

## **A Korea Peace Treaty Campaign in North-East Asia - Situation Surrounding the Korean Peninsula and the Need for a Peace Treaty -**

Rev. Ra Heak Jib  
Chair  
Reconciliation and Reunification Committee  
The National Council of Churches in Korea

The Chosun Peninsula is marked by geopolitics. Halford Mackinder, a British geopolitician used a counter concept of geopolitics when explaining the continental and maritime powers. According to his theory, because the Chosun Peninsula is perceived by the maritime power Japan as a passageway to land while by the continental powers Russia and China as a way to the waters, it becomes a geopolitical area where the two forces inevitably clash with each other.

This area has already seen two wars take place in the past precisely because of this geopolitical factor. The Sino-Japanese War during 1894 and 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War during 1904 and 1905 were both wars that ultimately sought to take control of the Chosun Peninsula. Wedged tightly between the two forces, Chosun suffered great loss and also suffered great pain whenever a war broke out in the area.

With the reparations extracted from victory in the two wars, Japan earned the opportunity to advance into land and when it saw that victory was near during the war with Russia, Japan acted promptly in dealing with the U.S. over the issues concerning the Far East. On July 29 1905, Taro Katsura, the then Japanese Prime Minister and temporary Minister of Foreign Affairs and William Howard Taft, the then U.S. Army General signed together a secret agreement. This agreement is the Katsura-Taft Agreement. Under this agreement, the U.S. earned control over the Philippines while Japan earned the U.S.' recognition over its control of the Chosun Peninsula. On the surface the agreement stated that peace in the Far East will be secured through an alliance among the maritime powers, the U.S., Britain and Japan, but ultimately the agreement led to the allocation of different Asian territories to the three powers.

Japan, which has earned control over the Chosun Peninsula robbed the Korean Empire of its diplomatic rights and degraded the country as a protectorate through the Japan-Korea Treaty signed on November 17, 1905, and Japan went further to annex Chosun on August 29, 1910 and consequently justified its colonial rule over the country.

Soon after, Japan with the hope of ruling all of Asia under its 'Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' became a major player in World War II.

Up until the day Japan declared defeat on August 15, 1945, the Korean peninsula went through tremendous pain under Japanese rule. When Japan lost to the U.S. in the War, Korea came under the U.S.' sphere of influence.

The Korean peninsula had to experience ongoing war even after the War of the great powers was over. The Peninsula became a battle place for proxy wars and ultimately ended up being divided due to the proxy war spurred by the Cold War.

Though there may be many reasons behind Korea's division, it could be said that the world wars played a critical role. Korea's division is not an issue limited to the Korean Peninsula but it is a worldwide issue and peace in this region directly reflects world peace.

Depending on how the division in the Peninsula is resolved, the world may face conflict and trouble or it may achieve peace.

This is why the issue must be addressed from a broader framework, world peace. Peace in this region is deeply connected to world peace.

#### 1. Situations Surrounding the Korean Peninsula

A ceasefire was established for the proxy war that started in 1950 in the Korean Peninsula when an armistice agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. And the two Koreas have still been at war for the last 65 years. Hence, the situation in the Korean peninsula is unpredictable.

Along the 155-mile-long Military Demarcation Line, heavy weapons and heavily armed soldiers confront each other. In the divided Korea, South Korea is tightly bound to the U.S. under the US-Korea alliance. The whole issue does not only concern the two Koreas. The war-player, the U.S., is stationed in the Peninsula and with the war still going on, tension lingers in the air.

Just last year, the Korean Peninsula was almost on the brink of war with North Korea's ongoing nuclear tests and launch of its ballistic missiles along with the U.S.' strategic capabilities focused on the Peninsula. The countries walked on thin ice, not knowing when a nuclear war would break out.

Situations surrounding the Peninsula changed rapidly this year. This is because Kim Jong-un, upon announcing the completion of the country's nuclear tests, displayed intentions to complete his work on the North Korean military and instead to focus on the economy during his New Year's address.

The Pyeong Chang Winter Olympics provided an opportunity to achieve peace in the Peninsula whilst tension and instability were still prevalent. Many high-level officials from North Korea attended the Olympics and during the event, both Koreas were able to build mutual trust and organize the Inter-Korean Summit. The Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula promised to overcome the division and instead bring peace to

the Peninsula. As the two Koreas made not only the Inter-Korean Summit but also the US-North Korean Summit possible, a great opportunity for peace was created to overcome the division in the Peninsula. North Korea wants economic growth and regime security while the U.S. wants to protect its country from outside threats by addressing the nuclear issue.

The Korean Peninsula is now at the crossroads of peace due to the success of two inter-Korean summits and one possible DPRK-US summit.

As mentioned before the division of the Korean Peninsula is not an issue limited to the two Koreas. It involves the powers (the U.S., Russia, China and Japan) surrounding the Peninsula as well as geopolitical factors. The Peninsula's fate will depend on how a peace regime is built not only in the Korean Peninsula but also in Northeast Asia. China and the U.S are currently undergoing a power struggle. The two countries are constantly struggling with each other in order to maintain or earn its position as a great hegemony. Under such a situation, Russia is attempting to retain its past position and Japan too is working to return again to becoming a war-waging country. Hence, the surrounding circumstance is not at all peaceful. It will be important to lead surrounding powers into the Peninsula's ring of peace.

## 2. The Need for a Peace Treaty

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) asserted the need for a peace treaty in the 1988 Declaration. Since then there were active movements for a peace treaty. It is through a peace treaty that war would cease on the peninsula and separation would be overcome.

In 2013, the 10th Session of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was held in Busan, Korea. Through the statement, "On a Peaceful Korean Peninsula", the WCC declared the start of its peace treaty campaign. With the help of the WCC, three peace treaty campaign tours have been held so far. Starting in U.S. the campaign tours have visited Europe and recently in Asia and Japan. Back when we were carrying out the campaigns, the situations in and surrounding the peninsula were dire. But now things have changed. Everyone now speaks of a peace treaty. When the two Koras declare the end of war and sign a peace treaty, then the Peninsula will no longer be a center of conflict but a center of peace. There is a need to reform the Northeast Asian geopolitics with a peaceful Korean Peninsula in the center. Such will transform the current alliance-system in the international society to an era of a multilateral and a common security regime. The world security framework can be reconstructed so that under it, countries protect each other and cooperate instead of threatening each other. Such a regime could go beyond a security framework to becoming a peace framework. It can become a framework where everyone can constructively deal with humanitarian, ecological and climate security issues, beyond the usual focus only on military security.

“A common home for Northeast Asia”, as coined by Wada Haruki, a prominent Japanese professor, can be made possible.

The Korean Peninsula’s peace treaty is like a blueprint for this common home. The methods for building both a cooperative framework based on common security and a common home based on the peace treaty will be the key in achieving Asian and world peace.

What we need right this moment is imagination and focus. Peace is not a foregone conclusion. It must be earned and built together.