

Korea --- A Settlement? Very Possible, Highly Unlikely, But --- by Steven Jonas

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North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons and its right to maintain them, indefinitely. After all, if the three states that have not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India, Pakistan, and Israel, can have them, why not North Korea? The excuses for India and Pakistan are primarily each other, for Israel, its size and its geographical isolation. For North Korea, the reason is a rather different one. Rather, it is reasons. Let me count (some of) them: North Korea (1950-53), Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Vietnam (1954), Hungary (attempted, 1956), Brazil (1964), the Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), (Afghanistan, 1978-86), Nicaragua (partial, 1980s), the Soviet Union (which, despite having nuclear weapons, succumbed to the 75 Years War Against the Soviet Union, 1917-1992), Iraq (2003), Cuba (since 1961, unsuccessful, but still trying), (Iran, presently, still trying), Libya (2012), Venezuela (2017). And so on and so forth.

This is a partial list of countries in which the U.S. has attempted, often but not always with success, what is politely called "regime change." The interventions have ranged from the frank overthrow of a freely elected government (Iran, 1953), to direct military invasion of a supposedly "threatening" military dictatorship which, however, presented no threat to the United States other than what was put out in the government propaganda of the time (Iraq, 2003).]

It happens that it was the U.S. that created the two Koreas. As World War II was coming to a close, the Soviet Union was poised to invade Japan and its then colonial possession, Korea, on August 8, 1945. One motivation for the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9) was to foreclose the possibility that the Red Army would establish a foothold on Japanese territory (the first landings were to be on the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido) and would quickly take over the whole of the Korean Peninsula.

With the forestalling of the Soviet invasion, U.S. personnel quickly were moved to Korea. Before they arrived in September, in Washington a young U.S. colonel, one Dean Rusk, looked at a map and decided that a line dividing Korea in two, one a "Soviet" zone, and the other a "US" zone, would a) be a good idea, and b) would be [arbitrarily] drawn at the 38th parallel. (With this sort of action, Dean Rusk, an army colonel at the time, was obviously preparing for his much bigger role in preparing and perpetuating the War on Viet Nam.) Although the first North Korean leader, Kim il Sung, and his parents, had been leading anti-Japanese guerilla forces since the Japanese conquest of Manchuria in 1932, and was widely respected (revered by some) throughout Korea, the US set-up a pro-US government under the former exile, the pro-Washington Syngman Rhee. Using many former Korean Japanese collaborators, they spent much of their time rooting out, and in many cases killing, supporters of Kim il-Sung residing in the South.

North Korea has previously negotiated with the United States and at one time was an adherent to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It pulled out in 2003 because, bottom line, despite what was being said in Washington at the time, it simply did not trust President George W. Bush. (And, after "Iraq," why would any potential adversary?) Regardless of what did or did not happen between North Korea and the United States during the Obama Administration, the former clearly now does not trust the U.S. any more than it could hoist the whole country onto one of its Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (or perhaps, if they really have one, an ICBM) and send the whole country into outer space.

It is very important to note that there has never been a peace treaty, either between North and South Korea nor between the North and the United States following the conclusion of the armistice that ended the fighting in 1953. The North has been asking for such a treaty for many years, as have many elements in South Korea. Under neither Democratic nor Republican Presidents has the U.S. ever shown any inclination to negotiate one. And so, as far as the North Koreans are concerned, the number one objective for the U.S. has been the overthrow of their government, with the likely "unification" (and man, would that be a bloody affair) under South Korean rule.

That of course would put a close diplomatic, commercial and military ally of the U.S. on both the Chinese and Russian borders. As I said at the beginning of this column, the North Koreans are never going to give up their nuclear weapons. Those weapons are the only guarantee they have against U.S.-sponsored "regime change."

For obvious reasons, as is well known, neither the Chinese nor the Russians want that to happen either. Nevertheless, the outlines of a deal are on the table.

- A peace treaty is negotiated. (In early 2016, North Korea did say that in return for a peace treaty, it would end nuclear testing. And that had to have been an opening negotiating position.)
- Relations between North Korea and South Korea and the United States are normalized.
- All sanctions are lifted.
- North Korea re-joins the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, agrees to a freeze on its ballistic missile development program, and subjects itself to regular International Atomic Energy Agency inspections (like Iran), including its military facilities (unlike Iran).

There are give-ups on both sides here, but such a resolution would be very beneficial to the North as well as to Russia and China. There has been much talk about the impending collapse of the NK government --- for years. It has not happened. But true peace would give it the opportunity to massively develop the nation economically. There is much talk about how poor and backward it is. Nevertheless, it has been able to create what must be a fairly large group of scientists and engineers, for its nuclear programs, peaceful and military. A settlement would allow the turning of those human resources towards productive pursuits, for all.

Finally, would the U.S. agree to such a proposal? Not a chance, especially under Trump. Since North Korea would, and could, never agree to de-nuclearization, such a deal would be an almost impossible sell politically for any U.S. President, but especially Trump. But more than that, the U.S. needs the "North Korean threat" to justify all sorts of things, military and commercial, starting with the maintenance of Permanent War. In a while, the short-term threats from both sides will quiet down. (Yes, Trump will get bored with this one and turn his attention elsewhere where he can mouth off.) But, because of the inherent U.S. resistance to it, any permanent, peaceful resolution of an unstable situation that has been in place or over 60 years is a long way off.

BUT, if South Korea and its ruling class, with the country's capital within massive artillery (not nuclear) range of the North, finally gets tired of being led around by the nose by the U.S. (and most especially by its current President) on the matter of relationships with the North and decides to go off and negotiate its own peace treaty, well then ---