

UPF Geneva, Switzerland: Neutral Nations' Efforts to Keep Peace in Korea

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Geneva, Switzerland -- Neutral nations' efforts to keep peace on the Korean Peninsula were the focus of a UPF webinar.

UPF of Europe and the Middle East held the online conference "Korean Peninsula: Armistice and Effect of the NNSC (Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission)" on June 10, 2021. There were 106 viewers on Zoom.

The keynote speaker was **Major General Patrick Gauchat**, the head of the Swiss delegation to the NNSC at the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) near Panmunjom. General Gauchat presented an inclusive report on the reality of the armistice on the Korean Peninsula, how it evolved from 1953 until now, the situation in the DMZ, as well as the role and impact of the NNSC in contributing to peace across the demarcation line.



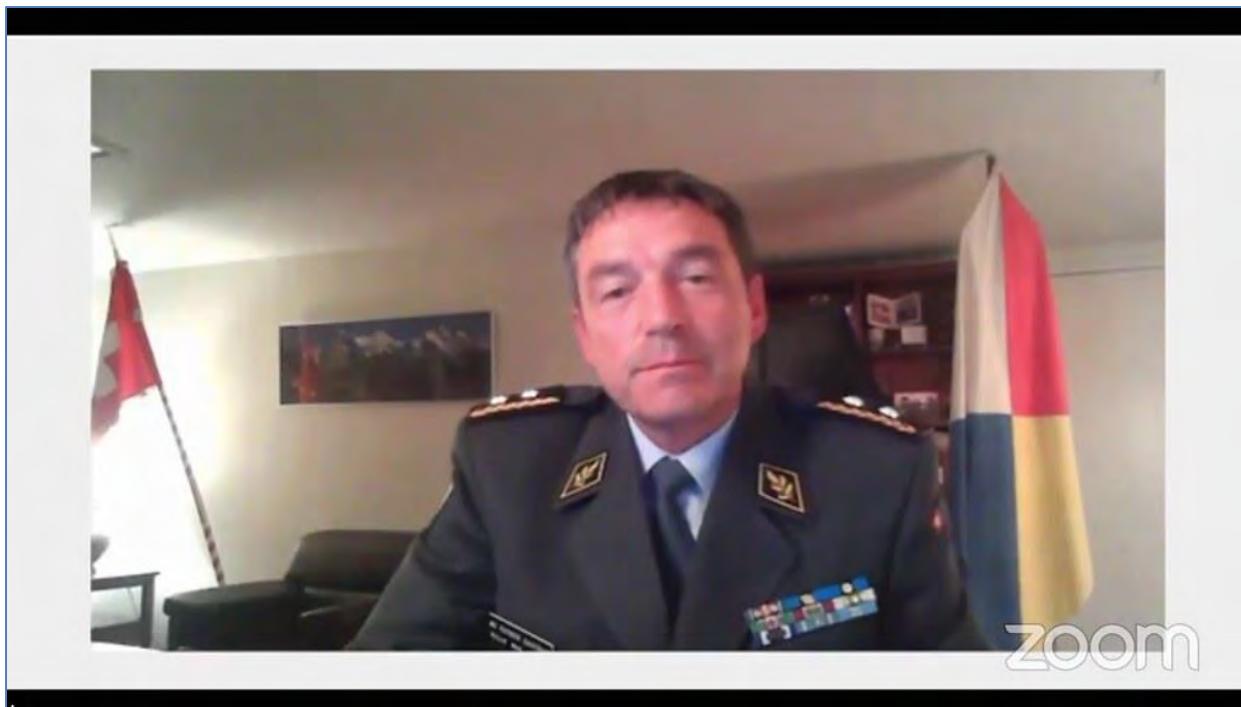
The respondents were **Dr. Claude Béglé** from Switzerland and **Dr. Marek Aleksander Czarnecki** from Poland, two members of the recently launched UPF initiative Think Tank 2022, a worldwide group of experts in politics, academics, religion, business and the media that contribute to Korean reunification.

Chantal Chételat Komagata, the coordinator of UPF for Europe, was the moderator. She mentioned the hundreds of conferences that UPF has organized around the world focusing on the reunification of Korea,

which UPF believes is central to peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Mrs. Komagata hinted at a new paradigm in which the people of North and South Korea, independent of their increased economic and cultural gap, would cooperate with one another and share mutual prosperity based on common values. She then introduced the keynote speaker, Major General Patrick Gauchat.

General Gauchat gave a very precise presentation explaining many details unknown to most people. He pointed out that the initial separating line drawn after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union was exactly on the 38th parallel but that this line was changed after the Korean War to what it is now.



The general pointed out that as the Korean Peninsula is surrounded by superpowers and has many territorial issues, particularly small islands, "Whatever is happening on the Korean Peninsula has an effect on disputes." He said that Northeast Asia "doesn't have a de-escalation system, [unlike] Europe with OECD [the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]."

In a diagram highlighting tensions between the parties, the year 2017 showed a peak related to North Korean nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests and sanctions from the United Nations Security Council. The level of tensions decreased in 2018 through a summit policy starting with North Korean President Kim Jong-un's speech at the United Nations on January 1, followed by meetings with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and U.S. President Donald Trump. The Sept. 20, 2018, agreement signed in Pyongyang brought comprehensive military arrangements and some new confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Unfortunately, General Gauchat said, after the Hanoi Summit of February 2019, the talks stopped and the liaison office at the North Korean town of Kaesong was destroyed. However, the tensions felt now at the border between South and North Korean soldiers are less than in 2017 and have stabilized. Also, due to the pandemic, things have slowed down.

General Gauchat explained that it took 18 months for the Korean People's Army (North Korea), the People's Volunteer Army (China) and the United Nations Command, led by the United States, to sign the Armistice Agreement (AA) on July 27, 1953, during which time many more lives were lost. This established a ceasefire on the military level as a basis for a political discussion that would achieve a peace treaty. The Military Demarcation Line defined a 2-kilometer buffer zone on each side to avoid local confrontation.

However, General Gauchat said, "what was not described in the armistice documents became a source of tension." The five islands off the West coast were decided as belonging to the United Nations Command (UNC) in the AA, but the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the ocean was decided by the UNC in 1954. As it was a unilateral decision, it was challenged by the DPRK with another line including the five islands in its territory. That's where 130 lives were lost in incidents.

The general described the NNSC as neutral and independent, with all published reports and discussions limited to the parties without involvement of other governments. From the four European nations chosen to secure the positions at the DMZ from August 1953, the two former satellites of the Soviet Union on the North Korean side of the line, Czechoslovakia and Poland, were dismissed in the 1990s, and only the

Swiss and Swedish delegations remained. Although the NNSC proposed that two other nations replace them, this hasn't been realized yet.

He emphasized the growing number of confidence-building measures (CBMs) undertaken on the military side as the basis to achieve a peace treaty on the political level. Among the CBMs, he mentioned increased distance between the parties, removal of mines in the DMZ, joint recovery operations, demolition of guard posts and technical agreements on maintenance -- all of which are reported to both parties in order to diminish tensions and transform the DMZ into a peace zone.

The NNSC also proposed different CBMs to the parties, such as increased joint exercises, depth of observation, check of absence of weapons and decreased numbers of US troops. General Gauchat said that the added value of the NNSC is appreciated by all the parties as the "only neutral body contributing to diminishing the risk on the DMZ."

He compared the NNSC with a referee who only intervenes if needed. The NNSC wouldn't "want to survive as a remainder of the armistice," the tactical military level serving as support for the discussion on the political level.

After General Gauchat concluded his presentation, the two Think Tank 2022 experts offered comments based on their own experience and viewpoints.

Dr. Claude Béglé, the founder and president of Symbioswiss and former member of the Swiss Parliament, had been at the DMZ with a team of parliamentarians just before 2017. Although the border remained sensitive because of the importance of DPRK land armed forces and the proximity of Seoul, he said that - - contrary to the situation in 1953 -- a military offensive through the DMZ was not likely to happen, and the threat now was mainly nuclear and in the field of cyber-attacks.

Dr. Béglé described North Korea as an "enigma not to be underestimated," the Kim regime's survival being at stake, and said that the "transition should be acceptable to the DPRK leaders." He affirmed that the nuclear threat had opened Kim Jong-un's seat at the negotiation table with President Trump and that dialogue needed to be reopened, offering perspectives to a DPRK becoming gradually open to the rest of the world, becoming a complementary partner and by no means capitulating.

He emphasized that the major risk factor is coming mainly from tensions between the United States and China, especially with the rise of Asia's new economic and technological powers. Finally, he suggested that the task probably would require the participation of more neutral observers to help both parties reach a federal state with a balanced outcome, not with "a winner and a loser." Thus, the NNSC is keeping the front calm, he said, with the hope that one day the politicians finally will negotiate real peace.



Dr. Marek Aleksander Czarnecki, a lawyer and former Polish member of the European Parliament, explained the role of Czechoslovakia and Poland on the side of North Korea, but only until the 1990s, due to "the changes in the political landscape after the fall of the Berlin Wall." It was the dissolution of Czechoslovakia that initiated the withdrawal of Czech representatives to the NNSC at the northern side of the Military Demarcation Line.

Dr. Czarnecki said that "aiming at dissolving the inconvenient NNSC, North Korea used very effective

means to limit abilities of presence and work of Polish representatives," who, "as a result of enormous pressure, were forced to leave the dislocation area in the northern part of the Joint Security Area in Panmunjom." Since that time Polish representatives have not been able to observe North Korean movements but occasionally take part in the work of NNSC by arriving at Panmunjom from the southern side.

Mélanie Komagata, a post-graduate student of East Asian studies at the University of Geneva, presented questions from the audience.

She mentioned the historic crossings at the demarcation line, by Micheline Calmy-Rey, a member of the Swiss Federal Council, and the presidents of the ROK and the US.

General Gauchat said that the Swiss federal councilor had been the last person to cross the border in 2003 before the presidents crossed it 15 years later. The NNSC had prepared for security, welcome and comprehension. Major General Adrien Evéquoz, head of the Swiss delegation to the NNSC at the time, had gone to the North to welcome her and crossed with her before guiding her to the Swiss camp. Also for the meetings of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and U.S. President Donald Trump, the NNSC was present; the parties had prepared all in good collaboration without any provocation. Thus, the summits went well, and one couldn't see any military presence on either side.

To the question of the establishment of a Peace Park and a fifth United Nations office at the DMZ, as was discussed at UPF events at the UN office in Geneva, he answered that the beautiful nature was ideal for a peace park and meeting place, and many projects could be realized by both Koreas together in the future.

Asked about South Korea's expectations of the NNSC, the general mentioned that the ROK is not a signatory to the armistice but recognizes it and sees the NNSC as a tool of stabilization, expecting it to stick to the armistice and be available to the parties, especially when incidents happen, to edit a neutral report and recommendations with the aim of reducing risk.

Concerning the length of mission and highlights in the DMZ, General Gauchat spoke from a perspective of two to eight years, not knowing how much longer he will be staying. He spoke of the very interesting four years starting in 2017 with very high tension and an unbelievable summit policy in 2018, followed by the amazing confidence-building measures.

Asked about the prospects of the DMZ being opened for the free passage of people, he explained that suddenly in 2018, some crossings had taken place -- for example, a North Korean official from Pyongyang, for the Winter Olympic Games that were held in South Korea's Pyeongchang county. He said that both North and South Korean military were working together in the middle of the DMZ, that many discussions had taken place at Panmunjom and that things can go fast once the political level finds some agreement, as in the past two years.

He explained that the military is like a sensor. He observed that everything goes well when there are talks and projects, and that when the stop in discussions, as in Hanoi, puts an end to the CBMs, then everyone waits for the political level to continue.

For the final statements, Dr. Béglé summarized the steps to reconciliation, starting with a ceasefire, followed by re-creation of trust between the partners, which is possible only with a new mindset without a winner or a loser -- "partners looking each other in the eyes and building a new future."

Dr. Czarnecki deplored the fact that for some, the NNSC remains a façade and reassured the audience that "Poland supports the peaceful reunification of Korea and the six-party talks on Korean denuclearization."

General Gauchat concluded by appreciating peacekeeping as an opportunity to do good and for the peacekeepers to learn a lot.

The MC thanked the keynote speaker and the two respondents for their great contributions as well as the participants and the UPF staff. She said she hoped that many will support Think Tank 2022 and the envisioned goal of a unified Korean family as a step toward world peace.