



How can the European experience be brought to bear on the search for peace on the Korean peninsula?

Robin Marsh

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## 'How can the European experience be brought to bear on the search for peace on the Korean peninsula?' Universal Peace Federation - Europe and the Middle East

### Universal Peace Federation - UK



Video Recording [here](#)

MC: Humphrey Hawksley, Former BBC World Affairs Correspondent, Author and Commentator (Full bio below)

Panel:

Major General (Ret.) Mats Engman: Head of the Stockholm Korea Center and Distinguished Military Fellow, Institute for Security and Development Policy (Full bio below)

Dr Samir Puri: Associate Fellow, UK in the World Programme, Chatham House (Full bio below)

Backgrounder:

*"In Europe's rich tapestry, diverse nations with complex histories have overcome past conflicts through compromise and soft power. Transitioning from non-democratic to democratic governance, Europe leveraged trading, political, legal, and military agreements for peace, stability, and economic growth. Can this experience be applied to engage the DPRK and facilitate change? As Europe catalysed transformation in Eastern Europe can similar strategies be effective in North Korea?"*

*During this webinar we are seeking to draw on the expertise of our panel to discuss innovative, as well as the tried and tested, approaches while considering the parallels that Europe's experience can bring to bear in the search for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.'*

The programme was opened by Humphrey Hawksley who introduced a video of excerpts of the previous webinar on a similar theme.

Secondly Hawksley introduced Major General (Ret.) Mats Engman, Head of the Stockholm Korea Center and Distinguished Military Fellow, Institute for Security and Development Policy.

Major General Mats Engman expresses pessimism about Europe's opportunities to foster peace on the Korean Peninsula, focusing on trust-building as a path to peace and stability. He shares insights from an exchange program at his institute, which involved North Korean guest researchers visiting Sweden and engaging in joint research with South Korean counterparts. This program, suspended due to the pandemic, showcased the value of long-term engagement for building trust.

Engman also highlights his experiences with the Military Armistice Commission and the Comprehensive Military Agreement, emphasizing the importance of transparency and risk reduction through measures like disarming soldiers and demining the Joint Security Area. Despite these efforts, trust-building activities involving North Korea have stalled since early 2020.

Looking forward, Engman identifies four major factors hindering trust-building:

- 1) Geopolitical Shifts: The recent summit between Putin and Kim Jong Un, which included an agreement for "automatic military intervention in times of crisis," complicates regional security dynamics and strains the US-South Korean alliance.
- 2) North Korea's Nuclear Advancements: The development of new missiles, mobile launchers, underwater launch capabilities, and improved command and control systems increases the risk of military miscalculations.
- 3) North Korea's Hostile Stance: The declaration of South Korea as North Korea's principal enemy and the policy shift away from unification efforts.
- 4) Pandemic-Induced Isolation: The pandemic has further isolated North Korea, diminishing the limited external support and direct personal contacts that existed pre-pandemic.

Engman concludes with four main points:

- 1) Increased Risk of Incidents: Provocations and military activities in the DMZ have heightened the risk of unintended incidents.
- 2) Arms Race: The ongoing regional arms race will likely continue, with North Korea benefiting from Russian technical support.
- 3) Dialogue Imbalance: North Korea is not in a hurry to engage in dialogue, and the political cost for Europe to engage has risen.
- 4) Europe's Diminished Role: Europe, traditionally a facilitator and moderator, has lost influence in North Korea's foreign policy.

Engman calls for a discussion on how Europe can regain influence and reengage with North Korea, despite the current challenges.

Responding to questions from Humphrey Hawksley, Maj. Gen. Mats Engman explained that North Korea's growing independence is due to alliances with Russia, Iran, and others, reducing its reliance on Western support. He highlights China as the key player influencing North Korea, but geopolitical tensions with the US hinder progress. Engman describes a developing security architecture in East Asia, with liberal democracies (US, Australia, Japan, South Korea) on one side and authoritarian regimes (China, Russia, North Korea, Iran) on the other. He emphasizes the need for dialogue but doubts North Korea's willingness to engage, particularly on denuclearization. Engman suggests Europe should recognize its stake in Korean security and develop a coordinated US-Europe policy to prevent North Korea from exploiting divisions within Europe.

Dr Samir Puri

Hawksley next introduced Dr Samir Puri who discussed the evolving geopolitical landscape in East Asia while focusing on the implications for the Korean

Peninsula. Drawing from his experience, particularly with the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Puri examines how geopolitical shifts influence regional stability.

Puri highlights the drastic changes over the past two decades, such as the defunct Six-Party Talks that included Russia, which can no longer be revived due to the current Russia-West conflict, especially in light of the Ukraine war. This conflict has profound implications for the Korean Peninsula, as evidenced by the burgeoning North Korea-Russia partnership.

He notes that Western narratives about the Ukraine war are not universally accepted in Asia, where many governments advocate for a negotiated settlement rather than a military solution. This perspective reflects broader regional views on conflict resolution and impacts how countries like Indonesia and India perceive security challenges.

Puri's main message is that Europe may inadvertently learn from East Asia's approach to managing unresolved geopolitical tensions. East Asian security has historically navigated around unresolved disputes, like those involving North Korea and Taiwan, focusing on conflict management rather than resolution. This contrasts with Europe's current approach to the Ukraine conflict, where a total defeat of Russia seems unlikely.

He suggests that North Korea's enhanced relationship with Russia, potentially involving increased military and diplomatic support, represents a significant shift. This partnership could lead to greater regional security challenges, especially for Japan and South Korea, given North Korea's advancements in missile technology.

Puri also points out that South Korea's relatively moderate stance on sanctions against Russia might position it as a potential intermediary in future geopolitical alignments. However, the overarching concern is that Europe, traditionally lacking experience with prolonged unresolved conflicts, might have to adapt strategies from East Asia's longstanding conflict management practices.

In conclusion, while North Korea's situation offers lessons for Europe in managing persistent conflicts, the reverse learning is limited. The evolving dynamics, particularly the North Korea-Russia-China nexus, underscore the need for careful diplomatic navigation to avoid exacerbating regional tensions.

In the discussion after Dr Samir Puri's speech, Humphrey Hawksley and Dr Puri, examined the complexities of the geopolitical landscape, particularly focusing on the dynamics between major powers. Puri highlighted the strategic calculations of countries like Russia and China, emphasizing their long-term, multifaceted alliances. They discussed the implications of these alliances for global stability, noting the potential for friction and conflict. Puri underscored the necessity of dialogue and diplomacy in managing these tensions, while Hawksley reflected on the challenges posed by the evolving power structures and the need for a cohesive response from Europe and other Western nations to address security concerns.

In the **Question and Answer section**, Humphrey Hawksley and Major General Mats Engman addressed the potential for peace on the Korean Peninsula, noting the historical context and current geopolitical constraints. Engman highlighted that while Europe's experience in military risk reduction and confidence-building could offer lessons, these approaches need adaptation to fit the Korean context. He was pessimistic about immediate peace prospects, given North Korea's demands and the lack of willingness from the U.S. to concede on denuclearization.

Engman recalled a near-war situation in 2015, emphasizing the importance of having experienced and calm military leaders during crises. He suggested that constant exercises and trust-building between military and political leaders are crucial, a system not as well-developed in authoritarian regimes like Russia and China.

Dr. Samir Puri noted that deeper historical analysis could entrench conflicts rather than resolve them, as seen in how leaders like Xi Jinping and Putin use historical narratives to justify current policies. He echoed Engman's view that North and South Korea have vastly different concepts of unification, complicating any prospects for peace. Puri also highlighted that the changing global economic landscape, with the rise of countries like India and Indonesia, impacts the effectiveness of sanctions and geopolitical strategies.

Engman noted that current direct communication channels between the Koreans are nearly non-existent, with North Korea preferring to deal with the U.S. directly. Both Engman and Puri discussed the limited impact of sanctions and the potential for new alliances, such as North Korea's relations with Russia and China, to provide alternatives to Western influence.

They also addressed the possibility of a people-power revolution in North Korea, with Engman skeptical due to the regime's tight control over information and society. Both concluded pessimistically about the short-term prospects for change in North Korea, underscoring the regime's resilience and the challenging international dynamics.

**In his closing speech Jacques Marion**, UPF Europe and the Middle East Co-Chair addressed Europe's role in promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula amid current geopolitical tensions, particularly the recent Moscow-Pyongyang summit and its implications for Europe. Despite the challenges, he emphasizes seeking a silver lining, reflecting on the Universal Peace Federation's (UPF) efforts for peace and reconciliation in Korea.

Marion highlights the historical significance of the Korean War as the first military conflict of the Cold War, noting that many Europeans fought for freedom and democracy, which was only achieved in the South. The recent DPRK-Russia Defense Pact has broad political, military, and economic consequences, positioning North Korea as a significant player in a new Eurasian security architecture that benefits China as well.

He underscores the need for Europe to strengthen and coordinate its security plans across Eurasia, aligning the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters of operations. Despite the low prospects for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula, Marion suggests looking beyond the current conflict towards future possibilities.

Marion references Kim Jong Un's recent declaration that North Korea would no longer focus on reunification and considers South Korea an enemy. However, he doubts Kim's ultimate goal is permanent separation. Citing Dr. Glyn Ford, Marion suggests that North Korea's nuclear capabilities are its only leverage against South Korea and that economic growth could eventually lead to reunification discussions.

Marion recalls his experience with UPF in Russia and the ambitious development plans for the Far East under President Putin, including a proposed tunnel at the Bering Strait to enhance economic leverage. He believes Russia, despite its current focus on the Ukraine conflict, understands its future development lies in the East and supports Korean reunification for mutual benefit.

Quoting UPF Founder Dr. Moon, Marion envisions a unified Korean Peninsula as a stabilizing force for regional cooperation among superpowers. While current prospects are dim, the potential for a prosperous Northeast Asia economic zone remains significant. Marion calls for Europe to look ahead and contribute to future cooperation between the Koreans, noting the growing interest of young Europeans in Korean culture and their potential role in fostering peace and reconciliation on the peninsula.

#### **Bios:**

**Humphrey Hawksley** is an award-winning author and foreign correspondent whose assignments with the BBC have taken him to crises all over the world. His **Rake Ozenna series** originated when reporting from the US-Russian border during heightened tension

He has been guest lecturer at universities and think tanks such as the RAND Corporation, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and MENZA Cambridge. He moderates the monthly Democracy Forum debates on international issues and is a host on the weekly **Goldster Book Club** where he discusses books and talks to authors. He has presented numerous BBC documentaries and his latest non-fiction work is *Asian Waters: The Struggle Over*

**Major General (ret.) Mats Engman**, is the Head of the Stockholm Korea Center and Distinguished Military Fellow at ISDP. His expertise lies in security policy, military strategy and crisis management, and his work has a particular focus on developments in East Asia, and the Korean Peninsula.

Maj Gen Engman has more than forty years of active military service. His most recent assignment was as the Head of the Swedish Delegation to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, in South Korea between 2015-2017. He was commissioned in the Swedish Air Force in 1976 and has predominantly served in joint and international positions. Among those are; two times as a UN military observer in the Middle East, three years as the Defense attaché to the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, Instructor in strategy at the National Defense College, Deputy Director of the Military and Security Directorate and Head of the International Department at the Joint Staff.

**Dr. Samir Puri** was raised in 1980s London in a family that had traversed three continents in three generations, from Asia to Africa to Europe.

He later completed a PhD at Cambridge University in International Relations, worked at RAND, and then the Foreign Office, where his assignments covered counter-terrorism, and a year in east Ukraine monitoring the onset of war in 2014 - 15.

After government service, Dr Puri became a lecturer in War Studies at King's College London, and guest lectured at Cambridge and Johns Hopkins. He retains a visiting post at King's and between 2020 and 2022 was Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore. In 2023, he became an Associate Fellow at Chatham House.

His book, 'The Great Imperial Hangover', is a distillation of these varied perspectives: from the academic to the practical; from the personal to the political; and from the descendants of the colonized to those of the colonizers. <https://www.samirpuri.com/>

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