

A Grand Bargain: Peace Terms for Korea

Written by Walter C. Clemens Jr.

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WALTER C. CLEMENS JR., JAN 21 2011

How can Korea become a zone of peace rather than a crucible for war? Talks and actions to calm the present confrontation are needed, but the key players must work toward a long-term solution. They need to create a grand bargain that meets each party's security needs and improves its economic prospects.

Nearly six decades since the Korean War, the key players in Northeast Asia need to supplant the 1953 armistice with a viable peace treaty. Failure to sign a peace treaty leaves the door open to renewed hostilities. Hardliners strut and shout across the stage. Each player finds cause to distrust the others. Duplicity and double dealing have been common—not only between Communist and non-Communist players, but also among nominal allies in Pyongyang, Moscow, and Beijing. The North asserts that the South's maneuvers with U.S. forces are provocative. The South fumes that its citizens and property have been attacked. All parties need to cool their self-righteousness and try to view things as the others do.

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"If they invade (????? ????), we'll unleash revenge on the American pigs! (????? ????!)."

The grand bargain must accept the reality of two Korean states. So long as Pyongyang and Seoul see themselves in a win-or-lose struggle, neither can contemplate a closer union or even a confederation. Nobody can know if or when the regime in Pyongyang will implode. Nor can we know how Beijing would view a unified Korea, even if Seoul retains only a "benign alliance" with Washington. .

Peace in Korea will require major changes in the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West (Yellow) Sea. Yes, the 1953 Armistice Agreement gave South Korea five islands close to North Korean coasts. But the NLL established by the United Nations *after* the armistice spawns conflict. An international mediator would probably say that it violates customary international law. Instead of following the southwest trajectory of the Demilitarized Zone on land, the NLL curves northward. It leads to disputes over fishing rights and complicates shipping lanes for both North and South.

North Korea for decades has sought direct negotiations with the United States. Provided that Washington stands by South Korea, the United States should officially recognize its long-time adversary. Diplomatic recognition does not imply approval. An exchange of embassies can improve understanding and communication. Despite East Germany's repressive regime, the United States and West Germany recognized the German Democratic Republic in 1973.

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Seventeen years later, the two Germanys became one.

Pyongyang's leaders want security for themselves and for North Korea. Having pursued a nuclear deterrent for decades, North Korea developed the nuclear devices tested in 2006 and 2009. If the North's arsenal expands, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan may take countermeasures that cascade from China to India to Pakistan. Meanwhile, North Koreans' living standards continue to deteriorate. More North Koreans are fleeing. Despite the regime's slogan of self-reliance, the North needs aid and access to the world's stocks of knowledge and opportunity.

North Korea now has a small nuclear arsenal that Pyongyang will not abolish except for substantial rewards. The price seemed right in 1994 when Pyongyang halted plutonium production in exchange for U.S. promises of heavy fuel oil and two light water reactors. This "agreed framework" endured for eight years until the Bush Administration broke off negotiations and positioned North Korea on an "axis of evil."

Sometimes things get worse before they get better. Stepping back from the Cuban brink, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in 1963 set up a hot line, restricted nuclear testing, and increased trade. All the players in Northeast Asia should recall the U.S.-Soviet model and shift from confrontation to détente by steps both small and large..

Here is an outline for resolving conflicts in Northeast Asia:

- Establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the DPRK.
- Peace Treaty ending the Korean War signed by Washington (for the UN), Seoul, Pyongyang, and Beijing.
- Reaffirmation that all of Korea is a nuclear-weapons free zone; dismantlement of nuclear weapon assets verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency; and renewed commitment by all parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.
- The U.S. agrees to supply fuel oil and electric power facilities to the North equal to those pledged in the 1994 Agreed Framework.
- The DPRK permits direct foreign investment and business operations and reaffirms the property rights of all ROK enterprises established in the North.
- All parties, including Japan and Russia, agree to share their resources and know-how with the North and to facilitate DPRK participation in international trade and banking organizations.
- The ROK and DPRK agree to reduce all branches of their armed forces by 50 percent in stages from 2011 to 2015.
- An end to all sanctions against the DPRK by the UN and by the U.S. and its partners
- Establishment of a demilitarized zone in waters off both Koreas in which neither bases nor maneuvers are permitted. The ROK retains the five islands awarded to the South in 1953, but fishermen from North and South may operate in the West Sea up to the waters under Chinese jurisdiction. Seoul and Beijing reconcile their claims to leo-do and surrounding waters.
- The DPRK and ROK agree to exchange thirty graduate students each year starting in 2012 and to expand joint cultural and athletic activities.
- The DMZ becomes a World Heritage Site to preserve its natural bounty.

Besides these formal commitments, the parties agree to cut back on hostile propaganda; step up family exchanges between North and South; and establish a joint facility to process and distribute fish from the West Sea.

Each concerned country will challenge aspects of this accord. On reflection, each should perceive that it will gain from the package and that no better deal is available.

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