



Asia Pacific Leadership Network Press Release

Immediate Release

Hotline Between Two Koreas: Status, Limitations, and Future Tasks

A new special report by Professor Chung-in Moon and Research Fellow Seung-Chan Boo provides a historical overview of communication lines and their significance between the two Koreas.

Seoul, Monday 8 March 2021

The shooting of a South Korean official by the DPRK navy in the autumn of 2020 shows how the lack of communication channels can complicate inter-Korean relations. A [special report](#) by APLN Vice-Chair, Professor Chung-in Moon and Institute for North Korean Studies Research Fellow Seung-Chan Boo provides a historical overview of hotlines between the two Koreas and examines their present status.

The authors recommend that greater effort must be made to restore broken communication lines between the two Koreas; that hotlines should be integrated in nuclear negotiations; and the DPRK's communications infrastructure must be modernized and upgraded through the adoption of CATALINK.

Communication lines are reliant on functioning relations between the two Koreas and the United States. Only two communication lines are currently operational—one between the UNC and the DPRK military in Panmunjom and the other for air traffic control. Since June 9, 2020 there have been no communication lines between the DPRK and ROK.

The authors highlight the limitations of hotlines as they have been repeatedly resumed and suspended, and how they can improve relations on the Korean peninsula and beyond. The DPRK opened direct communication lines with ROK in 1971. Since then, communication lines between the two countries have been shut down on seven occasions. This includes after the

Panmunjom axe incident in 1976, suspension of working group for the inter-Korean prime ministerial talks in the 1980s, Seoul's imposition of sanctions in retaliation to the sinking of the ROK Cheonan in 2016, and the propaganda leaflet sending effort in 2020.

With many hotlines set up to prevent accidental military clashes and unintended conflict escalation, the authors emphasize that the issue of hotlines must be:

1. Integrated in nuclear negotiation discussions with the DPRK to de-politicize and stabilize communication lines;
2. Make efforts to restore broken communication lines between the two Koreas to facilitate greater exchange and cooperation on Korean peninsula; and
3. Modernize and upgrade the DPRK's communications infrastructure by introducing CATALINK into the DPRK and ROK as most of inter-Korean hotlines were composed of copper cables, making the quality of communication poor and intermittent.

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Note for Editors

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The paper was prepared for a Workshop on hotlines held in August of 2020 and convened by the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, the Institute for Security and Technology, and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security. It was published originally on December 17, 2020. The original text in PDF may be downloaded [here](#).

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN) has ninety-three members from sixteen countries across Asia and the Pacific, consisting of former political, diplomatic and military leaders, senior government officials, and scholars and opinion leaders. As an advocacy group, the APLN aims to inform and energise public opinion, especially high-level policymakers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and eventually eliminated.

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