

## **Cooperation and Conflict in Northeast Asia: the Korean Role**

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# **The Sunshine Policy and the Inter-Korean Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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South Korea's former president Kim Dae Jung proudly declared that the two Koreas would peacefully co-exist and cooperate in the spirit of national reconciliation and there would be no more war on the Korean peninsula when returning from the historic summit with Kim Jong Il, his counterpart in North Korea on June 15, 2000. At the historic face-to-face meeting, the two leaders adopted the South-North Joint Declaration for the peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula. Kim Dae Jung government and its successor Roh Moo Hyun government have regarded the inter-Korean summit as the offspring of the Sunshine policy and made every effort to engage North Korea despite of so many problems and criticism against that policy in and out of the Korean peninsula.

In fact, North Korea had announced that it had completed its nuclear development programme and become to possess nuclear bombs in February 10, 2005. Since then, North Korea continued to gain plutonium by reprocessing nuclear fuel and to develop

its missile delivery system. Finally, North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that it was ready to test its nuclear bomb anytime soon as a defensive measure against the threats of the U.S. on October 3, 2006. Now, it is time to examine thoroughly the implementation of the nine-year old Sunshine policy and thus provide a better way to resolve the crisis on the Korean peninsula.

### **Principles and Tasks of the Sunshine Policy**

President Kim Dae Jung declared three principles of his new North Korea policy(Sunshine Policy) in his inaugural address on February 25, 1998. Firstly, according to the former president, South Korea would not tolerate any armed provocations initiated by the North. He promised to maintain deterrence against the DPRK by strengthening the combat readiness of the ROK-US combined forces. Secondly, the Kim Dae Jung government made it clear that it would not try to absorb North Korea. By revealing that the South had no intention to reunify the divided land by annihilating the North, the South Korean government expected North Korea to concentrate on their efforts to open and reform their society. Thirdly, the South Korean government should pursue a genuine reconciliation with the North by increasing inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation.

It was the lesson over the last 50 or 60 years that North Korea would not be changed by being pressed from outside. Even if North Korea has failed in maintaining an independent, self-sufficient system in economic terms at least, it is not yet possible to expect a sudden collapse of the North Korean state mainly due to the support from its

neighboring countries like China and Russia. It would therefore be more appropriate , according to the Sunshine policy to help North Korea(or engnage) to adopt reform and opening policies by itself through active inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation rather than pushing it to the corner or ignoring its existence. Unilateral, unconditional and generous assistance from the South is still regarded as the best way for North Korea to be changed.

Both the Kim Dae Jung and the Roh Moo Hyun governments assumed that all the inter-Korean issues should be dealt with peacefully through the governmental-level inter-Korean dialogue. At the same time, the improvement of the inter-Korean relations and the peace system on the Korean peninsula would bring about a major change in the relationship among the regional powers. The Sunshine policy which was initiated to bring a warm and friendly environment for North Korea to change for the right direction assumed that North Korea would adopt a reciprocal approach toward the international community as well as South Korea. Therefore the believers adhering to the Sunshine policy assumed that the defense ministerial level dialogues launched for the first time since the inter-Korean summit talks would bring a permanent peace system on the Korean peninsula. They hoped to see that those kinds of dialogue would resolve security issues like the reduction of military tensions and the formulation of confidence building measures.

Since the adoption of the Sunshine policy and the June 15th Declaration, in particular, nineteen inter-Korean ministerial level talks were held in both capital cities and the general relationship between the two separate regions of the Korean peninsula

has been improved. South Korea became North Korea's second largest trade partner following China. Over one million South Korean tourists have been to the Kungang mountain resort located in North Korea but developed by South Korean Hyundai-Asan Group. Fifteen South Korean companies are now operating their own factories in Kaesung Special Economic Zone in North Korea. At least fourteen thousand members of the separated families were able to meet each other and 69 unswerving communists returned back to North Korea as they wished. Hundred of thousands of tons of food and fertilizers have been provided to the North every year while the railways and the roads being reconnected over the DMZ.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Despite of such achievements, however, the most serious problem in the inter-Korean relations since the June summit is that the peace and security surrounding the Korean peninsula has not been improved at all mainly because North Korea has not ceased its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Once right after the summit meeting, there was a high expectation of peaceful coexistence on the peninsula. North Korean leader Kim Jong Il was acknowledged to accept the US forces stationed on the Korean peninsula and the active roles of Koreans to realize the peace mechanism. Over the last six years, however, only one or two sessions have ever been held on these issues between the two sides. The problems of NLL(Northern Limit Line) in the West Sea are not yet been resolved and the delegates from North Korea argue more frequently that their politics of the military-first has kept peace and stability on the peninsula and protected South Korea's security.

### **The Sunshine Policy and North Korea's WMD programs**

Contrary to the expectation of the Sunshine policy, North Korea's First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Suk-joo acknowledged the U.S. delegates led by Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly that Pyongyang had conducted a secret programs of enriching uranium for developing nuclear weapons on October 4, 2002. Kang's remarks were regarded as a confession of Pyongyang's violation of the Geneva Agreement and its commitment to South Korea to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. The disclosure was the beginning of the second nuclear crisis of the Korean peninsula jeopardizing the very foundation of the Sunshine policy.

In fact, it seemed that there was no direct relations between the Sunshine policy and Pyongyang's clandestine WMD programs. But it is also difficult to deny the fact that the Sunshine policy failed to deter North Korea's goals to develop and possess weapons of mass destruction.

Firstly, the Sunshine policy could never be free from the criticism that it has neglected the cold reality due to its philosophical naivete on the policy assumptions and its wishful thinking of the rapid reconciliation between the two Koreas. Former president Kim Dae Jung and President Roh Moo Hyun assumed that the peace on the peninsula could and should be realized only when easier issues be resolved. They seemed to believe firmly that such a functional approach could bring peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula just like in Germany as well as in Europe in general. But it was wrong to believe that Pyongyang would change and abide by the international norms for peace and stability if North Korea could overcome its economic difficulties by the generous assistance from Seoul and its neighbors

Secondly, adherents of the Sunshine policy were very much proud of the optimistic perspectives that both Koreas could cooperate to resolve all the Korean issues independently without any significant involvement of major powers. But North Korea's ambition to become a nuclear state and South Korea's reluctance to criticize North Korea's wrongdoings in a serious manner have resulted in wider and deeper involvement of foreign powers on the Korean issues.

Thirdly, the Sunshine policy has been regarded as one of the financial sources for North Korea's WMD program. It was confirmed that South Korea has paid at least US\$ 500 million to Kim Jong Il in return for hosting the first inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang. Mt. Kumgang tourism has provided at least, officially, over US\$ 500 million in cash to North Korea since 1999 and many inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation projects could be realized with money back to the North Korean authorities. Considering North Korea's access to hard currency has been closely monitored and restricted in recent years, particularly since the US investigations and economic sanctions against the Banco Delta Asia, South Korea's generous and unregulated provision of hard currency might play a bigger role for North Korea to modernize its military and purchase equipments and material for developing its WMD programs.

Fourthly, the Sunshine policy, despite of its good intents and concerns turned out to be an appeasement policy toward North Korea. Inter-Korean self-reliance and coordination are Pyongyang's year-long propaganda to mobilize pro North Korean moods in the South. Specialty and Duality of the inter-Korean relations are the two pillars for maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. The mixed relationship of the brotherhood and the enemy is not easy to live with but necessary for

the delicate balance on the Korean peninsula. However, the Sunshine policy full of appeasement measures gave Pyongyang wrong signals to accelerate its united-front strategies in the southern part of the peninsula. The cleavages in the South has been extended to drive a wedge over the traditional US-ROK alliance. As has been revealed in history, an appeasement policy adopted to gain short term interests could not achieve long term interests like peace and stability by deterring aggressors' ambitions to increase their power by all means.

As was revealed in recent crisis over Pyongyang's test firing of multiple missiles and its declaration of impending nuclear bomb testing, South Korea's Sunshine policy does not seem to be effective in deterring North Korea's irrational behavior. It is not proper to accuse the Sunshine policy being responsible for Pyongyang's WMD programs. But it seems correct to say that because of the Sunshine policy, or because of its improper implementation, Pyongyang has not felt to change its behavior and policy directions for developing WMD programs.

### **The Sunshine Policy and the Process of the Korean Unification**

It is necessary to examine the process of the unification on the Korean peninsula from the context of the Sunshine policy. The key elements of the unification formulae and their implication for the peaceful coexistence between the two sides should be disclosed. The most unexpected and surprising outcome of the inter-Korean summit meeting, should be the agreement to resolve the questions of unification independently

and through the joint efforts of the Korean people. For the Koreans, of the North as well as of the South, achieving unification means to have a unified and a single national community. However, the formulae for the unification have been quite different and full of contradictions.<sup>2)</sup>

To achieve such a unified state, the Seoul government since the former President Rho Tae-woo has kept the National Community Unification Formula featuring the process of reconciliation and cooperation, an inter-Korean commonwealth and a unified state. According to this unification formula, South and North Korea should enter a relationship of reconciliation and cooperation instead of hostility and confrontation to initiate dialogue for unification. To this end, the South and the North at this stage must build up mutual trust by recognizing (as they pledged in the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement in 1991) each other's systems and energizing multi-pronged exchanges and cooperation.

In the second stage the South and the North would restore and further develop their economic, social and cultural links through co-prosperity and consolidation of peace. At this stage, the South and the North would realize a common national living sphere, the South and the North would realize a common national living sphere, the so-called South-North Commonwealth, as an intra-national special relationship(a so-called confederation of a special kind).<sup>3)</sup>

At the final stage, we would see the unification into a single state within one nation. The South and the North would realize political integration by forming a unified legislature and government under democratic procedures based on a unified



Constitution, thus accomplishing complete unification featuring a single government and system of a single state within one nation.

On the other hand, North Korea has insisted upon its plan of unification by the 'Federation'. The concept of a federal republic was first presented by Kim Il Sung in August 1960, and formulated in the form of a proposal to the South under the name of the Democratic Federal Republic Koryo(DFRK) at the 6th Congress of the Korean Worker's Party on October 10, 1980. The formula is designed to realize a federal system under a central government within the framework of one nation, one state, two systems and two governments. The proposal for the Federal Republic along with the three principles for unification(Self-reliance, Peace, National Solidarity) declared in the July 4th North-South Joint Communiqué in 1972 and the 'ten point decree' for grand national solidarity advanced by the late President Kim Il Sung in 1993 has been regarded as the ultimate policy guideline for the unification. The real points are, however, to eliminate the ROK's National Security Law and its National Security Agency(the National Intelligence Service) and force the withdrawal of the US troops from South Korea. This implies that even if North Korea does seek coexistence with South Korea by forming a federal republic by the two governments, it maintains its united front strategy.

While upholding the unification formula of the DPRK, the North has offered a loose form of federation, which allows each government to keep its right to foreign affairs and defense for a certain period until the time when a firm federation system under a central government is established.<sup>4)</sup> This formula of unification by forming a loose form of federation represents the concept of federation in its lower stage meaning a coexistence in one state as a transitional process to the unification.

Ever since the Cold War era was over, all the countries around the world began striving hard for getting an edge in such severe competitions. But North and South Korea were still confronting each other under the threat of war. In fact, both sides had once agreed to recognize and respect each other as independent polities on the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement signed by their chief executive officers on February 19, 1992. It was time to put an emphasis on the maintenance of peaceful coexistence on the Peninsula and thus sought to manage the division of the motherland with peaceful means. On the basis of this spirit of coexistence, President Kim Dae Jung has initiated the Sunshine policy to bring peace and reconciliation by activating inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation. After all these efforts being completed successfully, Koreans would have a momentum through which the North and the South could realize their final goal of unification.

In fact, once being elected as the ROK President in late 1997, President Kim who had proposed his own three-phased unification formula of Confederation, Federation and the Unified Korean State revealed that it was not appropriate to push for immediate unification by developing any formulae for unification because it seemed to be more urgent to establish durable, peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the two Koreas.<sup>5)</sup> Instead, President Kim has put more emphasis on promoting reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea by not mentioning about the unification formulae themselves. He was also very critical about the efforts of the former regimes of the South to formulate their own unification formulae which had resulted in frustration and deadlock. President Kim himself was very reluctant to have remarks on the unification formula until the June summit talks in 2000.

However, as was revealed in the second clause of the Declaration, President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il had acknowledged that there was a common element in the South's proposal for a confederation and the North's proposal for a loose form of federation as the formula for achieving unification. According to the official statement of the South Korean government, the two Koreas came to the conclusion that it was unrealistic to bring about a formula for the reunification and therefore the top leaders had just confirmed that both sides were independent members of the United Nations and had developed their own systems based upon their own ideologies and independent governments. That is, if anyone is eager to push his own unification formula without considering the reality of the inter-Korean relations, it would be regarded as an attempt to absorb the other or communize the whole land under its own term regardless of the contents and procedure of the unification formulae. It would take more time and efforts to put the agenda of reunification up to the formal dialogue between the two sides. Under the spirit of peaceful coexistence, both the South and the North should be required to develop friendly environment for reconciliation and cooperation by overcoming the hostility and distrust deepened since the division of the nation.<sup>6)</sup>

### **The Sunshine policy and Reform efforts in North Korea**

Since the division of the peninsula was the result of the power sharing among the allies at the end of the World War II, the Korean people could play only a very limited role in determining her own destiny. Unfortunately, the Korean War which had expanded with the involvement of foreign forces including the U.S. and China made it difficult for the Korean people to formulate a peace system on the peninsula by resolving the Korean problems by their own efforts. Partly because of this experience, North Korea had interpreted the former July 4th Joint Communiqué in 1972 as an agreement to achieve unification independently from any foreign forces, the United States in particular. Therefore, the North had demanded the withdrawal of the US troops from the South as a precondition for further dialogues between the two Koreas.

From the outset of the inter-Korean summit talks in 2000, North Korea has been showing a sign of change. Kim Jong Il's remarks on the Rodong Shinmun of January 4th, 2001, under the title of 'the 21st century is a century of grand potentiality and of creation,' could be construed as a message based on a new thinking that he would run the country in a new point of view in this new era. At the same time, concern on and interest in the new thinking have been heightened in associations with Chairman Kim's visits to China up to the recent visit to the southern part of China in January 2006.

It seemed that Kim Jong Il must have concluded the economy was so shattered and the national system was so ineffective that he could hardly lead the country with the existing economic management system. North Korea was able to surmount the food shortages with external assistance including that from the South, but economic development can not be achieved with foreign aids alone. Ardent desires for becoming

an economic power will end up nowhere unless the people are allowed to create motives and unless the country should adjust itself to the age of science and technology.<sup>14)</sup>

While strenuously attempting to reinforce mental preparedness of its people, a lesson the country learned in the construction of a socialist society, Chairman Kim presented a proposition called 'new thinking' in order to comply with the changing reality.

Kim Jong Il must have growing interests in the socialist development model China established while it was promoting reforms and open-up in the last 20-odd years. The Chinese model calls for introducing, while maintaining the existing political system led by the Communist Party, a sweeping market economic system and adopting the 'one-nation, two systems' formula as the model for territorial unification. North Korea must have a positive appraisal on the Chinese model. Unlike other socialist countries which collapsed while undergoing reforms, the Chinese political system will remain stable for a considerable period of time, despite conspiracy of imperialists and wriggling by internal betrayers. Besides, Chairman Kim must have advocated the new policy direction with confidence as he was convinced that China is supporting North Korea steadily despite its improved relations with South Korea.

The Seoul government, meanwhile, should be watchful of Chairman Kim's new policy direction before it pins an expectant hop on it. The new policy direction could be a realistic means of diagnosing problems faced by North Korea. However, it is yet to be confirmed whether it will follow the Chinese model which is aimed at elevating the quality of public life and subsequently maintaining the status quo based upon the acknowledgement of the peace and stability without resolving North Korea's nuclear problems at the six-party talks.

While advocating new policy direction, North Korea, at the same time, has been reinforcing political and ideological ground by emphasizing the need for upholding the Suryong(supreme leader) at the cost of life and resorting to militaristic politics. Lately, North Korea is also stressing the necessity for resolving inter-Korean issues self-reliantly and achieving unification by the federal system without mentioning about the concrete schedule of Kim Jong Il's return visit to Seoul and the second inter-Korean summit talks.

### **Concluding Remarks: Peace and Unification**

As has been revealed since the June summit, the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations seem to try to keep the agreement in the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation. However, it is too early to expect fundamental changes in the North and of its leader. The North does not seem to be ready for reforming its system nor opening its society fully toward South Korea, in particular. The ruling elite of the North are worrying about the infiltration of the foreign influences into the society secluded for a long time under the guidance of the Juche Ideology(self-reliance) and the leadership of the Suryong if the inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation continue to increase as fast as they can. It was reported that the North Korean delegates at the inter-Korean talks asked its South Korean counterparts to control or reduce the speed of the inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation while the political education of the mass and the worship for the supreme leader were intensified.

On the other hands, there are conservative people within the South who have doubts about the real intentions of the North and thus worry about the development of the inter-Korean relations. They are critical about the communist's strategies and tactics which the North had utilized to communize the South in the past and they believe that the North has not changed. Out of distrust and hostility against the North and its leader, they asked not to provide massive assistance to the North without resolving nuclear issues and confirming transparency and reciprocity.

Now it is time to review the implementation of the agreements between the two and the Sunshine policy itself for the constructive development of the inter-Korean relations from the context of peace, reconciliation and cooperation. As almost all the people of the South welcomed the spirit and the general direction of the Joint Declaration for the improvement of the inter-Korean relations, one of the fundamental causes of mistrust and frustration in the process of North-South relations is in the field of the unification discourse without peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula. At this moment, the talks on unification formulae lead for the benefits of the North Korean regime in terms of justification and implementation of its united front strategy.<sup>15)</sup> The main reason for the North not to abide by the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement representing the spirit of peaceful coexistence was that it could not guarantee the justification and material interests gained by addressing the unification. Therefore, it would be one of the failures of the Policy of Peace and Prosperity if Roh government makes a hasty attempt to comply with the North for formulating a unification formula as was revealed in the Joint Declaration with the North at the official talks. In fact, regardless of the propaganda in the North and the nationalistic sentiment within the South, former president Kim and

President Roh had made frequent remarks on the unification that it could be realized only in 20-30 years. The cautious approach for the unification should be kept until the peace mechanism in the spirit of coexistence is established firmly on the Korean peninsula.□

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