

A Message to Washington: Don't Blow The Third Chance of Peace in the Korean Peninsula!

By [Prof. Joseph H. Chung](#)

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Pyeongchang Olympics might be able to offer the third chance of peace in the Korean peninsula. In fact, there were two chances of peace in the past, one in 1994 and the other in 2005. Both could have led to success but failed because of some unjustifiable reasons. Let us hope that the third chance will succeed.

One of the most memorable events of the Pyeongchang Olympics was the visiting of the North Korean delegation including Kim Young Nam, head of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly and, above all, Kim Yo-Jong, sister of Kim Jong-un who came with her brother's message of peace and a possible inter-Korean summit. Kim Jong-un's message has given the world a hope of peace.

The world is asking this question:

“What is the chance of ending the nuclear crisis in the Korean peninsula after the Pyeongchang Olympics?”

In fact, there were two chances of peace in the past, one in 1994 and the other in 2005.

On October 21, 1994, there was what was called the Framework Agreement by virtue of which North Korea agreed to abandon all nuclear programs in return of peace, construction of two Light Water Reactors (LWR), supply of 500,000 tons of fuel oil and even international assistance for the economic development of North Korea. The second chance of peace in the Korean peninsula came in 2005. On September 19, 2005, at the 4th round of the 6-Party Talks in Beijing, North Korea promised what it had proposed in 1994 in return of peace with Washington and the supply of heavy fuel oil. North Korea also promised to return to NPT and allow the inspections of IAEA.

The international community blew both chances of peace. The 1994 Agreement failed because of mutual mistrust between the U.S. and North Korea, controversy surrounding missile tests and, above all, Washington's treatment of North Korea as a part of the “axis of evil”.

The chance of peace in 2005 did not succeed largely because of the lack of mutual trust and, in particular, freezing of Pyongyang's \$ 25 million deposited at the Banco Delta Asia in Macao. But, these visible reasons of the failures of peace opportunities were merely

circumstantial ones. What were then the fundamental reasons? To answer this question, we have to know the nature of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and North Korea. To be more precise, we have to know what each side expects to get from the bilateral relations.

What North Korea wants is to be free from the American attacks. To do so, North Korea claims that it is obliged to have nuclear weapons. This position has been consistently kept for the last several decades. In fact, the dying message of Kim Il-sung to his son, Kim Jong-il was denuclearization of the Korean peninsula; Kim Il-sung did not want nuclear weapons in Korea. Kim Jong-il did not want to have them either; he wanted to respect his father's wish.

Kim Jong-il told Japanese Prime Minister, Koizumi, at the meeting with the Japanese delegation on May 22, 2004 in Pyongyang, about his deep concerns about possible US attacks; he made it quite clear that North Korea had to develop nuclear weapons solely to defend itself. His message was quite clear:

“Nobody can keep silent, if threatened by someone with a stick. We come to have nuclear weapons for the sake of the right of existence. If our existence is secured, nuclear weapons will be not necessary any more”.

A statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Korea of October 11, 2006 made the same point. It said:

“The nuclear test was entirely attributable to US nuclear threat, sanctions and pressure. North Korea was compelled to substantially prove its possession of nuclear arms to protect its sovereignty”.

This position has been clearly reiterated in Kim Jong-un's New Year speeches since he took over the power in 2012.

In other words, in the eyes of North Korea, the fundamental root of the nuclear crisis in the Korean peninsula is American threats to attack the land of Juche. As far as Pyongyang is concerned, the deployment of a large number of American nuclear assets in South Korea during the Cold War era, installation of the American nuclear umbrella protecting Japan and South Korea since 1991, annual U.S.-South Korea joint war games (the Foal Eagle and Key Resolve joint exercises in Spring and Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercise in Autumn) have been and are real threats to Pyongyang.

North Korea being threatened by the U.S. has been consistently asking for peace with the U.S. Then, why does the U.S. ignore Pyongyang's plea? There can be three reasons. First, the U.S. might worry about the North Korean dream of reunifying the peninsula under the Red Flag. But, North Korea officially abandoned such dream by virtue of its 1992 Constitution. Besides, the North Korean model of reunification is the regime of Koryo Confederation in which both Koreas would remain sovereign states.

Second, American leaders may not like the ideology of North Korea. It is certain that the North Korean ideology is different from American values. But, the U.S. has friendly relations with many countries having ideologies which are very different from the American way of thinking.

Third, the U.S. claims that North Korea is a threat to the U.S. This begs two questions. Does North Korea have the military capacity to threaten the U.S.? Even if it has such capacity, what benefits can it expect to gain from threatening the super power? Let us be realistic about such possibilities. North Korea is a small country with a population of 23 million people, a GDP of US\$40 billion spending each year perhaps less than US\$ 5 billion on national defence. How can such a small country threaten the U.S. of 327 million people with a GDP of US\$18 trillion spending each year more than US\$ 600 billion on national defence?

It is true that North Korea has been making belligerent statements even warning counter attacks. But, this warning has been for self defence, not for offensive purposes. A more important question is about possible benefits which North Korea expects to obtain from engaging a war against the U.S. Nobody would deny what is inevitable; a war with the U.S. would be a certain tragic suicide of Pyongyang's regime.

On its part, the U.S. argues that its mighty military muscles deployed in South Korea are for the protection of South Korea and the U.S. against North Korean nuclear attacks. But North Korea says that it has no intention of attacking South Korea. At the same time, North Korea says that it will never attack the U.S. unless it is threatened. The trouble is that Washington does not seem to believe what North Korea is saying. Here lies the root of deep mistrust between Washington and Pyongyang.

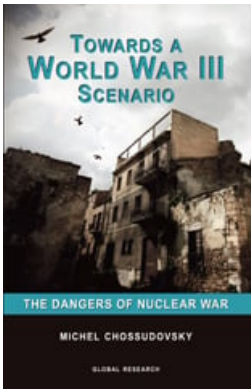
Under these circumstances, what is the chance of having permanent peace in the Korean peninsula? It goes without saying that the first thing to do is reopening of dialogue between Pyongyang on the one hand, and on the other hand, Washington and Seoul. Fortunately, owing to highly productive diplomatic initiatives of the president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in, shown during the Pyeongchang Olympics, the dialogue has become a possibility

Obviously the dialogue is a good start, but the dialogue must lead to fruitful negotiations for peace. The success of negotiations depends on a compromise between what the U.S. wants and what North Korea desires. It is likely that Pyongyang will demand peace treaty with the U.S., elimination of joint military exercises, or reduction of their size at least, removal of sanctions, compensation for the loss of economic benefits due to sanctions and resuming of Inter-Korean peaceful interaction and cooperation. In return, Pyongyang might abandon its nuclear program.

On the other hand, The U.S. may satisfy some parts of North Korea's demand; it may reduce the range of sanctions; it may reduce the size of joint military exercises; it could allow inter-Korean cooperation. But what does Trump really want from the negotiation? It appears that Trump asks no less than a full denuclearization of the land of Kim Jong-un. But if the full denuclearization of North Korea takes place, Trump will have difficulty in justifying the deployment of American armed forces in South Korea. The world will be anxious to see how far Trump will go in negotiations

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Professor Joseph H. Chung is Associated Professor of Economics and Co-director of East Asia Observatory of University of Quebec in Montreal. He has been teaching economics at various universities in Canada and Korea. His recent research projects have been focusing on inter-Korean relations, in particular, the issue of reunification of the Korean peninsula.



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–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute



[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website www.globalresearch.ca . He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

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