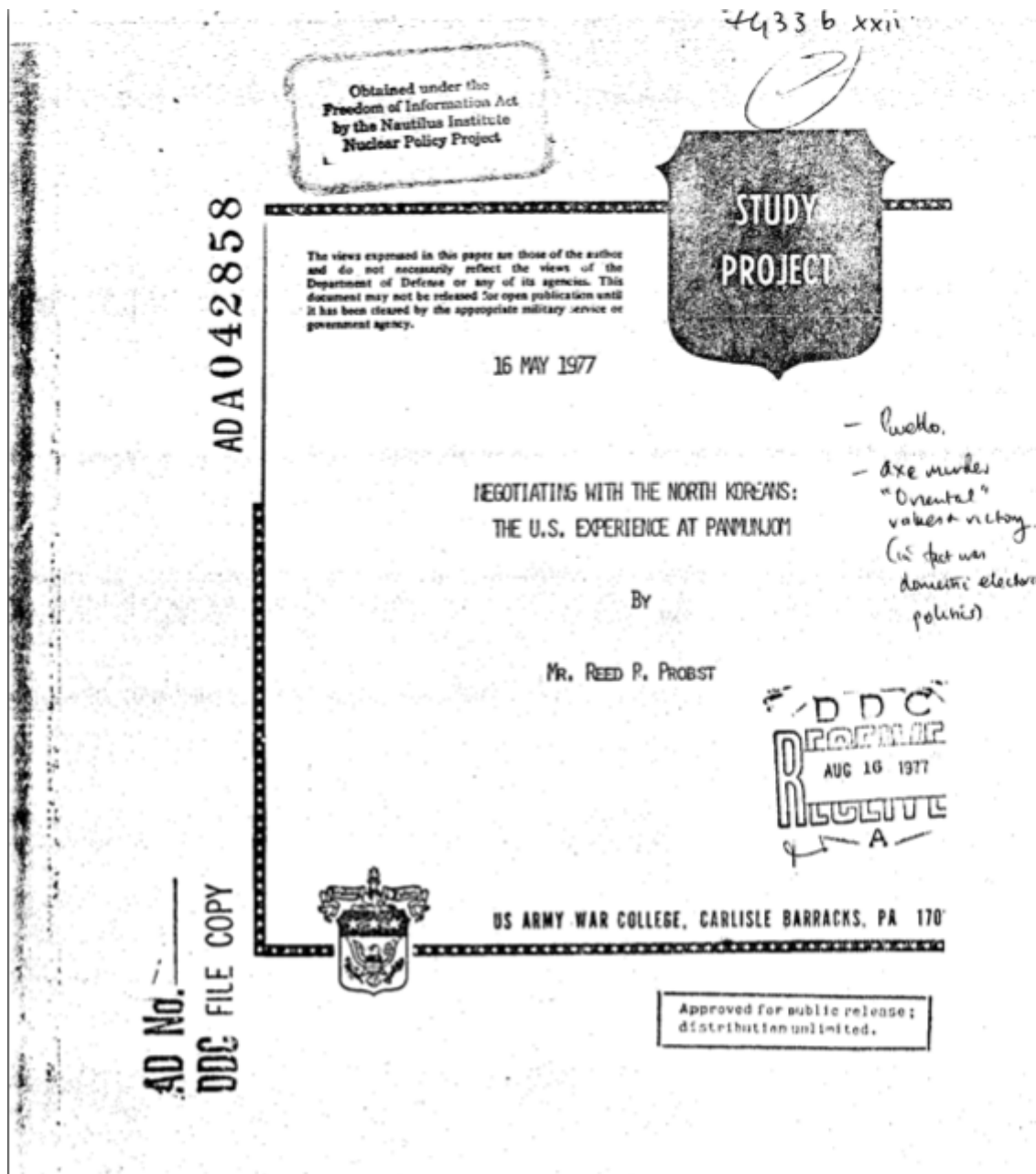


Negotiating with the North Koreans: The U.S. Experience at Panmunjom



Recommended Citation

"Negotiating with the North Koreans: The U.S. Experience at Panmunjom", September 17, 2012, <https://nautilus.org/foia-document/negotiating-with-the-north-koreans-the-u-s-exp->

On July 27, 1953, the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in the village of Panmunjom, resulting in the formal cessation of hostilities between participants of the Korean War. Panmunjom served, and continues to serve, as the locus of diplomatic communications between the ROK and DPRK within the Joint Security Area of the DMZ. On January 23, 1968, North Korean naval forces forcibly seized the USS Pueblo and its 82-member crew despite its location within international waters. The hostages were subsequently released following negotiations between the U.S. and DPRK, amidst confessions of espionage by the crew despite being obtained under duress and later retracted. This penchant for hostility was again exhibited in the murder of two U.S. officers by North Korean military personnel in the DMZ in what is known as the 1976 Axe Murder incident. Past and recent incidents such as the deadly 2010 sinking of the ROKS Cheonan and island shelling of Yeonpyeong, as well as the detainment of a number of U.S. citizens by the North highlight the DPRK's boldness and willingness to engage in hostile acts of provocation in order to achieve appearances of strength vis-à-vis the U.S. and a strong position at the negotiating table.

This case study by Reed Probst examines the negotiation strategy between the U.S. and the DPRK in regards to discussions over two watershed events between the two countries: the 1976 Axe Murder incident in the DMZ, and negotiations over the 1968 North Korean capture of the USS Pueblo. Reed's report analyzes both incidents by addressing the circumstances surrounding each event, dissecting both countries' respective and differing negotiating postures, as well as offer recommendations for American strategy in dealing with potential future transgressions by exploring North Korean values of power, legitimacy, and regard for human life.

Probst writes:

“The record shows that the North Koreans have been quick to go to the conference table with the US when one or more of the following conditions have obtained:

- a. when the North Korean position or recent gains are physically threatened.
- b. when the North Koreans believe that negotiations might help them to consolidate past gains or to facilitate future gains.
- c. when the North Koreans wish to avoid an escalation of tension or a direct military confrontation.”
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This report was released to the Nautilus Institute under the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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