

# **Negotiating the Nuclear and Humanitarian Crisis on the Korean Peninsula: A Simulation and Teaching Guide**

## **Biographical Note**

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## **Abstract**

I offer a simulation scenario based on of-the-minute thinking about the Korean Peninsula crisis. The scenario highlights the tradeoffs and difficulties in addressing the nuclear and humanitarian crisis, tasking students to negotiate to reach consensus on track I- and track II-levels. Students are negotiators, gaining experience and exposure to key international relations and political science concepts through active learning. An optional media teams and press conference component is also discussed. The scenario, grading rubric and supplemental materials are included to give instructors a resource that is easily modified across groups varying in size, ability, and composition.

## **Introduction**

While there is a wide literature on simulation scenarios, there is no up-to-date simulation listed for one of the most important foreign policy crises facing the world today: the Korean Peninsula crisis.<sup>1</sup> The simulation scenario I offer here reflects of-the-minute thinking about the Korean Peninsula crisis and highlights the tradeoffs and difficulties in addressing the nuclear and humanitarian crisis. New research challenges conventional assumptions about the strength of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)-China relationship, and the downplaying of non-traditional security issues like mass human rights abuse, disease, migration, and state collapse as problems on the Peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

I offer a negotiation simulation that lasts at least two weeks, plus a debrief session. Assignments are scaffolded in for preparation, including a team background paper, a two-minute opening speech for the negotiations, and a number of debrief mini-assignments. This simulation is useful for an introductory International Relations class, and given its versatile themes it can be used in a more advanced course on East Asian Regional Relations, International Organizations or Security Studies. The simulation is straight-forward to run, and does not require much preparation, with no additional class materials.

### **Benefits of a Simulation**

Students are decision-maker negotiators addressing the crisis with overlapping, conflicting interests to secure and limited capabilities to execute their goals. The simulation is grounded in real-world context, and emulates a professional setting and requires students to make a connection between doctrinal learning and the real world and the social context around them. Through this learning by doing, students perform beyond basic recall of theory as they engage in higher order thinking to resolve complex, ill-defined problems.<sup>3</sup>

The simulation highlights the different dominant theoretical perspectives of International Relations, including debates about whether zero-sum bargaining outcomes are inevitable (i.e. a nuclear missile attack), how states' domestic interests affect international cooperation (i.e. does Japan's focus on addressing abductee issues mean defection from a united front against DPRK nuclear expansion?), and norms around appropriate action or the social construction of 'security' (i.e. should there be a prioritization of nuclear security issues over massive humanitarian concerns?). The simulation also emphasizes core International Relations concepts like the security dilemma, (mis)perceptions, historical memory. This scenario has many benefits for large introductory International Relations, East Asian politics or Security Studies classes. Many of the teams have an in-built two-level negotiating tensions, which could be exploited by Pyongyang in order to gain concessions. The tension between finding an international-level outcome (between negotiating teams) that might be

acceptable for each individual team and their imagined publics highlights problems of the two-level game. Students will also grapple with much more esoteric concepts like ‘reputation’ and ‘status’ as they come to assess why certain teams are still invited to the talks. In my experience as instructor, questions are raised about Russia’s participation in the simulation even though it is no longer as significant a player in Korean Peninsula politics. The simulation then invites discussions about how states form reputation and status.

### **The Simulation Scenario**

The scenario incorporates traditional and non-traditional security issues in the context of massive economic and social concerns. Drawing from news headlines, the scenario emphasizes that the DPRK continues to test its ballistic missile systems, while pursuing the miniaturization of its nascent nuclear weapons stockpile. The scenario also notes the DPRK production of highly-enriched uranium, which has the sole purpose of making nuclear weapons. Along with these latest nuclear and missile-related developments, there are other non-traditional security pressures. The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK found unparalleled crimes against humanity, and interest continues to grow about the Commission’s recommendations for action. The scenario notes that the DPRK faced an unseasonably long and bitter winter, which has meant concerns about food, health

and migration, coupled with reports of a new strand of the bird flu carried by North Koreans crossing the border.

The negotiation's players are loosely based on a modified Six-Party Talks format with the six nation-states: the DPRK, the United States, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan, China and Russia operating on a track I level. Along with these states, other track I negotiators includes Switzerland and Sweden, given their long-standing diplomatic representation in Pyongyang, and presence as Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission members monitoring the demilitarized zone. The International Atomic Energy Association is also a track I negotiator given its expertise in nuclear affairs.

The track II negotiators include the small number of declared foreign non-governmental organizations and educational institutions that are present in the DPRK. Leaders from the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology; Red Cross Society of the DPRK; the UN Country Team in the DPRK, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation are invited to offer expertise and guidance on addressing the social, development and security issues listed in the simulation. I also added the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea because of the renewed interest in the human rights conditions in the DPRK.

The scenario sets up a classic two-level game. For example, the nation-state players have varying levels of interests in the success of the talks, given their competing interests and capabilities. The United States, the ROK and Japan all have interests in securing their foreign nationals in the DPRK; China has particular concerns about managing the border, given the Chinese ethnic Korean population, tuberculosis infection rates in the DPRK, and the potential for a costly state collapse. Russia is keen to maximize its technical expertise and diplomatic prestige. The competing interests highlight the difficulty in executing a successful ‘stag hunt’ against the DPRK, where Pyongyang can exploit nation state’s competing interests as part of its diplomatic strategy. Similarly, Switzerland, Sweden, the IAEA and the track II negotiators face constraints about operating within DPRK approved boundaries. Their different corporate identities shape their response to the scenario and their willingness to cooperate with one another. For example, the Eugene Bell Foundation maintains a focus on diagnosis and treating tuberculosis, which may make it a reluctant player to address the writ of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

The objective for the negotiation simulation is that both tracks must produce their own joint statements, and these joint statements must complement one another. All track I players must sign their joint statement and all track II players must sign their

joint statement. There is no correct outcome for the simulation or the content of the joint statements.

### **Setup for the Simulation**

Prior to the beginning of the negotiations, the instructor offers a brief recap of the history, security and political situation on the Korean Peninsula, including prior failed attempts at negotiated outcomes. The instructor then issues the one-page scenario, contained in appendix A of the supplemental materials, and reminds students that negotiations do not begin until their assigned kick-off date. The simulation itself is run over two weeks, incorporating all lecture and recitation meetings. Once negotiations are complete, the following lecture period should be reserved for debriefing and discussion.

The instructor divides students into groups representing the negotiators at the track I and track II levels. The ideal size for each group is three to four students a group. Larger groups can be accommodated, but this number permits active participation from all members, reduces the opportunity for ‘free-riders’ and gets groups to focus on a cohesive list of negotiating points.

Negotiating teams then turn to their preparatory tasks of researching and writing their team background papers. These papers address the team’s historical

background vis-à-vis the issues contained in the background scenario; the team's capabilities and interests, their core goals for the negotiations, and present their strategy for negotiations (which other teams are negotiating partners, which issues are priorities etc.). Students are encouraged to draw insights from their team's past practices in prior rounds of negotiations. Only the instructor will see the background paper beyond the team, so students can write frankly and directly. This group project familiarizes students with their teammates and prepares them for the negotiation by gaining knowledge and expertise about their assigned team. Students appoint their individual roles within teams. These are either divided by national focus or by function. For example, a four-person Japan team may decide to break down their team via specialists in Japan-US, ROK-Japan, abductee issues, and health security issues. Clearly utilizing team members on these issue areas highlights the relevance of these issue areas for negotiations. Written and face-to-face feedback is given by the instructor. Ideally, teams then have a week between receiving feedback and the negotiations beginning, giving negotiators a chance to reformulate goals and strategies if needed.

Once the written and one-on-one feedback is given on their policy background papers, the negotiations commence in a single room during lecture time, which simulates the real proximity of chambers during negotiations. Negotiations start with teams preparing to deliver a two-minute opening speech. The speeches serve an



important function of distilling the key points from team's policy papers, pushing negotiators to think about what their most important message is for the forthcoming negotiations. Moreover, these speeches are the first time that other teams can learn about their counterpoints interests, capabilities and priorities. If due to time constraints, only certain teams will be chosen at random to deliver their speeches, then all speeches can be uploaded to the class online platform for reading beforehand instead, for example. In lecture settings students often move to set up working groups or caucuses, trying to figure out broader aspects of cooperation. In smaller recitation settings, students switch to hammering out details of their agreements with other negotiators. Negotiators may also see fit to use Facebook groups, WhatsApp chat groups or any other means to reach negotiation success with the set time period. Tactics can include the use of high-level summitry between select players, the offer of economic or medical aid as incentives or the use of sanctions as punishments. However, negotiation processes should draw from key strategic realities, like China's *de facto* control over DPRK sanctions enforcement or the military disparities between the DPRK and ROK.

The instructor announces their veto over proposals that clearly reject reality (e.g. the United States abruptly disbands all alliance commitments with Japan and the ROK). The instructor must not use the veto for proposals that appear surprising or extreme, as long as these negotiating points do not violate each groups' capabilities or

interests. Once the negotiations begin, the instructor's role shifts to meeting with student teams, prompting them to conceptualize their goals clearer, asking what acceptable parameters are, and discussing negotiating tactics. Students should be encouraged to use prior strategic relationships, and even back-channel contacts, when appropriate. For example, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Switzerland would have a natural opportunity for coordinated policy. Just as Switzerland and Sweden would form a negotiating pair given their decades of cooperation as military observers at the border. The instructor becomes a facilitator for the negotiations. Instructors of larger classes might benefit from having more teaching assistants to observe negotiators and help self-critical conversation.

### **Debriefing and Assessment**

Debriefing is crucial for students to process their negotiation activities and articulate their connections to course learning goals. The debriefing is key from a pedagogical viewpoint as it reinforces what students have learned through traditional learning and assessment modes, while offering additional opportunities for students to make new connections between their negotiations experience and their knowledge from lectures, recitations and readings.

When the class reconvenes to debrief, the instructor is again a facilitator, drawing student discussion on topics including the relevance of readings to the negotiations, surprising outcomes, or how this simulation relates to issues in the news. For example, if the scenario is used in the context of an East Asian regional studies class, then the instructor's questions during the debriefing can focus students on themes covered in the course: to what extent did the negotiations reflect the problems of historical memory? Given the scenario, how better could the negotiations address the Korean Peninsula crises? What are the impediments to a more robust response to the Korean Peninsula crisis? How does the negotiations experience reflect real-world events? For a class on Foreign Policy Analysis, students could be prompted to reflect on such questions as whether their negotiation experience presents a model for dealing with crises? What are the implications from their negotiations experience for decision-making at the international level?

A variety of straight-forward assessment aids can be used to facilitate the debrief. A simple handout at the end of each lecture and recitation session asks students to give four answers: What did you do during this class? What were your goals for this session? Did you achieve your goals (if not, why?) Do you need to change your goals for next session? Using these completed handouts gives students an opportunity to capture changes in their thinking and approach over the two-week period.

Alternately, students can hand in a short critical self-reflection paper about their

individual experiences in the team and in the negotiations, which can be used to understand the inner workings of the group and relieve free-rider concerns inevitable in group-based assignments. Both these documents assist the instructor in assessing learning, as evidence of how students process the effects of competing interests and constraints of limited capabilities as negotiators, and the ability of the press to construct and publicize the news. A grading matrix is included in appendix B showing a grading scale for negotiators performance during the simulation and debriefing.

### **Extension**

A press corps component can be added to the simulation to further model the two-level conditions present in the simulation. Students in these teams are reporters, not negotiators, and play a key part in the success of the negotiations. Press teams are assigned to each nation-state present in the simulation and are composed of three or four students that cover breaking news, leaks, or write editorials based on the negotiations progress. The press corps serve an invaluable function as another source of information and analysis, while also reinforcing domestic pressures on the negotiating groups through critical or supportive reporting. Each national player should have a press team (e.g. *ITAR TASS*, *CNN*, the Korean Central News Agency, the *Asahi Shimbun*, *The People's Daily*, the *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *20 Minuten*), and if class size permits, then there can be a different array of political

views represented by the press outlets (e.g. *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, for the United States and *the Daily NK* along with the Korean Central News Agency for the DPRK). Press teams also write team background papers, in which they note the objectives, political persuasion and their media outlets existing critical coverage of the Korean Peninsula issue. Press teams also choose their individual roles: whether it be functional specialties (e.g. health editor) or national specialties (e.g. Japan news editor). The press meet their assignments during the negotiations by producing at least two articles regarding the negotiations, which are published on the class online platform. An additional lecture session can be set aside for a media conference to critically assess the process of the negotiations and the content of the joint statements.

## **Conclusion**

This simulation enriches the instruction of international affairs as students take on real world roles negotiating resolution for the Korean Peninsula crisis. The simulation offers students to negotiate an outcome for a crisis with no ‘good’ solution, reflecting realities of cooperation under constraint. The process of negotiation gives students a more intimate understanding of why massive humanitarian crises continue and the failure to address apparently vital security threats. The simulation captures many core International Relations concepts while still adaptable to other courses.



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<sup>1</sup> Simulation scenarios often use fictional states (for example, see Stodden 2012; Young 2006; Newmann and Twigg 2000), or use other regional crises (for example, see Chasek 2005 using terrorist attack in Singapore; Kempston and Thomas 2014 using a South China Seas simulation scenario; and Siegel and Young 2009 using the Middle East).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Mastro (2017) about Sino-DPRK relations, and Bae and Natsios (2018) which considers the effects of disease, refugee flows, and state collapse on the Korean Peninsula.

<sup>3</sup> There is an extensive literature on the benefits of simulations in Political Science and International



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Relations classrooms: Newmann and Twigg (2000) discuss the benefits of this active learning, especially for students who may not respond as well to conventional approaches; Kempston and Thomas (2014) emphasize the benefits of metacognitive skills for students' ability to become self-directed learners; Young (2006), Kanner (2007), Stodden (2012) and Hunzeker and Harkness (2014) note simulations promote students ability to apply theory to practice. Shellman and Turan (2006) and Powner and Allendoerfer (2008) note the benefits of simulations for leading to improved assessment performances.