

The Disarmament of the Korean Peninsula and the Prospect for Peace and Order in the Post-COVID Era

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1. The Need for Disarmament in the Era of Covid-19 and Artificial Intelligence

A wide variety of 'risks' have increased as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept across the world in the past year. According to the World Economic Forum's The Global Risks Report, the current infectious diseases have not only caused health impacts but also brought economic risks, including asset bubbles, price instability and debt crises, which have posed a great threat to humanity. The economic risks are followed by the geopolitical ones of interstate conflicts and geopolitical tensions, thereby increasing the risks of military conflicts. While climate change continues to be a looming risk, the risk of international action failure is also increasing.

There are many analyses of growing uncertainties given the fact that people's lives, health and economy depend on and interact with not only the geopolitical and social conflicts but also the climate crises. Concerns over the rapid social changes and the deepening U.S.-China conflicts due to the technological changes are also cited as the factors that increase the uncertainty. In addition to the new risks of the coronavirus, the technological, financial and economic competition between the superpowers is followed by the revival of "armament competition" in the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. Paradoxically, the recent competition has emerged, on one hand, as an oldest form of arms race between countries, and on the other, as a competition over AI and machines which are built to better the intellectual activity and relieve human suffering and efforts. The uncertainty created by the new changes is being intertwined and connected with the old risks.

Protean Power is key to cope with uncertainty. This is especially true in areas where the change is fast and unpredictable, such as technology, finance, film industry and new human rights norms. However, to cope with already identified risks requires a clear control power. Old risks like wars and military conflicts must be controlled to prevent and contain them, and such experiences are accumulated (Katzenstein and Seybert, 2018). The entanglement of the recent technological competition and the past arms race around the Korean Peninsula reflects a side of the complexity of experiencing new technological changes without resolving the inherited conflicts and risks of the Cold War. In this context, this article reexamines the discussion of disarmament surrounding the Korean Peninsula and attempts to draw discourse for seeking peace and order in East Asia.

2. The 1990s in the Prime of Disarmament Talks through the Course of History of Disarmament

The efforts to establish and implement the concept of disarmament accelerated in the wake of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. The devastation of World War I and II prompted a broader social demand for disarmament. Salvador de Madariaga, who served as Chief of the Disarmament Section of the League of Nations, led the way in the formation of disarmament talks during the interwar period. He stressed the need for disarmament through his published work and played a leading role in the World Disarmament Conference held in Geneva between 1932 and 1934. Philip John Noel-Baker, another renowned campaigner for disarmament, organized programs for world disarmament and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1959. That year, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on 'general and complete disarmament' (Freedman, 2020).

In the history of disarmament, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union marks a grave period in which the two superpowers plunged into a nuclear competition. The disarmament during that time was not just a matter of reducing military spending and putting efforts to restore trust between the states, but of universal survival to prevent the annihilation of the human race. As summarized in Table 1 below, disarmament talks in the late 20th century were mainly nuclear-related. Important agreements were formed during the period

of Détente between the late 1960s and the late 1970s and a broader consensus in various areas spread worldwide in the post-Cold War era by the 1990s.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the problem of reducing excessive military spending was an issue mainly for the United States, Russia, and European countries right at the beginning of the post-Cold War era. The 1990s saw a rise in the international efforts toward disarmament and arms control, some of which have borne fruit. However, the advent of various uncertainties with the end of the Cold War has reversed the trend of disarmament. A prime example is the massive military spending during the “War on Terror” that took place from the late 1990s. During this period, military conflicts and security uncertainties tended to rise around the Middle East. The new trend in the post-Cold War disarmament talks has been that small states and international NGOs have begun to take part. Moreover, aside from the nuclear weapons, a number of ethical and legal issues regarding humanitarianism, conventional arms trade, and more recently, killer robots, drones, and cyber weapons have appeared on the agenda (Erickson, 2018: 233-245, Akimoto 2019).

What sets the arms control of the Cold War apart from that of the post-Cold War era is a matter of who is the main actor and what risks are most dominant and significant. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union led the nuclear disarmament, and in the post-Cold War world, various countries and actors have been dealing with a wider range of weapons and dangers. What these two periods have in common, however, is the need to improve interaction between actors with respect to the risks they face, to better evaluate the risks and responses of adversarial states, and to slow down the pace of making decisions.

How was the situation in Asia? During the post-Cold War era of the 1990s, an atmosphere of international reconciliation and cooperation was formed in Asia but it did not lead to disarmament. According to an annual report published by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), military spending in Asian countries has been steadily increasing since the late 1980s. Their military spending has increased from \$13.6 billion in 1988 to \$53.1 billion as of 2019, and its size and speed have not decreased once in the past 30 years. When asked whether there was an arms race among Asian countries, no researcher could provide a clear answer until the 1990s. However, Asian countries’ arms race has become an undeniable truth since the 2010s when Asia’s military spending overtook Europe’s (Tan, 2013).

3. The Past and the Present of Disarmament Theory on the Korean Peninsula

There have been various disarmament theories in Korea and East Asia. The disarmament was heavily discussed in Korea in the 1990s and 2000s. Willy Brandt, the former Chancellor of West Germany who developed *Neue Ostpolitik* (New Eastern Policy), emphasized the key principles and grounds for disarmament and trust building in his keynote speech at an international conference on disarmament held in South Korea in 1989. Faced with budget deficits, governments had to cut their military spending, and met demands to reduce social efforts and costs to create peace and maintain stability. Instead, furthering detente could create new opportunities for peaceful cooperation(Kim et al., 1989: 15-22).

Nevertheless, the division and cold war structure of the two Koreas have locked up the idea of disarmament toward universal peace in a framework of mutual distrust, considering it as a national strategy. In fact, North Korea had proposed disarmament of the Korean Peninsula on a number of occasions during the Cold War. North Korea mainly proposed and called for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea, mutual reduction in forces and equipments, signing of a peace agreement and a mutual non-aggression pact, establishment of the zone of peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, no further introduction of military equipment and military drills, cultivation of mutual trust, prevention of accidental military conflicts and installation of hotlines. The South Korean government was relatively less engaged in the issue of disarmament during the Cold War. South Korea emphasized the mutual trust-building measures rather than disarmament, which was proposed as a strategy in the context of system competition, and insisted on the renunciation of armed forces or signing of agreements(Lee, 1989: 190-196).

The two Koreas held different lists of priorities in their proposals for disarmament. While North Korea recognized the U.S. forces in South Korea, the joint South Korea-U.S. military drills and the United States' nuclear threats as their risks, South Korea considered North Korea's asymmetric warfare capabilities and large-scale conventional forces as risks. Thus, North Korea tried to resolve the nuclear issue through U.S.-North Korea negotiations, then sign a peace treaty and settle the issue of U.S. forces in Korea while South Korea tried to resolve the nuclear issue and conventional arms control first through inter-Korean talks(Lee,

2017). Although more comprehensive issues had to be addressed at the same time, both South and North Korean governments, as well as the United States and China, did not regard disarmament as an urgent issue, and therefore did not make comprehensive diplomatic efforts.

It was after the end of the Cold War and, more precisely, North Korea's nuclear weapons program that the issue of disarmament became more urgent and was placed on the agenda for negotiations. When the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework, a form of denuclearization negotiation, in 1994, the agreement was implemented and made progress on denuclearization and disarmament until 2002. During this period, North Korean nuclear program was frozen, weapon inspectors from International Atomic Energy Agency(IAEA) were stationed in Yongbyon, and the first inter-Korean summit was held June 13-15, 2000. From 1988 to 2004, 95 inter-Korean high-level talks were held and 73 agreements were signed(Jung, 2020).

However, such trend did not last long. A change of government took place in the United States from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 2001 and the U.S.-North Korea relationship deteriorated rapidly as the war on terrorism progressed after the September 11 attacks. The six-party talks were held in 2003 to continue the denuclearization negotiations and the Gaeseong industrial complex was completed in 2004 as an effort to carry on the achievements of the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration. Regrettably, despite all the efforts, as the war on terrorism panned out worldwide, the trend of disarmament was reversed and the Agreed Framework was abrogated, making North Korea-U.S. negotiations and inter-Korean relations much more difficult. With changes in government in the United States and South Korea, the agreements reached under the previous administrations were mostly overturned. The 9/19 Military Agreement, following the April 2018 inter-Korean Summit and 2018 North Korea-United States Singapore Summit, was an attempt to bring about denuclearization through the United States-North Korea negotiation, and inter-Korean exchanges and disarmament through inter-Korean agreement. However, it was difficult to persist due to the new geopolitical dynamics of G-2 conflicts.

4. G-2 Conflicts and the Control of Old Risks

Today, it is the United States and China that can lead the global trend of disarmament and reconciliation in highly competitive fields. Although the United States and the Soviet Union have signed many agreements in the past, the United States and China have yet to begin bilateral agreements or negotiations in the fields of security and military. For the discussion on disarmament to take place globally, many disarmament researchers suggest that China should participate, and to this end, trilateral talks between U.S., China and Russia or a bilateral dialogue between the U.S. and China should be held.

As suggested, the United States and China can and must reach negotiations and agreements in many areas. The two states can try to reach an agreement on placing a cap on military expenditure or military buildup, sign No first use policy that pledges not to use nuclear weapons first, or pursue an agreement on conventional prompt global strike(CPGS). It is also possible to agree to reduce hypersonic missiles, which are considered a threat to mutual security, and to agree on mutual confirmation of missile bases or deployment areas. Mutual confirmation of the purpose of missiles or bilateral transparency agreement can resolve and prevent the mutual distrust triggered by radar deployment, for instance(Haynes, 2018).

Although the various agreements reached between the United States and Russia may not serve as concrete references to the negotiations between China and the U.S., the United States and China can attempt to reach an agreement through mutual trust building and communication for shared interests and responsibilities as superpowers. As a matter of fact, the Obama administration attempted to reach an agreement with China in 2015 regarding the peaceful use of nuclear energy. If the United States and China try to agree and negotiate in this area, the Korean Peninsula will be able to negotiate denuclearization at the level of

the Agreed Framework or the six-party talks, prevent South Korea's suffering from conflicts like the THAAD dispute, and advance a step-by-step implementation of comprehensive negotiations and agreements that were annulled due to mutual distrust and differences in positions.

Whether the United States and China will start such discussions is still uncertain. However, in the current situation which could lead to another vicious cycle of arms race in 30 years after the end of the Cold War, there is a growing justification and duty to avoid conflicts

that can worsen in the future and to prevent arms race which consumes much of national strength. It is time for everyone - China who needs to secure peace at home and abroad for sustainable development, the United States who has long covered its military spending with the national debt, North Korea whose economic development potential has been blocked due to the nuclear sanctions, and South Korea who has been affected by the U.S.-China conflict and has been restricted from cooperation opportunities due to the national division - to take the disarmament discussions more seriously. When cross-border relations improve, allowing cooperation and making new opportunities, East Asia and the United States will be able to discuss arms reduction and peace dividend once again, just like Europe in the 1990s.

Disarmament is ultimately about controlling the risks. The kind of risks has changed from time to time. According to the statistics from World Health Organization(WHO), the leading causes of death today are health problems like cardiovascular disorder and cancer, traffic accident, infant mortality, suicide and crime, not interstate military conflict and war. The risk of the Covid-19 era, which swept the world over the past year, posed a challenge of risks incurred by man-nature relation and man-technology relation, rather than cross-border risks or interpersonal social risks. Controlling and preventing the current and the future risks and uncertainties in this era is no less than an effort to mitigate the gaps and discrimination in environment, health and exchange of knowledge. In comparison, the issue of denuclearization, arms control and disarmament is to reduce the cold war risks that control the interstate conflicts, and the establishment of peace structure is to put an end to all the wars in the past once and for all.

Although disarmament on the Korean Peninsula and peace in East Asia are linked to complicated and structural conflicts like the US-China superpower rivalry and the Cold War conflict at the East Asian level, it is all the more reason to straighten things out before they get worse, and they are also the peace agenda that the international community has already experienced and dealt with. Will the favorable trend of 2018 resume on the Korean Peninsula in 2021? Or can the trend of 1990 be set around the world? The question of whether the Korean Peninsula and East Asia would become a place where the past risks are clearly controlled and innovations are triggered in the space of opportunity created from peace, rather than a place where the future uncertainties and the past risks overlap, depends on people's willingness and decision to gain wisdom from the past and open up the opportunities by controlling risks.

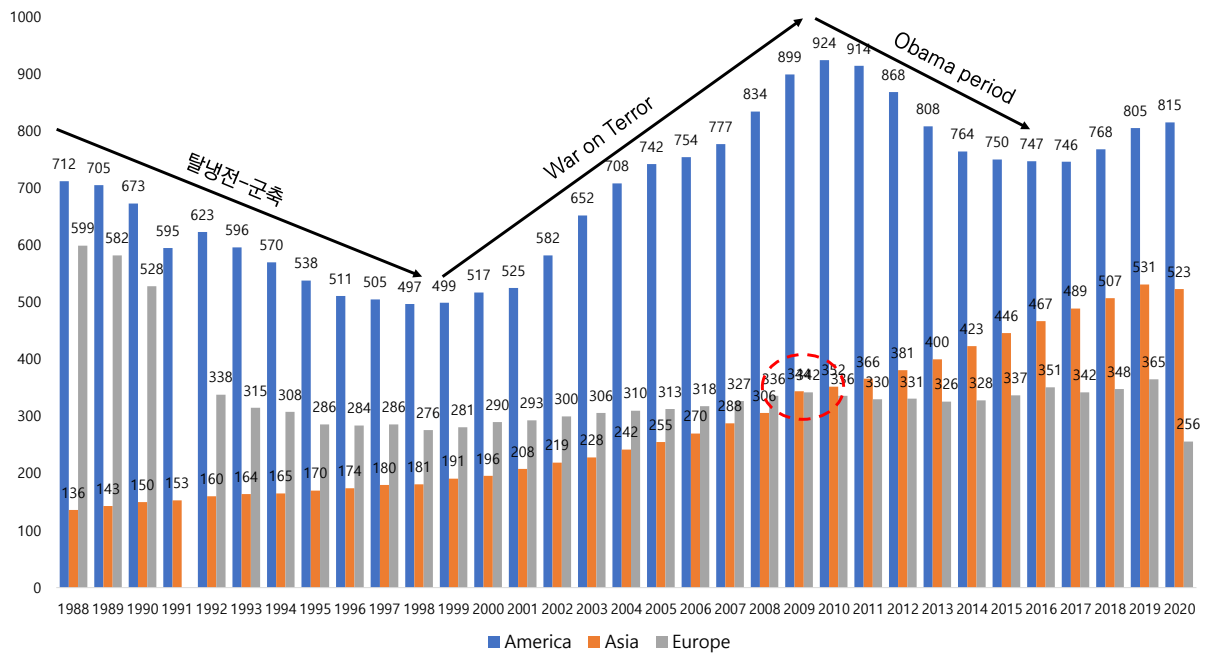
Table 1. Cases and Agreements of Disarmament on major areas(1960~2017)

		before 1960	1970	1980	1990	2000 이후
Nuclear	Nuclear Weapon Test	1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty	1974 Threshold Test Ban Treaty 1976 Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty		1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty	
	Disarmament		1972 ABM 1972 SALT I 1979 SALT II	1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty	1991 START I 1993 START II	2002 Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reduction 2010 New START
	Nonproliferation	1968 NPT	Negative Security Assurances		Agreement on nuclear material, supply and technology control 1994 Agreed Framework	NPT Review Conference 2006 FMCT 2017 JCPOA
	Dismantlement	Reports				2017 TPNW
	Nuclear Weapons Free Zone	1967 Tlateloco		1985 Treaty of Rarotonga	1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula 1995 Bangkok Treaty 1996 Treaty of Pelindaba	Denuclearization of Central Asia Denuclearization of the Middle East, South Asia and Europe Non-nuclear-weapon state (New Zealand, Nordic countries, Mongolia)
Weapon	Chemical and Biological		1972 Biological Weapons Convention		1990 미소 화학무기 합의 1993 화학무기 협약 convention	
	Conventional	MBFR			1990 CFE Treaty 1996 Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control 1997 대인지뢰 협약 1991년 5강 커뮤니케	2002 리마 합의, Wassenaar Arrangement

		before 1960	1970	1980	1990	2000 이후
War Prevention and Trust Building	Conflict Prevention	Hotline Agreements	1971 Accidents Measures Agreement 1973 Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement	1989 Agreements Concerning the Prevention of Incidents	OSCE conflict prevention centre(CPC)	
	Trust Building		1975 Helsinki Accords	1986 Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security- Building Measures	1990~1999 Vienna CSBM Document, OSCE Lisbon Document, NATO- Russia Founding Act, The NATO- Russia Council 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe 1996 Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions of Shanghai, China 1996 Agreement between India and China 1997 Treaty of Moscow 1998 Joint Statement of Participants of the Almaty meeting 1999 Lahore Declaration	2001 Sino- Russian Good- Neighbourliness Treaty, The ASEAN Undertakings
	Maritime Conflict		1971 Seabed Treaty	1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea		
	Multilateral Agreement	Provisions of each agreement on deterrence, trust building, inspection, provision and exchange of information				

Source : organized from Jozef Goldblat (2002), Arms Control: The New Guide to Negotiations and Agreements, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo

Figure 1. Regional military spending trends in America, Europe and Asia(1988~2019)



Source: SIPRI military expenditure data

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