New Ways to Seek Peace

The Track II ‘Globis Model’ and the Korean Peninsula

By Han S. Park & Brock F. Tessman

Four months before the signing of the 2012 “Leap Day” agreement between the US and North Korea — which seemed to herald a fresh start to diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula before quickly unraveling — high-level representatives from the US, North Korea and South Korea gathered for a series of informal meetings at the University of Georgia. These meetings, conducted outside the channels of traditional diplomacy, may have had a direct impact on the formulation of the US-North Korean relations that is based on our experience designing and hosting the highly successful Triad Track II Diplomacy Seminar between leaders from the United States, North Korea and South Korea on the University of Georgia campus in October 2011. We call our brand of Track II Diplomacy the “Globis model” — named after the university’s Center for the Study of Global Issues, or Globis — and suggest that it may provide a viable alternative path to durable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY on the Korean Peninsula seems trapped in a cycle of sporadic breakthroughs and dramatic reversals. Since the accession of Kim Jong Un, relations between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the outside world illustrate this cycle. Positive developments such as the landmark “Leap Day” agreement of Feb. 29, 2012, quickly fell apart in the aftermath of North Korea’s failed rocket test on March 16, and Pyongyang’s allegations that promised aid had not been delivered. Since that time, relations have been further complicated by — among many other events — Pyongyang’s successful rocket launch in December 2012, its third underground nuclear test in February 2013, the detention of several US citizens and the trial and execution of Kim Jong Un’s uncle and former political mentor, Jang Song Thaek.

This pattern is frustrating and tragic. It also illustrates the insufficiency of traditional intergovernmental diplomatic channels when it comes to achieving durable peace in the region. Absent a basic level of mutual trust and more open dialogue about shared grievances and objectives, preliminary agreements fall apart due to mutual suspicion and, perhaps most importantly, immense domestic political pressures that prevent either side from exhibiting patience, empathy or compromise toward the other. As long as political, economic and military interests that prevent either side from engaging in credible compromise compound the general lack of trust between leaders in Pyongyang and Washington, the cycle of false promises and broken agreements is likely to continue.

We believe that it is vital to take a new approach to peace building on the Korean Peninsula. In fact, we question the sanity of relying on the same failed techniques in hopes of achieving different results. In this essay, we propose a new diplomatic approach to US-North Korean relations that is based on our experience designing and hosting the highly successful Triad Track II Diplomacy Seminar between leaders from the United States, North Korea and South Korea on the University of Georgia campus in October 2011. We call our brand of Track II Diplomacy the “Globis model” — named after the university’s Center for the Study of Global Issues, or Globis — and suggest that it may provide a viable alternative path to durable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

TRACK II DIPLOMACY

What is Track II diplomacy, and what evidence do we have that it may be an effective complement to, or possible substitute for, intergovernmental, or so-called Track I, negotiations?

In general, Track II diplomacy is distinct from Track I diplomacy in the sense that individuals participate as private citizens rather than as official representatives of their state, agency or political party. This generates a more relaxed and informal atmosphere that allows participants to develop a greater sense of trust, mutual respect and open communication. It is our belief that this atmosphere can alter attitudes, relationships and the ground rules for negotiation in a way that can generate real breakthroughs in more formal Track I negotiations. We believe the Globis approach to be effective in promoting what we see as fundamental to a fair and lasting peace: mutual trust, mutual respect and open communication. There is good reason to believe that important elements of the (admittedly short-lived) Leap Day Agreement, including the declaration of mutual respect, reaffirmation of past diplomatic agreements and the desire for humanitarian co-operation, were built directly upon progress made during the 2011 Track II seminar that we hosted.

In this brief essay, we will draw on our experience to identify and justify the primary components of the Globis Track II model. Our hope is that this description may serve as a basic template for additional Track II seminars that Globis or other organizations can use to address seemingly intractable international conflicts.

Our 2011 seminar was certainly not the first effort at Track II diplomacy. Other organizations and universities have held similar meetings both within the context of Korean relations and other ongoing disputes. But a number of important elements define the Globis model, which is built on three principles: informality, “unofficiality” and unaccountability. In addition, the Globis Track II seminar was unusual because it attracted “high-impact” participants and discussions were actively mediated by Globis staff.

Informality. Track II diplomacy stresses the importance of trust-building, mutual respect and open communication as the basis for problem solving in a multilateral context. The Globis model recognizes that informal interactions between seminar participants can be just as effective as formal negotiations in achieving these objectives. The Globis Track II seminar was designed around shared meal space, informal gatherings and other social functions that allow delegations to interact with one another in a setting that encouraged relaxation, frank discussion, the exchange of personal stories and a general sense of friendship and shared humanity.

While it is difficult to demonstrate empirically, our experience is that, quite often, more diplomatic progress can actually be made in such settings than around a formal negotiating table.

Unofficiality. While the Globis Track II semi-
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Throughout the discussions, participants were to refrain from attributing quotes, positions or arguments to specific seminar participants. This was reinforced by emphasizing the personal aspect of the meetings on the first day: each participant was asked to give a personal introduction before any negotiations began.

High-Impact Delegations. These three principles — informality, unofficiality, and unaccountability — formed the foundation of the Globis model. This approach was not unique to Globis, but it functioned particularly well for two additional reasons: the ability of Globis to attract extremely high-impact participants (particularly from North Korea), and the way in which discussions were mediated. Because of its successful record as a peace-building institution, Globis has a favorable reputation in South Korea, North Korea and the United States. As such, the Track II seminar at Globis attracted top-ranking legislators, opinion leaders, cabinet-level ministers and senior advisors. This means that, although they participated in an unofficial context, they had the ability to influence real policy changes. This is a crucial difference between the Globis Track II meeting and those hosted by other institutions. Unless they include high-impact participants, these meetings are sometimes not so much genuine Track II seminars, but are more akin to academic conferences.

Active Mediation. The Globis model also stands out for the active mediation during the discussions themselves. It was most important that negotiations stay balanced and objective. This was particularly the case in a trilateral setting that included North Korea, South Korea and the United States. In order for trust and mutual respect to grow, all delegations had to be on equal footing, and with equal time and audience. A wide range of factors — historical experiences, political differences, language barriers and location of the discussions — might have conspired to effectively tilt the discussions toward one side. While this might have apparently produced short-term outcomes in favor of one side or another, it would have hindered the emergence of a true, durable compromise that is the real objective of Track II diplomacy. Throughout the seminar, Globis staff members served as active mediators ready to redirect discussion, introduce new ideas and produce counter-arguments in the name of genuine balance. Active mediation also allowed Globis to maintain progress over the course of several days. There is a tendency, in an open forum with participants that have historical grievances, to rehash the past and engage in revisionist interpretations. While important on some level, this kind of discussion may not be effective at achieving positive change. The Globis Model emphasizes forward-looking discussion, and we actively guided negotiations with a series of relevant questions distributed to participants at the beginning of the seminar.

THE GLOBIS MODEL IN ACTION

The 2011 Triad Track II Seminar on “Peace-Building and Reintegration on the Korean Peninsula” took place near the University of Georgia campus on Oct. 17-20, 2011. About 30 high-ranking diplomats, legislators and advisors from the DPRK, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States gathered for the talks, with a roughly equal numerical balance among the three delegations (see box). In addition, roughly a dozen Globis staff members and volunteers were present, with Professor Han S. Park acting as the seminar host and primary mediator. The Associated Press, CNN International, South Korea’s MBC Network and several other prominent South Korean media agencies covered the opening ceremony and subsequent talks.

Over the four days, there were six sessions, totaling approximately 20 hours, that were open to seminar participants only. Each session had an overarching theme (e.g. “DPRK-US Relations”) and revolved around a series of organizing questions that were distributed beforehand and used to enhance the focus of negotiations. Participants were encouraged to operate in a brainstorming environment in which no idea was considered inherently bad. The principles of unofficiality and unaccountability allowed the participants to approach sensitive matters from a personal perspective without fearing political or professional consequences. Mediation by Globis staff also helped to promote open communication.

Among participants at the 2011 Peace-Building and Reintegration on the Korean Peninsula seminar were:

From the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: Pak Ik Nam (Director, The Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee); Pak Jong Il (Director, The Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee); Kim Chon Hui (Director, The Korea Committee for Solidarity with the World Peoples); Kim Pyong Chol (Director, The Institute of National Reunification), Cho Ki (Director, The Institute of Peace and Disarmament); Hwang Tae Hyon (Researcher, The Institute of Peace and Disarmament); Pak Chol (Counselor, DPRK United Nations Mission); Cho Ye (Counselor, DPRK United Nations Mission).

From the Republic of Korea: Paik Nick Choon (Professor Emeritus, Seoul National University); Won Hyeong (ChNP Legislator); Park Soo-kun (Democratic Party Legislator); Yu Yewoon (Former GNP Legislator); Moon Chang In (Professor, Yonsei University); Park Yong-chul (Professor, Emeritus, Konkuk University); Joong Ang Ilbo); Park Hak Sun (Senior Researcher and Professor, Sejong Institute); Kim Hyeon Kyoung (Senior Journalist, MBC News); Ko Yoon-hee (Director, The Institute of Peace and Disarmament); Pak Chol (Counselor, DPRK United Nations Mission).

From the United States of America: Ambassador James Loney (Former US Ambassador to South Korea); Frank S. Jordan (Policy Director, East Asia and Pacific Affairs Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate); Keith Luse (Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate); Leon Sigal (Director, The Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee); Kim Young-sun (Senior Researcher and Professor, Sejong Institute); Kim Hyeon Kyoung (Senior Journalist, MBC News); Ko Yoon-hee (Director, The Institute of Peace and Disarmament); Pak Chol (Counselor, DPRK United Nations Mission).
Six-Point Pact

The joint statement released at the end of the October 2011 meeting included six points:

1. We agree that the three countries should build trust through dialogue and promote mutual acceptance and respect for sovereignty and diverse socio-political systems.

2. We recommend that all concerned parties reaffirm their commitment to past agreements, particularly agreements entered into by heads of state.

3. We recognize the need to replace the current armistice with a permanent, comprehensive and durable peace mechanism among all relevant parties.

4. Given the unfortunate past incidents in the West Sea, we emphasize the need to take necessary measures to prevent similar future occurrences.

5. We recommend that the three countries should pursue humanitarian co-operation in the areas of food aid, reunion of separated families, and a joint recovery program with respect to MIAs (missing in action).

6. We agree that the three countries should build trust through vibrant exchange programs in such areas as economy, culture, education and technology.

and mutual respect. Outside the closed-door sessions, individuals were free to talk to the media. In addition to heavy news coverage, the seminar also attracted attention from academic, policy and think-tank organizations on a wide range of print, television and online platforms. Data from the University of Georgia’s public relations office indicate that global media outlets referred to the Globis talks over 1,000 times within a week of the seminar’s conclusion.

Throughout the seminar, participants shared meals, coffee breaks and other social activities. After long hours of focused discussions, evenings were used for informal conversation, musical performances and even group songs with the seminar participants themselves. The climax of these informal social interactions was a spirited table tennis tournament involving delegates from all three countries as well as Globis staff.

At the closing ceremony on October 20, Professor Park publicly announced a unanimous joint statement on key areas of agreement on peace-building and reintegration of the Korean Peninsula. This document resulted from deliberations during the formal negotiations as well as informal gatherings over the four days. Toward the end of the seminar, Globis staff began drafting statements that captured some of the shared sentiments expressed during the substantive sessions. These drafts were refined based on feedback from each of the three delegations, until a formal, unanimously supported joint statement was produced and endorsed (see box).

This statement was remarkably similar to that released by the US State Department on Feb. 29, 2012, following the Leap Day Agreement. The official 2012 statement tracks the 2011 Globis statement quite closely when it comes to declarations of mutual respect (“The United States reaffirms that it does not have hostile intent toward the DPRK and is prepared to take steps to improve our bilateral relationship in the spirit of mutual respect for sovereignty and equality”); reaffirmation of past agreements (“The United States reaffirms its commitment to the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement … The United States recognizes the 1953 Armistice Agreement as the cornerstone of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula”); and the desire for humanitarian co-operation and exchanges (“US and DPRK nutritional assistance teams will meet in the immediate future to finalize administrative details on a targeted US program consisting of an initial 240,000 metric tons of nutritional assistance with the prospect of additional assistance based on continued need … The United States is prepared to take steps to increase people-to-people exchanges, including in the areas of culture, education, and sports”).

Of course, it is impossible to directly attribute the February 2012 agreement to the 2011 Track II talks in Georgia. But it is not unreasonable to believe that the Globis talks played an important role in paving the way for such a diplomatic breakthrough. Our assertion is that events such as the 2011 Globis talks can help “reset the table” for intergovernmental discussions by introducing new ideas that would not emerge in a more rigid atmosphere.

**KEY CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR TRACK II DIPLOMACY**

For organizations that want to host Track II seminars, it is useful to know that the success of the 2011 Triad Track II Diplomacy Seminar involved overcoming several significant challenges. The most noteworthy included, but were not limited to, securing the attendance of a high-impact delegation from North Korea, working with the US State Department to secure visas for the North Koreans and ensuring that the negotiations themselves were serious, unbiased and fruitful.

In addition, serious effort was needed to generate the funding to host such an important event.

We believe that Track II diplomacy should become an increasingly significant complement to traditional negotiations as the process of conducting foreign policy becomes subject to greater public scrutiny. There is little doubt that democratization, technological advances and the growth of social media have allowed for more transparency and mass awareness about foreign relations. One need only consider the ongoing controversy surrounding Edward Snowden and his revelations about massive and sophisticated data collection efforts by the US National Security Agency (NSA) in order to understand the sensitive interaction between technology and diplomacy. This emerging reality may generate political pressures that constrain intergovernmental negotiations, because negotiators may find their positions under constant scrutiny from a global audience that is increasingly skeptical about the intentions of both their own governments and those of rival states. Interestingly, the spread of democracy actually exacerbates government vulnerability to the fickle demands of domestic economic and military interest groups, many of which have reason to promote continued confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. In this kind of environment, it is our firm conviction that Track II diplomacy offers a fruitful path to peace on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

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