
Plan Overview

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Title: Analysis of Blockage to Sustainable Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula: Counter-Peace Dynamics in the Kaesong Industrial Complex

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Project abstract:

Although more than 70 years have passed since the signing of *the Agreement Concerning a Military Armistice in Korea* (1953) (hereafter, “*the Armistice Agreement*”), conflict between North and South Korea persists. Since the end of the Cold War, the South Korean government has sought to advance inter-Korean relations through reconciliation and cooperation. Yet no tangible progress has been made due to political and military tensions between the two Koreas. Consequently, the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998 – February 2003) sought to build peace on the Korean Peninsula through a neo-functional approach. The Kaesong Industrial Complex (hereafter, “KIC”) project began after the agreement on inter-Korean economic cooperation reached at the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit. The KIC was a symbol of peace-building on the Korean Peninsula, serving as a space where South and North Korean people maintained the longest-lasting daily contact, with South Korean capital and technology combined with North Korean labour under a shared goal. Given the unique nature of inter-Korean relations under the enduring armistice regime, the R.O.K-U.S. alliance, the North Korean nuclear issue, and economic cooperation, the KIC project was a ‘Hybrid form of Peace’ that involved not only agreements between the South and North Korean authorities but also the complex interplay of coordination among the UN, the UN Command, the United States, and South Korean companies operating in Kaesong. Launched under the Kim Dae-jung administration, the KIC, until its closure in February 2016, weathered various crises – the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (2002, 2009), US Export Administration Regulations (EAR), North Korean nuclear tests (2006–2017), wage negotiations of North Korean workers (2009), the sinking of the Cheonan (2010), and the temporary suspension of the complex (2013) – while securing the self-determination of the South Korean government and the KIC companies through communication between the South Korean government and the international community, and local companies, thereby realising a nascent ‘positive form of hybrid peace’. However, following the fourth North Korean nuclear test (6 January 2016), as geopolitical factors surrounding the Korean Peninsula intensified, a conditional link emerged between the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and the KIC. In this process, the South Korean government underwent a hegemonic co-optation by neoliberal norms, shifting from its existing neo-functional approach to peacebuilding to a neoliberal one. This shift led to the collapse of the ‘positive form of hybrid peace’ system embodied by the KIC and ultimately resulted in a ‘virtual peace’ on the Korean Peninsula.

The formation of the ‘counter-peace’ dynamics during the Park Geun-hye administration was characterised by an active and voluntary nature. By voluntarily abandoning the strategic balance between the U.S. and China in favour of the ROK-US alliance to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, the Park Geun-hye administration re-securitized the KIC. In particular, the fact that the decision to close the KIC was taken pre-emptively (10 February 2016), before the UN Security Council’s resolution on sanctions against North Korea (UNSCR 2270, 2 March 2016) and the announcement of additional US unilateral sanctions (15 March 2016) demonstrates that this co-optation was a voluntary internalisation of hegemonic norms rather than external coercion. This led to the exclusion of local actors’ self-determination and agency in the decision-making process regarding the closure of the KIC. Furthermore, after the closure, the issue of the KIC transformed into a matter of government compensation, and as the legality of the decision was debated in the courts, a process of depoliticisation ensued; this, combined

with the domestic legal system, resulted in the weakening of resistance from local actors. Thus, the formation of the 'counter-peace' dynamics was consolidated.

The Moon Jae-in administration (May 2017 – May 2022) took office within the counter-peace structure that had already been established, shaped by UN and US sanctions against North Korea and the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system. Unlike the Park Geun-hye administration, which actively and voluntarily internalised hegemonic co-optation, the Moon Jae-in administration's co-optation was of a structural nature. As the governmentality of neoliberal norms took effect, the inter-Korean summit agreement (18 September 2018) included the phrase 'when conditions are met' (interpreted, according to publicly released government explanatory materials, as progress in denuclearisation) regarding the resumption of the KIC, thereby introducing a conditional nature. This demonstrates the structural characteristics of hegemonic co-optation operating between the two Koreas through the institutional framework of sanctions against North Korea, irrespective of the Moon Jae-in administration's willingness.

Despite the willingness of the inter-Korean authorities and KIC companies to resume operations at the KIC, the environment of sanctions against North Korea has curtailed the South Korean government's policy autonomy and the self-determination of KIC companies; furthermore, as the North Korean nuclear issue has come under the influence of U.S.-China strategic competition, the prospects for the reopening of KIC have become even more uncertain. The KIC, which was closed in 2016, has not yet been reopened, despite the willingness of the inter-Korean authorities and the KIC companies to do so during the Moon Jae-in administration. The dynamics of 'counter-peace' have thus become entrenched, and the Korean Peninsula remains in a state of virtual peace without inter-Korean conflict having been resolved fundamentally.

The case of the KIC demonstrates that the dynamics of 'counter-peace' can operate in two ways. One is the manner in which the state actively internalises neoliberal norms through hegemonic consent; the other is the manner in which the state and local agents are co-opted, irrespective of the will of the actors, due to structural governmentality. 'Counter-peace' disrupted the 'positive form of hybrid peace' system in the KIC and thwarted the actors' will to resume the operations of the KIC, thereby hindering the fundamental resolution of inter-Korean conflicts and entrenching a virtual peace. This suggests that counter-peace dynamics can arise even in peacebuilding based on agreements between the parties to the conflict, and underscores that international cooperation in response to local needs is essential for sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, the reality that, during this vacuum in peace on the Korean Peninsula, closer ties between North Korea, China and Russia, the intensification of US-China strategic competition, and the deepening of regional bloc formation are making such prospects even more difficult.

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Analysis of Blockage to Sustainable Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula: Counter-Peace Dynamics in the Kaesong Industrial Complex

Manchester Data Management Outline

1. Will this project be reviewed by any of the following bodies (please select all that apply)?

- None of the above

2. Is The University of Manchester collaborating with other institutions on this project?

- No - only institution involved

N/A

3. What data will you use in this project (please select all that apply)?

- Generate textual supporting information only
- Acquire new data

I will plan a literature review and a semi-structured interview.

4. Where will the data be stored and backed-up during the project lifetime?

- Other storage system (please list below)

5. If you will be using Research Data Storage, how much storage will you require?

- < 1 TB

6. Are you going to be receiving data from, or sharing data with an external third party?

- No

7. How long do you intend to keep your data for after the end of your project (in years)?

- 0-4 years

Guidance for questions 8 to 13

Highly restricted information defined in the [Information security classification, ownership and secure information handling SOP](#) is information that requires enhanced security as unauthorised disclosure could cause significant harm to individuals or to the University and its ambitions in respect of its purpose, vision and values. This could be: information that is subject to export controls; valuable intellectual property; security sensitive material or research in key industrial fields at particular risk of being targeted by foreign states. See more [examples of highly restricted information](#).

If you are using 'Very Sensitive' information as defined by the [Information Security Classification, Ownerships and Secure Information Handling SOP](#), please consult the [Information Governance Office](#) for guidance.

Personal information, also known as personal data, relates to identifiable living individuals. Personal data is classed as special category personal data if it includes any of the following types of information about an identifiable living individual: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious or similar philosophical beliefs; trade union membership; genetic data; biometric data; health data; sexual life; sexual orientation.

Please note that in line with [data protection law](#) (the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018), personal information should only be stored in an identifiable form for as long as is necessary for the project; it should be pseudonymised (partially de-identified) and/or anonymised (completely de-identified) as soon as practically possible. You must obtain the appropriate [ethical approval](#) in order to use identifiable personal data.

8. What type of information will you be processing (please select all that apply)?

- Anonymised personal data
- No confidential or personal data

9. How do you plan to store, protect and ensure confidentiality of any highly restricted data or personal data (please select all that apply)?

- Not applicable

10. If you are storing personal information (including contact details) will you need to keep it beyond the end of the project?

- Not applicable

11. Will the participants' information (personal and/or sensitive) be shared with or accessed by anyone outside of the University of Manchester?

- No
- Not applicable

12. If you will be sharing personal information outside of the University of Manchester will the individual or organisation you are sharing with be outside the EEA?

- Not applicable

13. Are you planning to use the personal information for future purposes such as research?

- No

14. Will this project use innovative technologies to collect or process data?

- No

15. Who will act as the data custodian for this study, and so be responsible for the information involved?

Oliver P. Richmond, Jasmin Ramovic

16. Please provide the date on which this plan was last reviewed (dd/mm/yyyy).

2026-05-28

Project details

What is the purpose of your research project?

This study aims to identify the blockages to building sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula through the case of the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

What policies and guidelines on data management, data sharing, and data security are relevant to your research project?

The University of Manchester Research Data Management Policy

Responsibilities and Resources

Who will be responsible for data management?

Moonbo Sim- Researcher (PhD student)

Oliver P. Richmond- Main supervisor

Jasmin Ramovic- Secondary supervisor

What resources will you require to deliver your plan?

A qualitative research methodology, comprising interviews and literature review, is employed to examine the operation of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), including decisions regarding its agreement, resumption and closure.

To identify the specific groups best placed to answer the research questions, purposive sampling is conducted across four groups—three relating to internal factors and one to external factors. Firstly, regarding internal factors, interviews are conducted with South Korean actors involved in the operation of the KIC under different governments and during major events—namely, the government, the KIC Foundation, and the KIC companies—to gather their experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, interviews with South Korean academics will be conducted to interpret or evaluate the impact and role of geopolitical factors (the United States and China) and neoliberalism on the operation of KIC.

The literature review will examine both internal and external factors, focusing on academic materials, journalistic publications, government white papers, speeches and statements by government officials, including the President, reports from research institutions supported by the state or parliament, and memoirs of government officials.

The semi-structured interview method allows for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of stakeholders regarding events related to the operation of the KIC and their interpretations of the choices made. During the interviews, the flexible addition of open-ended questions proves useful for uncovering new facts and interpreting them.

Data Collection

What data will you collect or create?

This study aims to demonstrate that blockages to peace-building on the Korean Peninsula are systematic and structural in nature.

How will the data be collected or created?

implementing a literature review and semi-interview

Documentation and Metadata

What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?

N/A

Ethics and Legal Compliance

How will you manage any ethical issues?

I will manage ethical issues through relevant regulations.

How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues?

I will manage those issues through relevant regulations.

Storage and backup

How will the data be stored and backed up?

I store data on my laptop and the personal computer in the office every time while working on my research.

How will you manage access and security?

Encrypting data documents for storage

Selection and Preservation

Which data should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?

All data I collect have been preserved until completing my research. I do not have plans to share data with others.

What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset?

I use the MS Cloud and my laptop storage.

Data Sharing

How will you share the data?

I do not have plans to share my data.

Are any restrictions on data sharing required?

I do not have plans to share my data. However, if I have to change my plans, I will follow the relevant data and sharing regulations.

Planned Research Outputs

Dissertation - "Analysis of Blockage to Sustainable Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula: Counter-Peace Dynamics in the Kaesong Industrial Complex"

Although more than 70 years have passed since the signing of *the Armistice Agreement* (1953), the inter-Korean conflict persists despite efforts to build peace between the two Koreas. With the advent of the post-Cold War era, the South Korean government sought to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula through reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas, the parties to the conflict. However, due to political and military tensions between the two Koreas, the accomplishments were intangible. Therefore, the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998–February 2003) promoted a peace process on the Korean Peninsula through a neo-functionalist approach. The Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) project, which began with the agreement reached at the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit, was a symbol of peace-building through inter-Korean economic cooperation, combining South Korean capital and technology with North Korean labour. Among the three major inter-Korean economic cooperation initiatives (railway and road cooperation, Mount Kumgang tourism, and the KIC), the KIC was the space where inter-Korean cooperation and daily contact between the people of the two Koreas persisted for the longest period. Given the unique nature of inter-Korean relations under the armistice regime, the R.O.K.-U.S. alliance, the North Korean nuclear issue, and the context of inter-Korean economic cooperation, the KIC project constituted the ‘hybrid form of peace’ that involved not only agreements between the South and North Korean authorities but also the complex interplay of cooperation from the UN, the UN Command, the United States, and South Korean companies operating in KIC. Initiated under the Kim Dae-jung administration, the KIC realised a nascent ‘positive form of hybrid peace’ as cooperation, facilitated through communication with the international community and local KIC companies, was systematically maintained across the three subsequent administrations. However, as geopolitical factors were activated and a hegemonic co-optation occurred at the level of the South Korean government, the South Korean government’s neo-functionalist peacebuilding transformed into neoliberal peacebuilding. As counter-peace dynamics surrounding peace on the Korean Peninsula took shape, the system of ‘positive form of hybrid peace’ collapsed, and the KIC was closed (February 2016). After the closure of the KIC, the established dynamics of ‘counter-peace’ have eroded the South Korean government’s policy autonomy and the local self-determination of the KIC companies. Moreover, as the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue has come to be influenced by US-China strategic competition, the prospects for the KIC’s reopening have become increasingly uncertain. The KIC, closed in 2016, has not yet been reopened despite calls from both inter-Korean authorities and the KIC companies. Consequently, the Korean Peninsula continues to maintain a state of virtual peace, with inter-Korean conflicts remaining unresolved due to the dynamics of ‘counter-peace’.

This study aims to identify the blockages to building sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula through the case of the KIC. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this study, in conjunction with the Contact Hypothesis, is that the interplay of geopolitical factors can act as a blockage to building sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula. In other words, the operation of geopolitical factors may lead to the non-implementation of inter-Korean agreements, and such non-implementation may reduce inter-Korean contact, thereby causing a regression in peace. Conversely, when geopolitical factors do not come into play, inter-Korean agreements and their implementation become possible, thereby increasing inter-Korean contact and sustaining a state of peace.

To this end, the scope of this study is limited to South Korea. Utilising the theoretical frameworks of the ‘Hybrid form of Peace’ and ‘Counter-peace’, this study aims to conduct a chronological analysis of the collapse of the hybrid peace system, the formation and consolidation of counter-peace dynamics, and their entrenchment, as manifested in the process of the ‘operation, closure, and failure to reopen of the KIC’ across five consecutive administrations (from the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998 – February 2003) to the Moon Jae-in administration (May 2017 – May 2022)). Through this analysis, this study aims to demonstrate that blockages to peace-building on the Korean Peninsula are systematic and structural in nature. To analyse these blockages, we adopt the four-tier framework of the International Peace Architecture (IPA), dividing factors into internal and external categories. The South Korean government (nation) and the KIC companies (local) are classified as internal factors, while the UN and the UN Command (international) and the United States and China (regional) are classified as external factors.

Planned research output details

Title	DOI	Type	Release date	Access level	Repository(ies)	File size	License	Metadata standard(s)	May contain sensitive data?	May contain PII?
Analysis of Blockage to Sustainable Peacebuilding ...		Dissertation	Unspecified	Open	None specified		None specified	None specified	No	No