

# Pro-Diplomacy, Pro-Peace Principles to Guide Presidential Campaigns on North Korea

**The current moment:** Recent U.S.-North Korea relations have ranged from intense military tensions<sup>1</sup> in 2017 to highly publicized summits<sup>2</sup> in 2018. Looking forward to 2020 and beyond, the focus turns to the hard work of sustained diplomacy.

The first summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong Un in Singapore resulted in a joint declaration that constructively called for new relations based on peace, the establishment of a peace regime, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> But actually achieving those goals will require specific, concrete next steps.

The next administration will have to pick up where this one leaves off, and will have an urgent responsibility to make progress with North Korea. Make no mistake: the failure to find diplomatic solutions could result in an escalation (intentional or accidental) that triggers a full-scale — potentially nuclear — war, endangering us all.<sup>4</sup>

With this in mind, the undersigned organizations urge all presidential candidates to embrace the following principles as they formulate policy on North Korea:

**Agree to step-by-step, reciprocal, verifiable actions to advance denuclearization and peace.** “All or nothing” demands are a recipe for failure. In other words, the United States cannot realistically expect North Korea to unilaterally disarm before providing any sanctions relief, security guarantees, or other incentives.<sup>5</sup> The two sides should build trust and work jointly toward shared goals.

**Build confidence and reduce tensions.** There are many interim steps that the United States and North Korea can take to shore up the potential for successful peace and denuclearization. These steps include, but are not limited to:

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/world/asia/north-korea-un-sanctions-nuclear-missile-united-nations.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44435035>;  
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/27/politics/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-vietnam-summit/index.html>;  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48817898>

3

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>

<sup>4</sup> If war erupted on the Korean Peninsula today, it's estimated that as many as 300,000 people would die in the first few days of conventional fighting. <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/nuke/R44994.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> This is essentially the “Libya model” that current National Security Advisor John Bolton has advocated <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/world/asia/north-korea-libya-model.html>

- Opening liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang and taking other steps toward normalized relations<sup>6</sup>
- Strengthening sanctions exemptions for humanitarian activities and removing travel restrictions to improve humanitarian access and people-to-people contact<sup>7</sup>
- Continuing the repatriation of POW/MIA remains<sup>8</sup>
- Facilitating reunions between long-divided North Korean and Korean American families, and granting any necessary sanctions waivers for in-person or video reunions between separated South Korean and North Korean families.<sup>9</sup>

**End the Korean War.** Even though active hostilities between the United States and North Korea ended 66 years ago with an Armistice Agreement, there was never a formal end of the war with a peace agreement. This continued state of war is not a mere technicality — it's the root cause of militarism and tensions that must be resolved if there is to be real progress with North Korea. Formally ending the Korean War is the most effective trust-building mechanism available. It costs zero dollars, removes North Korea's stated justification for nuclear weapons<sup>10</sup>, and does not undermine the U.S.-South Korea alliance. This is an essential element of the next administration's success on the Korean Peninsula.

**Support our ally South Korea:** South Korean President Moon Jae-In has used the mandate from the South Korean people who elected him in 2017 to conduct diplomacy that lays the foundation for new relations with North Korea. His meeting with Kim Jong Un in April 2018 produced the Panmunjom Declaration, which calls for, among other things, inter-Korean economic and civic projects, and replacing the Armistice Agreement with a peace agreement. The United States should stop impeding inter-Korean cooperation, and should instead support the South Korean government in working toward these goals.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The United States and North Korea do not have diplomatic relations. The Swedish Embassy in North Korea is the U.S. protecting power and provides limited consular services to U.S. citizens...North Korea has no embassy in Washington, DC, but it is represented in the United States through its mission to the United Nations in New York." <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-north-korea/>

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<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/humanitarian-groups-say-sanctions-impede-aid-north-koreans>; <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-peoples-republic-korea/2019-dpr-korea-needs-and-priorities>

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<https://www.npr.org/2018/07/29/633686761/seeking-closure-an-effort-to-repatriate-remains-of-u-s-vets-kill-ed-in-korean-war;>

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/455595-reuniting-families-is-a-critical-step-in-diplomacy-with>

<sup>9</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/time-for-us-north-korea-family-reunions/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/kp\\_en.pdf](https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/kp_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> On September 17, 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reportedly complained to his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-hwa in fall 2018 about Seoul's conciliatory approach to North Korea, notably regarding the conclusion of an inter-Korean military agreement and the consideration of a partial sanctions relief. On October 10, 2018, President Trump rebuffed the idea that South Korea would provide sanctions relief, saying: "They won't do that without our approval. They do nothing without our approval." <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/rare-public-discord-between-us-s-korea-raises-concern-about-rift-1.551885>; <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-korea-south-north-sanctions-1163012>

**Make the negotiating table more inclusive.** It is imperative that those impacted by current policies have a seat at the table. Including the views and recommendations of women, youth, and other members of civil society will improve the chances that a peace agreement lasts longer and is more durable.

**Reject the framing that diplomacy is a gift to North Korea.** Too often, we see public figures suggest that talking to North Korea in some way disproportionately benefits Kim Jong Un. By definition, diplomacy involves talking to, meeting with, and making deals with friends and adversarial actors alike. In this way, talking and negotiating with North Korea should not be viewed differently than doing so with any other authoritarian powers -- which the United States does regularly. Additionally, ignoring North Korea will just leave it a hostile and growing nuclear power with acute risk of arms proliferation. The status quo means more nuclear weapons, more human rights violations, more separated families, more suffering from sanctions, and, at worst, nuclear war. It is in everyone's interest to change course with a concrete plan toward peace and denuclearization.

Signatories:

American Friends Service Committee  
About Face: Veterans Against the War  
Arms Control Association  
Beyond the Bomb  
Center for International Policy  
Foreign Policy For America  
Franciscan Action Network  
Institute for Policy Studies, New Internationalism Project  
Just Foreign Policy  
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation  
Peace Action  
WAND (Women's Action for New Directions)  
Win Without War  
Women Cross DMZ