

UPF-Russia's webinar: Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Maria Nazarova
November 20, 2020



Moscow, Russia -- UPF-Russia held its third webinar on the theme "Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula."

Background

After programs on November 10 and November 16, UPF-Russia held the third webinar of the series on November 20, 2020. The three online programs, organized to mark the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, gathered scholars from Russia, the United States and Europe to discuss obstacles and possibilities for the reunification of Korea. The situation on the Korean Peninsula affects not only the Asia-Pacific region but also countries around the world.

At the same time, 2020 has been a year of dramatic shocks for all of humanity, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. Panelists in these three webinars discussed if 2020 has brought the prospect of peace on the Korean Peninsula closer or further away.

Panelists

Harry J. Kazianis from the United States is the senior director of the Korean Studies Center for the National Interest, and the executive editor of *The National Interest* magazine.

Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky from the Russian Federation is a chief researcher at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, a full member of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, and an expert of the Russian Council of Foreign Affairs.

Dr. Michael Jenkins from the United States is the president of Universal Peace Federation International.

The moderator of the webinar was Maria Nazarova, the president of UPF-Russia.

Each panelist gave a seven-minute presentation. The presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session.

Harry J. Kazianis pointed out that the United States is approaching North Korea as if we were in 1990. The next U.S. president would be well advised to see North Korea for what it is now, he said: a state armed with nuclear weapons which, most likely, can reach the United States with its intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Mr. Kazianis suggested that the next U.S. president should reassure North Korea that he intends to carry on with President Trump's legacy, possibly via a statement even before his inauguration, and that he won't ignore the progress made. This might prevent the DPRK from conducting missile tests, which it will be tempted to do. Most importantly, to gain the confidence of North Korea, that statement must reaffirm that

all agreements signed by President Trump or agreed to informally by him will be honored. The next U.S. president should not fall back on strategic patience, which was the policy of Barack Obama's administration.

The United States should understand North Korea's dire domestic situation after three typhoons, food insecurity, and international economic sanctions -- all amplified through COVID-19. It should understand that a pressure strategy will be matched by a countermeasure from North Korea.

The United States should conduct a policy that supports denuclearization, even though that is unlikely to happen in the short or even long term. Priority should be given to building trust. There should be a peace declaration ending the Korean War. How otherwise can North Korea be asked to give up its ICBMs? Lastly, there need to be talks about arms control on both sides, to lower the temperature militarily on the Korean Peninsula.

Dr. Vladimir Petrovsky also said that the United States still approaches North Korea as if we were in the 1990s. All countries involved should consider why there is this gap in time. Dr. Petrovsky said he remembers the process of cross-recognition in 1990: China and the United States diplomatically recognized South Korea, while the United States and Japan were to give diplomatic recognition to North Korea, but this did not happen. Russia, the United States, China, and Japan all have the same goal of denuclearization, but the question is how to achieve that. If you want to obtain something, you need to give something. This is the main point for the policy with North Korea to be successful. Therefore, China, the United States and the other members of the UN Security Council need to find a mechanism to suspend the economic sanctions on North Korea and at the same time support denuclearization.

Dr. Petrovsky also said that what President Trump has achieved during his term of office should not be abandoned.



Question-and-Answer Session

Answering a question from the North Korean radio in Russia on what the policy of the United States would be if Joe Biden became the next president, Mr. Kazianis said that, from his point of view, it would depend a lot on what North Korea would do first. He strongly advises North Korea not to conduct any provocations whatsoever. It also would be good for North Korea to show its readiness to continue the dialogue with the United States. At the same time, it is hard to know what the next U.S. president would do.

During his visit to South Korea in 2018, Mr. Kazianis was told that, in fact, South Korea is like an isolated island on the peninsula, without communication with or possibility to go to North Korea. Transportation of goods is possible only by air or by sea, which hampers the economic development of not only South Korea but also China, Russia, and North Korea. If we are talking about bringing North Korea into the international community, major infrastructural projects are essential, he said. Allowing North Korea to be part of the international community by allowing its economy to grow, thanks to better infrastructure, is more useful than concentrating on the nuclear issue. It is worth trying to propose infrastructural projects to Pyongyang step by step and to see how they react.

Mr. Kazianis said he thinks that the South Korean government under President Jae-in Moon is very

enthusiastic about the unification of North and South. However, Korea in 2020 is very different from the Korea of 20 or 30 years ago. Even though the country is now the 10th economy in the world, it faces quite serious demographic problems that will affect economic development for years to come. However difficult unification may be, it is the most challenging and indispensable project of the 21st century. The South Koreans are well aware of the opportunities that a unification of North and South would bring.

Dr. Petrovsky emphasized the importance of infrastructural connectivity between the two Koreas, both for the relationship between Russia and North Korea and for the relationship between the two Koreas. Some years ago, Russia proposed to build a trans-Korean gas pipeline and a trans-Korean railway. The railway would connect the North and South Korean railways to the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway. Russia also proposed to build the Asian Super Grid, which is a multilateral energy project. Russia has an excess of hydroelectric energy that could be exported to China, North and South Korea, and Japan. The only obstacle, however, is the situation on the Korean Peninsula. As soon as North and South Korea manage to trust each other, these ideas can be implemented.

Dr. Petrovsky was asked whether for the unification of North and South Korea it is necessary for both sides to be completely independent of external factors. At present, he said, South Korea's foreign policy is entirely dependent on the United States. How can external sovereignty be achieved? He said that the necessary infrastructure and trade could be built easily as soon as there is enough trust between the two Koreas. He reminded us of the so-called confederation that North Korea proposed many years ago, in which both North and South Korea would keep their integrity and sovereignty and be able to communicate with each other in terms of trade, infrastructure, education, etc. This idea is still valid, but difficult to materialize by the two Koreas on their own. Its success depends largely on the support given by the major international players involved, i.e., the United States on one side and Russia and China on the other side.



The final remarks were given by Dr. Michael Jenkins:

We must be patient in regard to a peaceful resolution of the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, he said. Dialogue must be continued, and the relationship between Russia and the United States is crucial. As both have seats at the UN Security Council, they need to work together with the other participants of the Six-Party Talks to find a peaceful resolution.

UPF, together with The Washington Times, found out from fact-finding tours in South and North Korea, Japan, and other places that no one is really happy with North Korea being a nuclear power. There are concerns that this situation will provoke Japan to develop its own nuclear weapons.

UPF would like to see Korea denuclearized. Understandably, North Korea should receive something worthwhile in exchange for giving up its nuclear weapons, as it considers its nuclear power as its main line of influence rather than defense. It wants to be taken very seriously by the international community.

The Korean conflict is not merely a cold conflict; it actually could turn hot, Dr. Jenkins said. We therefore should tread carefully.

Dr. Jenkins quoted Christopher Hill, the former U.S. ambassador to South Korea, who said there needs to be an understanding of what a unified Korea would be, and how it would not be a threat to China, Russia

or the region. And it wouldn't be simply the expansion of U.S. power in Asia either. There would be a balanced development.

UPF promotes its Peace Talks because it considers dialogue and engagement as absolutely critical, Dr. Jenkins said. Indeed, UPF is looking forward to more engagement and development. Borders should open up, and transportation networks should be built all the way to China and Russia.

Years ago, the founders of UPF proposed the building of a bridge and a tunnel across the Bering Strait, as well as a tunnel between Korea and Japan. As the founders are both from North Korea, their longing for the unification of the two Koreas is very strong. The cooperation of Russia, China and the United States is quintessential here. Dr. Jenkins ended the webinar on a hopeful note, expressing his belief in the merit of dialogue.

