

North Korea's Revolutionary Unification Policy¹

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Abstract

Some scholars consider that North Korea's provocative actions are responsive to the activities of its adversaries, namely South Korea and the United States. This article counters that line of thinking, arguing that North Korea acts in a more purposeful manor to achieve its short- and long-term objectives, the most important of which is its aim of revolutionary unification. In order to achieve this, North Korea employs a pattern of following hostile provocations with peaceful offensives, using its own version of carrots and sticks to garner concessions from its adversaries. North Korea also exhibits a long history of engaging in strategic deception that if better understood can help interpret the North's actions and intentions going forward.

Keywords: Korea, North Korea, South Korea, DPRK, ROK, United States, Japan, the Korean War, Korean unification, re-unification, Kim Jung Un, Kim Jung Il, Kim Il Sung, Kim dynasty, peace treaty, strategic deception, North Korean provocation

The North Korean Revolution Rages On

In late-nineteenth century Meiji Japan, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* became popular as a "how-to" book, namely, how to build an island state. In the uniquely totalitarian state of North Korea, one finds striking parallels with "Oceania," the fictional dystopia depicted by George Orwell in *1984*. In an Orwellian world, "war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength." In the bizarre world of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the past 61 years of de facto peace since the Korean War armistice is war; a life of grinding servitude to the state is freedom; and national strength is rooted in ignorance of the outside world.

For example, each year North Korea marks July 27, Korean War Armistice Day, with pomp and ceremony that far exceed the scale of celebrations in any of the other combatant nations. In the weeklong lead-up to this day, hailed in the North as "Victory Day in the Great Fatherland Liberation War," the state news agency repeatedly informs its isolated population of various parades, exhibitions, and conventions celebrating the nation's "victory" in 1953. On the eve of this July 27, North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile eastward from its southwest Hwanghae Province. The missile flew more than 300 miles across the country and off its east coast before landing in the sea. Lest there were any ambiguity as to the intended "target," the North Korean news agency released still photo shots of Kim Jong Un watching the launch and also directing a firing drill at U.S. military bases in South Korea.² In last year's July 27 military parade, North Korea showcased truckloads of soldiers holding onto packs with radioactive warning symbols, suggesting that the country had in its arsenal suicide squads armed with radioactive dirty bombs.³

North Korea clings to this date because it is a reminder of the unfinished business of communizing the entire Korean peninsula. In North Korean verbiage, as enshrined in the Charter of the country's communist party, this means:

Ensur[ing] the complete victory of socialism in the northern half of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the accomplishment of the revolutionary goals of national liberation and the people's democracy on the entire area of the country, with the ultimate goal of the indoctrination of the entire society with Juche philosophy and the establishment of a communist society . . . [and] oppos[ing] imperialism and hegemonism at the vanguard of which stands the U.S., and struggl[ing] to win the victory of the collective feats of peace, democracy, ethnic independence, and socialism.⁴

Whereas the 61 years since the armistice is a period prosperity and liberalization for South Korea, those intervening years have been a period of regression and frustration for the North. The war may have ended in 1953, but the North Korean revolution still rages on.

North Korea's Constitution also clarifies this "supreme task" in an unusually unequivocal fashion. For example, the Preamble to the Constitution states, "The DPRK and the entire Korean people

will...complete the Juche revolution under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea."⁵ Article 2 under Chapter 1 of the Constitution defines the DPRK as a "revolutionary state." For emphasis, Article 9 under Chapter 1 of the Constitution states, "The DPRK shall strive to achieve the complete victory of socialism in the northern half of Korea by strengthening the people's power and vigorously performing the three revolutions -- the ideological, cultural and technical -- and reunify the country on the principle of independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity."⁶ In other words, the task of completing the North Korean revolution is not an option or even a high priority for the Kim dynasty, but the essential *raison d'etre* of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Danger of Underestimating North Korea

Few Americans or, for that matter, South Koreans, know that July 27, 1953 is the date on which the armistice that brought the Korean War to its end was signed. The ambiguity of the war's finish—ending without a clear victor and with the Korean peninsula divided more or less along the same lines as at the start of the war in 1950—does not easily inspire revelry over the ceasefire agreement. Most South Koreans and Americans, particularly the generations who have no first-hand experience of the war, would rather forget than dwell on this unspectacular end to the three years of feral fighting.

But the end of the war has world-historical implications: It made possible the long peace in the region, gave meaning to the United Nations (UN) Charter and the concept of collective security, and planted the seeds of South Korea's commitment to freedom and prosperity. In 2010, President Barack Obama declared July 27 "National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day," calling upon "all Americans" to observe the day and federal departments to fly the national flag at half-staff in memory of the Americans who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the war.⁷ Moreover, on July 27, 2013, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, President Obama gave a stirring speech before Korean War veterans at the National Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., emphatically giving meaning to the sacrifice of American veterans in this "forgotten war":

It took many decades for this memorial to gain its rightful place on this great Mall where we tell our American story. It has, perhaps, taken even longer to see clearly, and understand fully,

the true legacy of your service. But here, today, we can say with confidence that war was no tie. Korea was a victory. When 50 million South Koreans live in freedom -- a vibrant democracy, one of the world's most dynamic economies, in stark contrast to the repression and poverty of the North -- that's a victory; that's your legacy. (Applause.)

When our soldiers stand firm along the DMZ; when our South Korean friends can go about their lives, knowing that the commitment of the United States to the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver -- that is a victory, and that is your legacy.

When our allies across the Asia Pacific know -- as we have proven in Korea for 60 straight years -- that the United States will remain a force for peace and security and prosperity --that's a victory; that's your legacy.

And for generations to come, when history recalls how free nations banded together in a long Cold War, and how we won that war, let it be said that Korea was the first battle -- where freedom held its ground and free peoples refused to yield, that, too, is your victory, your legacy.⁸

Herein lies a central dilemma for the North Korean regime. It has long been apparent to most of the outside world which of the two Korean states vying for pan-Korean legitimacy is the more legitimate and successful one. By every conventional index of measuring state power— economic power, territorial and population size, cultural or soft power— besides military power, South Korea overwhelms the North. This transparent reality is also apparent to large portions of the North Korean population, as over the past twenty years tens of thousands of North Koreans have escaped their country at great personal risk with the view toward resettling in the South, with more than 26,000 having successfully made their way to South Korea. On the other hand, this kind of lopsided superiority in state power breeds complacency on the part of the South Korean public and its American counterpart. Even governments have consistently fallen prey to taking a patronizing view of the North Korean regime and have shown a gnawing propensity to assume that Pyongyang, lacking a strategic mindset of its own, merely reacts to stimuli coming out of Washington or Seoul.⁹

Furthermore, if North Korea indeed won the war 61 years ago, what explains its insistence on signing a peace treaty with its vanquished foe, the U.S.? Or why does a regime intent on suing for peace regularly make threats against its object of peace? The answer is not paranoia, but that Pyongyang sees itself as the actual party wielding the carrots and sticks in order to cajole and coerce its adversaries, Washington and Seoul. And Pyongyang knows that the lure of effecting genuine peace in Korea is an irresistible prospect that South Korea and the United States simply cannot ignore. Hence, the dual-pronged strategy of launching provocations and peace offensives—at times even simultaneously—is an essential tool in North Korea's revolutionary unification policy.

In recent months, North Korea has alternated between threatening gestures and a conciliatory tone, firing off more than 260 projectiles from missile and rocket launchers as well as artillery guns,¹⁰ while agreeing to send athletes and cheerleaders to the September Asian Games hosted by South Korea. This is a time-worn pattern in Pyongyang's playbook. It was played out with particular force in the twilight of Kim Jong Il's rule, as the North Korean leader was trying to accelerate the grooming of his son, Jong Un, to take over the reins of power.

For example, on March 26 2010, North Korea torpedoed and sank a South Korean navy ship, the *Cheonan*. This unprovoked lethal attack was preceded by a peace offensive by Pyongyang, where on March 3, 2010, North Korea sought military talks with the South. Likewise, on October 30 of that year, the two Korea countries held an emotional round of family reunion meetings. Extending this streak of "peace offensives," on November 11, the North called for talks on the stalled Mt. Kumgang tourism project. However, the very next day, on November 12, North Korea conducted a poor man's uranium test by revealing its brand new and advanced uranium enrichment facility in Yongbyon to a renowned American nuclear physicist, Siegfried Hecker, just as Seoul was hosting a major international event, the G-20 Summit. And on November 23, North Korea shelled a South Korean island, killing four South Korean nationals.

This was the crucial year for Kim Jong Un coming out, which he did by name in late September and, in person, standing next to his father on the reviewing stand at a military parade on October 10, Party Founding Day. On the assumption that Pyongyang is a rational actor, these patterns of peace and provocations can only be interpreted as an attempt by the inexperienced heir facing a compelling need to prove his military mettle

and under the guidance of his ailing father to resort to strategic deception before attacking the South on March 26 and November 23 during a critical year of coming out.

In the aftermath of a UN Security Council Presidential Statement from July 9, 2010 on the sinking of the *Cheonan* that fell considerably short of directly blaming North Korea for the attack, Pyongyang issued a dovish statement the very next day. While vociferously denying any role in the sinking of the ship, North Korea declared on July 10 that it would “make consistent efforts for the conclusion of a peace treaty and the denuclearization through the six-party talks conducted on equal footing [*sic*].” However, just two weeks later on July 24, North Korea’s National Defense Commission issued the following statement in protest of the scheduled combined U.S.-South Korean naval exercises off South Korean waters: “The army and people of the DPRK will start a retaliatory sacred war of their own style based on nuclear deterrent any time necessary in order to counter the U.S. imperialists and the south Korean puppet forces deliberately pushing the situation to the brink of a war.”¹¹

The first dovish statement is an illusory carrot presented to North Korea's crisis-weary interlocutors. In other words, North Korea’s foreign ministry, apparently pleased with the weakly worded UN Presidential Statement, tried to close the chapter on the *Cheonan* and once again dangled before the international community the carrots of peace and denuclearization. The second hawkish statement attempted to buttress the time-tested tool of nuclear deterrence with a touch of bona fide North Korean brinksmanship. Clearly intended to intimidate, the statement intimated an irrational willingness to wage a nuclear war even at the risk of self-destruction.

Taken together, these two stances reflect North Korea’s longstanding rotating strategy of creating instability and reaping reward for promising not to cause trouble again. Specifically, North Korea’s end game in suing for a peace treaty is the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from South Korea and nudging its rival Korean state out of the U.S. security umbrella, a prospect that would tilt the balance of power in the North’s favor. And North Korea’s frequent verbal threats and occasional physical threats are intended to imply to Washington and Seoul what the dangerous alternative to appeasement is. They also create the illusion that genuine negotiations, for the right price, are within reach. In sum, North Korea has consistently shown that it has both tactical and strategic objectives

vis-a-vis its, conventionally speaking, stronger neighbors, and that it does not merely react to rhetorical or physical stimuli from South Korea or the U.S., no matter how hostile or even civil they may be.

South Korea and the United States should be fully aware that the recent peace offensive by Pyongyang is more likely a smokescreen before a provocation than a genuine overture seeking reconciliation. All states, to varying degrees, practice strategic deception—or sending out mixed signals in order to mislead or deceive one's adversary. North Korea has taken this to a lethal level. Blatant deception on the eve of a provocative act has been its mode of operation since at least 1950. For example, just days before invading South Korea in June 1950, Pyongyang reached out to the South for high-level talks on how to achieve Korean unification. Kim Il Sung started the Korean War in order to complete the North Korean revolution, which remains the highest goal of the North Korean state today. It was a high-risk gamble, the biggest gamble by the Kim dynasty to date. In short, Kim felt a compelling need to deceive his enemy with a smokescreen before he launched the invasion.

Furthermore, on the eve of detonating a bomb at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Rangoon, Burma, on October 9, 1983, targeting the visiting South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan, North Korea asked China's help in conveying that it wished to hold direct bilateral talks with the Reagan administration. Beijing gladly obliged, and the next day the bomb went off, killing 17 South Korean officials and four Burmese nationals. This was a high-stakes operation for Pyongyang, because the previous year Kim Il Sung had officially anointed his son Jong Il as his heir. The untested heir apparently needed to prove his military mettle against the South Korean head of state, Park Chung Hee's successor and another military-man-turned president, Chun Doo-Hwan. Hence, the smokescreen was a crucial tactic in advancing Pyongyang's objectives.

Today, Kim Jong Un faces a similar strategic need to prove his leadership. As firm as Kim's grip on power seems for now, in view of his youth and inexperience, Kim still needs to consolidate further his place in the North Korean political hierarchy as the supreme leader. One essential aspect of achieving this goal is to be taken seriously by North Korea's neighbors, in particular, by the North's two main adversaries, South Korea and the United States. The proven means to this end for Pyongyang is to coax and cajole its bigger neighbors to return to diplomatic negotiations with concessions in tow. Hence, whatever comes

in the form of a peace offensive in the fall of 2014 will likely be punctuated by a serious provocation after the new year.

North Korea's Unification Policy toward South Korea

The 1950s

In the aftermath of the end of the Korean War, neither Korea could realistically pursue a reunification-by-force policy toward the other, in spite of Pyongyang's urging of the South Korean public to rise up and destroy the Syngman Rhee regime or Rhee's occasional proclamation of "marching into the North" and achieving Korean reunification. In other words, the pressing task of postwar reconstruction and, more importantly, the ample war fatigue evidenced in Pyongyang's and Seoul's respective patron states—the Soviet Union and China on one side, and the United States on the other—made imminent reunification impracticable. Therefore, both the North and the South were forced to postpone the implementation of any meaningful unification policy and turn instead to domestic economic reconstruction.

At the same time, even as the Kim Il Sung regime was constrained by the needs of reconstruction and the consolidation of power in the wake of its failure to complete the revolutionary war, on occasion, the Kim regime would test its South Korean counterpart with moderate-sounding overtures. For example, Pyongyang would propose to Seoul the establishment of a reunified, pan-Korean government through general elections held under the supervision of neutral nations--the unfeasibility of an election in both form and content notwithstanding. For one, Pyongyang made such propositions while calling for equal number of delegates from the North and South to this pan-Korean assembly, despite the North's population being half of that of the South. Furthermore, North Korea occasionally called on the South to conclude a non-aggression treaty, reduction of both the armed forces of the North and South to a bare minimum, and the creation of a loose confederation of autonomous Northern and Southern governments on a provisional basis. As conciliatory as such proposals may have seemed, North Korea still insisted on the following:

1. The achievement of reunification through the efforts of the Korean ethnic nation ourselves ("Uri minjok kkiri," in Korean: 우리민족끼리)
2. The immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea
3. Noninterference of the UN in Korean affairs

4. The repeal of South Korea's National Security Law.

Pyongyang's first demand above has special resonance in the politics of the Korean peninsula. "Minjok" is certainly not a term native or exclusive to Korea. It is in fact the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese characters 民族 (**minju**), which means "ethnic nation." At the same time, in the Korean context, and particularly in the common lexical configuration **Uri minkokggiri**, "by the Korean ethnic nation ourselves," the term has an unmistakable connotation of Korean exceptionalism and exclusivity. In fact, the latter formulation is featured in the first article of the South-North Joint Declaration signed by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il at the 2000 Pyongyang summit. The same Korean words transliterated slightly differently, **Uri minzokkiri**, are the official name of a website run by the Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland, a major arm of the North Korean propaganda machine founded in 1961 under the auspices of the Workers' Party of Korea.¹²

Pyongyang's second demand, the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the South, is a constant in North Korea's external relations. It has special strategic implications for North Korea's revolutionary unification policy—a point discussed further in the next section. The third and fourth demands are complementary to the first and second, but important enough for Pyongyang to continually invoke even today. In sum, North Korea has shown a proclivity even in the postwar years of the 1950s to deftly switch back and forth between hostile and conciliatory rhetoric, while all along focused on the all-important task of minimizing the U.S. influence in the Korean peninsula in general, and in particular, evicting the U.S. forces in the South. Therefore, North Korea's pattern of peace offensives and provocations is more than just an attempt to gain economic and political concession in the short-term. It is an essential means to advancing North Korea's highest state interest of completing the *Juche* revolution.

1960s to 1971

Kim Il Sung purportedly regretted not having aggressively seized upon the April 1960 student uprising in the South, which led to the overthrow of the Syngman Rhee regime. While the tenor of the student movement was based on moral grievances against the Rhee regime's election-rigging in March and the violence against student protestors, a pro-ethnic Korean *esprit* also drove the idealistic student protestors, intent upon

bringing about political and social change. Kim may or may not have regretted his missed opportunity in the spring of 1960 to galvanize pro-North Korean sentiment in the South amid the upheaval to advance his interests. What is beyond doubt is that whatever regret Kim may have felt in 1960 would have grown considerably bigger by the spring of 1961, in the wake of Major General Park Chung Hee's coup d'état in May that overthrew the premiership under Chang Myon. The advent of a military authoritarian rule in Seoul, one that was unabashedly anti-Communist and pro-U.S., was a most unwelcome development for Kim. Hence, throughout the decade between 1961 and 1971, Kim Il Sung markedly ratcheted up militant hostility against the South in an attempt to undermine the anti-Communist Park Chung Hee regime and the U.S. forces in South Korea.

In particular, from the mid-1960s until April 1971, when the shocking news of U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing broke, North Korea launched a continual campaign of armed infiltration, subversion, and terrorist attacks against South Korea. The conventional view is that North Korea's militant policy was a reaction to the ascension of anti-North Korean military regime in Seoul and the dual unwelcome developments in 1965—namely, the normalization of South Korea-Japan diplomatic relations (despite approximately 100,000 ethnic Korean residents of Japan choosing to resettle in North Korea in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and the Park regime's dispatch of South Korean combat troops to Vietnam.

Clearly, all states, in varying degrees, react or respond to the changing international environment. But North Korea's militant line during this period is more representative of proactive response rather than a passive reaction. The extent to which North Korea pushed the envelope, repeatedly launching deadly attacks against the South and the U.S. forces in South Korea, is less reminiscent of passive-aggressive reaction than purposeful and calculated ripostes. This becomes all the more apparent as of early 1968, when the political tide in the U.S. war in Indochina turned irreversibly worse for the Lyndon Johnson administration.

In 1966, for example, North Korea instigated at least 50 border skirmishes, which led to the death of 35 South Korean soldiers. In 1967, North Korea provoked 547 incidents, killing 153 South Korean military personnel and civilians and wounding over 330 South Korean citizens. The North's provocations grew in scale and severity the following year:

The North's attempted commando raid on Park Chung Hee in January 1968, and its forcible seizure of the USS *Pueblo* in international waters off North Korea's east coast on January 23. Pyongyang brutalized the 82 U.S. sailors and held them in captivity for 11 months before releasing them only upon an official apology by the Johnson administration. In late October and early November, some 130 North Korean commandos infiltrated the South. And, on April 15, 1969, on the occasion of Kim Il Sung's 57th birthday, two North Korean fighter jets shot down a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, EC-121, some 90 miles off the Korean coast, clearly in international air space, killing all 31 U.S. servicemen on board.

The reaction by the new Richard Nixon administration was strong in internal deliberations, but muted in practice. As possible retaliatory action, the senior-most officials under President Nixon discussed the following options, from the diplomatic to the forceful and to the lethal:

1. Diplomatic demands for appropriate redress
2. Requesting the Soviets to make representations to the North Koreans
3. Conducting high altitude/high speed reconnaissance flights in the same area with the same type of reconnaissance aircraft
4. A show of force
5. Blockade of North Korean ports
6. Feints against North Korean air defense
7. Destroying North Korean aircraft off the coast of North Korea
8. Selective air strikes

In the end, none of the above measures were taken due to prevailing concerns over the increasingly diminishing fortunes in the Vietnam War. In other words, for fear of escalation with North Korea while the war in Vietnam seemed less and less winnable, the U.S. took no countermeasure at all at North Korea's blatant lethal attack. In the meantime, on August 17, 1969, North Korea shot down a U.S. helicopter that had accidentally ventured into North Korean airspace. North Korea released the U.S. crew on December 2 only upon receiving an official apology stating that the UN Command had committed a "criminal-act [*sic*]" by "infiltrating" the helicopter "deep" into the "territory under the control of North Korea."¹³ Moreover, while engaged in this standoff with the U.S., Pyongyang

pushed the envelope even further from its position of strength by ambushing and killing four U.S. soldiers on October 18.¹⁴

The Nixon administration assessed North Korea's shoot-down of a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft over international waters as a "deliberate attempt by Pyongyang to revive a high level of tension with the United States."¹⁵ The administration also accurately read Pyongyang's game of brinkmanship as a vital step in its long-term propaganda efforts to paint itself as the aggrieved party in the world of public opinion and reduce the likelihood of U.S. retaliation. For example, U.S. officials noted that within "hours after the destruction of the reconnaissance aircraft, Pyongyang called for a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission at Panmunjom on Friday, April 18...as a propaganda forum to their charges of U.S. 'aggression.'"¹⁶

Nonetheless, despite such assessments and understanding of North Korea's brinkmanship, the U.S. chose, repeatedly, to retreat in the face of deadly attacks on South Korea and U.S. personnel in South Korea. This pattern of passivity continues to this day. While history may yet come to judge such passivity a necessary factor in the past 61 years of de facto peace in the Korean peninsula, what is also beyond doubt is that the U.S. and South Korea have conditioned the North to assume that it can get away with murder.

Peace and Revolution

Between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the Korean War, patchily remembered in the United States and increasingly in South Korea as the "Forgotten War," there were four other wars in Korea and its vicinity. The U.S. was involved in only the fourth, the Pacific War (1941-1945). But taken together, these earlier conflicts reinforce the lesson of the Korean War; that a power vacuum in Korea is an invitation for aggression.

It goes without saying that preparing for the next geopolitical shift in Korea—almost certain to emanate from Pyongyang as occurred in June 25, 1950—it will be imperative for keeping the peace in the region and honoring the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers who served in the Korean War.

Whereas an uneasy but de facto peace has lasted in Korea over the past 61 years since the 1953 armistice, in the 56 years leading up to 1950, the Korean Peninsula was engulfed in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), the First Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), the Second Sino-

Japanese War (1937-45), and the Pacific War (1941-45). In each of these pre-1950 wars, Japan was the principal actor—the revisionist power driven by desire to change the geopolitical setting in its favor.

By defeating China in 1895, Japan won Taiwan as its first colony and pushed Korea out of the traditional Chinese tributary system, effectively ending the centuries-old Chinese world order. By defeating Russia in 1905, Japan won international recognition of its "paramount political, military and economic interests in Korea," as enshrined in the Treaty of Portsmouth. By 1937, Japan was in full control of its Korean colony and ready to utilize the Korean Peninsula as a supply base and military platform for invading China.

Lacking strategic interests in Northeast Asia, the U.S. chose to stand by as Japan gobbled up Korea and advanced into Manchuria. However, Japan's success in successive wars of aggression across nearly half a century came to a dead end at Pearl Harbor. Imperial Japan was eventually brought to its knees by the U.S. in August 1945. Yet, in that moment of triumph, the geopolitical importance of Korea was not lost on the victorious allies. They partitioned the peninsula at the 38th parallel.

With the occupation of defeated Japan and also one-half of liberated Korea, the United States emerged for the first time as the key shaper of geopolitics in Northeast Asia. Yet, despite having governed South Korea for three years from 1945 to 1948, and despite lingering misgivings about North Korea's intentions, the US withdrew troops from the South by the summer of 1949 and returned to a policy of benign neglect vis-a-vis the key strategic arena in Northeast Asia that history had anointed as the Korean Peninsula.

Kim Il Sung took advantage of the power vacuum and launched an invasion of the South on June 25, 1950. Kim's attempt to unify the peninsula under his own communist control was thwarted by a multinational coalition led by the United States and supported by 15 other nations under the banner of the United Nations. Hence, South Korea was saved.

The U.S. commitment thereafter to the defense of South Korea against North Korean aggression has since kept the peace in Korea for nearly 60 years—a certain cause for celebration. John Milton's adage that "Peace hath her victories, no less renowned than War" is self-evident, as President Obama proclaimed on July 27, 2013, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War, in the free and affluent modern state that is South Korea today.

At the same time, North Korea has time and again shown its intentions as a revisionist state in Northeast Asia, willing to take considerable risks to overturn the strategic environment. North Korea is well aware that the task of revisionism, overturning the strategic environment in its favor for good, cannot be achieved overnight. Pyongyang also is acutely aware of lessons it learned in the Korean War—that the greatest impediment to completing its revolutionary unification policy is the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea, namely the presence of U.S. forces in South Korea. Therefore, for the Kim Jong Un regime, resolving the issue of U.S. troop deployment in South Korea by creating the political environment for the withdrawal of the troops, followed by the abrogation of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, is a necessary condition for completing the *Juche* revolution begun by his grandfather more than 60 years ago.

For North Korea, the primary objective in any international negotiations —beyond gaining short-term concessions from its richer neighbors—is replacing the Korean War armistice with a formal peace treaty, or building a new "peace regime" in Korea. Since the early 1970s, when North Korea opened its observer mission at the UN, Pyongyang has persistently called on the U.S. for negotiations on a peace treaty. North Korea made considerable progress in advancing its revolutionary unification policy in 2005 when it was able to persuade the U.S. and South Korea to agree to insert the phrase "peace regime" in the September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party talks. Pyongyang knows only too well that any peace treaty or "peace regime" forged with the United States would call into question the rationale for the continued deployment of U.S. troops in South Korea, as more and more South Koreans and Americans come to call on their government to withdraw the U.S. troops from a Korea that is protected by formal peace.

The South Korean government, in particular, would increasingly come under political pressure to evict the U.S. troops, an opportunity that Pyongyang would seize in all its multifaceted dealings with South Korea, the United States, and Japan. Should the political forces surrounding the Korean peninsula align so as to lead to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, the balance of power between the two Koreas would undergo a fundamental shift in Pyongyang's favor.

Conversely, if North Korea were ever to reconcile itself to the continued presence of U.S. troops in the South, that would indicate, more than any peace agreement on a piece of paper, a fundamental shift in

North Korea's national policy toward reconciliation and peaceful coexistence with South Korea. Despite claims by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung in June 2000, in the wake of his summit meeting with Kim Jong Il, that the northern Kim had agreed to the long-term stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea, North Korea's explicit demands and actions since the historic summit only point to the contrary. Since the very next day after the summit, North Korea has persistently called for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops.¹⁷

Furthermore, North Korea has demonstrated continued progress in its nuclear and long-range ballistic missile capabilities, notably with its first successful intercontinental ballistic missile test on December 12, 2012, and its third nuclear test on February 12, 2013. North Korea today seems close to achieving its long-held objective of developing the capability with which to credibly threaten the United States with a nuclear-tipped long-range missile. That eventuality, which seems to be only a matter of time, will be a turning point in North Korea's decades-old goal of completing its revolutionary unification policy.

No U.S. administration would be able to opt to honor its treaty obligation to defend its ally under a credible nuclear threat to its own territory. And absent the U.S. nuclear umbrella, no South Korean administration would be able to opt for a prolonged war against a blitzkrieg attack by a nuclear-armed North Korea. South Korea's considerable achievements over the past several decades in terms of national wealth and democracy weigh heavily against that option. As with any elected American leader, no elected South Korean leader would be able to ignore the voice of the people.

Hence, 60 years from now, as future generations ruminate on the meaning of the Korean War, they may say that North Korea's first big gamble to complete its revolutionary unification policy was thwarted by the United States and the fifteen other states that came to defend South Korea under the banner of the United Nations. However, several decades later, North Korea was finally able to "liberate the Korean peninsula and complete the people's democratic revolution"—the culmination of dogged determination to develop nuclear and long-range missiles and crafty strategic brinkmanship.

Or, future generations may say that prudent and pragmatic policymakers, a sexagenary cycle ago, paved the way for a permanent peace in the Korean Peninsula, through their correct reading of North Korea's strategic calculations, and ultimately paid the greatest honor

possible to all those who served in heroically on the battleground in 1950 in a war that is decidedly forgotten no more.

South Koreans, in particular, would do well to remember the noble resolve of all who fought against the North Korean invasion and the precious gift those courageous soldiers left behind: an extended period of peace, a free and prosperous South Korea, and the unimpeachable lesson—that unlike in Orwell's Oceania or totalitarian North Korea, in the real world of international politics, deterrence is peace, freedom is not free, and that to remember the past is the true mark of national character and strength.

Notes:

¹ Portions of this essay are derived from Sung-Yoon Lee, "U.S. Misses History Lessons on Korea," *Asia Times* (July 2, 2010) and "In North Korea, Peace is War," *Asia Times* (August 13, 2010). Used with permission.

² "Korea Marks 61st Anniversary of War Armistice," *Voice of America*, July 27, 2014. <http://www.voanews.com/content/two-koreas-mark-61st-anniversary-of-war-armistice/1965978.html><Accessed August 12, 2014>.

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¹⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

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