

UPF Peace Talk 4 -- Audience Questions about Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Thomas G. Walsh

May 8, 2020

UPF Peace Talk 4, Prospects and Challenges for Peace on the Korean Peninsula in Light of Recent Developments



Dr. Walsh: In the interest of time, I want to move to some questions from the audience. They've waited patiently. I think they have been stimulated by the presentations. (Here are some questions for various speakers.)

Question: Why did the six party talks fall apart and is revival of the talks possible?

Joseph De Trani: I hope they could be revived in the future. The Six Party Talks did have success with the Joint Statement of October 19, 2005, when North Korea's Kim Jong-il, the father of Kim Jong-un, submitted to complete verifiable denuclearization in return for security assurances and economic development assistance. It fell apart in 2009 on the issue of verification when North Korea would not sign an agreement to permit monitors, nuclear monitors, to leave the Yongbyon facility to visit non-declared suspect sites and that's almost pro forma. When they did not sign that agreement, things began to fall apart quickly, unfortunately.

Question for Dr. Mansourov: What would a unified Korea look like? What would be the first challenges of uniting the people after sixty years of separation?

Alexander Mansourov: Do you want me to give an honest answer? My honest answer is, Not in my lifetime. I do not want to daydream. There are several examples in the past. Vietnam gives us one example. Germany gives another. I hope something along the lines of a Pan-Korean community one day might emerge. We observed in Europe, the nations of Eastern, Central and Western Europe coming together, forming a common market without borders. A unified identity might one day become possible. This is long sought. I do not think it will happen in Kim Jong-un's lifetime. Being public officials, of course, no North Korean leader can abandon the unification talk, the unification strategy. Just like in South Korea, no political leader in the south can abandon the unification dream. Realistically, we have two completely different countries with two different economic and political systems. You would even need to merge two different national identities. So (if anything) a process of reconciliation and rapprochement will unfold slowly, gradually. Maybe our grandchildren one day will be fortunate enough to visit a unified Korea, like that united state of Russia and Belarus -- another way to go, another potential model. But definitely not the German way or not the Yemeni way, because we saw what happened in Yemen's reunification. God forbid ending up that way. I am a bit on the pessimistic side.

Question: How can countries threatened by nuclear weapons ensure that those weapons are never used?

Ambassador Chung: We cannot think about them never using nuclear weapons. We must always think of the one percent chance that they will use them. Because of nuclear weapons and nuclear programs, the attitude of North Korea is drastically changing. We should notice it. That is why we worry about the nuclear aspect. The international community is worried about the spread of nuclear weapons, even to terrorists. That is why elements of the international community, including UPF, talk about unification, peaceful unification... Regarding unification, the successful unification of Germany involved many factors, but the most important international factor was the collapse of the Soviet Union, the weakening of the Soviet Union, which created the chance for East and West Germany to merge with each other. But in the case of the two Koreas, it is different. Now, China is emerging. Under that circumstance, we cannot expect peaceful unification.

We need to wait until North Korean society changes -- the society, not the leader. The society needs to be more mature. The people of North Korea should have a different idea. We have not seen this yet, but I am hopeful because North Korea's distribution system has collapsed, completely collapsed. People in North Korea are living on the market and on information. Mobile phones are spreading enormously. Information is flowing. That is a good factor for us to see change in North Korean society in a mature way. We have to wait until that time.

Question: Might the us withdraw some troops from the Republic of Korea partly because of the dispute

over South Korea's contribution toward the basing of us forces?

Ambassador DeTrani: I hope that's not the case. The Special Measures Agreement (SMA) is an ongoing dialog. The Republic of Korea contributes significantly. We are talking about close to nine hundred million a year. We are talking about that going up to as much as five billion. There has to be some movement on both sides, and I think we are coming close to reaching a resolution. I don't think the money should be holding the number of troops for the joint command hostage. I think those are two separate issues. We need to resolve the budget issue. We are getting close to resolving it, and the troops -- we're talking about twenty-eight thousand, five hundred troops -- which is a tripwire. It's also a message to North Korea that the United States and South Korea are close allies and we want a peaceful resolution to issues. If North Korea should do anything untoward, and hopefully, that is not the case, they are not suicidal... I think we have rational leadership in North Korea, but the US is committed to that and that's where the twenty-eight thousand, five hundred troops are [in or near the Demilitarized Zone]. That [any possible reduction in US troops] has got to be, I think, negotiated separately, depending on what the vagaries are, but I don't think it's related to the financial budgetary issues that we discussed.

Dr. Walsh: That will have to be about it. I'm sorry for all those who submitted questions that we don't have time for both through E-mail and from some of you through chat.

I'm going to ask one last question. It may just be that you repeat something you said earlier, but what would be the one or two steps that you would recommend going forward. Dr. Mansourov, you to some extent answered, but by way of summation I invite each of you to make a final intervention of no more than one minute but just remind us or give us an action step, a call to action.

Ambassador DeTrani: In one minute, I would say that being we that have two declarations, the Panmunjom Declaration and the Singapore Joint Statement and we've had a lot of dialog with Kim Jong-un, I think for President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un could move on into Korean relations, to move in that direction, look into economic integration. I think that's powerful. And for the United States, I think reaching out not only to the ROK and Japan but also to Russia and China. Someone mentioned the Six-Party Talks, I think that was a successful process we had there. Reconstituting something along those lines, so that we could look at a peaceful resolution is a good idea and Ambassador Chung's comments of complete verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, is too, because we certainly don't want nuclear weapons proliferating in the region anywhere. So that's what we're looking at. I think these are achievable, no question, within the next decade.

Ambassador Chung: Thank you very much. This has been an important webinar that has been productive. We should mobilize the older agreements from previous years. These older agreements were not implemented. Because of the lack of North Korean leadership to implement the agreements, particularly from the [February 27–28, 2019] Hanoi Summit meeting, which washed out all possibility of dialog.

As I mentioned earlier, the United States should initiate dialog. Of course, North Korea desperately wants to have dialog with the US president. So, now, no matter what and how much our president, Moon Jae-in, emphasizes the intention of cooperation with North Korea, it is in vain. North Korea despises talk with us, because their priority is to have improved relations with the United States. So, the United States should initiate all the dialog.

Lastly, as I mentioned, Korea has the historical experience of being victimized because of the friction between powerful countries. So we need to move toward international order, and we want [to experience] the good governance of the international order. So the friction between China and the United States should be addressed. That is important. We have a good indicator: Quite recently, the United States and China agreed to a [previously proposed] trade agreement. That is a good start. I want to lastly say, regarding UPF's focus on encouraging the United States and the international community to establish good governance and a balanced international order, thank you very much.

Dr. Mansourov: To be honest, it is hard to expect much this year because of the pandemic and the upcoming US elections.... I would recommend that next year, once all the air traffic restrictions are lifted and the social distancing measures are relaxed, that UPF and Mother Moon especially, try to reach out to the North to increase the transparency in the spirit of greater cooperation and reinvigorated reconciliation and basically make an effort to open up North Korea, not only for our members but the rest of the world. UPF must be the just broker, must display moral leadership. Go to North Korea and open up that country for dialog. Dialog along the North–South line and the US line. That's for Mother Moon, really; that's her mission. Next year would be the right time to do it.

Thomas Walsh: Thank you, Dr. Mansourov for that call to action for UPF and the world powers, and I thank all three of our panelists. From the chatter I am reading, the audience is thrilled with your expertise and articulation of the issues. This has been encouraging. You brought honor and dignity to this webinar series. I thank you on behalf of the audience and on the behalf of UPF, and I look forward to our ongoing collaboration.