

Notes on Strategy

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What must begin with the end-of-war declaration

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“War is Over in Europe.”

“Peace! It's Over.”

“Victory! Japan Quits.”

These are the newspaper headlines that announced the end of World War II. There is great joy contained in such short but bold-font words. People ran out into the streets and embraced complete strangers. Such jubilant emotions are forever memorialized in the famous photograph of a navy sailor and a blonde woman kissing on a boulevard.

When will we see similar spectacles on the streets of Gangnam in Seoul, on Ryomyong Street in Pyongyang, or on the trails at the DMZ? When the four words of “end-of-war declaration” reemerged onto the global stage regarding the Korean Peninsula, emotions were running high, as if ready to spread wings and soar into the hopeful future. However, the political process has only just begun.

A war unknowingly prolonged

The Korean War is the longest-running war in the

history of modern international politics, excluding a few civil wars and the Indo-Pakistani War. Buildings and factories were destroyed and innumerable people were killed, but the war failed to conclude with a faithful commitment to a political agreement on its cessation. Nine months after the armistice agreement was signed, peace negotiations were held in Geneva. The date was April 1954. At the time of the armistice agreement, both sides had pledged to hold political talks “to ensure a peaceful settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue.” It was clear what the peace agreement was intended for. This was part of a formal procedure to end the war, and a stable peace could not be achieved under the state of an armistice. However, these efforts in reaching a political agreement were ultimately unsuccessful, and 67 years have since passed. On the Korean Peninsula, the war is not over but rather at a standstill. We have to remind ourselves that the Korean Peninsula has been at war for 71 years. Considering this, the historical transformation of South Korea, which in spite of an ongoing war achieved remarkable development that captured the world's attention, may seem even more unusual.

In September 2021, President Moon Jae-in again proposed an end-of-war declaration in his speech at the United Nations. It was a proposal to ‘declare’ putting an end together to a war that has lasted far too long. This declaration itself has sufficient

political power because it is a declaration that signifies a historical transition. Here, the end-of-war declaration cannot serve as a benediction for a particular country. That is, it is unreasonable to regard the decision to end the war as an act of benevolence to other countries, unless the country somehow has a particular preference for the circumstances of war. Likewise, it is also not reasonable to talk about the 'conditions' for an end-of-war declaration. The problems created by war and confrontation should not be regarded as the 'conditions' to declare the end of war but should instead be treated as issues that need to be 'gradually solved' after the transition. Some may suspect that the call is simply a ploy for an inter-Korean summit. But this too is a misunderstanding from distorted views. An inter-Korean summit is one procedural option that can emerge in the process of the end-of-war declaration, thus, not the end in itself.

End-of-war declaration as a historic turning point

The end-of-war declaration is not a new issue. It was proposed at the 2006 Roh- Bush summit, and it also emerged in 2018 amid the heightening feelings of a 'spring time on the Korean Peninsula.' But that is all it amounted to. It was a reminder of how the Korean Peninsula is an unusual place where the desire for peace has been overshadowed by the

habits of a continuous war. There may be a number of reasons why there is no real push for a transition. As always, the force of change is fiercely competing with the force of continuity. The factors behind immobility are memory-induced inertia, fear, and profit calculation methods. On the other hand, the factors behind the push forward are imagination, aspiration, and anticipation of new gains. The competition between these factors was observed in 2018 as well. An absurd suspicion arose that the end-of-war declaration was a preliminary measure for the eventual withdrawal of United States forces from Korea. It rekindled an age-old fear. And it further sparked a political and ideological debate. Forces that would rather prefer war and confrontation than peace often come to reveal their identities under these conditions.

But something seems different this time. Having witnessed the difficulties of the past, this time, the demand that ‘something must be different’ is more sincerely felt among observers. North Korea has also responded by stepping forward but with conditions, in line with its habits in discourse. The United States also responded by stating it is ‘open’ to the possibility. Another positive indication is the “Peace on the Korean Peninsula Act,” which is being pursued by Korean-American activists and has been introduced in the United States House of Representatives. For China, whatever its true

sentiment may be, it will be difficult to be averse to the possibility of change. The positions are converging between the three or four countries involved in this issue; our proposal has been gaining much-awaited momentum. It does not matter much whether now is a good time or not to pursue change. The moment in which consensus and incentive for change are formed is a good timing in itself.

The end-of-war declaration as an outset strategy

We should also consider the strategic significance of the end-of-war declaration as a symbolic declaration toward peace. Issues regarding the Korean Peninsula are always complex. Various challenges are intertwined with each other, such as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's regime security, partial lifting of sanctions against North Korea, economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance, easing military tensions, arms control, and alleviating distrust. We may choose to put all these issues on the table and discuss their solutions all at once. This is a so-called 'one-shot deal' or 'grand bargain.' In this context, the bold political judgment of political leaders becomes necessary. While this approach may provide a sudden surge of progress, there is equally the risk of progress coming to a sudden stop. A top-down approach should be tightly linked by a

bottom-up consultation process. It is also important that at each stage of implementing agreements, each side confirms with the other on the mutually exchanged gains involved. This will simultaneously build trust, and thus checkpoints along the path towards progress that will make it difficult for one side to suddenly backtrack to previous means of conduct. This was a crucial lesson learned after the Hanoi's No Deal.

If we consider a step-by-step approach, it is important to place the end-of-war declaration at the starting point of each step of the procedure. Then various subsequent procedures will be made available. Usually, strategy planning starts largely based on the planners' aspirations, but later becomes practical only through efforts to understand the interests of relevant parties and resolve any rising concerns. Therefore, it is imperative to consider North Korea's current concerns through a strategic viewpoint. While various issues lie intricately intertwined, there are two main concerns: regime security and economic security. In terms of their solutions, the former will revolve around resolving hostile policies, and the latter will be on the lifting of sanctions to secure the rights to live and develop. Both solutions are self-evident in their ties to the process of denuclearization. Ultimately, in the series of processes on regime security and economic security guarantees, putting the end-of-war

declaration at the forefront of negotiations will certainly bring a number of positive side effects.

Most of all, the end-of-war declaration will provide momentum for the resumption of dialogues. South Korea, North Korea, and the United States must engage in dialogues in some form or another. For North Korea, this will be an opportunity to discuss various demands for resolving current hostile policies against the country. In fact, the end-of-war declaration itself serves as a signal for the resolution of hostile policies. Following the declaration, further measures can be sequentially discussed, such as the establishment of a liaison office between the United States and North Korea, establishment of diplomatic ties, and the conclusion of a peace treaty. Partial lifting of economic sanctions should be aligned with this implementation of resolving regime security. It also becomes clear that all these issues are linked to North Korea's commitment to denuclearization. It is necessary to first go through this process and establish a structure of trust in order to minimize North Korea's controversial image of 'being compensated, then betraying and fleeing.' Potentially 'compensating' North Korea without the country having changed its behavior is a major concern. Realistically, we cannot ignore the voices of those that worry for the possibility of being set up and deceived by North Korea. Lastly, the pursuit of the end-of-war declaration will also provide an impetus

to unravel the psychological barriers and mechanisms of distrust between the United States and North Korea that have grown in the absence of dialogues.

End-of-the war declaration as an imperative for the future

The end-of-war declaration must also secure support from the international community. In truth, there is the risk of slowing progress if too many actors are involved in the end-of-war declaration. The smaller the number, the easier it is to execute demands. However, support from the international community is necessary when considering that transition toward peace on the Korean Peninsula is a universal demand of the times. And the international community must also be reminded that a Korean Peninsula of peaceful coexistence can provide more benefits than a Korean Peninsula of war and confrontation. In doing so, it is necessary to change the twisted strategy calculations of some national strategists who have become accustomed to hostile confrontations on the Korean Peninsula and treat war as a source of gains.

No country gives up its security by declaring the end of war. Even after the official end of war, especially in the midst of peaceful coexistence, proper efforts to pursue security should continue. There may be some changes to how South Korea pursues this. But this will rather be an opportunity

to put various security initiatives into practice. There is no 'single road' to achieving security and peace. Likewise, there is no one simple answer offered in the realm of political theory or the political field. The end-of-war declaration also does not suspend or diminish sovereignty. The South Korea-United States alliance is an agreement under the premise of state sovereignty. Even after the end-of-war declaration, measures for security cooperation between South Korea and the United States, including the role of United States Forces Korea, should continue to be extensively explored and sought after.

“Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind.” This is a quote from former United States President John F. Kennedy, made during his speech in 1963. The phrase, highlighting a desperate sense of danger, later re-appeared during the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. War and violence have occupied a large part of the history of human civilization. However, it is also true that this constant waging of war has only greatly intensified the human aspiration for peace. The history of human civilization is not called the history of war because of this strong will of humanity to find light even in the depths of darkness. Such hopes must continue on for the Korean Peninsula in the 21st century. It is time to ask ourselves again whether our perception of the tragedy and horrors of war has dulled over time from the prolonging of war. Hence, the war must end now.