

Video: American Armies Are the Greatest Impediment to Peace in the Korean Peninsula

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The Korean war never really ended, of course. It was just put on hold. The war itself lasted three years from 1950 to 1953, with both sides — the ROK in the south backed primarily by the US, and the DPRK in the North with significant military support from communist China — storming across the 38th parallel dividing north and south, only to be beaten back after vicious fighting.

The armistice bringing an end to open hostilities between the combatants was signed on July 27, 1953 by US Army Lieutenant General William Harrison, Jr. and North Korean General Nam Il. It established the 38th parallel, originally created as the demarcation line between the US-occupied South and the Soviet-occupied North during the post-war US military command of Korea, as the official border between the North and South. It established a 2.5 mile wide buffer zone, known as the Demilitarized Zone or DMZ, which to this day remains the most heavily defended border in the world. And it committed both sides to pursuing negotiations in expectation of a peace treaty to formally end the war.

And yet even now, 60 years after the war concluded, no such peace treaty has been signed. Over 28,000 US troops are still deployed in South Korea, ready to resume combat with North Korea. And the Korean nation remains divided along an arbitrary line on a map, splitting families from their ancestral homelands and creating yet another rift in a nation that has been conquered, ruled, occupied and divided throughout much of its history.

On the surface, the casual observer of Korea could be forgiven for forgetting that the nation

is still at war. The South has been utterly transformed since the days of the fighting, with the impressive skyline of modern-day Seoul reflecting the country's modern, high-tech economy. Even the DMZ has been tamed and gentrified, with souvenir shops and tourist attractions mingling seamlessly with military personnel whose presence at times seems more ceremonial than operational.

But beneath that surface remains the deep, lingering scars of a nation divided against itself, and the memories of a bitter, brutal war. Now, 60 years after the signing of the armistice, Korean peace activists are working harder than ever to confront the myths that have propped up and maintained this state of war, spearheading an effort to finally bring real peace to the Korean peninsula.

One such initiative was a recent international symposium which brought together peace activists, scholars, journalists and concerned citizens to events in Seoul, Pyongyang and Tokyo, all with the aim of confronting the enabling myths of the Korean war and working toward a peace treaty. The symposium took place around the 60th anniversary of the armistice and included the participation of Unified Progressive Party leader Jung Hee Lee and the Korean Alliance for Progressive Movements, as well as scholars like [Professor Michel Chossudovsky](#) of the Centre for Research on Globalization, [Professor Kiyul Chung](#) of Tsinghua University in Beijing, journalist [Xiong Lei](#) of CCTV in China, activist Brian Becker of the ANSWER Coalition in Washington, and former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Some of the myths that this symposium worked to deconstruct included the fundamental myth of the legitimacy of the war itself. The war effort in the South has long been characterized as a UN-led effort taking place under a United Nations Command that was authorized by [UN Security Council Resolution 83](#). The legitimacy of this resolution has been challenged on several levels. In direct violation of [Article 32](#) of the UN Charter, North Korea was not invited to participate in the Security Council deliberations on the dispute. The conflict was beyond the scope of UN action, as the North-South border skirmishes that drew UN attention was a civil war, and thus an internal matter beyond the mandate of UN intervention. And the Soviet Union [boycotted](#) the Security Council resolution, invalidating the action in the eyes of many legal scholars.

Even more fundamentally, the UN never in fact established a formal United Nations Command for the fighting. Security Council resolution 83 merely called on member states to provide assistance to the South Koreans, but the so-called UN Command was always primarily a US military effort, a point [conceded](#) by former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The nuclear threat to the Korean peninsula was also a topic of discussion. Completely counter to the western narrative, however, which posits North Korea's estimated six to eight nuclear devices and lack of intercontinental delivery system as some sort of existential threat to the United States, [attendees stressed](#) that the real nuclear threat is and always has come from Washington.

Given these facts, and given its history of scuttling attempts at serious peace negotiations, consensus at the symposium emerged around the notion that Washington and its 28,000 in country troops is the single greatest impediment to peace on the Korean peninsula.

As part of the events marking the 60th anniversary of the armistice, the symposium

mounted a protest at the doorstep of the Demilitarized Zone, including speeches from a range of international speakers, and a march and rally outside the Yongsan US Army Garrison in central Seoul. The days events culminated in a candlelight vigil that drew 20,000 people out to Seoul Plaza for an overwhelming display of solidarity amongst Koreans truly interested in peace and reunification.

As this anniversary passes and another year without peace in Korea is added to the calendar, the Korean people increasingly take up the mantle of beginning the process of healing by themselves. It will be a long and difficult road, complicated by interference from all of the outside parties with a stake in using the Korean war as an excuse to militarize the region, but for this very reason it is important that peace is not delayed any longer. The people of Korea, the people of the Asia-Pacific, and indeed the people of the world, can't wait any longer.

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