



# Executive Memorandum

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## WHY NORTH KOREA SHOULD SIGN A PEACE TREATY WITH THE U.N., NOT THE U.S.

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A small ceremony in Korea on April 20 quietly marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations' entry into the Korean War. This was arguably the first major international conflict sanctioned by the United Nations in which foreign forces fought side-by-side under its banner. Although initially the willingness of U.N. member nations to commit their troops to the war was uncertain, 15 countries eventually joined forces with the United States and South Korea to fight for the United Nations Command in Korea.

The war in Korea lasted for only three years, but it claimed the lives of a million people before an armistice was negotiated in 1953, effectively ending the fighting. The agreement, however, fell short of establishing permanent peace. Officials at the U.S. Department of State are now considering signing a bilateral treaty with North Korea to formally end the war and establish direct relations. Though a noble goal, a peace treaty negotiated solely between the United States and North Korea would be a travesty of history. Moreover, it would hand Kim Jong-il, leader of the North and son of the man who first sent communist forces to invade the South, a major diplomatic success—a direct treaty with the United States, but one that ignores the significant contributions of the other U.N. countries that fought to defend South Korea.

The more appropriate policy for the Bush Administration would be to insist that any treaty designed to establish permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula be negotiated between the formal

warring parties: the United Nations and North Korea.

**The U.N. Forces in the Korean War.** The Korean War began when the People's Army of North Korea crossed the 38th parallel to invade the South on June 25, 1950. The U.N. Security Council convened an emergency session and passed a resolution calling for the "immediate cessation of hostilities" on the Peninsula, as well as the withdrawal of the North's forces from the South. Russia, an ally of the North, was unable to veto the measure because it had withdrawn its representative six months earlier to boycott Taiwan's control of China's seat on the Security Council. Two days later, after the South appealed for greater assistance, the council passed a resolution recommending that U.N. nations assist the South "to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security to the area." A multinational force was quickly formed under the unified command of the United States.

This was the first time that the United Nations established a military force to intervene in an international conflict. Although the U.S. military

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dominated the coalition effort, thousands of other soldiers fought under the U.N. flag, including troops from Ethiopia, Colombia, and Luxembourg. A total of 150,000 foreign servicemen fought in Korea, with over 11,000 wounded and 5,000 either killed or listed as missing in action. The United Kingdom was the first to send troops to the front lines; by war's end, of the 60,000 British soldiers who had fought there, 4,436 had spilled blood on Korean soil. Canada had the fourth largest contingent; of its 27,000 soldiers, there were 1,556 casualties. Australia sent 17,164 soldiers and had 1,416 casualties. The Turkish forces numbered 15,000 and sustained 3,216 casualties.

The April 20 anniversary events in Pusan were symbolic of the international contribution to the defense of the South in the Korean War. Several hundred veterans attended the events in Korea to honor the many battles that took place along the Imjin River 50 years ago. Among them was the famous stand on Gloucester Hill where the British Gloucestershire Battalion, though completely overwhelmed, fought long enough for the reinforcements to arrive to ensure that Seoul would not fall. The Battle of Kapyong a few miles east saw Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Royal Australian Regiment repel a Chinese attack, protecting a vital flank that would have enabled the Chinese to storm Seoul. In most instances, the U.N. forces were grossly outnumbered by the invading Chinese forces, who had entered the war in late 1950. Yet they stayed their ground to buy time for the American-led counteroffensive.

**Seeking Permanent Peace.** The last two years of the Korean War deteriorated into a battle of attrition along the original border between the two sides prior to the invasion. Weary of bloodshed, U.S. Army General Mark W. Clark, Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command, and representatives from North Korea and China signed a Military Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953—an armistice between North Korean forces and the United Nations, not the United States. The

government of South Korea refused to sign the treaty, finding the prospect of a divided Korea unacceptable.

At the insistence of Pyongyang, the U.S. Department of State is currently negotiating an exclusive peace treaty between the United States and North Korea that would replace the existing armistice. Although peace on the Peninsula is long overdue, this is the wrong way to close the book on one of the epoch-defining events of the 20th century. A peace treaty solely between the United States and North Korea would cloud the legacy of those 37,895 soldiers who fought and died together under the U.N. flag. Although a bilateral treaty may be politically expedient, history should not be ignored for purposes of convenience.

A bilateral peace treaty between the United States and North Korea, moreover, would give an enormous diplomatic victory to a North Korean regime that has refused to end the war against the South. The reason Pyongyang wants to negotiate with the United States alone is that it hopes to secure monetary concessions in exchange for peace. Later, North Korea could argue for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The memories of the war, however, are far too valuable to be used as a bargaining chip in political discussions between Pyongyang and Washington.

**Conclusion.** On this issue, there should be no compromise. The 1953 armistice ending the Korean War was signed by the U.N. commander; a peace treaty should be an extension of that agreement. Therefore, the Bush Administration should direct the State Department to cease its unilateral efforts and insist instead that North Korea sign a peace treaty with the United Nations to formally end the North's 50-year-old hostilities toward the South.

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