

UPF-IMAP: Backchannel Diplomacy in Peacebuilding: The Case of Korea

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United States - UPF's International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) hosted an online meeting on the theme "Backchannel Diplomacy Approaches to Korean Unification, Telling the Rest of the Story" on December 28, 2021.

Track II diplomacy refers to unofficial and informal "backchannel" meetings between private citizens and other non-state actors. Track II can augment official diplomatic efforts (Track I), but is not a substitute. The value of Track II diplomacy is the freedom it offers for mitigating conflicts by exploring solutions derived from the public view in a relatively relaxed setting out of the spotlight, and without the burden of bargaining for advantage in formal negotiations.

The IMAP-North America program featured Dr. Seung-ho Lee, president of the DMZ Forum, Inc. and an expert in environmental management. Dr. Lee expressed hope that US President Joe Biden's leadership will support the proposal to turn the DMZ into a Peace Zone.

Overcoming

Panmunjom, DMZ
To break the deadlock with North Korea ...

Credit: U.S. Department of State

Pyongyang

Despite the highly expected US-North Korea summits during the Trump administration, their mutual demands are still not met. (c.f. President Biden's visit to Pyongyang, Impossible? Jerusalem of the East)

North Korea demands: "Stop the hostile policies towards North Korea and lift economic sanctions." (c.f. hostile policies by China)

The US demands: "Discard North Korean nuclear weapons" that North Korea claims to possess for purely defensive security measures. (c.f. USSR 8/29/1949; China 10/16/1964; NK 10/9/2006 - 9/3/2017)

Dr. Lee explained the complicated geopolitical situation that preceded the Korean War. In November 1950, a nuclear attack by the US was considered but not executed because its effectiveness was questioned. At that time, Rev. Moon was imprisoned in Heungnam Prison by Kim Il Sung and was liberated due to the US air strikes over the city. Chairman Mao's eldest son, Mao Anying (age 28) was killed during the air strikes of Nov. 1950 and buried in North Korea. It is estimated that the number of

Chinese who died in the war is between 180,000 and 900,000.

Dr. Lee supports the proposal to establish a 5th Secretariat of the United Nations in that special zone. It would be a Secretariat for climate and environmental protection. Making the DMZ a war memorial and a peace park would make the DMZ a "Gettysburg and Yosemite" rolled into one, according to professor E.O. Wilson of Harvard University. If President Biden followed this Track II approach, the situation on the Korean Peninsula could be changed quickly.

Mr. Julian Gray, a longtime resident of South Korea, and director of FFWPU International HQ Mission Department, discussed what members of the Family Federation have achieved through Track II diplomacy over the last half century.

Currently, North and South Korea do not recognize one another's legitimacy. They both claim to be the sole owners of the whole peninsula. China values the DPRK as a buffer zone and it is uncertain how China might react to a unified Korea. Both the US and China need to be involved to resolve the division.

Mr. Gray explored the question: What do civilian efforts at Track II diplomacy have to offer to realize a peaceful settlement of the Koreas? Rev. and Mrs. Moon have made tremendous efforts, he said. In the end, history will evaluate their contribution. Kim Il Sung recognized in Rev. Moon a kindred spirit. As was the case with a previous historic meeting between Rev. Moon and President Gorbachev, it was a backchannel media connection that allowed the meeting with Kim Il Sung and Rev. and Mrs. Moon to take place in Pyongyang.

In their discussions with Chairman Kim, reunion of separated families was included, as well as economic cooperation. Dr. Antonio Betancourt of the Summit Council for World Peace, founded by Dr. Moon, met with Kim Il Sung several times. H.E. Rodrigo Carazo, former president of Costa Rica, played a key role in organizing this meeting. Much humanitarian work resulted from these meetings.

The Women's Federation for World Peace representatives met with women's organizations in North Korea. Seminars were organized in Beijing with students from North Korea, South Korea, Japan and China. At the closing of these events, the song "Tongil" was sung arm in arm. Students from North Korea and South Korea were deeply connecting with one another, with many moved to tears.

Julian Gray shared about his personal trip to Kumgang Mountains, and his conversations with the guards. They asked questions about USA and the Iraq War and tried to catch him off guard, but in the end, they were interested in knowing how to learn English and were quite friendly.

The Little Angels went to perform in North Korea and, in exchange, North Korean troupes came to do likewise in South Korea.

Not long after these events a young artist from the Little Angels was interviewed by the media. When asked when she thinks the Koreas will unite, she answered, "The children have already united. We are waiting for the adults to do likewise."

Sang-gwon Pak, of Pyeong Hwa Motors, said it is possible to do business in the DPRK. He claims it's easy: "I deal with them honestly. I have been here for 18 years, I love them." He has always been honest in his business dealings with the North.

International investor Mr. Jim Rogers stated at a recent Think Tank 2022 event his vision for a unified Korea: "Just imagine what would be possible if what is now the DMZ were open for railway and highway traffic? The opportunities for commercial development and cultural development would be unlimited. Once the barriers start to come down, once there will be an explosion of growth, once we open the 38th parallel, it will benefit not only North and South Korea, but China, Russia, Japan, Asia, Southeast Asia, the whole world."

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