**Major Global Issues and Challenges - 国際社会研究演習 – - “The Korean Peninsula” - - an essay**

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***ESSAY QUESTION TITLE HERE***

**Reasons of the division**

Since Korea was divided into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea in 1948, relations between the two countries have remained tense to this day. This not only affects the security of countries throughout Northeast Asia, but is also significant for Western countries, especially those with strong ties to Korean politics, such as the US and Russia.

The reasons for the division can be traced as far back as the Cold War (after 1946), when, as a result of the systemic competition between other countries, Korea was drawn into the dispute between the USSR and the US.[[1]](#footnote-1) After World War II and the defeat of Japan, Korea was liberated from Japanese colonialism, but as a result of a series of decisions made at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, Stalin and Truman decided to temporarily divide the country (the goal was to work towards full Korean independence). Two occupation zones were then created: the Soviet one in the north and the American one in the south.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Andrzej Bober, in his book "The united Korea - a chance or an Utopia," cites the words of Professor Kang Jeong-Koo, who believed that the division of the Korean Peninsula was three-part, namely, one could distinguish: geographical, ideological and political division. The Americans decided to artificially divide Korea along the 38th parallel in order to secure their sphere of influence on the Peninsula (geographical division). Naturally, through the division between the Americans and the USSR, an ideological division also emerged - in the north, following the model of the Soviet state, authorities were entrusted to communists with Kim Ir Sen as prime minister, while in the south democracy and capitalism were introduced. There, in contrast to North Korea, free elections were held in 1948, resulting in Syng Man-rhee becoming president. The political division, by contrast, was most evident during the Korean War (1950-1953), when North Korea, seeking the return of a single independent state, attacked the South.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In fact, in the midst of this war, a picture emerged of the Korean states pursuing military confrontation in order to realize their own unification vision and introduce "their" system of government in a unified Korea. All this had the effect of reinforcing the division of North and South Korea.

The war ended with an armistice. An armistice agreement was concluded on July 27, 1953, which is still in effect today. This agreement provided, among other things, that the demilitarized zone was to extend along the 38th parallel, UN supervision of the armistice, and an exchange of prisoners of war between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The war divided the nation even more than before and caused the two parts of Korea to be closely isolated. Until the early 1970s, there was no contact between the two Korean states.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**North Korea as a threat**

Security issues on the Korean Peninsula are a current and serious problem in the regional and international security arena. Within the framework of the security problem on the Korean Peninsula, three main issues can be identified. First, the nuclear and missile program of North Korea, which is considered one of the greatest threats to security in the region. Second, the threats of war between the Korean states and the possible repercussions of the conflict. Formally, the countries have remained at war since the outbreak of the Korean War, as they have only signed a truce agreement, not a peace treaty. The Korean Peninsula, artificially divided after World War II, is still struggling with the problems of future Korean reunification, finding itself in the middle of the interests of the great powers. Third, the international consequences of a change in the status quo of Korea, i.e. a potential war in which the world powers could become involved: China, the US and Russia, and the regional consequences of reunification have significant implications for the balance of power and security throughout Asia.

Currently, the most obvious threat to regional and global security is North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and provocative actions against the Republic of Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea began its nuclear program by signing a cooperation agreement with the USSR in 1959 to develop nuclear energy technology, and then building the Yongbyon nuclear complex in 1962. The Korean state began operating its nuclear weapons program in 1983, conducting experimental high-explosive detonations.[[6]](#footnote-6) Since then, the following reactors have been built: the oldest Yongdong, followed by Sangdong, Kaechon, Pakchon, Shinpo and the largest and most famous Yongbyon.[[7]](#footnote-7) At the end of the 1970s, Kim Ir-Sen's government simultaneously began developing missile technology. There was also an intensification of the production of biological weapons agents and and expansion of chemical weapons capabilities.[[8]](#footnote-8)

On December 12, 1985, under pressure from the USSR, North Korea signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Under the treaty, the country pledged to sign a nuclear security agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency within 18 months. In 1991, the DPRK signed an agreement with the IAEA; however, as early as 1993, due to, among other things, increasingly deep inspections of North Korean nuclear reactors by the Agency's inspectors, the agreement was broken and North Korea withdrew from the NPT.[[9]](#footnote-9) In 1994, North Korea returned to talks with the IAEA as a result of the Geneva Accord, but briefly, due to the failure of the US, Japan and South Korea to comply with the October 21, 1994 agreement to build light water reactors.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The Six-Party talks involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Japan and Russia have been ongoing since 2003, following the DPRK's subsequent withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The meetings so far have not yielded much result and alternately end in either failure or success. In 2005, for example, the parties reached an agreement under which North Korea was to receive a security guarantee from the US and energy resources. In return, North Korea pledged to dismantle its nuclear program. However, the arrangement did not go into effect because the parties could not determine the order in which the provisions would be implemented. In July 2006. North Korea instead conducted missile tests, and in October it conducted its first nuclear test. Its actions again caused an impasse in the Six-Party talks. However, as early as 2007, an agreement was reached, according to which the DPRK pledged, among other things, to close the Yongbyon nuclear facility, and in return received guarantees of supply of 50,000 tons of fuel oil and assurances that it would be removed from the list of states sponsoring terrorism. In addition, the U.S. said it was ready to talk about normalizing relations with the DPRK if the stipulations are fulfilled by it.[[11]](#footnote-11)

However, these meetings did not bring a solution to the nuclear threat. Since 2008, i.e. since the reign of Lee Myung-bak, North-South Korea relations have become increasingly tense. Since then, North Korea has managed to terminate some economic and political agreements, conduct more nuclear tests (in 2009, 2013 and 2016), and demonstrate its strength by performing a series of long-range missile tests (in 2021 alone, it conducted as many as 31 tests[[12]](#footnote-12)). Faced with the rapid development of its nuclear program, South Korea has taken precautionary measures in the form of creating new specialized military units to combat nuclear elements. In response, on September 24, 2015. The DPRK accused Seoul of provocation and warned against such actions that threaten the security of the peninsula.[[13]](#footnote-13) All this adds up to a dangerous image of North Korea in the eyes of the world.

The threat of war on the Korean Peninsula is still present and remains a threat to the security of the region, although it seems less likely than in the early period after the division of Korea. Although neither the DPRK nor the Republic of Korea and other countries in the region have an interest in a war on the peninsula, such a scenario can unfortunately be considered as well.

According to the above information cited in the essay, formally the Korean states are still at war, as they have not signed a peace treaty under international law. Despite attempts at peace talks and maintaining improved relations through, for example, the introduction of the Sunshine Policy[[14]](#footnote-14), yet relations between the countries remain strained. To this day, the two countries are still bound by the July 1953 Panmunjom truce, but its provisions have been repeatedly violated by the North Korean side. In addition to the nuclear threat, North Korea, despite declaring its desire to maintain good relations with South Korea, has moved to numerous provocations, acts of aggression and diversion since the first talks after the Korean War. Since the end of the war, the DPRK has committed 125,000 violations of the 1953 Armistice Agreement, and there have been 420,000 terrorist attacks on structures and citizens of the Republic of Korea committed by the DPRK. In addition, 3750 people were abducted and not returned to their country (this is data from South Korea, and kidnappings also involved people from other countries, especially Japan in the 1970s and 1980s). Those kidnapped were forced to work as language teachers, spies, and women as courtesans.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, tensions in relations have also been affected by recent incidents that have proved quite telling for other Northeast Asian countries as well, namely the sinking of the Cheonan ship and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island[[16]](#footnote-16).

On March 26, 2010, in waters near the border between the two Koreas, South Korea's warship Cheonan was hit by a North Korean torpedo, claiming the lives of 46 crew members. South Korea requested that North Korea be punished at the UN Security Council, but due to the fact that China, among others, was in favor of North Korea, the Council only condemned the incident without naming the country that attacked the ship. On November 23, 2010, meanwhile, the shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island took place. The attack resulted in the deaths of two Republic of Korea soldiers and two civilians, and more than a dozen people were wounded, to which then-President Lee Myung-bak announced a strong response.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The two incidents not only cooled inter-Korean contacts, but also increased tensions in the Northeast Asian region. China's reaction seemed to give North Korea permission for further provocations, but in reality Beijing was constrained by fears of destabilizing Kim's regime. The incidents prompted a reassessment of bilateral relations in the region - particularly the South Korea-U.S. alliance - and revealed the continuing importance of Sino-U.S. relations in Korean Peninsula security matters.[[18]](#footnote-18)

After Kim Jong-Il's death, there were numerous provocations that could uncontrollably lead to war. For example, in March 2013, after U.S. B2 strategic bombers flew over DPRK territory, Kim Jong Un ordered missiles to target U.S. bases in Hawaii and the mainland. Concern was expressed by China and Russia. On March 5, 2013. Kim Jong Un, due to US-South Korean military maneuvers, broke the Panmunjom Agreement and announced a return to a state of war with the Republic of Korea, authorities in Seoul reacted calmly, considering it another provocation. Actions that were more dangerous on the part of the North were the development of conventional and strategic weapons capabilities. The South Korean authorities were aware of this, so on October 8, 2013, they signed a military treaty with the United States against the potential use of nuclear weapons by North Korea. Kim Jong Un responded by putting the military on high alert.[[19]](#footnote-19)

To date, North Korea is moving to a number of increasingly bold provocations against South Korea, which is not unresponsive to its neighbor.

A third issue that could affect security on the Korean Peninsula is the internationalization of the Korean issue. The prospect of reunification of the peninsula is not a matter for the Koreans alone, but also for the powers involved, most notably: China, the US, Japan and Russia.

As alluded to above, the division of the two Koreas along the 38th parallel into two spheres of influence came about after World War II through the US and USSR. Despite talks to unify the country, the two Koreas pursued independence driven by their own motives ultimately leading to war. Despite the ceasefire, the division is a source of instability on the Korean peninsula, but also continues to involve foreign powers that want to influence inter-Korean relations. In particular, there are attempts to control the nuclear program possessed by North Korea.

The two largest organizations that have influenced security improvements are the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the Six-Party Talks. KEDO was established in 1995 at the initiative of Japan, South Korea and the US, and was later joined by European countries. Under KEDO, North Korea - in exchange for giving up the development of its nuclear program - was to receive two modern "light water" reactors. They were to be completed by the end of 2003, but unfortunately, as a result of North Korea's failure to live up to its agreements, the project was suspended in 2005.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Six-Party Talks, on the other hand, were established in 2003 at China's initiative, with the aim of convincing the DPRK to abandon its nuclear program. The parties to these talks were China, the US, Japan, Russia, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. On August 26, 2008, there was a major impasse due to North Korea's unilateral disruption of the talks. It was not until 2010, after a long pause, that Kim Jong-Il declared his readiness to denuclearize North Korea and return to the six-party negotiations. However, the resumption of talks did not take place. In December 2011, Kim Jong-Il died, and his successor Kim Jong Un remained inactive in the international arena for some time.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The 2013 nuclear test triggered a strong reaction from the international community when the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on North Korea. The sanctions under the resolution mainly targeted North Korean diplomats and restricted access to luxury goods. The assets of three individuals and two companies linked to North Korea were also frozen.[[22]](#footnote-22)

It is worth mentioning that the international perturbations related to North Korea's actions in the international arena are reinforced by the fact that Kim Jong Un's regime also supports other non-democratic regimes and sometimes terrorist organizations, and the DPRK was included in the US list of rogue states in 2002. In addition, it is also a country where human rights are violated and a system of concentration camps still exists, which is a major concern for the international community.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Since Kim Jong Un took power, the DPRK's contacts with China as a major ally have also cooled. Kim Jong Un is aware of his country's isolation and sometimes, as part of the diplomatic game, tries to improve North Korea's image by taking steps to break the DPRK's isolation. In this regard, for example, in 2014, the head of North Korea's Foreign Ministry took part in the ASEAN Regional Forum, a fact that is important because this formula is the most important platform for addressing security issues in this part of Asia and the only one of which the DPRK is a member.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In summary, the countries involved in the Korean Peninsula are both responsible for the current situation and related security problems.

**Why has North Korea become so determined to develop nuclear weapons since the 1990s?**

In my opinion, paradoxically, North Korea's nuclear program is its most important security guarantee, which is why there is such an emphasis on its development. Also according to many North Korea scholars, the nuclear program is not offensive, but only to ensure the survival of the current political regime. North Korea is currently a country with a weak economy and many problems. Despite the fact that the country's nuclear program poses a serious security threat on the Korean peninsula, I think from the DPRK's point of view, it is to ensure the country's survival in the international arena.

The international mechanisms established under Kim Jong-Il: both the KEDO organization created to deal with the nuclear problem and the mechanism of multilateral negotiations called the Six-Party Talks have failed to live up to the hopes placed in them. Currently, there are no other equivalents, making Kim Jong Un's regime appear even more unpredictable, which affects its strength. Using the example of the previously cited attempts at agreements within the framework of, for example, the Six-Party Talks, such as in 1995 or 2005, which failed each time, due to the DPRK breaking off the talks, has made Korea, in my opinion, simply not viable for denuclearization. Nevertheless, the regime notes that isolating the country internationally, such as through imposed sanctions, is not an ideal situation either, leading to a slow opening to international cooperation. Particularly as world powers are becoming less patient with the regime's aggressive policies. Until now, North Korea has avoided the consequences of its actions because participants in the Six-Party Talks have been unable to agree on a strategy for dealing with the regime. Now, however, a nuclear North Korea is not in the interests of the participants in these talks.

The threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program to the Republic of Korea, Japan or countries in the region certainly looms large, but the process of weaponization could prove to be lengthy and exhausting both politically and economically. North Korea, as Jacques L. Fuqua, Jr. argues in *Nuclear Endgame: The Need for Engagement With North Korea* North Korea will not relinquish its nuclear weapons so easily because they are a guarantee for its leader and ruling elite to stay in power. North Korea's eventual demilitarization process, if it occurs, will be more complex and multifaceted. North Korea will have to halt not only its development of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, but also end its advanced missile program, reduce its army, and safely carry out a political and economic transition.[[25]](#footnote-25)

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2. Burdelski, Marceli, *Czynniki warunkujące proces podziału i zjednoczenia Korei* (The determining factors of the process of division and unification of Korea). Torun: Adam Marszalek Publishing House, 2004, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bober, ibidem, pp. 39-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p. 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Burdelski, ibid., pp. 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ahn, Mun Suk (2011): *What Is the Root Cause of the North Korean Nuclear Program?*, “Asian Affairs: An American Review”, 38:4, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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   26:1, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bober, ibid., p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Mansourov, Alexandre Y. (1995): *The origins, evolution, and current politics of the North Korean nuclear program*, “The Nonproliferation Review”, 2:3, pp. 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Details on the light-water reactor project available at: http://www.kedo.org/pdfs/SupplyAgreement.pdf [accessed 22.07.2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ahn (2011), ibid., pp. 180-183. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Green, Mark (2022), *North Korean Missile Tests,* a blog of the Wilson Center, available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/north-korean-missile-tests [accessed 23.07.2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Buczek (2016), ibid., pp. 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Sunshine Policy is South Korea's policy toward North Korea, which was implemented by President Kim Dae-jung in 1998. The new policy was aimed at diplomatic, political and economic measures that, over a multi-year period, would enable the reunification of the two countries through economic and social interactions. After Lee Myung-bak came to power in 2008, relations between the countries deteriorated, and in 2010 the South Korean Ministry of Unification described the Sunshine Policy as a failure. Definition available at the New World Encyclopedia website: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/sunshine\_policy [accessed 23.07.2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bober, ibid., p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Yeonpyeong Island are islands belonging to the Republic of Korea that are located near the Demilitarized Zone. Due to its access to rich organic resources in the form of fish, among other things, the DPRK claims these islands. Buczek (2016), ibid., p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Snyder, Scott, Byun, See-Won (2011): *Cheonan and Yeonpyeong*, “The RUSI Journal”, 156:2, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Snyder, Byun (2011), ibid., pp. 74-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Buczek (2016), ibid., p.33. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
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21. Buczek (2016), ibid., p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Buczek, ibid., p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibidem, pp. 39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic organization established in 1961, bringing together Southeast Asian countries as a form of integration of this part of the world. The ASEAN Regional Forum was established in 1994 as a mechanism for resolving disputes, which political agenda goes beyond the composition of member states. Definition is available at the New World Encyclopedia website: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Association\_of\_Southeast\_Asian\_Nations [accessed 23.07.2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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