

BRIEF:

The Implications of a Peace Agreement for US-ROK Relations

A peace agreement would advance the key goal of the alliance: the security of both countries. It would also help recalibrate the relationship in ways that better fit contemporary circumstances and interests.

1. A peace agreement would improve the national security of the United States and South Korea.

- a. Remaining in a state of war raises the risk of military escalation and is hardly reconcilable with the original premise of the alliance – deterring “Communist aggression.” The paradox of remaining at war in the name of deterrence is leading to growing contradictions in the alliance.
- b. Remaining at war raises the extent to which each ally may appear as a liability to the other. On the one hand, the continuous failure of US policy on North Korea raises risks for South Korea. On the other hand, the development of the North Korean nuclear program raises risks for US security in assisting the South.
- c. Remaining at war perpetuates practices that may be ineffective or counterproductive in ensuring security. For instance, the content of the US-ROK joint military exercises and the deployment of certain US military hardware in Korea appear to inflame conflict more than deter it.

2. A peace agreement does not legally imply an end to the alliance or a withdrawal of US troops from Korea, unless otherwise specified.

- a. The alliance grew out of the war but is not explicitly conditional on it. The US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty provides that the alliance “shall remain in force indefinitely” until either side decides to revoke it.
- b. The presence of US troops in South Korea is governed by the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Status of Forces Agreement, and neither are expressly predicated on the war. South Korea has the sovereign right to invite or disinvite foreign troops on its soil.
- c. A peace agreement does not necessarily imply change in arrangements regarding operational control over South Korean forces. South Korea has the sovereign right to maintain or end this delegation of control.
- d. A peace agreement would imply the dissolution of the Armistice or bar any claims that it is still in force, as there is no *raison d’être* for a ceasefire under a state of peace.
- e. A peace agreement must provide for the dissolution of the “United Nations Command.” The UNC’s persistence today is based on an extreme interpretation of “peace and security” that is incompatible with peaceful coexistence with North Korea. In fact, the United States already once informed the Security Council it would dissolve the UNC – by January 1976.

3. The consequences of a peace agreement for the future relationship of the United States and South Korea should ultimately be determined by the people and should aim to create a peaceful, stable and sustainable world.

This brief was compiled from “Chapter IV: The Implications of a Peace Agreement for US-ROK Relations” in the report *Path to Peace: The Case for a Peace Agreement to End the Korean War*, published by the transnational feminist campaign Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War in February 2021. Read the full report at KoreaPeaceNow.org.



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