

Key Developments in the Korean Peninsula CBM Process

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The armistice ending the Korean War in 1953 was signed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the United States. Confidence-building and reconciliation on the peninsula requires the constructive engagement of all four countries. North and South Korea are still technically at war, with each state maintaining large standing forces across the Cold War-era tripwire known as the Demilitarized Zone that divides the two Koreas.

Two broad and ambitious confidence-building measure (CBM) agreements were initiated in 1991, but implementation efforts have been delayed by competing visions of reunification and by North Korea's unwillingness to provide transparency for its nuclear program. However, these agreements have provided the basis for subsequent CBM efforts.

Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchange and Cooperation

The Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchange and Cooperation is an ambitious document committing North and South Korea to build confidence and improve relations in political, security, trade, and other areas. The document, signed in December 1991, stipulated that several consultation and communication bodies were to be established within a specified period of time from the agreement's date of activation. Among the provisions:

Reconciliation Measures

Respect for each other's political and social system, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, renunciation of propaganda, sabotage, and subversion, and a commitment to cooperate in the international arena;

Resolution to transform the Military Armistice Agreement of 27 July 1953, into a "solid state of peace;" and

Establishment of a joint reconciliation commission and a working-level group to ensure implementation and observance of the agreement.

Nonaggression Measures

Nonuse of force, peaceful resolution of disputes, and prevention of accidental armed clashes; and

Establishment of a joint military commission to negotiate confidence and security building

measures and arms reduction accords on notification and limitation of military exercises; peaceful use of the demilitarized zone; exchanges of military personnel and information; phased reduction of armaments; elimination of weapons of mass destruction and surprise attack capabilities; verification provisions; installation of a hotline between “military authorities.”

Trade, Exchange, Cultural, and Humanitarian Measures

Increased trade, economic development, and cooperation;
Increased travel, communication, and educational contact; and
Family reunions and visits.

North–South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The Joint Declaration, signed in January 1992, included a range of CBMs specifically designed to address the nuclear issue:

Not to test, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons;
Not to possess facilities for nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment;
To use nuclear energy solely of peaceful purposes;
To verify compliance upon the request of one party but agreed to by both; and
To ensure implementation through the establishment and regular meeting of a South–North Joint Nuclear Control Commission.

Agreed Framework Between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

The provisions of the above agreements were routinely ignored by North Korea. Moreover, in 1994, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), heightening international concern about the North’s nuclear program.

The Agreed Framework Between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (known as the “Agreed Framework”) signed on 21 October 1994, committed North Korea to a process that would end the North’s troubling nuclear activities. The implementing mechanism is the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), established in March 1995. KEDO is a private corporation funded by a sixteen-nation international consortium that will finance the construction of two light-water nuclear power reactors in North Korea and provide for annual heavy fuel oil deliveries. Ground-breaking on the two reactors occurred in August 1997. Site preparation is ongoing and the target date for completion of construction is 2003.

For its part, North Korea consented under the Agreed Framework to freeze its troubling nuclear programs and to dismantle its graphite moderated reactors and related facilities, a process to be monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). North Korea also agreed to take steps to implement the 1991 North–South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. South Korea welcomed the US–North Korean Agreed Framework, and has been a significant contributor to the multilateral implementation process. The ROK serves as a member of KEDO’s Executive Board and has provided more than 100 South Korean nuclear experts for the project in North Korea.

Multilateral Cooperation

Multilateral cooperation is ongoing to help relieve North Korea’s severe food shortages resulting from years of flooding and drought. Almost 800,000 tons of food was contributed by the international community in 1997. In July 1997, a shipment of Red Cross food aid donated by South Korean charities was sent directly to North Korea for the first time.

Bilateral Cooperation

Modest initiatives for bilateral cooperation and confidence-building between North and South Korea have begun. In January 1996, the South Korean company Daewoo opened a garment factory in a joint-venture with North Korea. Since then, the ROK has approved five other inter-Korean economic cooperation projects, three of which are associated with KEDO projects. In January 1997, North Korea formally expressed “deep regret” for a submarine incursion on the South Korean coast. In October 1997, the Korean Land Corporation became the first South Korean government-owned company to be established in North Korea. The following November, North and South Korea agreed to proceed with plans to establish a car and passenger ferry service joining Sokcho in the South and Rajin in the North. North Korea and the United States are cooperating on an effort to account for US soldiers missing in action from the Korean War. Five joint searches took place in 1996 and three in 1997.

