

# How Does South Korea View the US-North Korea Conflict?

“Trump Not Welcome!”: South Korean Peace Movement to Protest Trump’s Visit to South Korea

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*The following is a presentation given by South Korean peace activist **Choi Eun-a** on a webinar entitled “On the Brink of War: Peace Activists in South Korea and Japan Respond,” hosted by a consortium of US peace organizations on October 25, 2017.*

*(For a video recording of the full webinar, click [here](#))*

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## 1. How do South Korean progressives view the current US-North Korea conflict?

I can’t speak for all progressive forces, but I will tell you the view of the Korean Alliance of Progressive Movements (KAPM).

We view the current conflict between the United States and North Korea as the product of the un-ended Korean war and antagonism that have continued for sixty years since the signing of the Korean War armistice in 1953. For decades, the United States has considered North Korea an enemy state, deployed US troops and weapons of mass destruction in South Korea, and held massive war games as displays of its military might. The South Korean government, too, has spent ten times more than the North on defense to exert asymmetric pressure on North Korea. Since the late 1980s, South Korea has normalized relations with former socialist countries, but relations between North Korea and the United States, Japan and South Korea have not normalized and instead have been one of asymmetric intimidation. This is the fundamental reason for North Korea’s decision to strengthen its own deterrence and is at the root of the current crisis on the Korean peninsula.

We should note that the point at which North Korea stepped up its nuclear development was when agreements reached through the six party talks began to unravel. Multilateral agreements were tossed out unilaterally by the United States, which pursued a policy of regime collapse and war in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. These events were key in driving North Korea to turn to strengthening its own deterrence, particularly in the form of nuclear weapons.

If anything, the decades of negotiations between the United States and North Korea have confirmed two things: that as long as the United States does not stop its military threats and

sanctions targeting North Korea, North Korea will not abandon its nuclear deterrent; and that lasting peace and denuclearization on the Korean peninsula is a distant possibility. Sanctions, military threats and shows of force will only push North Korea to increase its own deterrent capabilities and exacerbate, not resolve, war threats on the Korean peninsula.

In this light, we can no longer ignore what North Korea has demanded for decades: the normalization of its relations with the United States. The United States needs to change course by stopping its hostile policies, i.e. sanctions and shows of military force, and pursue a peace agreement that fundamentally resolves the nuclear issue and military tension.

## **2. What are your plans for Trump’s upcoming visit to South Korea and beyond?**



Choi Eun-a

The South Korean public is highly critical of Trump—for denouncing Obama’s policy of strategic patience as a failure but still continuing the same policy of sanctions and military pressure; openly making threats of war and dismissing the gravity of its consequences as something “over there”; demanding that South Korea pay for the cost of hosting the THAAD missile system and US troops; and demanding the renegotiation of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement. The general mood here about Trump’s upcoming visit is one of anger.

We are working with other progressive forces and peace organizations to organize coordinated and joint actions under the banner of “No Trump.”

Beginning with a press conference today, we will carry out a series of actions until the last day of Trump’s visit on November 8. Leading up to his visit, our aim is to generate an anti-Trump consensus among the broader public. To this end, we will hang large banners that say, “War-threatening, weapons salesman Trump unwelcome,” “No war No Trump,” “No THAAD, no war threats, no sanctions” all across the country, post pamphlets at every bus station, hold simultaneous one-person relay protests across the country, and get organizations representing various sectors of the progressive movement to release statements denouncing Trump. On Saturday, November 4, we will hold a mass demonstration, then during his visit on November 7 and 8, we will organize joint actions outside the Blue House, at Gwanghwamun Plaza and outside the National Assembly.

Throughout this year, we have been organizing to demand an end to sanctions and the US-ROK war games that only intensify military tensions, and the realization of a Peace Treaty. If there are no talks between the United States and North Korea in the coming months, then we believe tensions will further escalate before Key Resolve Foal Eagle, the next massive US-ROK joint war games, scheduled for March 2018. In February 2018, South Korea hosts the Winter Olympics. It is the desire of the Moon Jae-in government to use the Olympics as an opportunity for symbolic North-South reconciliation. A flare-up of tensions before the mass war games will frustrate this plan. So we plan to intensify our call for an end to the military exercises and the pursuit of a Peace Treaty. To this end, we are planning a mass peace mobilization on Feb 3 before the Olympics and the Key Resolve exercises, then a series of actions across the country until late March to denounce the military exercises.

### **3. How can the peace movements of South Korea, Japan and the United States build/strengthen solidarity?**

We should, of course, strengthen solidarity among all who desire peace, but it needs to be based on shared goals and a shared sense of why we need to work together.

In our view, the US-led trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea is a war alliance that is gaining strength at a rapid pace and a serious threat to the right of the people of all three countries and the broader region of Asia to live in peace. Therefore, building a US-Japan-South Korea counter-alliance for peace is an urgent task.

It needs to be the type of alliance where opposing US hegemony in Asia and war threats on the Korean peninsula are not something one does out of solidarity with the people of another country “over there,” but a joint action by the pro-peace forces of all three countries based on a consensus that we all have a shared stake in this fight.

The pro-peace forces of the United States, Japan and South Korea raising a unified voice for peace is, in and of itself, a meaning step. What about issuing a joint statement by the pro-peace forces of the three countries on US policy on North Korea—the main focus of Trump’s upcoming visit to Asia? Also, next year will mark sixty-five years since the signing of the Armistice. How about a joint campaign to end the Korean War and for a Peace Treaty, and holding coordinated actions in all three countries, including an international gathering in South Korea, on/around July 27, the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice? I hope we can discuss these ideas today and beyond.

For sustained pro-peace/anti-war solidarity among the three countries, we should consider ways to continue regular online discussion so that we may share with each other assessments of the developing situation and ideas for joint action. I believe this is important as joint action will be much more powerful if based on shared understanding. Organizations that fight against US bases in Japan, Okinawa and South Korea come together on a regular basis and hold annual symposiums; their way of solidarity-building could serve as a model.

**Choi Eun-a** is the chair of the Reunification Committee of the Korean Alliance of Progressive Movements (KAPM), which brings together social movements — trade unions, farmers, urban poor, women, youth — for peace and democracy. It was instrumental in the fight to oppose the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement and the “candlelight revolution” that ousted former President Park Geun-hye.

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