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Let's try peace with North Korea

Dan Leaf

OPINION

Not many people know how to wage nuclear war. I'm one of them.

As a young U.S. Air Force fighter pilot in the late 1970s, I was trained to carry out nuclear strikes in a rigorous process designed to ensure that no contingencies — mechanical or ethical — deter your mission. Certain things remain burned into my memory: Maps and photos of my target and the realization of the Armageddon I would leave in my wake. Training culminated with a sworn pledge to vaporize that target without hesitation.

Much of my 33-year career was spent as a nuclear warrior — I later oversaw the U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile fleet and served as deputy commander of American military forces in the Pacific — experience that informs my deep alarm over the growing risk of nuclear conflict with North Korea.

Pursuing a long-overdue official end to the Korean War could be a game changer.

The United States has tried for decades to prevent the country from becoming a nuclear threat, veering from diplomacy to pressure to patience. None of these approaches have worked.

Here's something that might: End the Korean War.

On July 27, 1953, an armistice was signed that halted combat, but the United States and South Korea technically remain at war with the North. This is no longer acceptable.

North Korea has nuclear weapons. It has conducted missile tests at a record pace since last year, including powerful ICBMs believed to be capable of delivering a warhead anywhere in the continental United States. In January, Kim Jong-un, North Korea's leader, ordered an "exponential" expansion of the country's nuclear arsenal, and last year his government passed a law authorizing a pre-emptive nuclear strike. In response, President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea has said his country may consider developing nuclear weapons.

In this hair-trigger environment, one bad decision or misunderstanding could kill millions.

I spent four years in South Korea, including in high-level positions at the headquarters of combined U.S., South Korean and U.N. forces, overseeing the vast destructive forces amassed for a war that was no longer being fought. In my time in the region, I went from scratching my head to pulling my hair out. The standoff is one of the great absurdities in global geopolitics.

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The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



HAYLEY BENOFF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ian Lieber, left, and Charles Haslett, have seen greater interest in their services as King Charles III imitators.

Torture and nuclear peril: an insider's account



DAVID GUTTENFELDER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear facility, along the banks of the Dnipro River, in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces seized the plant early on in the war.

KYIV, UKRAINE

BY MARC SANTORA

By the time Russian soldiers threw a potato sack over his head and forced him to record a false video statement about conditions at Europe's largest nuclear facility, Ihor Murashov had already witnessed enough chaos at the plant to be deeply worried.

Mr. Murashov, the former director general of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine, did not know how much more stress the workers there could endure as they raced from one crisis to another to avert a nuclear catastrophe.

He watched as staff members were dragged off to a place they called "the pit" at a nearby police station, returning beaten and bruised — if they returned at all.

He was there when advancing Russian soldiers opened fire at the facility in the first days of the war, and he fretted as they mined the surrounding grounds. He witnessed Russians use nuclear reactor rooms to hide military equipment, risking an accident.

Mr. Murashov, 46, is gone from Zaporizhzhia now, having been expelled from Russian-occupied territory in October. In the months since, the situation at the plant has only grown more precarious, according to Ukrainian officials and international observers.

On March 9, it was plunged into a blackout for the sixth time since the occupation, forcing nuclear engineers to rely on hulking diesel generators to

Former director of Ukrainian power plant tells of abuses by the Russians who took control



LAETITIA VANCON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ihor Murashov, the former head of the Zaporizhzhia plant, said that workers have raced from one crisis to another to avert a nuclear catastrophe. He left the plant this past fall.

keep critical cooling equipment running.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director general of the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, has raised repeated alarms about the mounting dangers.

On Monday, he met with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine to discuss the problem, and he planned to visit the facility on Wednesday for only the

second time since the war started.

Only around 4,600 of the plant's 11,000 employees are still working, Petro Kotin, the head of Energoatom, Ukraine's state nuclear power company, said in an interview.

Employees at the facility have been given a deadline of April 1 to sign contracts with Rosatom, a state-owned Russian nuclear conglomerate. About 2,600 have signed the contract and the rest

are still refusing, Mr. Kotin said.

The current problems are not a surprise to Mr. Murashov, who recounted his experience over several hours of conversation recently, providing a harrowing account of how Europe's largest nuclear power plant had descended into such turmoil.

His account could not be independently verified, but it aligns with testimony from other workers who have since fled and those still there who have been interviewed by The New York Times and other news organizations over the past year.

Mr. Murashov said the Russians set up special areas in the nearby satellite town where employees were interrogated, bullied and beaten.

"There were two places called 'the pits,'" Mr. Murashov said. "One was the police department in the town. Another was inside the local military unit."

Mr. Murashov added: "I saw one of the employees who went to the pit, and he was all yellow because of the bruises he had been given. So I knew what could happen."

Workers were sometimes taken from their homes, he said, and other times were stopped at checkpoints as they entered the plant and were taken away. They were routinely checked for pro-Ukrainian content.

At first, he and other employees said, the Russians were searching for people who were stationed at barricades trying to prevent Russian soldiers from entering the town. Later, he said, they seemed intent on getting employees to sign contracts with Rosatom.

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Countries in debt seek out China as a last resort

BEIJING

Beijing has emerged as a new heavyweight, catching up to the I.M.F.

BY KEITH BRADSHER

Since the end of World War II, the International Monetary Fund and the United States have been the world's lenders of last resort, each wielding broad influence over the global economy. Now a new heavyweight has emerged in providing emergency loans to debt-ridden countries: China.

New data shows that China is providing ever more emergency loans to countries, including Turkey, Argentina and Sri Lanka. China has been helping countries that have either geopolitical significance, like a strategic location, or lots of natural resources. Many of them have been borrowing heavily from Beijing for years to pay for infrastructure or other projects.

While China is not yet equal to the I.M.F., it is catching up fast, providing \$240 billion of emergency financing in recent years. China gave \$40.5 billion in such loans to distressed countries in 2021, according to a new study by American and European experts who drew on statistics from AidData, a research institute at William & Mary, a university in Williamsburg, Va. China provided \$10 billion in 2014 and none in 2010.

By comparison, the I.M.F. lent \$68.6 billion to countries in financial distress in 2021 — a pace that has stayed fairly steady in recent years except for a jump in 2020, at the start of the pandemic.

In many ways, China has replaced the United States in bailing out indebted low- and middle-income countries. The U.S. Treasury's last sizable rescue loan to a middle-income country was a \$1.5 billion credit to Uruguay in 2002. The Federal Reserve still provides very short-term financing to other industrialized countries when they need extra dollars for a few days or weeks.

China's emerging position as a lender of last resort reflects its evolving status as an economic superpower at a time of global weakness. Dozens of countries are struggling to pay their debts, as a slowing economy and rising interest rates push many nations to the brink.

The I.M.F. has also stepped up its bailouts in recent weeks, in response to Russia's war in Ukraine and the aftereffects of the pandemic. The I.M.F. reached a preliminary agreement on March 21 to lend \$15.6 billion to Ukraine, a day after its board approved a \$3 billion loan to Sri Lanka.

Beijing's new role is also an outgrowth of the decade-old Belt and Road Initiative, the signature project of Xi Jinping, China's top leader, to develop geopolitical and diplomatic ties through financial and commercial efforts. China

CHINA, PAGE 9

A king-size responsibility for Charles look-alikes

LONDON

Professional impersonators gain popularity and work after years of struggling

BY JENNY GROSS

In the days after Queen Elizabeth II's death last year, Charles Haslett, 66, along with many other Britons, was overcome with sadness. But he didn't have much time to linger on those feelings.

"I felt a weight of responsibility," Mr. Haslett said. "The time has come."

Mr. Haslett, a longtime impersonator of the queen's eldest son, Charles, spent more than 5,000 pounds (about \$6,200) "getting myself to be more kinglike than I was," he said. That involved buying a made-to-order toupee of gray hair, as

well as two double-breasted suits and a gold signet ring in the same style as the one worn by the new monarch, King Charles III. Mr. Haslett also ordered modeling clay to make his ears stick out just like the king's.

As the king, 74, is settling into his new role, so are those who bear a strong resemblance to His Majesty and impersonate him at fund-raising events, raffles, coronation celebrations and corporate parties. After years of struggling to get bookings, Charles look-alikes said they were loving their newfound limelight.

Guy Ingle, 62, another longtime Charles impersonator, said he used to play second fiddle to Queen Elizabeth look-alikes, standing in the background at events.

"None of these queens had any talent," he said. "It was very frustrating." To make matters worse, he added, imitators of Charles's son Prince William

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What does it mean to be ready to die?

Sunita Puri

Nine years ago, near the end of my residency training, I sat across from a patient, wondering whether he'd accepted that he was dying. He was in his 60s, an artist with sinewy arms and serene eyes, someone I'd come to know well over the past three years. Cancer had broken into his liver and bone marrow, robbing him of hunger and energy.

Each time I saw him, the hollows of his cheeks deepened. I wanted to tell him that he was dying, that I wanted to understand how he envisioned spending his remaining life. But he mostly spoke about his plans: a camping vacation in six months, a friend's wedding after that. I awaited some sort of arbitrary signal that it was safe to talk about dying. Maybe he'd tell me that he didn't want more chemotherapy or that his affairs were in order. Like many physicians, I feared that by talking about death before he appeared ready, I might take away his hope, make him give up or send him into an unstoppable tailspin of anxiety and depression.

Whether he hadn't accepted his fate or simply wished to avoid the subject, he didn't appear to be ready to talk about his death. How could I reconcile what appeared to be our radically different interpretations of his condition? By

waiting for him to act in ways that I understood as acceptance, I thought that I was being compassionate and sensitive. "I don't think he understands how sick he is," I told my supervisor. "He's not there yet."

In the years since, I have learned that trying to find immutable evidence of someone's readiness to die is like trying to wrap your arms around a ghost. Reconsidering what we think acceptance means — and whether it will come to pass — requires loosening our expectations of those who are dying. To become better at talking to one another honestly about death and to truly prepare for it, we must first understand why we expect the dying to demonstrate readiness in the first place.

During residency, my compatriots and I relied on Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of dying. We were quick to diagnose denial and wait for acceptance. We assumed certain decisions that we wanted people to make reflected readiness — a patient with heart failure who agreed to a do-not-resuscitate order, another with emphysema who enrolled in hospice.

But if patients dying of cancer insisted on life support, we figured that they probably weren't there yet. When people sobbed or screamed during conversations about their illness worsening, we told ourselves they simply weren't ready. We didn't want to stumble through the thicket with them; we wanted to meet them at the clearing. My patients' families often searched for similar clues, their pain amplified if their loved one didn't appear to have come to terms with death or wasn't ready to let go. Such searching, while well intentioned, betrays fears about suffering — the patients' and our own. If the dying reassure us that they are ready to die, perhaps we may live with a softer grief. If they show us that they are ready to go, we can be readier to let them go.

The stark separation between those who are dying and those who are not is

complicated inside a hospital. Family members and medical teams experience and respond to dying people's suffering in distinct ways. Yet doctors and families alike can shackle those who are dying with gauzy expectations: Perhaps they have newfound wisdom to bestow. Maybe their regrets will remind us what really matters in life. Saccharine fantasies of deathbed reconciliations protect us from the full spectrum of our emotions and those of the people we will lose. But romanticizing the dying strips them of their complexity. They are still human, equally capable of picking fights or making amends.

Fantasy also obscures a scarier question: If a loved one or a patient isn't ready to die, how should we respond?

It is easier to search for readiness than to process what its absence means. Distilling human experience into supposedly self-explanatory concepts like accepting death becomes a bandage that we apply, hoping that the raw emotions about death won't bleed through. We want neatness and containment, not the spill of grief.

But death is never neat. A good death should be defined by how well and honestly we care for the dying, not by their performance on our behalf. Expecting them to make death a process full of insight and peace only limits our full emotional and spiritual participation in their death. By sacrificing neatness, we can have a conversation about what the dying truly need from us. Understanding their authentic experiences helps us not only to see them more fully but also to prepare, together, for losing them.

Now, as an attending physician, I hear echoes of my younger self when I talk with residents. If they mention that a patient isn't ready to die, I ask what it looks like for someone to be ready to die. I remind them, gently, that awaiting specific imaginings of readiness may only justify excusing themselves from sharing hard truths with someone whose reactions they cannot anticipate. Abandoning this search may allow them to care for people in a way that might inspire their own versions of preparation.

Nine years ago, I think my patient sensed both my urge to tell him something and my hesitance. "Are you OK?" he asked me one day.

"I've been meaning to talk to you about something," I stammered, looking past him at the eye chart on the wall.

"I'm worried about you, because every time I see you, you're losing weight and seem less like yourself."

"It's because I'm dying." He was matter-of-fact, as though he'd just said it was raining outside.

I was stunned, then relieved. Yet I still struggled to tell him what I wanted to say. "I am so sorry," I whispered.

"It's not your fault. My father died in my arms. So did my wife," he said. "It's just my turn now."

"I feel bad that I didn't talk to you about this sooner," I said. "I thought I'd upset you or maybe you weren't ready yet."

He laughed. "Ready?" he said. "I've wrapped my head around being dead, certainly. Not sure if I'll ever really be ready. It's not like packing a bag and standing outside waiting for a taxi."

He died in his sleep a month later, missing his vacation and his friend's wedding. Even if he told me he was ready, nothing could have lessened the blunt force of losing him.

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JOSHUA BRIGHT

A tidal wave on the global economy

Rick Bookstaber

The economy today has been described variously as "weird," "really weird" and "very, very weird."

Weird because this is a yo-yo economy where gas prices shot up to more than \$5 a gallon and then settled back down. The inflation rate for used cars dropped, then accelerated at a 40 percent rate before deflating at a record rate. Housing has gone from boom to bust, then to boom again. Economic indicators have been described as "a Jackson Pollock painting of data points and trends."

Economists can't figure it out. Economic models are only getting us as far as separating top-flight economists into Team Stagflation and Team Soft Landing. Alan Blinder, the Princeton economist, talks about the prospects of the U.S. Federal Reserve nailing a soft landing like he is handicapping a team's Super Bowl prospects: "I think they still have a chance, but it's a tougher chance than it was."

Economists tried to deal with the twin stresses of inflation and recession in the 1970s without success, and now here we are, 50 years and 50-plus economics Nobel Prizes later, with little ground gained. The Fed and the Treasury Department buttressed the banking structure in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. Fifteen years later, we are seeing it breached.

There's weirdness yet to come, and a lot more than run-of-the-mill weirdness. We are entering a new epoch of crisis, a slow-motion tidal wave of risks that will wash over our economy in the next decades — namely climate change, demographics, deglobalization and artificial intelligence. Their effects will range somewhere between economic regime shift and existential threat to civilization. The risks to the economy, to the stability of society and to civilization are enormous if we don't get the economic models right for what's coming.

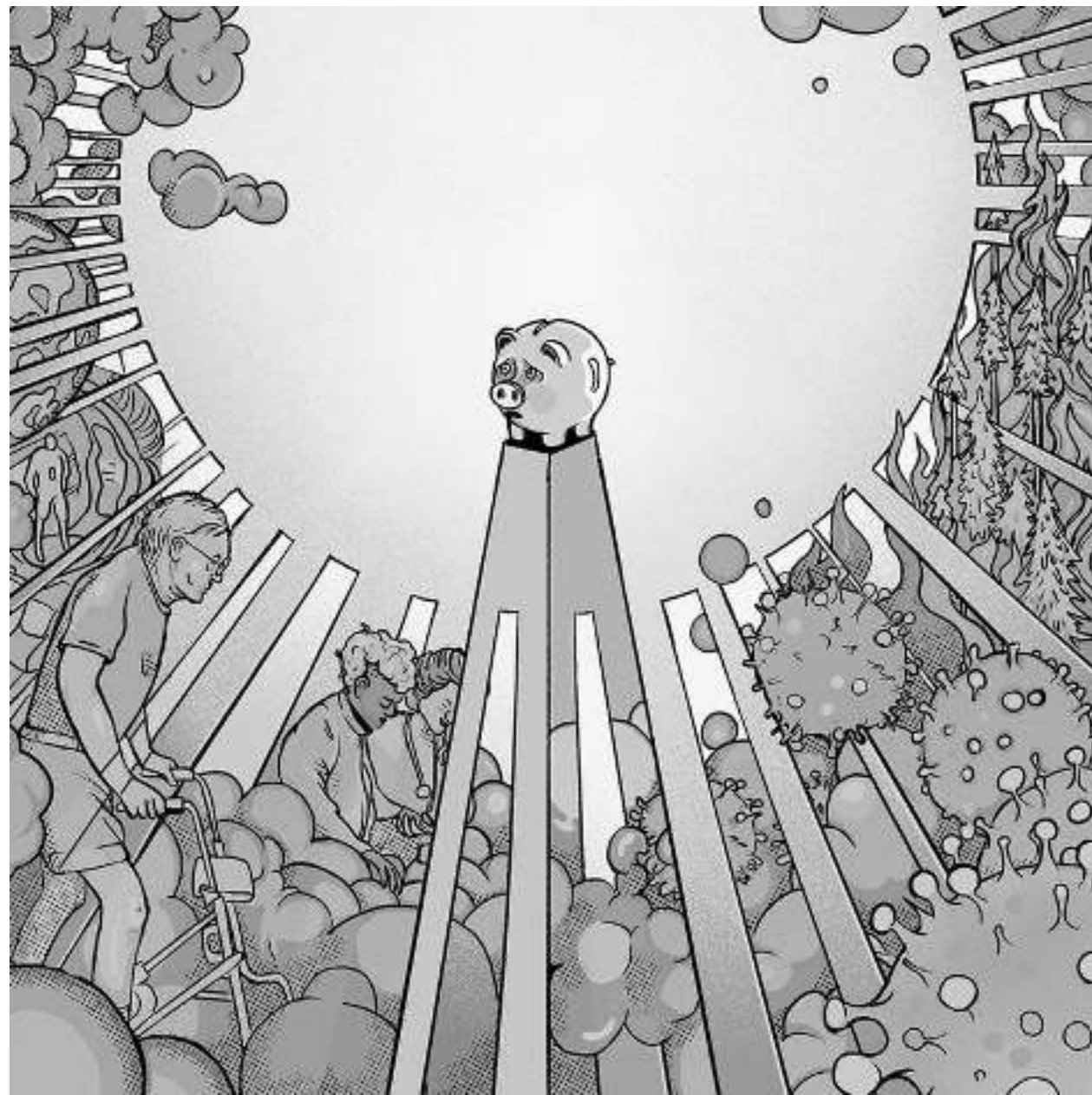
For climate, we already are seeing a glimpse of what is to come: drought, floods and far more extreme storms than in the recent past. We saw some of the implications over the past year, with supply chains broken because rivers were too dry for shipping and hydroelectric and nuclear power impaired.

For demographics, birthrates are on the decline in the developed countries. China's population is in decline, for instance, and South Korea just set a mark for the lowest birthrate in the developed world. As with climate change, demographic shifts determine societal ones, like straining the social contract between the working and the aged.

We are reversing the globalization of the past 40 years, with the links in our geopolitical and economic network fraying. "Friendshoring," or moving production to friendly countries, is a new term. The geopolitical forces behind deglobalization will amplify the stresses from climate change and demographics to lead to a frenzied competition for resources and consumers.

We can see the impacts of climate change, demographics and deglobalization coming. The fourth, artificial intelligence, is a wild card. But we already are seeing risks for work and privacy, and for frightening advances in warfare.

The problem here is not that our



EVA REDAMONTI

economic models don't work at all. The models seem serviceable when things are simple and stable, when we are in a steady state with tons of past data to draw on. The problem is that the models don't work when our economy is weird. And that's precisely when we most need them to work.

Economists have admitted as much. At the height of the 2008 financial crisis, Queen Elizabeth II asked the

question that no doubt was on the minds of many of her subjects: "Why did nobody see it coming?" The response, some months later, by the Nobel laureate economist Robert Lucas, was blunt: Economics failed with the 2008 crisis because

economic theory has established that it cannot predict such crises.

A key reason these models fail in times of crisis is that they can't deal with a world filled with complexity or with surprising twists and turns. For example, the mathematical models of economics analyze a representative agent — be that an individual or a firm — and assume the overall economy will behave the way that this one agent behaves. The problem here, and a

problem broadly with complex and dynamic systems, is that the whole doesn't look like the sum of the parts. If you have a lot of people running around, the overall picture can look different than what any one of those people is doing. Maybe in aggregate their actions jam the doorway; maybe in aggregate they create a stampede.

Economists fancy themselves as the physicists of the social sciences, wielding mathematical models to bring solutions to the economic world. But we are not a mechanical system. We are humans who innovate, change with our experiences, and at times game the system. Reflecting on the 1987 market crash, the brilliant physicist Richard Feynman remarked on the difficulty facing economists by noting that subatomic particles don't act based on what they think other subatomic particles are planning — but people do that.

What if economists can't turn things around? This is a possibility because we are walking into a world unlike any we have seen. We can't anticipate all the ways climate change might affect us or where our creativity will take us with A.I. Which brings us to what is called radical uncertainty, where we simply have no clue — where we are caught unaware by things we haven't even thought of.

This possibility is not much on the minds of economists. Charting Fed policy or forecasting consumer demand might have surprises here and there

but operate with a well-worn vocabulary. It's with the longer-term risks that "unknowable" has force.

How do we deal with risks we cannot even define? A good start is to move away from the economist's palette of efficiency and rationality and instead look at examples of survival in worlds of radical uncertainty. Take the cockroach: It has survived for hundreds of millions of years as rainforests turned into savannas and savannas turned into deserts. And it has done this with a coarse escape system, simply running from puffs of air on its cercal hairs. Not very elegant. It will never win the Insect of the Year award but has done well enough to survive a world of radical change.

In our time, savannas are turning into deserts. The alternative to the economist's model is to take a coarse approach, to be more adaptable — leave some short-term fine-tuning and optimization by the wayside. Our long term might look brighter if we act like cockroaches. An insect fine-tuned for a jungle may dominate the cockroach in that environment. But once the world changes and the jungle disappears, it will as well.

RICK BOOKSTABER has served as chief risk officer at major banks and hedge funds. His 2007 book, "A Demon of Our Own Design," warned of the coming financial crisis. His latest book is "The End of Theory."

Here's how to handle North Korea: Give peace a chance

LEAF, FROM PAGE 1

You must be aggressive to win wars but assertive to make peace. No matter how challenging the negotiations and politics of securing peace on the Korean Peninsula may prove, they are nothing compared to nuclear war.

A permanent peace agreement would undermine Mr. Kim's portrayal of the United States as an existential threat and his justification for building up his conventional and nuclear arsenal. It could also short-circuit the siege mentality underlying his repressive regime. Sanctions relief and economic development could follow, leading to long-hoped-for improvements in the quality of life and human rights for North Korea's 25 million people.

The United States, North Korea and South Korea have all pledged in recent years to pursue a lasting peace agreement. Separate meetings that President Donald Trump and then-President Moon Jae-in of South Korea held with Mr. Kim in 2018 committed to that goal. It brought an immediate easing of tensions. Land mines were removed from portions of the Korean Demilitarized Zone, Korean families held reunions, Mr. Kim declared a moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests, the North returned remains of U.S. servicemen and released three detained Americans. Even after Mr. Trump's outreach to Mr. Kim collapsed in 2019, Mr. Kim indicated he was still open to diplomacy.

There is currently a bill in the House of Representatives calling for a peace deal. The Peace on the Korean Peninsula Act would require the secretary of state to submit a "clear road map for

achieving a permanent peace agreement"; pursue "serious, urgent" diplomacy in pursuit of a binding agreement; and begin to address America's lack of diplomatic relations with North Korea by establishing liaison offices on each other's soil.

The bill is imperfect. Much of it focuses on creating the conditions for Korean Americans to visit relatives in the North. (U.S. law currently bars travel by Americans to North Korea unless it serves an ill-defined "national interest.") It also lacks other steps necessary to entrench peace, such as a process for U.S.-North Korean reconciliation, normalization of disputed maritime boundaries and a framework for talks between the opposing military forces.

There is an urgent need for progress. After the diplomatic overtures of recent years fell apart, Mr. Kim has only become more belligerent and the risk of conflict is more acute. Passage of a strengthened Peace on the Korean Peninsula Act is essential to securing a lasting solution, yet the current bill has not advanced since it was first introduced in 2021.

Critics argue that a peace agreement may actually increase the risk of war by undermining safeguards put in place by the armistice nearly 70 years ago. These include specific demarcation lines and protocols for communications, movement and other actions within the DMZ. But there is nothing foolproof about the armistice. President Bill Clinton considered bombing North Korea in 1994, and Mr. Trump reportedly discussed using nuclear weapons in 2017. North Korea occasionally car-



AHN YOUNG-JOON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A rally for peace on the Korean Peninsula in Paju, South Korea, last year. Despite the 1963 armistice, the U.S. and South Korea technically remain at war with the North.

ries out provocations, and the North and South have exchanged artillery fire on several occasions.

There are other risks: Pyongyang may use a peace agreement as a pretext to demand the removal of U.S. troops from South Korea, which is a matter between Seoul and Washington.

But the hardest part of ending the war might be building the political will for it in Washington. Accommodating North Korea would inevitably lead to accusations that we are rewarding bad behavior and legitimizing a totalitarian regime. But the Kim family has ruled for 75 years; it's time to accept that this

is unlikely to change anytime soon.

At this moment, the next generation of men and women north and south of the DMZ are preparing for nuclear war. May they never have to put their training to use.

LT. GEN. DAN LEAF is a retired three-star general, a former Air Force fighter pilot, a former deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Command and a former director of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu. He is the managing director of Phase Minus 1, a security and conflict resolution consultancy.