear up that issue, the US and the IAEA demanded that North Korea permit "special" inspections of two suspected nuclear waste sites in addition to the seven known nuclear-related facilities. Measurements of radioactivity and other procedures at the suspected waste sites would help solve how much plutonium has been produced through the reprocessing of spent fuel in recent years.

North Korea refused to allow the desired special inspection, claiming that the two sites were non-nuclear military installations. In response to UN resolutions and an ultimatum demanding access to the sites, North Korea stopped further ad hoc inspections and declared that it would withdraw from the NPT in March 1993. At the same time, North Korea demanded bilateral and high-level direct negotiations with the US to solve this issue. Direct dialogue between the two Koreas, including the negotiations of the South-North Joint Nuclear Control Commission, ceased.

The US government agreed to start low-level negotiations with North Korea in New York and Geneva in June and July 1993, respectively. North Korea agreed to suspend its withdrawal from the NPT. Subsequently, on February 25th, 1994, the US decided to enter into high-level, comprehensive negotiations with North Korea. However, North Korea removed fuel rods from its nuclear reactor in May/June and refused to allow the IAEA to take selective samples from the rods during removal. With international pressure mounting, it then decided to leave the IAEA.

The crisis escalated further, and a military conflict on the peninsula seemed unavoidable.<sup>14</sup> Former US president Jimmy Carter made a surprise visit to North Korea and defused the crisis. North Korea offered to "freeze" its nuclear program, and the US agreed to begin the third round of comprehensive negotiations with North Korea on July 8th, 1994, in Geneva.<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, a historical first-ever summit meeting between the presidents of the two Koreas was even scheduled. Shortly before the summit meeting, as the delegates of the US and North Korea began to negotiate in Geneva, North Korean President Kim Il-sung suddenly died. The planned summit meeting was cancelled, and negotiations in Geneva were postponed.

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13 For a detailed study of the North Korean nuclear program, see Kongdan Oh, "Nuclear Proliferation in North Korea", in W. Thomas Wander and Eric H. Arnett (eds.), *The Proliferation of Advanced Weaponry: Technology, Motivations, and Responses*. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1992, pp. 165-176; and David Albrecht and Mark Hibbs, "North Korea's Plutonium Puzzle", *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, November 1992, pp. 36-40.

14 Secretary of Defense William Perry revealed in Congress details of a plan to fight a war with North Korea after bombing the nuclear complex in Yonbyon in summer 1994. *UPI*, January 24, 1995.

15 The "freeze" includes commitments by North Korea not to reload the reactor with new fuel, not to reprocess the spent fuel, and to allow inspectors continuous access to the spent fuel storage pond.

In August high-level delegations resumed negotiations in Geneva. Finally, on October 21st, 1994, the US and North Korea signed the Geneva Framework Agreement in their efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem, laying the groundwork for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.<sup>16</sup> Interim arrangements were negotiated to defuse the immediate nuclear crisis and to initiate a long-term process to integrate North Korea into the international community, as well as to deter repetition of a potentially catastrophic confrontation. In order to induce North Korea to drop its nuclear weapons program, the US not only committed itself to deliver two light-water nuclear reactors worth \$ 5 billion and an interim energy supply, but also to expand diplomatic and economic ties with North Korea.

The success of the negotiation was possible only because the US made far-reaching political concessions by dealing with North Korea directly as a state and by postponing the demand to clarify past activities. Furthermore, the US promised not to threaten or to use nuclear weapons against North Korea. In return, North Korea promised to stop the program and to resume dialogue with South Korea in order to implement the agreed denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula of 1992 and thereby to keep the peninsula nuclear-weapons free.

The Framework Agreement not only defused the conflict and stopped the proliferation danger, but also ushered in a new chance of accommodation between the two Koreas. After some interruptions and delays on the South Korean side, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) with the participation of South Korea, Japan, the EU and the US was established in March 1995 in New York. North Korea closed down research reactor, and the US started delivering crude oil. KEDO selected the Korean Electric Power Company (KEPCO), a South Korean company, as the primary contractor to fulfill its obligations to supply a light water reactor to North Korea based on the Ulchin-3 and -4 designs in South Korea. KEDO is not only responsible for ensuring that a South Korean reference model light water reactor will be built in North Korea but is also a security building measure. Although the project is already a few years behind schedule, at present a few hundreds South Korean engineers and workers are building the light water reactors in North Korea.

North Korean and US experts finally started canning the used nuclear fuel rods in April 1996. The submarine incident of September 1996 almost derailed and further delayed the project for a few months. After the formal apology for the incident by North Korea in late December 1996, the canning operation was resumed and finally completed in May 2000.

Despite the continued implementation of the Agreed Framework since October 1994, suspicions about North Korea's secret nuclear activities still exist, and the nuclear impasse is not yet over. North Korea's long-range missile launch in summer 1998 aroused additional concerns about peace and stability in the region. Once some 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods are shipped to a third country, the danger of proliferation of North Korea will be greatly reduced. Therefore, the successful implementation of the Geneva agreement is crucial for keeping the peninsula free of nuclear weapons.

### **Ways to sustain a nuclear-weapon-free Korea**

North and South Korea each resorted to military means to unify the country. Such attempts, however, only deepened the division and caused incalculable economic and social damage to the nation as well as to individuals. Because of the long separation and lack of exchanges, the undeniable realities that the two Koreas have very little in common. Neither has any jurisdiction over the other, and the two have gone to opposite directions in the past 55 years. However, each still claims to be the sole representative of the nation which no longer exists. The two Koreas need to face reality and start normal relations with each other as good neighbours. Because of their domestic political constraints, they need international assistance to make this radical but simple political change. South Korea still fears a North Korean attack, just as North Korea fears a South Korean attack. These fears have been used and are still being used for domestic political purposes and as a stabilising factor for each system. Unification is put forward as a major government policy, but not as a real possibility to reunite

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<sup>16</sup> See Richard Nelson and Kenneth Weisbrode, "Interim Arrangements for North Korea: Are They Secure?", *Bulletin of the Atlantic Council*, Vol. V, No. 12, December 30, 1994, pp. 1-4.

people and to reduce human suffering. For the purpose of saving the system, even contacts between separated families are forbidden.

The new government in South Korea headed by the former dissident Kim Dae-jung has already signaled its desire for reconciliation with North Korea. The two Koreas now have chance to start a new relationship by accommodating each other. To this end, international bridge building is much needed to end the confrontation. Under all circumstances, the Geneva Agreed Framework must be implemented without any delay to reduce the danger of proliferation and to serve as a basis for nuclear cooperation as well as other forms of security-related cooperation.

If the two Koreas change their relations from confrontation to accommodation, even a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) covering Japan and the two Koreas might be possible. This would not only enhance peace, but also stabilise the nuclear status quo in the region. Because of Japan’s large-scale plutonium stockpiles and its ambitious space program, some countries in the region are suspicious of Japan’s intentions. A Japanese initiative for creating a NWFZ covering itself would help to alleviate these concerns.

In addition to supporting these NWFZ initiatives, the United States should take a more active role in nuclear transparency and confidence-building measures in the region. The mutual benefit of a cooperative mechanism for a nuclear-weapons-free Korea may offer opportunities for shaping a regional political framework to ameliorate distrust among neighbours. The fundamental interest in non-proliferation of these countries can function to create a new security system for the region.

To reduce the danger of proliferation and to sustain the nuclear-weapon free Korea, several steps need to be taken:

- The two Koreas must commit themselves not to use force to settle differences, and to normalise their relations. To this end, they should sign a basic treaty recognising each other as separate systems with sole jurisdiction, and exchange representatives in each capital.<sup>17</sup> The basic agreement of 1991 could be the foundation for a formal treaty.
- Until a formal treaty of mutual recognition is signed and ratified, North and South Korea should respect the truce agreement and refrain from using the reunification issue for the purpose of detracting from serious domestic political problems or from irritating the other side intentionally by increasing tension. Since both of them are undergoing radical transformation, it is crucial that each side be free from interference by the other.
- Once they have normalised relations, they should start negotiations to reduce their armed forces gradually to the level at which neither could be a military threat to the other. The US forces in Korea should oversee the reduction on both sides and guarantee the security of both Koreas.
- The US should recognise and establish diplomatic relations with North Korea, as promised in 1994. In return, North Korea should sign and ratify the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions as well as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and refrain from exporting missiles to other regions.

Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction are seen by the two Koreas not only as a tool of war, but also as one of deterrence and coercive diplomacy, and they are regarded as essential for each state’s survival as well as for national unification. Unlike most other countries seeking nuclear capabilities, here political prestige or regional hegemony (big power ambition) plays no role at all. Therefore, accommodation between the two Koreas is the key to eliminating the danger of proliferation. Finding the answer to the “Korea question” is now not only possible, but also essential, to reduce the danger of proliferation in the region.

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<sup>17</sup> The two Germanies signed a basic treaty recognising each other in 1972; this was no hindrance to later unification.