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Korean Peace - A Comprehensive Analysis

What is the issue?

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- North Korea has lately been engaged in a string of diplomatic engagements to resolve the nuclear standoff in the Korean peninsula.
- While this is a positive, the other stakeholders will have to adopt a pragmatic approach to negotiations in order to achieve sustain peace.

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What is the historic perspective to the Korean crisis?

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- **History** - The Korean War (1950-53) split the Korean peninsula into the North and South Korea along the 38th parallel latitude.
- The North was communist dictatorship backed by USSR, while the South

flourished into a vibrant democracy that is part of the US security alliance.

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- After the fall of USSR and re-unification of East and West Germany, the North Korean regime got isolated internationally and saw a threat to its survival.

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- Notably, both the North and South Korean governments claim to be the official representatives of the entire of Korea and do not recognize each other.

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- **Survival** - While China is North Korea's strongest ally, despite pressure from Pyongyang, Beijing recognized South Korea in 1992.

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- South Korea has now developed into a strong economic power and has become one of China's biggest trade partner and investment destination.

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- All these factors have made North Korean leadership increasingly insecure as an US assisted South Korean annexation of North loomed large.

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- While both Koreas have a stated official policy for reunification, neither seems ready to accept the political leadership of the other.

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- Consequently, North Korea took refuge in developing nuclear weapons for securing its political survival since 2006.

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What caused the recent tensions?

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- **Weapons Program** - North has conducted 6 nuclear tests thus far and the latest one in Sept 2017 is said to be 6 times as powerful as Hiroshima bomb.

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- The current North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong Un took over from his father Kim Jong Il in 2011 and has since accelerated the weapons mission.

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- While his father conducted 16 missile launch tests during his 16 year rule till 2011, the current leader in his 7 years rule has conducted 80 launches.

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- The last test in Nov 2017 successfully demonstrated the "Hwasong-15 missile", which has a 12,000 km range, and has the entire US territory within its reach.

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- **Diplomatic Standoff** - The Weapons program got the whole world concerned and multiple sanctions were passed in the UN.

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- These effectively cut-off all international ties of North Korea except China which continued to trade defying sanctions (although largely unofficially).

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- Notably, China too got concerned due to

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- Due to North's continued intimidations, Mr. Trump had threatened the Mr. Kim with a furious attack like never before in human history.

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What are the evolving diplomatic engagements?

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- Despite the harsh rhetoric of the other stakeholders, South Korean president Mr. Moon had been paddling a softer approach towards Pyongyang all along.

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- Consequently, in Jan 2018, Mr. Kim had spelt out his willingness to negotiate a solution, which set off a new diplomatic breakthrough.

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- North Korea participated in the recent Winter Olympic Games hosted by South Korea in Feb, and also Mr. Kim's sister led a delegation to the South Korea.

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- Kim has also paused his weapons program and he recently travelled to Beijing for a short diplomatic meet with the Chinese premier Mr. Xi Jinping.

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- A South Korean delegation also visited Pyongyang, and Mr. Kim is said to have conveyed his willingness to denuclearise if negotiations are successful.

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- Additionally, North and South Korean leadership is touted to meet in April at the "Peace House in Panmunjom" for furthering the warmth.

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- Also, the North Korean and US leadership are expected to meet sometime in May, which is touted to be the most significant part of the engagement.

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What are the expectations of various stakeholders?

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- **South Korea** - South wants to restore peace in the peninsula by sustaining this dialogue and furthering the cause of reunification.

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- It would also like to be kept in loop with any US decision regarding the North to ensure that its interests aren't compromised.

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- Notably, despite the multi-power geopolitics in the Korean peninsula, the current initiatives are solely powered by the North and South Korea.

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- **North Korea** - The North has been effectively isolated from the world due to sanctions, and it would like all sanctions to be lifted to help its economy.

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- It would also want to ensure its regime survival and its concerns regarding the massive US troop presence in South Korea also needs to be addressed.

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- While the desire for reunification is strong in both the Koreas, current engagements can increase the chances of a mutual and peaceful unification.

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- **China** - It hopes that the peace process will result in denuclearisation of its neighbourhood and withdrawal of the US troop and arms from South Korea.

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- While the reunification of the Koreas isn't to China's liking, the possibility of that happening anytime soon is low and isn't concern for Beijing currently.

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- **USA** - For the US, it is treaty obligated to protect South Korea in addition to its assumed role of being the "world saviour".

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- Additionally, it would want to curtail Beijing's increasing clout in the region, which demands an increased engagement in region's conflicts.

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- But there are multiple hardliners in the Trump administration, who might vouch for unrealistic expectations and thwart a deal, which is a genuine risk.

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- **Others** - Japan is also a key member in the Korean neighbourhood, and has been advocating a hard-line on North Korea for long.

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- Notably, it's also part of the US military alliance and fears that a pro-North Korean shift by US would weaken its case vis-a-vis China.

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- Additionally, Russia was an erstwhile player in the region during the Soviet era and has been asserting itself worldwide again under Mr. Putin.

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- It may want to engage and has to be satiated through suitable dialogues.

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Source: The Hindu

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