

Forum: General Assembly 4

Issue: Establishing measures to deescalate tensions in the Korean Peninsula

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Introduction

Throughout history, there has been many countries that were divided against their will due to an invasion of an external force. The division of Germany (to East and West), Ireland (Separation of Northern Ireland) and Korea (to North and South) are some notable divisions that exist or have existed throughout history. One similarity between these divided countries is that it was a result of a political disagreement between the powerful nations.

The Korean Peninsula are one of the few countries that remain divided till this day. North and South Korea are two countries that were once together, representing the Korean Empire led by King Gojong. The conflict in the Korean Peninsula refers to the ongoing tensions and disputes between North Korea and South Korea, two separate nations located on the Korean Peninsula in East Asia. The conflict originated from the division of the Korean Peninsula following World War II. The two nations which are racially and culturally similar, have been separated since 1945 after the retreat of the Japanese army. Since then, political tensions have built up in the region, constantly facing conflicts. Few notable incidents that escalated the conflict are the Korean War, ROKS Cheonan sinking, multiple missile testing conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and more. Some of these conflicts have resulted in short-term skirmishes, military incidents, and diplomatic tensions. Tensions have been intensified with North Korea's quest for nuclear weapons and missiles' advancement. In the effort to resolve the matter and ensure peace and tranquility in Korea peninsula, the international community together with regional bodies that include China, USA and Japan have been engaged in various diplomatic efforts.

Several attempts to end the dispute and create permanent peace have involved negotiations between governments, multilateral discussions, and different treaties. For instance, the Six-Party talks are a noteworthy case that comprised North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. aimed at denuclearization of North Korea and building a peace regime. Regardless though, there is little advancement because it is still complicated due to a delicate situation in the North Korea.

In particular, the Conflict in the Korean peninsula is very important in the sense that it has great humanitarian, economic, and security implications both into the regional and the global scenes. This issue has not gone away and is still a matter of global concern. Different stakeholders including United Nations representatives are still trying to bring peace between North and South Korea.

This report will cover a range of incidents relating to the conflict in the Korean Peninsula and provide delegates with a clear understanding of the incident. It will also cover a range of previous attempts to solve the conflict and propose some solutions that may contribute to resolving this long-lasting issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Korean Peninsula

an Asian peninsula (off Manchuria) separating the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan; the Korean name is Dae-Han-Min-Gook or Han-Gook

Multilateral Discussions

a diplomatic approach in which multiple countries work together to address common issues and challenges. This involves engaging in dialogue and negotiation to achieve shared goals and promote cooperation among nations.

Arms Race

a competition between nations for superiority in the development and accumulation of weapons, especially between the US and the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

A demilitarized zone (DMZ) is an area in which treaties or agreements between states, military powers or contending groups forbid military installations, activities, or personnel. A DZ often lies along an established frontier or boundary between two or more military powers or alliances. A DZ may sometimes form a de facto international border, such as the Korean Demilitarized Zone.

Intercontinental ballistic missile

An intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is a ballistic missile with a range greater than 5,500 kilometres (3,400 mi), primarily designed for nuclear weapons delivery (delivering one or more thermonuclear warheads).

Background

At the end of World War II in 1945, Korea was split between two zones of occupation that lay at the 38th parallel line. The Soviet Union went into the North, and the Americans entered the South. The goal of this division was for the short run and instead formed two different governments with distinct policies. The Soviet Union enforced communist beliefs on the North and the United States (US) imposed Democratic beliefs on the South. Many believed that the US feared the Soviet takeover of the country and had to interfere. The US and Soviet Union had different political beliefs and the US were eager to stop the spread of communism in Asia.

The Korean War

In 1950, North Korea under Kim Il-Sung declared war on South Korea and aimed at reuniting the Korean peninsula by force of communism. That was the onset of the Korean war, which is a dreadful battle that continued for three years. It was not only a conflict between North and South Korea but another global conflict after World War II as it involved many other nations. The United Nations (UN) Army mainly consisting of American Soldiers backed the South Korean army while the Chinese together with their allies, Soviets helped their northern rivals.

The Korean war resulted in significant casualties and destruction in infrastructure for both sides. It is estimated that at least 2 million deaths throughout the war with around 592,000 deaths for North Korea, and 514,629 deaths for the South. The other participating nations also had many deaths. Some of these countries were, The United States with a total of 36,574 deaths, UK with 1,078, China with 183,000, and the Soviet Union with 282.

It was not until the year 1953 that the Korean war came to an end upon signing of an armistice agreement instead of a peace treaty. The demarcation line at the 38th parallel thus separated the two Koreas and the demilitarized zone remained a buffer. The armistice, however, could be said to only have paused the conflict, as the two Koreas have continued in contention.

The Korean War had far-reaching implications. It solidified the division of Korea into North and South and set the stage for the ongoing tensions and conflicts on the peninsula. It also had broader geopolitical implications, as it heightened Cold War rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union, with both sides supporting their respective allies in the conflict.

The war also had significant human and humanitarian consequences. It resulted in the loss of millions of lives, including soldiers and civilians, and left a lasting impact on the Korean people and their society. Families were separated, and the division of the peninsula created a long-standing humanitarian issue with many families still longing for reunification.

The sinking of Cheonan

The sinking of the Cheonan refers to the sinking of the South Korean naval ship, ROKS Cheonan, on March 26, 2010. The incident occurred near the maritime border between North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea. The Cheonan was a Pohang-class corvette of the Republic of Korea Navy. It was on a routine patrol mission when it suddenly exploded and sank, resulting in the loss of 46 sailors' lives. Initially, the cause of the sinking was unclear, and there were speculations that the ship might have hit a mine or encountered a technical failure. However, after a thorough investigation conducted by an international team of experts, it was concluded that the sinking was caused by a North Korean torpedo attack. The investigation revealed that a North Korean midget submarine fired a torpedo, which struck the Cheonan and caused the explosion.

The sinking of the Cheonan led to a significant escalation of tensions between North and South Korea. South Korea, along with several other countries, condemned the attack and called for international action. The

incident also resulted in an increase in military readiness and joint military exercises between South Korea and its allies. The international community expressed its support for South Korea, and the United Nations Security Council issued a statement condemning the sinking. However, North Korea denied any involvement in the incident and accused South Korea of fabricating the evidence. The sinking of the Cheonan had a lasting impact on the relationship between North and South Korea. It further strained the already tense relations on the Korean Peninsula and contributed to the deterioration of inter-Korean relations in subsequent years. The incident served as a reminder of the volatility and potential for conflict in the region.

North Korea's Missile testing

North Korea's ICBM tests have been a subject of concern for the international community due to the country's aggressive nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program. These tests have violated multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions that prohibit North Korea from conducting such activities. One notable series of tests occurred in 2017 when North Korea successfully tested its Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 ICBMs. The Hwasong-14 was described as an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) capable of reaching Alaska, while the Hwasong-15 was claimed to be an ICBM with the potential to reach the entire mainland United States. These tests raised alarm and heightened tensions in the region.

The international community, including the United States, South Korea, and Japan, condemned these tests and called for further sanctions against North Korea. The United Nations imposed additional sanctions on North Korea in response to its missile and nuclear activities. It's worth noting that negotiations and diplomatic efforts have also taken place to address North Korea's missile and nuclear ambitions. For example, there have been talks between North Korea and the United States, as well as multilateral discussions involving countries like China, South Korea, and Russia, aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and reducing tensions.

Major Parties Involved

South Korea

South Korea has been actively committed in resolving the current conflict in the Korean peninsula. They have shown interest in reunification and even have a ministry dedicated to the reunification of the Korean peninsula. The country has a population of 51 million and is ranked 6th in the world military rankings. However, the country has insisted that peaceful negotiation is their main priority and have been against military involvement.

North Korea

North Korea has started majority of the tensions which has been occurring in the Korean peninsula. The Korean war started with the North invading the south, the sinking of Cheonan was conducted by the North as well.

North Korea has been putting minimal effort in resolving the ongoing conflict. In violation of UN Security Council resolutions, North Korea continues overt nuclear enrichment and long-range missile development efforts. Although the scale of North Korea's uranium enrichment program remains uncertain, U.S. intelligence agencies estimate that it has enough plutonium to produce at least six nuclear weapons, and possibly up to sixty. Decades of negotiations have so far failed to curb North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

The United States

The United States and South Korea are allies under the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty. Under the agreement, U.S. military personnel have maintained a continuous presence on the Korean peninsula. The United States has nearly 29,000 troops deployed in the Korean peninsula for that purpose. United States has deployed an anti-missile system in South Korea. The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system is located in the Seongju region of South Korea, one hundred and fifty-five miles from the northern border.

China

China's interests on the Korean Peninsula still carry a lot of weight. North Korea remains an important Chinese partner because it continues to act as a buffer between China and South Korea (and the U.S. troops it hosts). Beijing would naturally go to great lengths to ensure that any diplomatic progress between Pyongyang, Seoul, and Washington does not undermine aspects of this status quo that it finds advantageous. At the same time, Chinese leaders are keen to capitalize on ways that such diplomacy could erode the institutional foundations of the U.S.-led security order on the peninsula. (Kim)

The United Nations

United Nations Command (UNC) was established on July 7, 1950 following the United Nations' recognition of North Korean aggression against South Korea. UNC signifies the world's first attempt at collective security under the United Nations system. The UNC Member States reaffirmed that the promise and spirit of the 1953 Armistice Agreement continues to be necessary for the protection of peace and democracy on the Korean Peninsula today as it was in the past.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Korean Armistice Agreement (1953)

The Korean War, which lasted from 1950 to 1953, ended with the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. This agreement established a ceasefire between North Korea (supported by China and the Soviet Union) and South Korea (backed by the United Nations forces led by the United States). The armistice created the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as a buffer zone between the two countries.

Geneva Conference (1954)

The Geneva Conference was held to discuss the post-Korean War situation and aimed to find a peaceful resolution. However, the conference did not result in a comprehensive peace agreement for the Korean Peninsula. One reason for the failure is because the focus of the conference wasn't resolving the issue in the Korean Peninsula. Both North and South Korea were not involved in this conference.

Six Party Talks (2003~2009)

The Six-Party Talks included North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia. The negotiations aimed to address North Korea's nuclear program and provide security assurances in exchange for denuclearization. Several rounds of talks were held, and in 2005, an agreement known as the Joint Statement was reached, outlining principles for denuclearization. However, the talks experienced setbacks, and North Korea conducted nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, leading to the eventual suspension of the negotiations. As the North constantly broke agreements that were discussed in the Six Party Talks, the other nations were hesitant to continue providing security assurances to the country.

Panmunjom Declaration

In April 2018, a historic summit took place between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the border village of Panmunjom. The Panmunjom Declaration aimed to improve inter-Korean relations, reduce tensions, and work towards a lasting peace settlement on the Korean Peninsula. The declaration included commitments to denuclearization, establishing a peace regime, and increasing inter-Korean cooperation.

Possible Solutions

The solutions will not be effective unless North Korea is being cooperative to the clauses proposed. It is important to propose solutions that are realistic and unbiased. If North Korea believes they are facing a significant disadvantage, the probability of the resolution succeeding is minimal as the country will ignore the resolution and continue threatening the South and developing missiles.

Diplomatic Engagement

Continued diplomatic efforts and dialogue between the key stakeholders, including North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, and other regional powers, are crucial. Diplomatic channels provide an opportunity for negotiations, confidence-building measures, and addressing concerns through peaceful means. Again, it is important to ensure that North Korea does not close off their diplomatic channels whenever they are in a disadvantageous situation.

Incremental Steps towards Denuclearization

A step-by-step approach to denuclearization, accompanied by verifiable and transparent measures, could help build confidence and pave the way for a peaceful resolution. This approach could involve initial commitments

to freeze or limit nuclear and missile activities, followed by subsequent stages of dismantlement and verification. In return, the sanctions imposed on North Korea can be eased or taken away. This will encourage the country to denuclearize.

Economic Cooperation

Promoting economic cooperation and development initiatives on the Korean Peninsula can help foster stability and improve living conditions. This could involve projects that encourage cross-border trade, investment, and infrastructure development, benefiting both North and South Korea. One example of economic cooperation can be mining the natural resources in North Korea and using them to develop infrastructure in the Korean Peninsula.

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