

A Regional Contextualization of the Transition to the Post-Cold War Era in East Asia

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Abstract

This article focuses on the transition to the post-Cold War era in East Asia, highlighting the period between 1989 and 1994. Its narrative highlights 1972 as a pivotal year, witnessing the Sino-U.S. rapprochement and the July 4 South-North Joint Communiqué, alongside the two Koreas' domestic constitutional amendments that solidified their respective leaderships despite underlying tensions. Then, the paper moves on to discuss the transitional period of 1989-1994, marked by South Korea's normalization with the Soviet Union and China, inter-Korean agreements, and ultimately, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's 1994 visit to Pyongyang and Kim Il Sung's subsequent death. The paper concludes that the Korean Peninsula transitioned into the post-Cold War era in 1994, highlighting how a series of interconnected regional events led to its distinct conclusion.

Keywords

Cold War, Korean Peninsula, East Asia, Regional Dynamics, Détente

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Introduction

This article reframes the transition to the post-Cold War era in East Asia, with a primary focus on the period between 1989 and 1994. While the year 1972 marked a pivotal moment of strategic change and presented an early opportunity for a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, this article revisits it as essential historical background rather than the direct commencement of the post-Cold War transition. The research then directly draws the landscape of historical changes from 1989, which ultimately led the Korean Peninsula to the post-Cold War era in 1994. In taking this approach, the paper acknowledges a significant temporal gap in the direct narrative, recognizing that the intervening period has been thoroughly explored by many well-grounded studies (Wu 2024; Gray 2022; Liu and Sakai 2018). The proposed framework shifts the analytical focus from a universally applied Cold War timeline to a regionally specific understanding, arguing that the intricate dynamics of East Asia necessitate a distinct periodization for this transformative epoch.

This paper aims to enhance the reader's understanding of this East Asian history by revisiting events that occurred in 1972, a pivotal year that witnessed a significant diplomatic overture from the United States towards China, fundamentally altering the strategic calculus for East Asian states, including North Korea. This reorientation, highlighted by President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in February 1972, initiated a complex web of diplomatic realignments that reverberated across the region (Radchenko and Schaefer 2017). This period marked a departure from the rigid bipolarity of the earlier Cold War, fostering an environment in which states like South Korea began to pursue independent diplomatic initiatives, ultimately leading to the establishment of relations with China in the early 1990s (Hwang and Choi 2015).

During the Cold War period, East Asia exhibited stark ideological divisions, sustained military standoffs, and the solidification of alliance networks oriented toward either the United States or the Soviet Union. The region functioned as a primary arena in which global bipolar confrontation was vividly enacted. Over the ensuing decades, the Korean

Peninsula endured as a profoundly militarized divide. These structural dynamics engendered a geopolitical milieu defined by inflexible blocs, constrained diplomatic latitude, and persistent security dilemmas. Articulating these attributes furnishes a vital benchmark for appraising assertions of a post-Cold War transition. The strategic implications of the U. S.-China rapprochement in 1972, for instance, compelled North Korea to reassess its security posture, influencing its engagement with South Korea (Saraiva and Nunes 2019).

Within this milieu, the early 1990s heralded a confluence of developments that betokened a rupture from the entrenched paradigms of the Cold War. The normalization of diplomatic ties among principal regional powers, the advent of multilateral bodies such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the intensification of economic interconnections conjointly reconfigured the modalities of interaction throughout East Asia. These transformations denoted a progression from a domain governed by zero-sum security dynamics to one progressively oriented toward diplomatic interchange and collaborative apparatuses. Construed as a trajectory wherein an inflexible, ideologically bifurcated order incrementally yielded to more supple and variegated paradigms of regional governance, these alterations evince East Asia's accession to a post-Cold War epoch (Iwashita and Boyle 2022).

Concurrently, salient features of Cold War-era structures persisted, particularly on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has maintained a communist-derived, Juche-oriented authoritarian regime while advancing nuclear and missile programs that perpetuate antagonistic relations with the United States, Japan, and the wider liberal international order. Although inter-Korean relations have occasionally manifested episodes of reconciliation, the essential state of division, the paradigmatic emblem of the Cold War, remains unaltered. Nevertheless, contemporary East Asia cannot be conflated with its Cold War antecedent: despite these enduring anomalies, the region now functions amid a substantially transformed strategic and diplomatic milieu, defined not by bipolar antagonism but by intricate interdependence, institutionalized deliberation, and pluralized power configurations. This dialectic of transformation and continuity lies

at the heart of East Asia's post-Cold War trajectory. This nuanced perspective allows for an examination of how regional actors navigated a bipolar global order while simultaneously confronting their unique historical legacies (Selden 2009).

The article introduces the events of the transitional years in two separate sections. The section on the year 1972 captures the events that occurred in East Asia to describe this year of strategic change. The improved relations between China and the U.S., and the Joint Communiqué between North and South Korea, signaled a significant possibility of a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, demonstrating how regional dynamics shifted with the change in relations between great powers, thereby influencing inter-Korean relations. Following the Joint Communiqué, both North and South Korea amended their constitutions, which resulted in the solidification of their respective leaderships. The subsequent section focuses on the period between 1989 and 1994 to reveal how the Korean Peninsula gradually transitioned to the post-Cold War era. The normalization of relations between South Korea and the Soviet Union initiated a domino effect of improving diplomatic relations across the East Asian region. The Cold War history centered on the Korean Peninsula concluded in 1994 with the abrupt death (The Economist 1994) of Kim Il Sung, following President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang and the promise of reopening channels for inter-Korean dialogue. The illustrations presented in this article lead to the conclusion that the Korean Peninsula transitioned into the post-Cold War era in 1994. This specific timeframe critically highlights how regional dynamics, rather than solely global events, decisively shaped the trajectory of geopolitical shifts and the eventual resolution of Cold War tensions in this particular arena.

Methodology and Archival Considerations

This scholarly investigation draws upon a multidisciplinary array of primary and secondary sources, including declassified government documents, diplomatic communiqués, memoirs of key political figures, and

contemporary news analyses, to construct a comprehensive narrative of this pivotal period. While this article is informed by established historical facts, its primary impetus stems from the pivotal, contingent events that shaped its narrative, rather than a rigid adherence to a theoretical framework. Unlike a political science study that might employ theory as a strict model for hypothesis testing, this historical analysis utilizes theory merely as a guiding perspective. The objective is not to identify a universally applicable, predictive model, but rather to reconstruct and elucidate the distinctive circumstances of the past. This nuanced approach acknowledges the complexities inherent in historical analysis, where the interplay of structural forces and agentic choices often defies simplistic categorization. This approach also acknowledges the significance of small state identities and their vulnerability in shaping foreign policy decisions.

The research incorporates relevant sources found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series to illuminate the Korean Peninsula's intertwined history with the U.S. Moreover, the research acknowledges other valuable sources, such as those from the Carter Center and the Academy of Korean Studies, as they offer multidimensional perspectives beyond official government documents like those from the National Archives and Presidential Archives.

Given that government archival sources on the latter half of the Cold War are rarely available due to classification reasons, this article relies more heavily on testimonial writings from individuals who were part of the historical events. Specifically, it engages with the memoirs of Roh Tae Woo, the president of South Korea from 1988 to 1993, and Park Cheol Eon, a policy advisor to the Presidential Secretariat who was instrumental in Roh Tae Woo's 'Nordpolitik' and played a vital role in normalizing relations with Russia and China.

Additionally, sources related to inter-Korean relations made available by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Unification of South Korea are utilized. In the realm of English-language materials, the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Historian provides major historical documents on U.S. foreign policy through the Carter administration.

1972, The Year of Strategic Change

The rapprochement between the United States and China in 1972 stemmed from mutual geopolitical imperatives, foremost among them the shared interest in countering Soviet ascendancy against the backdrop of the escalating Sino-Soviet schism in the late 1960s. By the late 1960s, the Sino-Soviet rift had escalated into overt antagonism, profoundly reshaping the strategic triangle among Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Both the United States and China discerned mutual strategic benefits in offsetting Soviet power, thereby establishing the foundational rationale for their rapprochement (Goh 2004). The Nixon administration endeavored to capitalize on fissures within the communist sphere to realign its foreign policy and extricate itself from Vietnam. Simultaneously, China, facing increasing isolation and border disputes with the Soviet Union, sought to leverage a relationship with the U.S. to mitigate Soviet encirclement (Son 2023).

The developments illustrate that the pivotal diplomatic achievements of 1972 were not isolated events but rather the outcomes of converging geopolitical shifts, domestic political pressures, and broader systemic changes. The reconfiguration of great-power alignments, particularly the emergence of triangular diplomacy among the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, created new imperatives for regional actors to adjust their strategies. This fusion of global and regional dynamics ushered in a period of diplomatic flexibility across East Asia, enabling the United States, China, and both Koreas to realign their approaches and pursue options long blocked by the rigid bipolarity of the early Cold War.

Tensions and conflict continued in East Asia, whether stemming from ideological differences or internal and external state conflicts. Despite these challenges, regional actors endeavored to improve external relations. As a result, China normalized relations with the U.S. in the 1970s and with South Korea soon after the end of the Cold War. The modernization movement during the Park Chung Hee administration in South Korea, North Korea's solidification of its national identity, and most importantly, the normalization of relations between China and the U.S. all

occurred in the 1970s. These events signaled a new era. Interestingly, although East Asia, and the Korean Peninsula in particular, was at the forefront of the Cold War confrontation, movements indicating significant future change were already underway two decades before the official end of the Cold War. This complexity reveals the long-term, multilevel facets behind a global historical event.

1972 stands as a monumental year, marked by China and the U.S. establishing peaceful relations and North and South Korea signing the North-South Joint Communiqué. Concurrently, both Koreas amended their constitutions: South Korea adopted Yushin, an authoritarian constitution granting formidable power to Park Chung Hee, while North Korea enshrined Juche, an ideology of independence and resistance to foreign intervention. The Sino-U.S. rapprochement on February 21 and the North-South Joint Communiqué on July 4 eased the regional atmosphere. Conversely, the declaration of Yushin on October 17 and the institutionalization of Juche on December 27 intensified domestic tensions within both Koreas. In essence, leadership was solidified in both nations, and structural divisions appeared to deepen, even amidst rhetorical moves aligning with the broader regional détente.

1972 was a dramatic year, and the connections and disconnections among events require further analysis. The foreign relations atmosphere in East Asia shifted in 1972 with the Sino-U.S. rapprochement (Ostermann 2011). Both China and the U.S. recognized the importance of maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula, a sentiment reflected in two paragraphs of the Shanghai Communiqué, which included general clauses about the Korean Peninsula and regional peace. Kim Il Sung welcomed the rapprochement, hailing it as a “great victory for the Chinese people and the revolutionary peoples worldwide” (Chen 2001). He advocated for leveraging this opportunity to achieve unification on the Korean Peninsula, a process that, in North Korea’s view, included the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. China supported this aspiration, envisioning the plan collaboratively, especially given Kissinger’s statement that the U.S. intended to withdraw a “substantial percentage” of its forces from South Korea (FRUS 1971). Thus, 1972 marked a strategic shift for

North Korea, with Kim Il Sung's unification idea at its core (Kim 1975). However, the unification model he envisioned was not agreeable to South Korea. Unlike Kim Il Sung, Park Chung Hee did not warmly welcome the rapprochement between China and the United States. Peaceful relations between the great powers would undermine the justification for the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea. As South Korea was not prepared to confront North Korea militarily, the establishment of Sino-U.S. ties necessitated a more strategic approach for Park Chung Hee, compelling him to consolidate his domestic political power while strategically managing military ties with the United States.

With the new tide of international relations in East Asia, North and South Korea signed their first Joint Communiqué in July 1972. The 1972 Joint Communiqué between North and South Korea emerged from transformations in the wider Cold War landscape, coupled with shifting domestic and regional imperatives. The Washington-Beijing rapprochement unsettled long-held strategic presumptions on the Korean Peninsula, compelling both Pyongyang and Seoul to recalibrate their diplomatic orientations. Pyongyang, anticipating a possible attenuation of its preferential ties with China, pursued alternative channels to affirm its legitimacy and authority. Concurrently, under President Park Chung-hee, Seoul grappled with mounting international calls for political liberalization while striving to safeguard external alliances amid flux in great-power alignments. Furthermore, the international impetus toward détente, manifest in U.S.-Soviet arms control accords and nascent diplomatic overtures throughout Asia, engendered a propitious milieu for inter-Korean engagement (Westad 2017). Within this context of strategic ambiguity and guarded optimism, both Koreas recognized mutual benefits in initiating talks, culminating in the July 4 Joint Communiqué, which for the first time enunciated tenets for peaceful reunification and reciprocal nonintervention.

This statement established the three principles of peaceful unification: self-reliance, peace, and national unity. The principles are elaborated within the statement: first, unification must be resolved independently, without reliance on or interference from foreign powers; second, unification should be achieved peacefully, not through the use of force against

each other; and third, it is necessary to promote national unity as one nation, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies, and institutions (Kim 1977). This document was the result of the meetings between Lee Hu Rak, the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, and Kim Young Joo, head of organizational guidance in Pyongyang, from May 2-5, 1972, followed by Park Sung Chul, the DPRK's Second Deputy Prime Minister, visiting to Seoul from May 29 to June 1, 1972 (Nambuk Daehwa No. 1 ~1973.4). At this moment, the two sides openly exchanged views with a mutual desire to bring about peaceful unification. They also agreed to 'take active measures to prevent unexpected military clashes, not slander each other, large or small, and to ease tensions and create an atmosphere of trust.' This indicates that the two sides shared the view that they lacked trust and recognized the need to ease tensions to create an atmosphere of trust (Ruzicka and Keating 2015).

The Joint Communiqué was cautiously worded, leaving room for interpretation, and North Korea subsequently used it as a basis to demand the U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea. This was achieved through a stretched interpretation of self-reliance, building a logic for removing the U.S. from the Korean Peninsula. Ten days after the announcement of the Joint Communiqué, Kim Jong Il issued a document entitled "Let's fight firmly to carry out the three principles of the country," in which he argued for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea and the abolition of the South Korean alliance with the U.S (Malzac and Mahomed 2024). He further contended, "Regardless of communism or nationalism, it is necessary to eliminate evil laws such as the anti-communist law and the national security law, as it transcends the difference between ideology, political opinion, faith, and party."

Apart from newly established diplomatic channels, North and South Korea also solidified leadership domestically by amending their constitutions. In October 1972, the Park administration in the South introduced Yushin with the alleged spirit of rejuvenating the country (Park 1972). Park asserted that the country was in disarray, hindering the national objective of unification. He dissolved the National Assembly and advocated for systemic reform, eliminating the political system that chal-

lenged his leadership by regulating democratic political activities. Meanwhile, North Korea enshrined the Juche ideology in its constitution in December 1972. Juche, rooted in Marxism-Leninism, emphasizes independence and sovereignty, promoting the belief that a country should prosper through self-reliance in politics, economy, and military.

The Joint Communiqué initiated inter-Korean dialogues with the aim of fostering peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, this mood of reconciliation proved short-lived. North Korea began dispatching spies through tunnels dug from North to South Korea. One such tunnel was discovered in Yeoncheon, Gyeonggi Province, in November 1974, with North Korean artifacts serving as evidence (National Archives of Korea 1978).

These tunnels reveal North Korea's dual strategy towards the South, employing both dialogue and infiltration. This tactic also involves appeasement during dialogue coupled with military provocation, a strategy of brinkmanship. North Korea has a history of employing such mixed approaches, dating back to the Korean War. During the armistice negotiations, which commenced in July 1951, North Korea would demand negotiations when the front lines were unfavorable but refuse them when they were favorable. Ultimately, North Korea exploited the two years of negotiations by combining combat and diplomatic discussions. North Korea did not abandon its aggressive tactics even when dialogue channels reopened two decades later. According to Kim Bu Seong, a former designer of the tunnel who defected to South Korea, the tunnel was constructed in 1971 with the intention of invading the South (Jung 2017).

Another tunnel was discovered in Cheolwon on March 19, 1975 (Oberdorfer 1975). In total, four tunnels were found, with two more discovered in 1978 and 1990. North Korea's persistent efforts to infiltrate South Korea, irrespective of the ongoing dialogue process, only deepened South Korea's distrust of the North. This clandestine military infrastructure, designed for rapid troop deployment, further substantiated the South Korean perception of Pyongyang's deceptive and aggressive intentions despite overt diplomatic overtures (Han 1979).

The momentum of reconciliation in 1972 did not translate into con-

structive cooperation, as the two Koreas repeated the conflict and cooperation patterns characteristic of the Cold War. Chun Doo Hwan, president of South Korea from 1980 to 1988, emphasized the importance of trust between North and South Korea in his 1981 New Year's address (Chun 1981). This speech initiated a hopeful start to inter-Korean relations in the 1980s. However, despite this optimistic beginning, both sides expressed conflicting interests and did not hesitate to voice harsh criticisms later in the decade. The peaceful atmosphere of the early 1980s could have easily been shattered by the Rangoon bombing in 1983, North Korea's assassination attempt on Chun Doo Hwan (Tan and Bridges 2019). This significant and undeniable event deepened South Korea's distrust of North Korea. While available archival sources do not clearly delineate the sequence of events or dialogues that led to deteriorating inter-Korean relations, the scattered incidents across different periods suggest that distrust consistently drove these relations, which is why the division of the Korean Peninsula remains unresolved even after the end of the Cold War.

Transition to the Post-Cold War Era, 1989-1994

The end of the Cold War is widely accepted to have occurred in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Gaddis 2005). The traditional view of the end of the Cold War centers on the history of great powers. John Lewis Gaddis, a proponent of this traditionalist perspective, argues that U.S. strategies, such as military buildup, pressured regional actors and ultimately contributed to the end of the Cold War (Gaddis 2005). While this point is valid, it is limited in its ability to capture regional dynamics. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's edited volume on the East Asian Cold War, which incorporates Japan's history into the traditionalist view, helps to balance these shortcomings (Hasegawa 2011). He asserts that the Soviet Union's decision to normalize relations with regional actors—China, Japan, and South Korea—directly impacted the end of the Cold War era. However, this meaningful effort to capture regional dynamics still faces

criticism due to its primary focus on great powers.

The traditional view overlooks the perspectives of regional actors like China, North Korea, and South Korea. Scholars have acknowledged China's role during this period, with Jian Chen examining its contribution (Chen 2001). Similar efforts have been made in Korean studies. Victor Cha primarily explored South Korea and Japan, focusing on their roles as close allies of the U.S., while Charles Armstrong examined North Korea's unique position during this historical timeframe, noting that its economic and diplomatic isolation hindered its transformation from the Cold War era (Armstrong 2013; Cha 1999). This regionalist perspective has enriched the study of the Cold War's end in East Asia.

Just as Odd Arne Westad emphasizes that traditionalist views on the end of the Cold War are 'mono-dimensional', this article acknowledges that the conclusion of the Cold War resulted from a series of events rather than a single one (Westad 2017; 2014). The end of the Cold War had multiple endings, and dynamic events around the world influenced its conclusion. His view on these multi-dimensional endings suggests a broader perspective for understanding the history (Pons and Romero 2014). This article focuses on some of the major events that occurred on the Korean Peninsula during the transition to the post-Cold War era, aiming to understand the Cold War from a small-state's angle rather than the traditional great power perspective. This approach helps clarify the Cold War timeline in East Asia.

As much as this timeline of world history, the end of the Cold War in 1991, is relevant to the Korean Peninsula, it does not fully apply. The process of the end of the Cold War started in 1989 and concluded in 1994 in East Asia (Lee 2022). Several important events occurred during this timeframe. While the U.S. presidential transition from Ronald Reagan to George H.W. Bush happened across the Pacific Ocean on January 20, 1989, a student-led demonstration took place at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989. In June, Roh Tae Woo and Mikhail Gorbachev met in San Francisco, leading to the normalization of relations between South Korea and the Soviet Union on September 30, 1990. North and South Korea signed the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression,

and Exchanges and Cooperation on December 13, 1991 (Ministry of Unification 1992). Two weeks later, the Soviet Union dissolved on December 26. On January 20, North and South Korea announced another historic declaration, the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008). Three months later, North Korea revised its Socialist Constitution on April 9, and Kim Jong Il received the title of *wonsu*, denoting the highest military rank in North Korea, four days before the April 25 Military Foundation Day in 1992. In the same year, Kim Dal Hyeon, the then Deputy Prime Minister of North Korea, visited Seoul between July 19 and 25 to encourage South Korean private sector investment in North Korea. Shortly after this, China and South Korea normalized relations on August 24, 1992 (Hwang and Choi 2000). On June 16, 1994, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visited North Korea with his wife, responding to Pyongyang's invitation from 1991. Three weeks after the visit, Kim Il Sung died of a heart attack on July 8, 1994.

Among the major events that occurred from 1989 to 1994, the newly established relations across different ideologies deserve scrutiny as a historical breakthrough. This is because ideological rivalry supported a bipolar power structure in East Asia, a key characteristic of the Cold War (Kramer 2014). The two different systems of North and South Korea, each aligned with its respective allies, naturally created the ideological backdrop of the Peninsula, thereby influencing their relations.

South Korea's normalization with the Soviet Union initiated a domino effect in East Asian international relations, ushering in a new era. While detailed data on normalization are available, the research relies on memoirs from historical figures present at key moments (Moon 2023). The most valuable memoirs are those of Roh Tae Woo, the South Korean president at the time, and Park Chul Eon, a policy advisor to the Presidential Secretariat. Park Chul Eon's memoir thoroughly captures the background of South Korea-Soviet Union relations. Similar to other public diplomatic relations, the groundwork for normalization was laid by working groups from both governments. Park Chul Eon played a crucial role in paving the way for these relations. He held a secret meeting

with the senior vice president of the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party on March 22, 1990. During this meeting, Park Chul Eon delivered a letter from South Korean President Roh Tae Woo, expressing hope for normalization ‘to promote stability and peace’ (Park 2005). Park recalled Roh’s letter stating his wish for the wave of reconciliation and cooperation prevalent in Europe to extend to East Asia.

After a few more exchanges through unofficial channels, Roh Tae Woo and Gorbachev met in San Francisco on June 4, 1990. Although the summit did not immediately conclude with the normalization of relations, South Korean delegations, including Senior Economic Secretary Kim Jong In and Senior Secretary of Foreign Affairs Kim Jong Hwi, visited Moscow in August 1990. While South Korea was interested in building diplomatic relations, the Soviet Union primarily focused on economic cooperation. However, economic cooperation without normalization proved challenging. Therefore, on September 30, 1990, South Korea and the Soviet Union normalized interactions at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, with their respective foreign ministers, Choi Ho Jung and Eduard Shevardnadze, signing the agreement (Park 2005).

According to Roh Tae Woo’s memoir, the newly established ties between the two countries provided China with a stronger impetus to build relations with South Korea (Roh 1984). In the memoir, Roh reminisces about his meeting with former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz on October 17, 1990. Shultz informed Roh about his meeting with a former Chinese ambassador to the U.S. approximately three to four weeks prior. According to Shultz, this ambassador, Zhu Qichen, voluntarily expressed China’s desire to expand economic and trade relations with South Korea after Shultz mentioned he would be meeting with Roh Tae Woo. Roh reflects on the impression Shultz conveyed to him: it seemed to Shultz that China needed South Korea more than South Korea needed China. This section of the memoir is titled ‘China will walk into your arms,’ a direct quote from Shultz to Roh Tae Woo.

The desire to build relations was mutual, with Roh himself showing an effort to bond with China from the beginning of his administration. Even before Schultz stated that ‘China will walk into South Korea’s

arms,' Roh was maneuvering his way through the great powers. When students and citizens protested for democratization in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, Roh raised this matter with President Bush and Schultz, as well as British Prime Minister Thatcher. At the time, China's diplomatic relations were strained due to harsh criticism against the Communist Party, and the Western world maintained a firm stance on human rights. Roh emphasized that the world should approach China with more caution, respecting its history and culture. He recalls:

I don't know how much what I said worked, but their attitude seemed to have softened considerably. U.S. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, who visited Korea in November 1991 to attend the Korea-US Security Council, said, The history of the communist regime is over and the flow of world history has changed, and the results are now becoming clear. However, because China is slow to change, the U.S. Congress and the media will have to refrain from hurriedly demanding improvement of human rights in China. I think it is wise to pursue policy toward China slowly (Roh 2011).

China responded to these changes. Roh believed this was due to South Korea's elevated status in international society, a result of its newly established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and its joining of the United Nations. Roh concluded that 'despite the blood alliance with North Korea, it is inevitable to choose South Korea.' (Roh 2011) His confidence was also rooted in South Korea's amicable relations with Japan and the U.S.

According to Roh Tae Woo, an outer factor that directly influenced both China and South Korea in building relations was a sporting event. In his memoir, he recollects sports as an essential bridge for building connections with China. China participated in the Seoul Olympics, having won the Asian Games two years prior. The friendly atmosphere fostered by these two events persisted, and diplomatic relations matured in the early 1990s. Roh believed there was no reason to deliberately delay

diplomatic relations between Korea and China and hand them over to the next government. He was determined to complete his Nordpolitik, a policy aimed at establishing diplomatic relations with countries north of the Korean Peninsula, and normalization with China was crucial to achieving this before his term ended. His resolve was evident when he met with George Shultz, the former U.S. Secretary of State, on November 4, 1991, expressing his intention to establish diplomatic relations with China by the end of 1992 (Roh 2011).

As a final step toward officially establishing diplomatic relations with China, Roh Tae Woo met with Qian Qichen, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, to demonstrate South Korea's recognition of China as a key regional player. Roh conveyed to Qian that South Korea hoped China would persuade North Korea to denuclearize and contribute to maintaining peace. Roh recalled that China appreciated South Korea's acknowledgment of its significant regional role (Roh 2011).

As a result of various efforts, both before and after this meeting, South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Sang Ok visited China on April 13, 1992, to attend the General Assembly of the Economic and Social Committee of the Asia-Pacific region, where he proposed diplomatic relations with China.

Kim Young Sam, a civilian president reinstated after a prolonged period of military leadership, was inaugurated in 1993, marking a significant transitional period for both domestic politics and external relations. Kim Young Sam established the Presidential Segyehwa Promotion Committee to address globalization (Presidential Committee for Globalization 2006). South Korea leveraged its enhanced value as a trade partner to China following the Sino-Soviet split. Kim Young Sam's administration aimed to achieve advanced-nation status through economic policy, which prompted China to re-evaluate its relationship with South Korea. This, in turn, created a context in which Jimmy Carter's visit to North Korea appeared natural. North Korea invited Carter to Pyongyang in 1991, and he made the visit in 1994. Traveling as a civilian, Carter became the first person to cross the Korean Demilitarized Zone since the peninsula's division. Following a two-day dialogue, Kim Il Sung agreed

to freeze his nuclear program in exchange for the resumption of talks with the U.S. The Clinton administration received diplomatic confirmation from North Korea upon Carter's arrival, with Clinton hailing the trip as "the beginning of a new stage" ("Carter Trip Paves the Way for U.S.-North Korean Pact" 1995).

With the new winds of foreign policy in East Asia, Seoul showed interest in reconnecting with the North, and the two sides agreed to hold the first inter-Korean summit since the division on July 25-27, 1994. This marked a new turning point. However, Kim Il Sung died on July 8, roughly twenty days before the scheduled meeting, halting the newly changing atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula. The friendly atmosphere fostered by Carter's visit ended with his abrupt death, and North Korea entered a new era under the leadership of Kim Jong Il.

North Korea's drastic change after 1994, which contrasts greatly with South Korea's foreign policy orientation, clearly indicates that the Korean Peninsula transitioned into the post-Cold War era. North Korea cemented the Juche ideology, and Kim Jong Il succeeded to leadership. Unfortunately for him, North Korea began to tread an uneasy path politically and economically. Trade and aid from the Soviets ended due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The most critical blow to the country was the rapid decline of food production caused by famine. The March of Suffering, from 1994 to 1998, represents the hardest period of recent North Korean history, surpassed in difficulty only by the Korean War itself. Public food distribution dropped by 95.5%, and the mortality rate reached up to 28.7%, according to the Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement's statistical reports from 1998. In the 1990s, a shortage of electricity, caused by a shortage of coal, impacted flood-affected electrically powered irrigation systems. China was a crucial supporter of North Korea, especially during this time. North Korea's high dependency on trade from China—which constituted nearly one-third of its foreign trade—added to its dependence. Even amidst these hardships, North Korea did not abandon its nuclear development. Its nuclear program developed exponentially in the 2000s. The material difficulties at home did not diminish North Korea's growing confidence in diplomacy surrounding its nu-

clear power. Consequently, North Korea preferred bilateral talks, excluding its ostensible Chinese patron. This represents a contrasting foreign policy compared to the era of the Six-Party Talks in the 2000s. The description of a ‘lonely state’ no longer fits in the 2010s, as North Korea had diplomatic relations with 164 countries, and until early 2017, it had visa-free or visa-upon-arrival arrangements with 27 countries (Korhonen and Tomoomi 2019).

Conclusion

The historical review of the Korean Peninsula reveals its complex entanglement in the history of great powers, with each period of Korean history being wholly intertwined with them. Consequently, the Cold War, driven by these great powers, was highly relevant to Korea. However, the destiny of the divided reality was ultimately in their hands. They recognized the momentum for peace and, following the 1972 Joint Communiqué, made peace with other countries in the early 1990s, demonstrating a capacity for reconciliation despite differing ideological backgrounds.

1972 marked a significant shift for Korea, witnessing the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, which altered regional dynamics, and also saw North and South Korea issue a historic Joint Statement outlining their mutual vision for unification. Furthermore, both Koreas amended their constitutions, solidifying their respective leaderships. While the first two diplomatic events may seem disconnected from the latter two domestic occurrences, a connection emerges when leaders focused on leveraging their consolidated power to achieve unification in light of the Joint Communiqué or to foster peace with ideologically diverse nations. This prompts a deeper inquiry into the political priorities and actions of these leaders, specifically their vision for unification and the efforts undertaken to achieve peace. A series of crucial events between 1989 and 1994, including South Korea’s normalization of relations with the Soviet Union and China, and Carter’s visit to Pyongyang, arguably signal the end of the Cold War in East Asia. With the death of Kim Il Sung, the region transi-

tioned into the post-Cold War era in 1994. By this time, the peninsula's division, a symbol of the Cold War, had solidified into a defining characteristic of Korea.

Despite various chances for reconciliation prior to 1994, the pursuit of peace did not culminate in unification. Therefore, the article centrally argues that the period from 1972 to 1994 signifies the conclusion of the Cold War in East Asia, underscoring the profound shift in regional dynamics and the trajectory of Korean history. This perspective warrants further research into the underlying causes of this outcome.

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