

North and South Korea

Despite a series of contacts and proposals, North and South Korea continued to disagree on terms that would result in their first high-level political and military bilateral talks. In July 1988, President Roh Tae Woo of South Korea called for the normalization of relations between the North and South. He proposed certain measures, including a formula for economic trade and cultural exchanges, as steps toward this normalization.

Addressing the UN General Assembly for the first time, on 18 October 1988, Roh Tae Woo proposed a peace conference between North and South Korea, with the added participation of the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Japan. He also discussed reunification, as well as commercial and cultural exchanges. In November, a communiqué released by the North Korean Central News Agency outlined a plan for reunification suggesting a loose confederation of the North and South, upholding their respective political systems.

On 17 January 1989, North and South Korea tentatively agreed to meet in February for a round of highest-level official political and military talks. On 8 February, North Korea announced that it would not attend these preliminary talks, citing annual South Korean and American joint military manoeuvres ("Team Spirit") as a major obstacle to any further inter-governmental dialogue. Nevertheless, North Korean and US officials have reportedly met in Beijing three times since autumn 1988.

In late June 1989, a bill was introduced in the US Senate to withdraw 10,000 of the over 40,000 US troops in South Korea over three years. The US House of Representatives heard calls for South Korea to consider taking over more responsibility for its own security, given US fiscal pressures and the prospering South Korean economy. The Bush Administration opposes a unilateral cutback in US forces, insisting that reductions could occur only after agreement with South Korea and other US allies in Asia. On 28 June 1989, President Roh Tae Woo rejected all demands for US troop cuts in Korea, citing the continued intransigence of North Korea and the "recent turmoil in China." Roh also called on the US to disregard rising anti-US sentiment in South Korea.

Sporadic meetings between North and South Korean legislators have taken place, beginning in August 1988. In late April 1989, the Chairman of the Democratic Justice Party, South Korea's ruling party, was chief delegate to the "South-North parliamentary talks." The talks ended with little result, however.

Despite the inconclusive political and military talks between North and South Korea, some success has been reached in the economic sphere. On 1 February 1989, Chung Ju Young, founder of the Hyundai conglomerate, and Choe Su Gil, president of the Taesong Bank of North Korea, signed an agreement in principle on a joint business project (the development of a tourist site on the eastern coast of North Korea). It was the first time in forty-three years that an agreement of this kind had been signed between North and South Korea. Also, in June 1989, South Korean delegates attended the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students in North Korea.