

# CONFLICTING VISIONS FOR KOREAN REUNIFICATION

Young-Sun Ji  
Fellow, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs  
Harvard University  
June 2001

The author wrote this paper while she was a Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. The views expressed here are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of the Korean Government, the Hankyoreh Newspaper, or the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

## INTRODUCTION

After more than fifty years of division Korea is now facing a clearer vision for reunification than ever before. This has been developed through the global changes that followed the end of the Cold War and, in particular, the historic inter-Korean summit in June 2000. However, the visions for Korean reunification of bigger powers—the United States, China, Japan and Russia--follow their own national interests over the Korean peninsula and conflicting with each other. In order to attain peace and stability not only in the peninsula but in the region, I firmly believe that Korea should be unified in a way that primarily reflects the wishes and interests of the Korean people of both sides, not those of the bigger powers.

Korea has for a long time been the pawn of greater powers. Koreans describe their country's historical situation this way. "When whales fight, a shrimp's back is broken." The end of nineteenth century was one such bad period for Korea, when it became a battlefield of the Sino-Japanese War and then the Russo-Japanese War. Korea eventually fell under Japanese colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century. The end of World War Two was another bitter experience. Koreans were liberated from Japanese rule only to be divided and occupied by either the American or Soviet Army.

For more than fifty years Korea has remained divided against its people's wishes and concerns. In addition, the nations in the region have organized themselves around a divided Korea—it is a type of stability, which, one way or another, came to serve their own purposes.

Now, at the beginning of the twenty first century, ten years after the end of Cold War, Korea is facing the possibility of a new order, a possibility of reunification, after the historic summit of the South and North Korean leaders in June 2000. Consequently, the Korean peninsula has again become the focus of major powers' interest.

In the spring of 2001, the leaders of these powerful countries were busy exchanging visits with their counterparts in the two Koreas. Russian President Vladimir Putin paid a state visit to South Korea in February. Seoul received another official visit from former Chinese Premier Liping in March. South Korean President Kim Dae-jung met President Bush in Washington in the same month. Furthermore, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il paid a visit to Russia in April. And the Japanese and North Korean foreign ministers met in October 2000 in Beijing.

All these great powers--the United States, China, Japan and Russia--are interested in the Korean peninsula because its reunification will in part play a defining role in Asian geopolitics in the twenty first century. Accordingly, the issue of the Korean reunification is extremely complex: domestically it is already two-sided; internationally it is six-sided, between two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia.

It is true that there are still large differences between the North and South Korean governments in their positions toward reunification. After the three years of fratricidal war in the early 1950s, North and South Korea have confronted against each other along the world's most heavily armed border between them for half a century. No social or economic exchange, even the reunion of separated family members and exchanges of their letters, were allowed between the two parts until quite recently.

Nevertheless, a review of the history of North-South dialogues shows that both parties have continuously tried to talk each other. Unification has always been, at least officially, a top priority for both Korean regimes, because it is the desperate hope of the majority of the people. It is remarkable that both parties' unification policies have developed from aggressive militant

position to more realistic and peaceful way. They have gradually approached each other's position step by step, even though they have not yet converged.

There were not many instances of fruitful dialogue or agreement between the two Korean governments before last June's summit. The South and North Joint Communiqué in 1972 and the South and North Basic Agreements in 1992 were the most significant. They surprised and excited people very much, but soon led to disappointment.

It is interesting to find that the sudden collapse of those two achievements seemed to be closely related with the United States position on the Korean issue or the presence of the United States military in Korea.

The dramatic progress in reconciliation between the two Koreas after the June 2000 summit seems to have deteriorated again since the new Bush administration has advocated a hard-line policy toward North Korea. The reciprocal trip to Seoul by Kim Jong-il, which was initially expected in April 2001, is now being delayed because of his protest against United States policy. The South Korean government had originally prepared to conclude a peace agreement with North Korea in the second inter-Korean summit. However, President Kim Dae-jung has apparently toned this down after his meeting with President Bush in March 2001.<sup>1</sup>

At this critical moment, I would like to stress that each party should harmonize its concerns and interests wisely. The great powers especially need to listen to the opinions and desires of the Korean people in deciding their own future.

Korea's position is now different from the beginning of the twentieth century and at the end of World War Two. Koreans, especially South Koreans, now have a capacity to decide their own future. They have developed their country into the eleventh largest economy in the world and have succeeded in building a democratic government through a long struggle against

authoritarian military regimes. South Korea's civil society is brilliantly vital with its dense layer of well-educated middle class and its abundant experience from fighting dictators.

If the great powers try to excessively influence what happens on the Korean peninsula in their own interests, Korea will continue to be a fault line in Northeast Asia and will bring further instability to the region. In this sense, it is notable that the very first clause of the North-South Joint Declaration from June 2000 summit announced that "The South and the North have agreed to resolve the question of reunification independently and through the joint efforts of Korean people, who are the masters of the country".

In this paper, I am going to examine the development of both Koreas' unification policies and the differences between them and various other parties' interests and visions regarding Korean reunification.

---

<sup>1</sup> See The *Hankyoreh* Newspaper, March 10, 2001: Seoul

## Development of the South Korean Unification Policy and its Present Position

After the Republic of Korea (ROK) was founded below the 38 parallel of the Korean peninsula on August 15, 1948, Dr. Syngman Rhee, the first president of the ROK, advocated a very aggressive unification policy, a so-called ‘march north for unification’ approach. As he believed that the ROK government was the only lawful government on the Korean peninsula founded by the free general election according to the UN resolution of November 1947 and the North denied this resolution, he urged that the South would be justified in taking every available means, including the use of force, to achieve unification.<sup>2</sup>

However, it was shown that South Korea was not at all prepared for such an aggressive approach for unification by its inability to defend itself from the invasion by the North supported by the Soviet Union in June 1950. This war, which was joined by United Nations troops led by United States Army on behalf of the South and Chinese People’s Liberation Army on behalf of the North, lasted three years. The war ended with an armistice<sup>3</sup>, not a peace treaty, in July 1953. The peninsula remains divided similarly as before the war.

The armistice was signed by North Korea and People’s Republic of China on one side and United States of America representing 16 countries, including South Korea, which fought against the North under the flag of the United Nations, on the other<sup>4</sup>. The United States and North Korea are therefore technically still in war. And even though the command of South Korean forces was handed to the commander of the United Nations forces shortly after the war

---

<sup>2</sup> See Koh, Yu-hwan. Unification Policies of Two Koreas and Outlook for Unity. *Korea Focus*, Nov - Dec 2000: The Korea Foundation, Seoul; p.91.

<sup>3</sup> See Suh, Joo-suk. Armistice Regime in Korean Peninsula and United Nations Command. *Current View on Unification*, Winter 2000: Chung-myung Cultural Foundation, Seoul: 2000; p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 105.

broke out<sup>5</sup>, it is still in the hand of the United States forces commander almost fifty years after the war ended. Antagonism had been far more solidified between two parties as a result of the fratricidal war. And the South Korean government sustained its hard line anti-communism unification policy.

After Syngman Rhee was ousted from the presidency by students demonstration against autocracy during his fourth attempt for the post in April 1960, the short-lived Second Republic abandoned the ‘march north for unification’ policy in favor of achieving unification through peaceful means. For a short period, until the military coup overthrew this democratic civilian government in May 1961, a wide range of unification approaches, including North-South negotiations, North-South exchanges and the neutralization of Korea, could be openly discussed among people for the first time since the Republic of Korea was founded.

The administration of Park Chung-hee, who seized power through a military coup, returned the South to a pretty hard line anti-communist policy. But after gaining self-confidence in the competition with the northern counterpart through its successful economic development and owing to the new international detente between United States and China, it tried to open dialog with North Korea. In 1972 Seoul exchanged emissaries with Pyeongyang, which led to the signing of the North-South Joint Communiqué on July 4 of that year, the first government-level agreement negotiated between the two Koreas. In the communiqué, both the North and the South agreed on three principles for achieving unification: independence from foreign interference, peaceful means, and national unity transcending differences in ideology and system.

However, this inter-Korean dialog ended shortly after the agreement. James Lee, a former special adviser to the commander-in-chief, United Nations command on Armistice Affairs, explained in a special interview how the dialog came to stop: After agreement was signed

---

<sup>5</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 108



between South Korean emissaries and North Korean counterpart, the North urged the South to let US forces to leave the Korean peninsula according to the principle of independence from foreign interference. The reply from the South Korean government was that the presence of US forces in South Korea is a matter between the US and South Korea, not between two Koreas. The dialogues could therefore not go on.

After this dialogue North and South Korea maintained hostile relations throughout most of the 1970s. Both sides capitalized on the short-lived détente for their own internal political purposes. Shortly after signing the Joint Communiqué, both Koreas worked on reinforcing their own political institutions to perpetuate their respective leaders' hold on power.

The administration of Chun Doo Hwan, who took power in 1980 through another military coup and cruelly suppressed the democratic movement that rose after President Park Chung-hee's assassination by the head of his secret intelligence agency, made sustained efforts to improve inter-Korean relations in an attempt to gain popular legitimacy. These efforts resulted in a reunion of separated family members from the North and the South in September 1985, for the first time after the Korean War. Again, this dramatic event happened just once and failed to resume until the end of the century.

Chun's successor, President Roh Tae-Woo, one of the core members of the 1980 military coup, made several significant outcomes in inter-Korean relations that came with the changing international order after the end of the Cold War. In August 1990, a 'Law on North-South Exchanges and Cooperation' was enacted, providing the legal framework for the inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation. On September 11, 1989, Roh announced a 'Unification Formula for the Korean National Community', which has since served as a model for the unification policies of the succeeding administrations. The highlight of this formula is to clarify the process of

achieving unification, which consists of three stages: first, confidence building and cooperation between North and South; second, a confederation of the two Koreas; third and last, the establishment of a unified government.<sup>6</sup>

The Roh administration pursued so-called 'Nord Politik' and succeeded in making diplomatic ties with Russia in 1990 and China in 1992, while North Korea had yet to normalize relations with the United States and Japan. These diplomatic ties were evaluated as a remarkable victory for South Korea over its northern counterpart. They also have important meaning in the sense that they helped to dismantle the Cold War structure on Korean peninsula. The division and confrontation between South and North had long been balanced and solidified while the South was allied with the United States and Japan and the North with Soviet Russia and China. In September 1991, South and North Korea were jointly admitted to the United Nations as new members.

The most meaningful achievement reached by the Roh administration in inter-Korean relations was the 'Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchange and Cooperation' which was signed on December 31, 1991 by both prime ministers after a series of high-level talks between the two parties. It went into effect on February 19, 1992 along with the 'Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula'. A set of protocols were also concluded by the two Koreas on September 17, 1992, to implement the Basic Agreement.

However, this Agreement also soon became a dead letter and inter-Korean relations deteriorated over the North's nuclear development program. James Lee, the special adviser to the commander-in-chief, United Nations Command on Armistice Affairs, says that General LisCassi, the commander-in-chief at that time, was very surprised at the part of nonaggression in the Basic Agreement, when he read the English translation Lee provided with for him. To my question why

---

<sup>6</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 96

this Basic Agreement between two Koreas became a dead letter so shortly, Lee just answered “Think about why the North Korean nuclear reactor, whose existence had surely already been known to the US through intelligence satellite, suddenly became such a important issue at that critical moment. I would not elaborate upon it further.”

President Kim Young-sam, inaugurated in 1993 as the first civilian president after thirty years of military dictatorship, took a very active and positive stance in implementing policy toward North Korea. In his inaugural address he stressed that “No ally is more valuable than our own nation (that is, North and South Korea), underlining his commitment to deal with inter-Korean problems as a priority. As a gesture of reconciliation with the North he released an old North Korean spy who had been in South Korean prison for more than thirty years and sent him back to the North without any conditions. However, before Kim Young-sam’s effort had any result, disputes over the nuclear issue between the United States and North Korea in 1994 almost brought the peninsula to war again. Facing the stubbornness and brinkmanship diplomacy of North Korea, the United States seriously discussed a plan to bomb the suspected secret nuclear facility, while most Korean people didn’t know what their own country’s fate would be.

The peninsula escaped war large part owing to former President Jimmy Carter’s mediation. The late North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, accepted Mr. Carter’s proposal and agreed to hold not only high-level talks with the United States but a summit meeting with the South Korean president. This ‘first inter-Korean summit’ was scheduled for July 25-27, 1994, however, it was never realized because Kim Il-sung passed away just seventeen days prior to it.

After Kim Il-sung’s death, relations between North Korea and the administration of South Korean President Kim Young-sam soured again, because the discussion among the South Korean parliamentarians about the appropriateness of South Korean mission of condolence to the funeral

made North Koreans furious. On the other hand, Kim Young-sam's government felt uneasy at the progress of the North Korea-US talks, which resulted in the Geneva Agreed Framework of October 1994, calling for the restructuring of the North's nuclear program and improved bilateral relations.

President Kim Dae-jung, inaugurated in 1998, launched a comprehensive engagement policy toward North Korea based upon his long developed unification plan. The highlight of his plan is to set a confederation stage in which the South and the North coexist with their different systems for a certain period of time before they are gradually integrated into a more homogeneous nation. His unification plan was first announced in 1971, when he ran for the presidency for the first time. This plan has some elements in common with the North Korean reunification program and has also influenced the official unification plan of the Roh and Kim Young-sam administrations.

The policy toward North Korea of the present administration under Kim Dae-jung is oriented toward peaceful coexistence, which it is hoped will lead the two sides toward eventual unification. Its goals are to dismantle the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula and to induce the North to open up and become a member of the international community.

In distinction from previous administrations, the current government encourages North Korea to normalize relations with the United States and Japan. This administration has also tried to increase economic cooperation and various contacts between the two parties, as it believes that economic cooperation will help not only prevent the sudden collapse of the North Korean regime but improve the terrible living conditions of the North Korean people and gradually change that society. South Korea also hopes that all these things will help the two parties be integrated more efficiently when they are someday unified.

After last June's summit, reunions of separated family members have been realized three times, each time with one hundred people from each party. The most significant economic cooperation project is reconnecting railroads and highways. By connecting the railroads, busy ports on the southern coast of South Korea could directly be connected to the European markets via the Trans-Siberia railroad. Another important project is the transfer of electricity generated in the South to the North. The lack of energy is a crucial factor in the paralysis of the North Korean economy.

## **Development of the Unification Policy and the Present Position of North Korea**

Contrary to the initial policy of the South Korean government, which openly advocated a ‘march north for unification’ approach without actually preparing for the use of force, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) has always waged a diverse peace offensive against the South even shortly before it invaded the South on June 25, 1950. Since then its official unification policy has consistently aimed at the expansion of its socialist system to the South, even though it recently seems to realize this will not be possible on the Korean peninsula.

After North Korea failed to unify the peninsula by force in spite of a severe three-year long war, that sacrificed several million lives, in the 1960s it focused on a strategy of inciting revolution in the South. At the same time, North Korea proposed an interim federation system for unification, in which South and North Korea would coexist with their different political systems in one federation for a certain period of time before they entered into a final stage of unification.<sup>7</sup>

Federation as a mean of unification became North Korea’s official policy when Kim Il-sung presented a formula for the establishment of a ‘Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo’ (original Korean pronunciation of Korea) at the sixth congress of the North Korean Workers’ Party held in October 1980.

This elaborated the task of the independent and peaceful unification. First, South Korea should liquidate its ‘military Fascist rule’ for democratization and repeal the National Security Law which defines North Korea as a rebellious organization. Second, the Korean peninsula should be free of tension and the danger of war by replacing the Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty. Third, the United States should discontinue its manipulation of the two Koreas and

---

<sup>7</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 101

its interference in Korean internal affairs and withdraw the US forces in the South. and Forth, as a means of achieving unification based on the ‘three grand principles’ of independence, peaceful means, and national unity as specified in the July 4 Joint Communiqué of 1972, North and South Korea should form a Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo while retaining their existing ideologies and systems. He explained that the Federal Republic of Koryo would comprise one nation, one state, two systems, and two regional governments.<sup>8</sup>

Here we find a notable change in the formula for a Koryo Federal Republic, specifying that a unified Korea would remain as a kind of federation in the early 1960s, North Korea had made it clear that federation was only a transitional phase along the path toward achieving unification. It seems that the North Korean government started to realize at this point that it would not be possible to extend its socialist system to the South. At the same time, however, it never wanted to give up its system. Associating unification with federation reveals North Korea’s efforts to achieve national unification through retention of its socialist system under an ‘institutional unification.’

When the Reverend Moon Ik-whan, a respected South Korean spiritual leader, visited North Korea in 1989, he proposed to Kim Il-sung that he set p an interim stage, in which the North and South autonomous governments have their own diplomatic and defense authorities on the way to the federation. This plan was accepted and the declaration signed by the Reverend Moon and his North Korean counterpart, the Committee of Fatherland Peaceful Unification, atates that the Koryo Federal Republic may be set step by step.<sup>9</sup>

This modified formula was officially presented in Kim Il-sung’s New Year message for 1991. Kim stated that in order to facilitate national consensus, he was prepared to discuss

---

<sup>8</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 102

<sup>9</sup> See Kim, Bo-young, Confederation and Federation-Unification Policies of South and North Korea, *K o r e a n*

“interim measures that would provisionally accord greater authority to autonomous regional governments in the direction of expanding the central government’s function and authority and thus gradually achieving unification.” This statement can be construed as having advocated a ‘lower-stage’ federation in which regional governments in the South and the North would retain authority over their respective foreign affairs and armed forces. This will be explained more closely in the next chapter on the inter-Korean summit and South-North Joint Declaration.

The 1990s were marked by trials and tribulations for North Korea. It suffered not only from the aftershocks of the collapse of the communist bloc but extensive economic deterioration and serious food shortages. Consequently, the North again shifted its strategy toward the South by calling for a ‘grand national unity’ for the common interest of the Korean peninsula, while toning down its rhetoric for class struggle and revolution in the South.

In April 1993, North Korea’s Supreme People’s Congress adopted the ‘Ten Point Guiding Principles for Grand National Unity’, which includes phrases like: “solidarity should be promoted to ensure coexistence, co-prosperity, and common interest for the ultimate goal of unification”; “competition that heightens national division and confrontation should cease”; and “concerns about invasion either by the North or the South, and about communization or absorption, should be eradicated and mutual trust restored for unity.”<sup>10</sup>

The policies of Kim Jong-il, Kim Il-sung’s son who succeeded his father in 1994, are similar to those of his father. The son adopted his father’s federation formula, but in a more realistic way. Notable points of his unification policy include establishing a ‘new system for guaranteeing peace’ through the conclusion of a peace treaty with the United States; calling on South Korea to replace its ‘confrontational, anti-North Korea policy’ with one focused on

---

*History Webzine*, 1; <http://www.koreanhistory.org/webzine/01/01-07.html>

<sup>10</sup> See Koh, *ibid*; p. 104-105.



reconciliation and solidarity with the North; improving relations with the United States and Japan; and inducing cooperation for attaining unification from those powers with interests in the Korean peninsula.

Pyeongyang has recently stressed that under the prevailing conditions, in which both North and South Korea are opposed to compromising their respective ideologies and systems, the 'best and only way' to attain national unification is to establish a federal nation-state that precludes absorption by either side. We find here North Korea became increasingly defensive against possible absorption by the South.

Since Kim Jong-il accepted the proposal for a inter-Korean summit, there has been widespread suspicion about his intentions. Some argue that he just wants to get as much aid as possible—a view I agree with. I think that the ultimate goal of North Korea's policy toward South Korea is to safeguard the Pyongyang regime. Consecutive droughts and floods since 1995 have brought terrible famine to its people. The North Korean regime now faces the dilemma of opening its country at the cost of endangering its system or falling into total social and economic collapse. In order to maintain the present regime, the North realizes that it first needs to solve its economic problems.

North Korea's agreement to hold the summit meeting resulted from its assessment that the North Korea-US negotiating framework was not enough to satisfy its dual goals of safeguarding its regime and overcoming its economic difficulties, and that to achieve these goals it was necessary to take advantage of South Korea's current policy centered on improving relations and economic cooperation.

Along with dialogues with the South, North Korea has recently made great efforts to build diplomatic relationships with Western countries. Those that have recently established ties

with North Korea include Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Luxemburg, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand.

On the other hand, Kim Jong-il's frequent visits to China, a model of successful combination of socialist politics and market economy, suggest his intention for change. The prosperous markets and industry complexes in Shanghai were his favorite places in his China visits before and after the last June's summit.

Kim Jong-il certainly doesn't want his political system to be shaken by foreign influences. He continues to minimize the contact of his people with the outside world. But once the gate opens, change is inevitable. President Kim Dae-jung knows this well, and I think Kim Jong-il understands it too.

## **Inter-Korean Summit and Joint Declaration**

In their summit meeting in Pyongyang from June 13 to June 15, 2000, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il agreed to a five clause declaration:

- 1) The South and the North have agreed to resolve the question of reunification independently and through the joint efforts of the Korean people, who are the masters of the country.
- 2) Acknowledging that there is 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 reunification, the South and the North agreed to promote reunification in that direction.
- 3) The South and the North have agreed to promptly resolve humanitarian issues such as exchange visits by separated family members and relatives on the occasion of the August 15 National Liberation Day and the question of unswerving Communists who have been given long prison sentences in the South.
- 4) The South and the North have agreed to consolidate mutual trust by promoting balanced development of the national economy through economic cooperation and by stimulating cooperation and exchanges in civic, cultural, sports, public health, environmental and all other fields.
- 5) The South and the North have agreed to hold a dialogue between relevant authorities in the near future to implement the above agreement expeditiously.

The most notable among these five clauses is the second, which acknowledges the common elements in both Koreas' proposals for unification. The South's 'Unification Formula for the Korean National Community', which was announced by the Roh Tae-Woo administration

in 1989, and the North's unification formula for 'Koryo Federal Republic' proposed in 1980 look very similar. Especially, the second stage, the confederation stage, of the South's 'Korean National Community' unification formula and lower stage of the North's 'Koryo Federal Republic' sounds identical by their definitions.

Nevertheless, the two parties had always stressed the differences between their proposals until the leaders of the two Koreas acknowledged for the first time their communality in the June 2000's summit.

However, in spite of their definitional similarity, the North's federation and the South's confederation have an important difference. The North says its federation is composed of one nation, one state, two governments and two systems, whereas the South's confederation is understood to be composed of one nation, two states, two governments and two systems. Here I have to point out that the concept of a Koryo Federal Republic and South's confederation stage differ from the conventional notion of federation or confederation, which is based upon common social systems of component states. Both the confederation of the South and the federation of the North comprise two regional governments with different political systems.

The reason why North Korea sticks to the federation form and urges that it be comprised of 'one nation and one state' is again related to the issue of US forces in the Korean peninsula. Should a unified Korea become a federation, the North Korean government could have the right to speak about the US forces, whereas, as a member state of confederation, anything it said about US forces in South Korea would be on the level of foreign intervention in domestic affairs.<sup>11</sup>

The US forces in Korea have always been the key to solving the problems related to the Korean reunification. Independence, one of the three principles for achieving unification, which has been agreed to several times by the two Koreas since the 1972 Joint Communiqué, is a

repeated confirmation by the Korean people that their country's reunification should be realized in the ways that would best reflect their interests.

The fact, that North Korea has agreed to set 'a lower stage' federation and acknowledge its common elements with the confederation stage of the South's unification formula, suggests the possibility of a change in North Korea's position towards US forces in the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, President Kim Dae-jung said in his press conference held when he returned from Pyongyang summit that Kim Jong-il mentioned that he would allow US forces to remain even after unification.<sup>12</sup>

However, this doesn't mean that North Korea will allow US forces in Korea as they are now. North Korea has started to demand the 'legalization' and 'normalization' of the US forces in the Korean peninsula. By "legalization", North Korea urges that it is not legitimate for US forces in Korea to use the name of United Nations forces and that they should have a proper status and a proper name. "Normalization" means the normalizing of the relationship between the US and North Korea, which are technically still at war. It has long demanded that the US conclude a peace treaty. Nevertheless, Pyongyang also seems to be ready to recognize the role of US forces in Korea as a power balancer in the East Asian region.

Some people were unhappy because the Joint Declaration agreed to in the June 2000 inter-Korean summit was lacking in measures for disarmament or easing military tension between the two parts. But this is something that needs to be developed between with the United States—it is not a problem between the two Koreas.

Although the two Koreas have agreed to promote reunification from the common point of the North's loose form of federation and the South's confederation, the confederation or the

---

<sup>11</sup> See Kim, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> See the Hankyoreh Newspaper, June 16, 2000: Seoul

federation, which comprises two governments with different political systems and separate diplomatic and defense authorities, it is not supposed to be the ultimate form of unification. What then would or should the unified Korea look like?

As I have described above, North Korea's unification policy has originally aimed at the expansion of its socialist system to the South. But now it seems to focus more on retaining its system under an institutional unification.

There has not been much research conducted or even many discussions in South Korea about what a unified Korea look like. President Kim Dae-jung's Three Stage Unification Formula sets a final stage as a complete unification with one state, one system and one government. As for a unified Korea's ideology and system, the formula foresees that Korea will uphold democracy, a market economy and public welfare.

## **The United States Vision for Korean Reunification**

The dramatic slowdown in the North-South Korean dialog since the inauguration of President Bush shows the powerful influence of United States policy on the Korean peninsula issue. As the Bush administration has suggested nullifying what the previous Clinton administration had achieved issue through trial and error in addressing Korean peninsula, the frequent brilliant dialogs between South and North Korea since the June 2000 inter-Korean summit have definitely been stalled.

Most of all, Kim Jong-il's reciprocal visit to Seoul, which was expected in spring 2001, has still not been scheduled. Shortly after the US-South Korean summit in March, in which Bush openly expressed his suspicion about reconciliation with North Korea, the inter-Korean ministerial talks were abruptly cancelled by the North. Kim Dae-jung had worked hard to

conclude the South-North peace agreement in the second inter-Korean summit in Seoul, but he retreated from that plan after his summit with Mr. Bush.

After three months of an indefinite pause for a careful internal policy review, President Bush recently announced that he would resume negotiations with the North on a broad range of issues. The White House denies that new position reflects any policy change, but it seems obvious that new administration's position toward the North is tougher than that of Clinton administration.

The agenda of discussions with North Korea was said to include verifiable constraints on its missile programs and a ban on missile exports. Furthermore, a less threatening conventional military posture was added to the agenda. The Bush administration is also seeking an "improved implementation" of the Agreed Framework of 1994, under which North Korea froze its plutonium processing at a suspected nuclear weapons plant in exchange for the building of two light-water reactors by 2003.<sup>13</sup> This Agreed Framework was the solution of the North Korean nuclear crisis, which had brought the Korean peninsula almost to a war initiated by the US plan of bombing the North Korean nuclear facility.

The new policy has been much anticipated by American allies in Asia and Europe because of the perception that the administration was using the threat of North Korea's long-range missiles as a justification for developing its own missile defense. Professor Yan Xuetong of China Institute of Contemporary International Relations has said that the target of US missile defense program is obviously China, though the US demonizes North Korea to hide its real intention.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> The New York Times, June 6, 2001; US Will Restart Wide Negotiations With North Korea

<sup>14</sup> He said so as a panelist when he participated in the Northeast Asia Security Conference on *Korean Reconciliation: Implications for Northeast Asian Security*, March 15-17, 2001, organized by United States Military Academy.

The North Korea policy of the Clinton administration, which had planned to pay a presidential visit to North Korea as a step to normalizing relations with it at the end of its term, was initially as tough as that of present administration. It was on the line of traditional containment policy. Professor Ashton Carter of Harvard University who participated in the North Korea Policy Review team led by Dr. William Perry, once mentioned that there was no substantial North Korea policy at all in Clinton administration.

After the United States considered military action over the so called North Korea nuclear crisis in 1994 and then witnessed the launch of the North's long-range missile in 1998, President Clinton formed a special team to conduct an extensive review of US policy toward North Korea in November 1998. According to the Perry Report issued by this group, the US government had seriously considered the surgical strike in 1994 in bombing the so-called secret nuclear facility in Yongbyon, however, it finally abandoned the plan because of the tremendous losses expected from the inevitable war in an extremely densely populated peninsula, where 37,000 US ground forces are stationed. The US had found that the situation in the Korean peninsula was different from that of the Iraqi desert.

First of all, the policy review team determined that a fundamental review of US policy was indeed needed, since much had changed in the security situation on the Korean Peninsula since the 1994 crisis. In North Korea, formal leadership has passed from Kim Il-sung to his son, Kim Jong-il, and during this period, the DPRK economy has deteriorated significantly, though the Agreed Framework of 1994 had succeeded in verifiably freezing North Korean plutonium production in Yongbyon, there were serious concerns about possible continuing nuclear weapons-related work in the DPRK. In South Korea, President Kim Dae-jung, inaugurated in 1998, had embarked upon a policy of comprehensive engagement with the North. Japan has



become more concerned about North Korea because of the launch, in August 1998, of a Taepo-dong missile over Japanese territory. Furthermore this increasing concern could have a serious impact on Japanese domestic political support for the Agreed Framework, under which Japan funds a large portion of North Korea's new light-water reactor construction costs. China too understands many of the US concerns about the deleterious effects that North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile activities could have for regional and global security.<sup>15</sup>

After considering various possible alternatives, in October 1999 the review team recommended a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach: A Two-Path Strategy. The alternative policies the team considered included: status quo, undermining the DPRK, reforming the DPRK, and "buying" US objectives. The team reported that it rejected all these alternatives because none of them could guarantee effective constraint of North Korea's further nuclear and missile development and sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula, which is crucial for the stability of the region.

The first path of the Two Path Strategy is "a new, comprehensive and integrated approach to the negotiations with the DPRK" in close consultation with South Korea and Japan. Through the negotiation "the US would seek complete and verifiable assurances that the DPRK does not have a nuclear weapons program and also the complete and verifiable cessation of testing, production and deployment of missiles exceeding the parameters of the Missile Technology control Regime, and the complete cessation of export sales of such missiles and the equipment and technology associated with them".<sup>16</sup> If North Korea were prepared to follow this path and moved to eliminate its nuclear and long-range missile threats, the review recommended, the US

---

<sup>15</sup> Perry, William. Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations, Office of the North Korea Policy Coordinator, United States Dept. of State: 1999

<sup>16</sup> Perry. Ibid.

would normalize relations with the DPRK and take other positive steps, including relaxing sanctions that have long constrained trade with it.

However, the review also recommends that if North Korea rejects this first path, the United States and its allies “would have to take firm but measured steps to persuade the DPRK that it should return to the first path and avoid destabilizing the security situation in the region.” The policy review did not elaborate ‘the firm but measured step’ in the unclassified report. However, it is known that it also provided a concrete ‘stick’ in the classified report.

Therefore, United States policy toward North Korea in the latter part of Clinton administration, known as the Perry Process, coincided with that of South Korea in many ways. It tried to draw North Korea into the international community and also induced North Korea to have dialogue with South Korea.

Since the United States North Korea policy focused on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and maintaining the balance of power in East Asia, including peace on the Korean peninsula, reconciliation of the two Koreas was desirable for the U.S. However, reconciliation of the two Koreas inevitably raises question of the legitimacy of the US troop’s presence in South Korea. The command of South Korean forces is still in the hands of a United States commander forty-eight years after the Korean War ended, ever since it was handed over shortly after the Korean War broke out.

The United States, even under the Clinton administration, was very sensitive to this issue, because these forces are vitally linked to the United States strategy of maintaining peace and stability, as well as its own leading role, in Northeast Asia. If they are pulled out of the Korean peninsula, calls for similar troop withdrawals from Japan would likely gain momentum, which would eventually force the US to revise its security strategy for Northeast Asia.

It's also clear that although US policy orientation coincided with that of South Korea in many ways, this did not necessarily mean that their policies, in term of priorities and desired speed of implementation, were identical. In my view, the policy priorities of the US are probably something like this: first, the prevention of WMD proliferation; second, addressing Korean peninsula issues in relation to China; third, preventing war on the Korean peninsula. <sup>17</sup>Ashton Carter mentioned that the United States aim of the Korea policy pursued in the Perry Process is to bring sustainable peace and stability to the Korean peninsula. Reunification is the Koreans' business, not the Americans', he said.

In contrast, the policy priorities of South Korea are rather the opposite. First, preventing war on the Korean peninsula; second, peaceful and independent reunification of the country; third, the prevention of WMD proliferation, and so on.

Like many observers, I believe the Bush administration might go back to a more practical policy of negotiation, if it found its effort to tame North Korea did not easily bear fruit. What I am worry about is that this rare chance of reconciliation that the two Koreas have finally arrived at could easily deteriorate.

## **The Other Powers' Positions**

### **CHINA**

China has a special interest in the Korean peninsula and quite a large influence on North Korea, as an ally that fought for it in the Korean War and as a country that shares a long border with Korean peninsula. Since Kim Jong-il seems to plan to follow the Chinese model of development, its influence upon North Korea will be even greater in the future.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Manning, Robert. The Perils of Being No. 1: East Asian Trends and US Policies to 2025, which was prepared for

After Deng Xiaoping adopted the market economy and opened its society, China normalized relations with the United States in 1978 and also with South Korea in 1992 against which it fought with North Korea. Since then China has maintained a balancing policy between two Koreas. While the North has been a long-time ally of China's, the South has become an important trade partner and investor.

Since China should have basically realized modernization by the middle of the twenty-first century, as Deng planned, it needs peace and stability in the region, especially on the Korean peninsula. Either the collapse of the North or the war on the peninsula would trouble the stability of China and harm its economic development. It apparently does not like North Korea's development of nuclear weapon, which can easily trigger a chain reaction of similar activities in the region, especially with Japan and South Korea. In this sense, US and Chinese interests in Korea--a desire to avoid war, avoid collapse of North Korea and avoid nuclear proliferation--have been congruent until now.

However, as to what a unified Korea should look like, their interests and viewpoints cannot but diverge. Regarding the desirable process of Korean reunification, Yan Xuetong of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations stressed that the two parties should be unified through peaceful negotiations free from the interference of foreign powers. So, he urges, the opinions of North Korea should be properly respected. He suggested a neutral state as a desirable security option for a unified Korea.<sup>18</sup> In other words, he made it clear that China does not welcome a unified Korea under US influence. He also acknowledged that it is clear that

---

the National Intelligence Council Conference on the US and East Asia in 2010, February 17, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> He said so in the conference *Korean Reconciliation: Implications for Northeast Asian Security*.

decreasing tension as well as sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula are preferable for China, but it is not certain if Korean reunification would help Chinese interests or not.

On the other hand, the United States has recently become more and more aware of China's emergence as a global power, and the Bush administration has begun to treat China as a strategic competitor instead of strategic collaborator. Tension and rivalry between the two countries will obviously not help Korean reunification. The Sino-American relationship and the mutual accommodation of their interests will therefore be a key factor influencing what Korean reunification will look like.

## **JAPAN**

Japan has a special interest in the Korean Peninsula as one of its closest neighbor and as a country, that once occupied Korea. Japan sees three scenarios as North Korea's future: "collapse internally or implode because of incredible economic problems; invade the South over one issue or another; or lead to some peaceful resolution and unification with the South".<sup>19</sup> Since Japan is seriously worrying about the influence on Japan of the possible collapse of North Korea and war in the Korean peninsula, it watches the situation very closely.

In the case of violence, Japan's greatest concern about North Korea is its missile program. Because of the American forces stationed in Okinawa, Japan sees itself as the number-one target of a possible North Korean missile attack. It also worries about the impact of a possible North Korean collapse upon Japan, such as rush of refugees and demands for a Korean rehabilitation fund. About 100,000 North Koreans and their Japanese wives who returned to North Korea from Japan in the 1960s still have family and relatives in Japan.

---

<sup>19</sup> Okonogi, Masao. The North Korean Crisis and Japan's Choice. *The Two Koreas and the United States*, edited by Wonmo Dong. Armonk: 2000; p. 119.

Therefore, Japan's position toward Korean reunification seems largely to coincide with that of the United States and South Korea: that is an engagement policy with North Korea based on the close cooperation with the US and South Korea. In other words, Japan think it is desirable to normalize its relations with the North and help it to open its society and reconstruct its economy to stabilize the peninsula, if the North cooperates with United States and South Korea's engagement policy. Though Japan's talks with North Korea over normalizing relations have made little progress since the early 1990s, the reparations to be paid for Japan's brutal occupation of Korea are expected to be an important source of economic development for North Korea.

However, Japan seems to foresee that, even if North Korea survives its current economic and social crisis and succeeds in reviving its economy following the Chinese model with the outside help, especially that of South Korea and Japan, the peaceful coexistence of two Koreas would not last long. As adoption of a market economy would inevitably undermine its autocratic system. Therefore, Japan believes that North Korea's effort to open its society would eventually result in a kind of absorption of it by the South. It worries that the collapse of one system, even if it happened slowly, would bring an explosive of refugees and social instability. Japan thinks that both it and South Korea should prepare for that.

On the other hand, many Koreans suspect that Japan has profited from the division of the Korean peninsula and may not welcome a unified Korea with a population of seventy million and a fair amount of economic and military capability. The Japanese deny this, though they admit that they worry about the possible emergence of Korean nationalism.

Professor Masao Okonogi of Keio University wrote: "however ...it cannot be denied that many Japanese vaguely worry about a rise of extreme nationalism in a unified Korea and of that nationalism's being directed toward Japan. For example, if an emotional conflict occurs between

Japan and Korea, the possibility of a unified Korea turning to China to counter Japan, and making efforts toward its own military build-up, cannot be denied.”<sup>20</sup>

## **RUSSIA**

The Soviet Union, which along with the People’s Republic of China was one of North Korea’s most important traditional allies, opened the diplomatic relations with South Korea in June 1990. While Russia’s relationship with the North even further deteriorated after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 and its transformation into democratic market economy, its economic and social relationship with the South has become dramatically closer.

Since 1994 Moscow has been trying to put its relations with North Korea back on a normal track and to keep a more balanced position between two Koreas. However, because of its domestic political and economic difficulties, Russia has had little capacity to play an energetic role in recent Korean issues. It was also excluded from the Four Party Talks, which consisted of the US, China and two Koreas.

But recently Russia has tried to recover its influence, as circumstances on the Korean peninsula have started to become more active. President Putin regards himself as the key broker over the peninsula issue. He visited North Korea shortly after the Korean summit and delivered an offer from North Korea to the G8 meeting last July that North Korea would halt the development of long-range missiles, if foreign states launched satellites on its behalf. In his visit last month to Seoul, Putin reconfirmed his support for the peaceful reunification of Korea.

Evgeniy Bazhanov, director of the Institute for Contemporary International Studies in the Russian Foreign Ministry, summarizes Russia’s current objectives on the Korean peninsula as follows: “maintaining stability in Korea; establishing balanced relations with two Koreas;

---

<sup>20</sup> Okonogi, *ibid*; p. 129.

helping with inter-Korean dialogue; cooperating with other big powers in Korea; and opposing domination of the Korean Peninsula from external forces.”<sup>21</sup>

Russia also shows great interest in taking part in the economic cooperation between the two Koreas, including connecting the Korean railroads to the Trans-Siberia Railroad. In short, it does not want to be left behind in the big powers’ race to keep uphold their national interests in the Korean peninsula.

---

<sup>21</sup> Banzhanov, Evgeniy. Russia’s Policies Toward the Two Koreas. *The Two Koreas and the United States*; p. 163



## CONCLUSION

As we have seen in this examination of the visions for Korean unification of two Koreas and of the four bigger powers around it, unification will be an extremely complex task. In this context, I strongly believe that the best way to bring sustainable peace and stability to the region in a longer term is to unify the two Koreas in ways that reflect the majority of the Korean people's wishes and interests.

I'd therefore like to illustrate how the South Korean people think about their own country's reunification. We can hardly know what North Korean people think the desirable unification is like, but I think the differences between the visions of ordinary South and North Korean people are not as great as that between positions of the South and North Korean governments. So, I'll try to figure out the Korean people's vision of unification through illustrating how ordinary, reasonable South Koreans think about their unification.

Around 1996, when North Korea's famine was at its peak and South Korea had not yet encountered financial crisis, there were high expectations, especially among right-wing conservatives in South Korea, of a sudden collapse of the North and the absorption of it by the South. However, the North Korean regime has proved much more resilient than expected. Now, most South Koreans don't want the collapse of the North, they realize they are not really ready to bear the tremendous unification costs at one time.

One public poll, conducted shortly after the inter-Korean summit, showed that most South Korean people thought of North Korea as a country either to help (44.0%) or cooperate with (49.8%), only a few regarded it as someone to fight against (4.6%). It also showed that a majority of the South Korean people preferred reunification through negotiations (93.0%) to absorption by the South (4.9%) or communist takeover by the North (1.0%). Regarding the

desired system of a unified Korea, they preferred a compromise system of the South and the North (53.6%) to one state with two systems (24.1%), the South Korean system (17.8%) or the North Korean system (1.4%).<sup>22</sup>

There is a group of progressive intellectuals in the South who do research and speak about unification issues in a comprehensive way.<sup>23</sup> What they think the most important thing is that the interests and wishes of a majority of both the South and the North should be reflected as much as possible in every step of the unification process, so that the living conditions for a majority of people will be better in a unified Korea than they are now.

These intellectuals argue that the unification talks between North and South should be free of outside interference, that both side's positions must be respected, and that each government's unification policy should be grounded in what the majority of people want. This is why they don't think the German model of unification is desirable for Korea: most former East Germans might have become better consumers, but they also feel they have become second-class citizens in a unified Germany.

Given the still low level of Korean democracy, the present inability of South Korea's economic capacity to revive the North Korean economy and the character of crony capitalism, a rushed or unprepared unification might bring about tremendous turmoil and misery, especially for the unprivileged poor people on both sides.

I share the opinion that various types of reforms, including further political democratization, enhancement of human rights, environmental protection, expulsion of corruption, abolishment of gender discrimination and reduction of the gap between rich and poor,

---

<sup>22</sup> The poll was conducted by the Joong-ang Daily Newspaper in August 2000. Quoted from Lee, Sook-jong. Rapid Change of South-North Korean Relations and Change of South Koreans' Opinion toward North Korea and Security. *Situation and Policy, December 2000*. Seoul.

<sup>23</sup> The representative figure among those intellectuals is Professor Paik, Nak-chung of Seoul national University, who

are critically important not only to make a better society in the South, but also to prepare for a better unification.

To realize this Korean people's dream, it is most important that both Korean governments agree to overcome differences between them and reflect the people's interest as much as possible. On the other hand, the biggest exterior factor to be resolved in the process of two Koreas reconciliation is the trilateral relations between the two Koreas and the US and the presence of the United States military in the peninsula.

Regarding this last issue, it's desirable that the gap between the two Koreas' positions has become narrower by North Korea's new approach, that it might agree with the US troop presence in the Korean peninsula, should it act as a neutral power balancer in the region.

To be a real power balancer and an honest broker on the Korean peninsula, the United States should: a) stop demonizing poor, powerless North Korea; b) help it become a member of the international community; c) conclude a peace treaty and normalize relations with North Korea; d) revise the ROK-US Mutual Defense Agreement on equal terms including the returning of the command of ROK forces to South Korea; and e) restructure US forces in Korea in the direction of minimizing ground forces.

## REFERENCES

Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations. Report by William J. Perry, Special Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State: 1999.

Kremenak, Ben. *Korea's Road to Unification: Potholes, Detours, and Dead Ends*. Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland at College park: 1997

Bandow, Doug. *Tripwire, Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World*. CATO institute: Washington, D.C.: 1996.

*Two Koreas in Transition, Implications for U.S. Policy*. Edited by Kim, Ilpyong. Paragon House Publishers: Rockville, MD: 1998.

*The Two Koreas and the United States, Issues of Peace, Security, and Economic Cooperation*. Edited by Dong, Wonmo. An East Gate Book, Armonk, New York: 2000.

Kim, Bo-young. Confederation and Federation-Unification Policies of South and North Korea (in Korean language). *Korean History Webzine 1*. <http://www.koreanhistory.org/webzine/01/01-07.html>. Institute of Korean History, Seoul: 2000.

Koh, Yu-hwan. Unification Policies and Outlook for Unity. *Korea Focus, November-December 2000*. Korea Foundation, Seoul: 2000.

Kim, Sung-han. South Korea-U.S. Relations: Concerns and Prospects. *Korea Focus, November-December 2000*. Korea Foundation, Seoul: 2000.

Lee, Sook-jong. Rapid Change of South-North Korean Relations and Change of South Koreans' Opinion toward North Korea and Security (in Korean language). *Situation and policy, December 2000*. Sejong Institute, Seoul: 2000.