

The North Korea Instability Project

Review of Previous ROK Government Policies for Reunification and Future Policy Options in View of German Reunification

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December 2016

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Review of Previous ROK Government Policies for Reunification and Future Policy Options in View of German Reunification

I. Introduction

Germany was peacefully unified in October 1990, 45 years after its division. The process for reunification started with a mass exodus of East Germans to West Germany as well as a civil revolution called Monday demonstrations¹ in major cities of East Germany, including Leipzig and Dresden. Despite many differences between Korea and Germany, it would be meaningful to draw lessons from the German case for the following reasons. First, it was a peaceful reunification without any bloodshed. Second, the reunification process was democratic and legally pursuant to the West German constitution, the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). Third, the dictatorial communist regime with a planned socialist economy in East Germany, the same Soviet model as North Korea's, collapsed. The East German parliament, born through the free general election of March 1990 decided that the five East German states would enter the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) with a full-fledged democracy and a market economy. Fourth, 25 years after reunification, the unified Germany is much better off, playing a leading role in Europe in economic, security and humanitarian areas.

I will first examine what lessons can be drawn from the German case, and then review reunification policies of the past governments in South Korea. In conclusion, I will make policy suggestions for the peaceful reunification of Korea.

II. Lessons of German Reunification

1. Coherent Policy of “Change through Contacts”

Former West German leader Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* (normalization of relations) toward East Germany contained two basic premises. First, as Egon Bahr, Brandt's spokesman, noted, “conditions for reunification can be created only with the Soviet Union, not against it.”² Second, isolating or containing East Germany would not bring collapse of the East German regime, but rather increase the sufferings of the people there, deepening the chasm of division. Therefore,

1 From the early 1980s, a prayer meeting was held every Monday at the Nicholai church in Leipzig. In October 1989, massive demonstrations took place on Mondays in Leipzig, Dresden and other East German cities.

2 Egon Bahr, “Wandel durch Annaeherung,” speech at Tutzing Christian Academy, July 15, 1963, <http://web.ev-akademie-tutzing.de/cms/index.php?id=53> (April 5, 2015).

Timothy Carton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), 65.

it was felt that West Germany should press East Germany to allow for the maximum amount of contacts between the German populations.³

The West German government stressed that the German question remained unresolved, but it was not able to pursue reunification publicly, since the four victorious powers in the Second World War (the United States, USSR, Great Britain and France) reserved the responsibility and rights over Berlin and all of Germany, including the question of German reunification. Therefore, in its policy for East Germany, West German governments, both conservative and liberal, aimed at improving living conditions of the East German people. Based on the Basic Treaty of 1972, West Germany continued to engage with East Germany through exchanges and cooperation. Exchanges of people and materials, and cooperation in various areas between the two Germanys resulted in growing dependence of the East on the West and increasing leverage of the West against the East. East Germany's easing travel restrictions and improving human rights conditions in return for a massive loan in 1983-84 amounting to DM1.95 billion from West German banks opened the gate wide for East Germans to visit West Germany.

It was meaningful that in 1982, a new conservative governing coalition of the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) parties and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) under the leadership of Helmut Kohl inherited the so-called *Ostpolitik* from the liberal Social Democratic Party (SPD) government. It was partly due to the special nature of the West German political system, which seeks coordination and consensus rather than confrontation and division by forming coalitions. Chancellor Kohl was required to go along with the *Ostpolitik*, which his coalition partner, the FDP led by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had developed with the SPD in the 1970s. It had more to do with the need for the CDU/CSU union to accommodate a policy that had already been approved by the vast majority of the West German population.⁴ The West German people's support for the *Ostpolitik* was growing since the détente policy toward East Germany was threatened by surrounding international tensions over the deployment of intermediate nuclear forces (INF) in Europe. They did not want to see any chance of war grow in their German homeland.

2. Strong Alliance With the West

Throughout the period, West Germany strengthened its alliance with the Western bloc led by the United States. Its agreement to and implementation of the NATO Double-track Decision (*Doppelbeschluss*) of December 1979 was a good example. The NATO members decided to pursue two track policies: they would continue negotiations with the Soviet Union for banning nuclear armed intermediate missiles from Europe, but should those negotiations fail, the United States would deploy its Pershing II and cruise missiles in West Europe. Due to its internal split over the decision as well as economic crisis, West Germany's ruling SPD had to break its coalition with the FDP, which formed a new coalition government with CDU in 1982. New Chancellor Kohl placed his priority on implementing NATO's decision, and US Pershing II missiles began to be deployed in 1983. Kohl recalled that "without the deployment, US-German

3 A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided: From the Wall to Reunification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 99–100.

4 Fifty-five percent of people supported *Ostpolitik* and only 25 percent opposed it. Ibid., 152–55.

relations would have been hurt badly, probably putting NATO alliance at risk.⁵

When the East German regime was about to collapse in 1989 and reunification of Germany seemed possible, West Germany alleviated the concerns of Western allies—particularly former foes like England and France—with its assurances that German reunification would be pursued only within the framework of European integration. Kohl’s commitment to the united Germany’s remaining in NATO helped gain the strong support of US President George H. W. Bush for reunification. Kohl and Bush closely and frequently discussed almost every issue concerning reunification. Without Bush’s support, Kohl could not have succeeded in achieving reunification.

In particular, senior officials from the United States and West Germany consulted very closely to plan strategy for the Two Plus Four talks to settle external issues involving German reunification.⁶ They agreed to speed up the internal reunification process including the first general election in East Germany, while delaying convening of the Two Plus Four meeting until after the election. They also restricted the agenda that could be discussed at the international meeting.

3. Consistent Dialogues Between the Two Germanys

Intra-German dialogues in political, economic, cultural and social aspects helped avoid misunderstanding and encourage mutual cooperation during the critical period of 1989-90. In August 1989, Kohl exchanged letters with Erich Honecker, general secretary of the East German Communist Party. Ministerial-level discussions over the massive exodus of East Germans and a summit meeting in Dresden in December 1989 demonstrated the ability for the two Germanys to exercise self-determination.

When the situations were very destabilizing in East Germany with the mass exodus in the summer of 1989, senior officials from the two Germanys met frequently in Berlin and at the UN in New York to discuss how to handle tens of thousands of East German defectors staying at West German embassies. Kohl also talked over the phone with Egon Krenz, Honecker’s successor as general secretary, on October 26 to discuss matters of concern, including the new travel law of East Germany. The then President Richard von Weizsaecker recalled “Manfred Stolpe who worked after unification as Minister-president of Brandenburg had made an important contribution (to unification) by providing internal information and arranging valuable meetings with religious and political leaders in the East.”⁷

During this upheaval period (*Wende*) in East Germany, the two sides were having minister- or vice minister-level joint committees or experts meetings in 22 areas including transportation, legal cooperation and the economy. Even after the Berlin Wall fell and Hans Modrow became East Germany’s prime minister in December 1989, minister-level talks involving the issues

5 Helmut Kohl, *Ich Wollte Deutschlands Einheit* (Korean translation by Kim Joo Il) (Seoul: Haenaem, 1998): 26–27.

6 The two referred to East and West Germany; the four referred to the World War II victorious powers: the United States, the USSR, Great Britain and France.

7 Richard von Weizsaecker, *Der Weg zur Einheit* (Korean translation by Tak Jae Taek) (Seoul: Changbi Publisher, 2009): 79.

of transportation, posts, health, the environment and the economy continued between the two Germanys.

Kohl visited Dresden where the Monday demonstration was taking place and had summit talks with Modrow on December 19-20, 1989. They agreed to form *Vertragsgemeinschaft*, a confederative structure under two states and two governments. By having inter-German meetings at various levels, the two Germanys could send the message to the international community including the four victorious powers that they were in full control of the situation in East Germany and could pursue reunification in a peaceful and democratic manner through dialogue.

4. Winning the Hearts of the East German People

One of the major reasons that the four victorious powers could not intervene much in the process of reunification despite their responsibility and rights over Germany was that they were compelled to respect the self-determination of the German people. In an interview with the *Washington Post* on September 18, 1989, President Bush stated that reunification should be decided by the German people themselves. The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev also said the Soviet Union had no reason to object to self-determination by the Germans if they wanted reunification.

While stressing the importance of the German people's self-determination for reunification and freedom stipulated in the Basic Law, Kohl was careful to show respect for the self-determination of the East German people as well.⁸ He was patient enough to wait for them to form a new democratic government through free, democratic and secret elections. In the first general election in March 1990, about 48 percent of East German voters supported the union of parties that committed to early reunification with West Germany. On August 23, 1990, the *Volkskammer*, the East German Parliament formed by the election, passed a resolution that the five East German states shall enter the effective area of the Basic Law (*Beitritt zum Geltungsberieich des Grundgesetzes*) of the Federal Republic of Germany on October 3, 1990. Thus, it was the East German people who played a key role in this process of democratic and peaceful reunification.

Why did East German voters decide on reunification with West Germany? During the Monday demonstrations, they called for early monetary union by shouting, "If the DM [deutsche mark] comes, we will stay here, if not, we will go to you (DM)!" They wanted to live as rich as their West German brothers and sisters. Gunda Roestel, former head of the Green Party after reunification who was born in East Germany and grew up there, recalled in a seminar held in Seoul in March 2015 that she "could smell freedom through cosmetics, chocolates and coffees sent by her West German relatives." Unlike the two Koreas, for many years prior to reunification, there were active exchanges and cooperation between the two Germanys. They could send mail and gifts by post, and visits were possible. More than 80 percent of the people in the East watched West German television. Essentially, during the night, Germany had already been united. East Germans came to know about the better and freer life in the West and began to question their destiny under socialism, putting less and less confidence in their own regime. The

⁸ For instance, at his remarks at the dinner for Gorbachev visiting Bonn in June 1989, Kohl stressed the political will of his government to complete German reunification and freedom based on self-determination without outside interference. Helmut Kohl, *Ich Wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, 48.

dictatorial regime could not deliver daily necessities and clean air and transportation to them, while suppressing the population with naked force. When a window of opportunity opened to the East Germans, they decided to “shift their loyalties, expectation and political activities” to the West.⁹

5. Decisive Role of the West German Leadership

Leaders of West Germany—from both the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats—made the right decisions at the right time, all of which contributed to ultimate reunification.

Since West Germany concluded the Moscow treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1970, West German politicians, including Chancellor Brandt and his minister Bahr, kept up good relations with Russian politicians. They believed that improved and stable relations between Bonn and Moscow would facilitate better relations between East and West Germany. West Germany’s economic power contributed to the work of the diplomats and politicians in achieving their goal of good Bonn-Moscow relations.¹⁰ Trust was built between the two countries, and that was helpful to the reunification process.

Kohl recalled in his testimony at the hearing of the Enquete-Kommission that the loan to East Germany was “the most important decision in intra-German relations as well as more difficult decision than any other in his political life.”¹¹ His government offered a state guarantee to West German banks for a loan amounting to DM1.95 billion to the financially troubled East Germany. Kohl hoped his decision would widen chances for more East Germans to visit West Germany, during which they would become personally familiar with the West and no longer be deceived by the SED’s¹² hostile propaganda. After the loan, Erich Honecker eased travel restrictions drastically, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of East German visitors to the West.¹³ Honecker also started forming sisterhood partnerships between cities of the two Germanys from 1986. By the time of reunification, 62 cities had signed sisterhood agreements with West German cities.

Kohl was also proud that by the time of reunification, his Christian Democratic Party had kept rejecting East German requests that West Germany recognize a separate East German citizenship. He believed such a policy contributed to the quick, efficient entry and settlement of hundreds of thousands of East German defectors (*Uebersiedler*), thus paving the way for reunification. “If we had accepted East Germany’s request for recognizing its own citizenship, the defectors would have applied for political asylum as foreigners, even though we and they are the same

9 Ernst Haas defined political integration as “process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the preexisting national states.” James Dougherty and Robert Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Theories of International Cooperation and Integration* (5th ed.) (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1990): 510.

10 Timothy Ash, *In Europe’s Name*, 365.

11 Helmut Kohl, Hearing, November 3~5, 1993, at the Enquete-Kommission “Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland.”

12 SED stands for *die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, ruling communist party of East Germany.

13 The number of East German visitors (including pensioners) to the West increased to two million in 1986, five million in 1987 and 6.75 million in 1988.

Germans.”¹⁴

Kohl took the initiative in promoting reunification first by proposing his ten-point reunification plan on November 28, 1989. His insight into the dynamics in East Germany and his strong will for reunification were driving forces facilitating the reunification process. Earlier in his congratulatory speech for the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 10, Kohl stressed the most important things now are “Germany, reunification, rights and freedom.”¹⁵ He succeeded in winning support for early reunification from East German voters in the March 1990 general election by proposing a monetary union with a one-to-one exchange rate between East and West German currencies.

Without Kohl’s shrewd diplomacy and his coalition partner Genscher, reunification could not have been achieved. They won full support from US President Bush and his secretary of state, James Baker, and worked together to persuade Gorbachev to make a deal for reunification. In addition, Kohl’s personal relationship with Gorbachev was a decisive factor in the Soviet leader’s decision not to object to the unified Germany remaining in NATO. Kohl’s generous provision of economic and financial assistance to the USSR also played a part in winning Gorbachev’s support for German reunification.

III. Review on ROK Government’s Policy for Reunification

ROK governments have shown less consistency toward reunification policy than the West German governments. Let me examine key features of reunification policy pursued by South Korean governments from President Roh Tae Woo to President Lee Myung Bak. Since significant interaction with North Korea began in 1988, I have not included the governments before President Roh’s administration.

1. Roh Tae Woo Administration (1988-93)

In September 1989, President Roh announced the Korean National Commonwealth Formula for reunification on the Korean peninsula.¹⁶ The formula set independence, peace and democracy as basic principles of reunification. These principles were not only based on a national consensus but were borrowed from the North-South Joint Communiqué of July 4, 1972, which called for independence, peace and grand national unity.

The formula proposed the creation of a Korean commonwealth for linking the two Koreas together in an intermediate stage toward reunification. The proposed commonwealth was not meant to be the final form of a unified Korea but rather a transitional framework for promoting inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation. In other words, the “Korean Commonwealth” is not a union of states or a federal state. Its basic character was meant to be similar to that of the European Community or the Nordic Council in which a number of states form a single

14 Helmut Kohl, *Ich Wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, 68.

15 Ibid., 100–01.

16 “Commonwealth” has a different connotation from its use in the British Commonwealth. It refers to the special relationship between the two separate systems of North and South Korea in the interim stage, pending full-fledged reunification. National Unification Board, *Korea’s Unification Policy* (Seoul: NUB, 1993): 9.

economic, social and cultural community, with the ultimate goal of political integration.

The commonwealth would have a Council of Presidents, or the chief of executives from the two Koreas, as its highest decision-making organ. There would be a Council of Ministers composed of delegates from both governments and a Council of Representatives composed of members of the legislatures in the two Koreas.

The Korean National Commonwealth Unification Formula was created to meet such fundamental changes in the world order as the end of the Cold War and the moves toward reform and openness in the communist bloc countries. The formula's principle is that North and South Korea recognize coexistence of the two different systems and promote exchanges and cooperation to build a national community.¹⁷ The Roh administration pursued a new North Korea policy based not on adversarial confrontation but on mutual cooperation and reconciliation. In his Special Declaration on July 7, 1988, Roh announced radical steps to promote exchanges and cooperation with North Korea for national reunification; cross-border visits and exchanges by citizens with the government approval, recognition of inter-Korean trade as domestic, that is, internal trade and not between separate states, and equal development of the national economy, meaning no objection to trade between North Korea and the ROK's allies. The declaration marked an epochal change in South Korea's policy for reunification.

The Korean commonwealth formula also reflected domestic changes resulting from democratization in the South, including stronger civilian voices regarding reunification. To develop a new reunification formula, the Roh government liberalized discussion on reunification and conducted 250 seminars and round-table discussions with the academic, media, religious, cultural and business communities. Some of these sessions were held abroad with the participation of the Korean communities in the United States, Japan, Canada and Europe. The government also reflected the views of the major political parties and other participants in the hearings hosted by the ad hoc Committee on Unification in the National Assembly. Thus, the formula won bi-partisan support, particularly from the heads of the three opposition parties, two of whom subsequently became South Korean presidents. President Roh told his Unification Minister, Lee Hongkoo, that the new unification formula should be agreed to by the opposition parties, which at the time had more than a majority of seats (174 out of 299).¹⁸

The Roh government shaped a new reconciliatory unification policy, as South Korea had gained solid self-confidence regarding its capability and its status in the world community. It achieved democratization and grew economically into one of the 10 largest trading nations in the world. It also successfully hosted the Seoul Summer Olympics in 1988.

The Roh administration laid legal and institutional foundation for unification and exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas. It stipulated a new paragraph regarding 'peaceful unification' in the constitution, reaffirming the government's willingness to address the issue of national unification positively and realistically. Article 4 of the constitution says, "the Republic of Korea shall seek unification and shall formulate and carry out a policy of peaceful unification

17 Hongkoo Lee, *Crisis in a Transitional Era: Future of Unified Korea* (in Korean) (Seoul: Jisiksanup-Sa, 2010): 59.

18 Hongkoo Lee, in meeting with the author, September 2015.

based on the principles of freedom and democracy.” The government also legislated an “Act on North-South Exchanges and Cooperation” in August 1990 to encourage various exchanges and cooperation. Albeit with state permission, the Roh administration legalized inter-Korean exchanges of people and materials and other forms of cooperation, which had previously been banned by the ‘National Security Law.’ At the same time, the government enacted an “Act on Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund” to render financial support for inter-Korean cooperation and humanitarian projects. Such legislative measures encouraged civic participation in the process of moving toward reunification.

The dramatic changes in South Korea’s perception of North Korea and reunification policy contributed to improving inter-Korean relations. At the same time, taking advantage of the new policy, liberal persons (including religious leaders and a student) visited North Korea “illegally,” which sparked conflicting reactions from domestic political and social groups.¹⁹

The most remarkable progress in inter-Korean relations was the historic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation (hereinafter called the Basic Agreement) signed at the conclusion of the inter-Korean prime ministers’ meeting of December 10-13, 1991. This agreement was highly significant in several aspects: it was a basic framework for improved relations and peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas, equivalent to the German *Grundvertrag* (Basic Treaty) of 1972; it defined the character of the two Koreas not as foreign countries but as a special kind of nation formed in the process of moving toward reunification; it laid a groundwork for reconciliation and cooperation by agreeing that North and South Korea shall recognize and respect each other’s system, not interfere in internal affairs, and cease actions aimed at toppling the other’s system; it agreed on mutual nonaggression and military confidence building measures and disarmament; and it promised to carry out exchanges and cooperation in various fields, including reunion of separated families. In effect, the Basic Agreement reflected a gradual functional approach to reaching the national commonwealth.

However, such a dramatic agreement did not contribute much to normalizing relations between the two Koreas. First of all, North Korea’s nuclear weapons program emerged as the biggest obstacle for improving inter-Korean relations. The Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula signed by the two Koreas at the end of 1991 paved the way for negotiating denuclearization in North Korea. But the North-South Joint Committee for Nuclear Control failed to reach agreement on modalities regarding mutual inspection and verification by the end of 1993. In addition, South and North Korea pursued different objectives in implementing the Basic Agreement. South Korea sought to institutionalize exchanges and cooperation with North Korea, while the North wanted such an agreement with the South as a means of overcoming its crisis caused by the collapse of its communist allies. North Korea hoped that improved relations with the South would pave the way for improving its relations with the United States and Japan.

With its proposal of the Korean National Commonwealth Formula for Unification, the Roh administration laid the groundwork for reunification. Succeeding administrations inherited the

19 South Korean nationals’ visit to North Korea without prior approval from or consultation with the government was illegal. In 1989 several persons including Reverend Moon visited North Korea without such permission and were put on trial on charges of violating the National Security Act.

formula, which is still valid as the South Korean government's official formula for reunification. The Roh government opened an era of reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea by signing the historic the Basic Agreement and the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization. North and South Korea held eight rounds of prime ministers' talks alternately in Seoul and Pyongyang. But at the eighth round, held in Pyongyang in September 1992, in a period of a conservative backlash in the South and increasing international pressure on the North over the nuclear issue, the two sides failed to agree on humanitarian projects including an exchange visits by separate families, establishment of a reunion center at Panmunjom, and reciprocal repatriation of South Korean seamen and a North Korean patriot long held in a South Korean prison. After the plan for the annual ROK-US joint military exercise Team Spirit was announced, North Korea stated at the end of January 1993 that it would shut down all channels of meetings with the South.

Why did North Korea come to improve relations with its sworn enemy, South Korea? Due to German reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its socialist allies in East Europe, North Korea was faced with a crisis of regime survival. According to Kim Jong U, North Korea's deputy chairman of the Committee for External Cooperation, North Korea lost almost 70 percent of its external markets with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist bloc countries.²⁰ In his New Year address in 1991, Kim Il Sung turned defensive in his reunification policy. Fearing of reunification through absorption, he proposed a "confederation under two governments and two systems," stressing that reunification should not be achieved in the way that "one party eats the other, or one party is eaten by the other." In his previous proposal in 1980 for a Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo, he did not mention "two governments and two systems," presumably because he believed his socialist system would win over the South Korean system.

His fear of survival prompted him to improve relations with South Korea, as if he had followed Lenin's theory of a breathing spell in times of crisis or weakness. Kim Il Sung sought to prevent South Korea from containing or isolating North Korea, while obtaining assurance of coexistence and nonaggression from the South. He heartily welcomed the North Korean delegation to the prime ministers' talks by sending a helicopter to bring them to Pyongyang after they signed the Basic Agreement in December 1991. He must have been relieved of his fear of absorption by the South, as the North and South agreed "to recognize and respect each other's system (Article 1), not to interfere in each other's internal affairs (Article 2), and not to attempt any actions or sabotage or overthrow against each other (Article 4)."

In addition, South Korea's normalizing relations with North Korea's allied countries was "a blow to North Korea's prestige"²¹ and meant its defeat in competition with the South. The Roh administration succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with the two closest allies of North Korea, the Soviet Union in 1990 and China in 1992, and thus created a favorable external environment for its reunification policy. The normalization was a culmination of Roh's Northern Politik, a strategy to reach Pyongyang via Moscow and Beijing.

2. Kim Young Sam Administration (1993-98)

20 Jong U Kim, "North Korea's External Economic Policy," presented at a conference hosted by the Gaston Sigur Center for East Asian Studies, George Washington University in April 1996.

21 Hongkoo Lee, "Unification through a Korean Commonwealth," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 1989), 839.

The Kim Young Sam administration inherited the Roh government's reunification formula, developing it into a three-phased approach. The first phase consisted of reconciliation and cooperation, the second phase of the Korean commonwealth, and the final phase of a Unified Korea of One Nation, One State. During the first phase, North and South Korea were to overcome their hostility and mutual distrust and develop relations of reconciliation and cooperation through confidence-building measures. The Kim government set the phase of reconciliation and cooperation as the first stage for the sake of ensuring implementation of the Basic Agreement and the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization, which took effect in February 1992 under the Roh government. Although the Basic Agreement was concluded and a number of inter-Korean talks on the governmental level were held during the Roh administration, inter-Korean relations had not reached a satisfactory level of reconciliation and cooperation, which meant things were still stuck in the first phase. The planned second phase of forming a Korean commonwealth would be similar to a confederative structure in which the two Koreas reached a wide range of agreements to augment a common sphere of living, and developed communities of economic, social and cultural activities.

The Kim government set "democratic national consensus, coexistence and co-prosperity, and national well-being" as the three guiding principles in implementing the three-phased approach to unification formula.

The Kim government took the initiative in promoting inter-Korean reconciliation by deciding on March 11, 1993, to repatriate to North Korea Ri In Mo, who had spent 40 years in a South Korean jail as political prisoner, unwilling to renounce his allegiance to the North. Pyongyang had persistently asked the South for the return of the old communist prisoner. In his inaugural address, President Kim stated "any allied country cannot be better than the same nation," hinting that he would move forward with the North Koreans. Regrettably, however, on March 12, 1993—in a move apparently planned for many months—North Korea announced withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, or NPT. It had refused to accept a call by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for special inspection of two undeclared facilities. Against this backdrop, President Kim's attitude toward the North Koreans turned sour, stating at a news conference marking 100 days into his presidency in June 1993 that he "cannot shake hands with those who have nuclear weapons." North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT dealt a fatal blow to Kim's intention to promote reconciliation and cooperation.

Working-level contacts for an exchange of special envoys between North and South Korea to discuss nuclear issue were held eight times from October 1993 to March 1994, but they failed to reach an agreement. The vice minister-level contacts ended with a North Korean threat to "turn Seoul into sea of fire." Nonetheless, beginning in June 1993, the United States and North Korea held talks to resolve the nuclear issue, finally signing the historic Agreed Framework in Geneva in October 1994.

The North Korean nuclear issue was a source of a long-running dispute between Washington and Seoul. The liberal US administration under President Bill Clinton pursued a comprehensive package deal with North Korea, including normalization of relations. President Kim opposed a direct deal between Washington and Pyongyang, particularly while inter-Korean relations remained stalemated. The United States felt it was crucial to negotiate with the North Koreans

since it was in the US interest to prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, which would undercut the NPT regime. Concern with the NPT was especially compelling since a renewal conference was scheduled for April 1995 to review and extend the NPT.²² As a result, South Korea felt marginalized in the process of the nuclear deal between Washington and Pyongyang, though US delegates briefed South Korean diplomats over the outcome of each day's talks with the North Koreans. One of the reasons that President Kim did not appreciate the Agreed Framework was his wishful thinking about a possible collapse of the North Korean regime after its founder Kim Il Sung died of a heart attack in July 1994. In his calculation, "any American deal would help prop up a Pyongyang regime on the verge of collapsing, thus postponing reunification."²³

It is noteworthy that the Kim Young Sam government in South Korea started preparing for possible reunification, largely influenced by German reunification and Kim Il Sung's death. From 1995 the Ministry of Unification and related ministries defined specific scenarios for reunification, ranging from gradual integration to radical German-type reunification. For this purpose, the ministry trained officials from a dozen ministries and state-run think tanks and sent them overseas for case studies for the transformation and integration process. In addition, all ministries designated a division that assumed responsibility for preparing for reunification, although most of the ministries were not very active in fulfilling that mission.

The defection to Seoul in February 1997 of Hwang Jang Yop, a Workers' Party of Korea secretary and architect of North Korea's Juche ideology (self-reliance), fed the Kim government's hopes for collapse of the Pyongyang regime. Hwang was the highest senior official to come over to the South. The Kim administration legislated an Act on Protection and Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors in mid-July 1997 as the number of defectors was rising largely due to economic difficulties, including serious famine, in North Korea.

Before Kim Il Sung's death, the South Korean government was excited over the prospect of progress made toward reunification at the upcoming inter-Korean summit meeting, the first of its kind since the division of the Korean peninsula. The summit was arranged by former US president Jimmy Carter during his meetings with Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang in mid-June 1994. The two Koreas agreed to hold summit talks between Kim Young Sam and Kim Il Sung on July 25-27, 1994. Former South Korean prime minister Lee Hongkoo, head of the South Korean delegation to the preparatory talks for the summit meeting, expressed his regret that "Kim Il Sung's death led to cancellation of the summit, which could have marked a significant milestone in the history of inter-Korean relations."²⁴ Lee's analysis was that Kim Il Sung had intended to dramatically improve relations with the South and radically change the North Korean system, while trying to gain its economic assistance and normalize relations with the United States in return for denuclearizing the North. Negotiations over the terms of the summit meeting were very quickly concluded, and Kim Il Sung was supposedly making final preparations to entertain

22 According to the UNODA, on May 11, 1995, the treaty was extended indefinitely. A total of 190 parties have joined the NPT, including the five nuclear weapons states. More countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement, a testament to the treaty's significance. UNODA, www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPT (September 22, 2015).

23 Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas; A Contemporary History* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997): 358.

24 Hongkoo Lee, "South-North Summit Meeting; Regret and Wish," *JoongAng Daily*, July 14, 2014.

Kim Young Sam when he died. In other words, in June 1994 things had lurched back to a better place for North-South relations, and then regressed again with Kim Il Sung's death.

After his death, inter-Korean relations went into a deep freeze due to North Korea's strong resentment that the South Korean government refused to express condolences or allow South Koreans to pay tribute to Kim Il Sung. The issue of paying tribute ignited controversy and division among South Korean political circles and public opinion. The conservative government succumbed to the temptation to assume that Kim Il Sung's death and the North's economic collapse—exacerbated by a disastrous famine—had created a real opportunity for reunification. Seoul either did not know or underestimated the fact that Kim Jong Il had been appointed heir apparent in the early 1970s and had been deeply involved in running the affairs of state for almost two decades.

President Kim's policy for North Korea and reunification was inconsistent and sometimes ambiguous. Kim was strongly willing to not isolate North Korea in the beginning, and it was possible that South Korea could have helped North Korea improve its relations with the United States and Japan.²⁵ Although North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT swept away such desire from President Kim, he nevertheless did not favor military action, a conviction he demonstrated when he opposed US preparations in early June for a surgical strike on North Korea's nuclear facilities.

Kim was reluctant to provide food assistance for the famine-stricken North Korea but in June 1995 suddenly decided to deliver 150,000 tons of rice without sufficient preparation. He took a very nationalistic stance by insisting that South Korean food deliveries precede those from Japan. Yet when the international community began delivering food assistance to the North hit by floods in 1995 and drought in 1996, Kim turned very stingy. In early 1996, his government decided to donate only \$3 million to the United Nations World Food Program appeal for humanitarian aid to North Korea. Washington asked Seoul to give more, and it agreed to give additional food assistance worth \$10 million through WFP in 1997.

On April 16, 1996, as a result of Seoul's concerns about appearing to be sidelined due to the US-DPRK Agreed Framework, and the possibility of additional US-DPRK bilateral discussions over the future of the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement, US President Clinton and President Kim jointly proposed that the four parties (South Korea, North Korea, the United States and China) hold talks to discuss a peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula. The South Korean government considered the timing for this proposal favorable for the ruling party in the coming parliamentary election.²⁶ It wanted to demonstrate to voters that US-ROK relations had improved after a rough patch.

3. Kim Dae Jung Administration (1998-2003)

President Kim Dae Jung aimed at achieving de facto reunification by political and military confidence-building, establishment of a peace system, bona fide inter-Korean economic, social and other cooperation and exchanges, and external inter-Korean cooperation for common

25 Wan-Sang Han, *The Korean Peninsula Is Sick: Tragedy of Hostile Co-existence* (Seoul: Hanul, 2013): 81–82.

26 Se Hyun Jung, *Unification Talk* (in Korean) (Seoul: Seohaemunjip, 2013): 300–05.

national interests. His reunification policy, announced on his inauguration day, was based on three principles: no tolerance of military provocation, no pursuit of reunification through absorption, and promotion of reconciliation and cooperation.

A liberal politician and expert on the reunification issue, President Kim Dae Jung (commonly referred to as “DJ”) made considerable progress in inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation. Above all, he pushed for the first-ever inter-Korean summit meeting, which produced the Joint Declaration of June 15, 2000. In it, President Kim agreed with Kim Jong Il on the direction of reunification, cooperation and exchanges in economic, civic, cultural, sports, health, environmental and all other fields, and governmental dialogue to implement their agreements. In particular, the two leaders agreed to promote reunification based on their understanding that “there is a common element in the South’s concept of a confederation and the North’s formula for a loose form of federation.”

There have been conflicting interpretations regarding this agreement on a reunification approach. Critics, including the conservative party, argued that President Kim was persuaded by Kim Jong Il to accommodate the North Korean reunification formula of a Confederal Republic of Koryo, which they claimed aimed at unifying Korea by communizing the South. Liberal circles, however, hailed the agreement on the common direction for reunification. Lim Dong Won, the architect of the Joint Declaration as chief negotiator for the summit talks, stated the two leaders agreed to pursue reunification gradually on a long-term basis in accordance with the South Korean reunification formula of a Korean national commonwealth. He pointed out although the North Korean reunification formula of a Confederal Republic of Koryo seeks “first unification, and later exchanges and cooperation.” Kim Dae Jung persuaded Kim Jong Il to pursue a gradual reunification through peaceful coexistence, and exchanges and cooperation with the South.²⁷

The DJ administration quickly put the Joint Declaration into action by promoting inter-Korean ministerial talks and various forms of exchanges and cooperation, including family reunions between North and South Koreans long separated after the Korean War. A key element stabilizing the situation and promoting interactions was ministerial-level talks and other working-level meetings between responsible authorities. During DJ’s presidency, ministerial talks were held nine times, with the first taking place in Seoul in July 2000, soon after the summit. Ministerial talks were frequently followed up by meeting of the Committee for Promoting Economic Cooperation for agreement on the logistical details for shipping South Korean rice and fertilizer to the North.

As a result of the summit, the two Koreas held their first defense ministers’ meeting and other military talks to discuss nonaggression and tension-reduction measures, as well as necessary steps to support joint economic projects, including the Kaesong Industrial Park, Mount Geumgang tours and the linking of North-South railways. These three projects contributed to lessening tensions on the Korean peninsula and reawakening people’s enthusiasm for reunification. In significant symbolic gestures, North Korea moved its military units out of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Jangjin Port at the foot of Mount Geumgang, both strategically very important areas for North Korea.

27 Dong-Won Kim, “20 years of North-South Korean relations and North Korean Nuclear Issue,” lecture at a National Assembly forum, July 2008.

In addition to delivery of rice and fertilizer for the North Korean people, the DJ government liberalized provisions for humanitarian assistance by South Korean nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and encouraged such nongovernmental aid by providing matching subsidies through government funds. Both government and civilian assistances were criticized by conservative circles for propping up the North Korean regime, which they believed was on the verge of collapsing. In fact, however, the government delivery of rice and fertilizer was linked with the humanitarian project of reuniting separated families, though such linkage was not publicly acknowledged. Liberal circles claimed such assistance was essential as a peace dividend.

Improved relations with and humanitarian assistance from the South created favorable conditions for the North Korean regime to start economic reform at home and to improve relations with the United States. In mid-2002, Kim Jong Il introduced market elements into the North's planned economy by giving autonomy to managers of enterprises and allowing market activities. He authorized more power to his cabinet led by the prime minister in running the state economy at the expense of the Party and military. Reconciliation and cooperation with the South made Kim Jong Il less afraid of the "capitalist yellow winds" from the South, a frequent target of ideologically focused propaganda.

President Kim's sunshine policy of engaging North Korea on a large scale would have been impossible without support from the US government and improved relations between Washington and Pyongyang. After suspicion arose over North Korea's possible underground nuclear facilities at Kumchang-ri in August 1998, the US administration asked former defense secretary William Perry to conduct a thorough review of its North Korea policy. During this so-called Perry Process, the United States and South Korea consulted very closely and agreed on a road map to engage North Korea with a comprehensive approach. In accordance with a final report Perry issued and after consultation with South Korea, US President Clinton moved forward in normalizing relations with North Korea by exchanging visits of special envoys in the latter half of 2000. In the Joint Communiqué of October 12, 2000, the two sides agreed "to take steps to fundamentally improve their bilateral relations in the interests of enhancing peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region," and particularly "agreed on the desirability of greater transparency in carrying out their respective obligations under the Agreed Framework." Clinton had wished to visit Pyongyang but gave it up in December 2000 after the Republican nominee, George W. Bush, won the presidential election.

After President Bush took office in January 2001, President Kim had to struggle with the United States over how to deal with North Korea. Bush took a hard-line posture toward North Korea based on the neoconservative strategy of seeking regime change in North Korea.²⁸ Two incidents particularly stood as obstacles to Kim Dae Jung's path toward a de facto reunification process. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, profoundly shook the United States. In his State of the Union address in January 2002, Bush stated that one of his administration's primary goals was "to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction," and he labeled Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil." It was revealed in October 2002 by the US government that North Korea

28 Gary Schmitt and William Kristol stated "the lasting solution to the threat they (North Korea & Iraq) pose is a change of regimes," "Lessons of a Nuclear North Korea," *Weekly Standard* 8, no. 7 (October 28, 2002).

had secretly developed a nuclear weapons program based on highly enriched uranium in what the administration portrayed as a violation of the Agreed Framework. Conservatives in the administration used this as the excuse they had been waiting for to get out of the 1994 Agreed Framework with Pyongyang, setting in place a chain of events that culminated in the North Koreans withdrawing from the NPT one month before the end of Kim Dae Jung's presidency.

4. Roh Moo Hyun Administration (2003-08)

President Roh Moo Hyun inherited his predecessor's sunshine policy and developed inter-Korean relations closer to the phase of a Korean commonwealth. The October 4, 2007, Joint Declaration agreed at the end of summit talks between Roh and Kim Jong Il, and its implementation agreement concluded at inter-Korean prime ministers' talks in November 2007, laid out comprehensive measures that, if executed well, were meant to lead the two Koreas to the stage of a Korean commonwealth.²⁹

The Roh administration termed its engagement policy the Policy for Peace and Prosperity. The goals were promotion of peace on the Korean peninsula, pursuit of mutual prosperity for North and South Korea, and contribution to prosperity in Northeast Asia. Three action plans were set to accomplish these goals: peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and promotion of peace; expansion of inter-Korean cooperation and laying the foundation for a durable peace regime; and conclusion of an inter-Korean peace agreement and creation of a durable peace regime.

As it committed itself, the Roh government succeeded in pushing for a breakthrough for a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue by the agreement on the Joint Statement at the Six Party Talks on September 19, 2005. In the statement, North and South Korea, the United States, Japan, Russia and China agreed to the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner and the promotion of economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment. North Korea and the United States undertook to take steps to normalize their relations. Until the last minutes of the agreement, Washington and Pyongyang had not narrowed their differences over two issues; North Korea's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and provision of light water reactor to North Korea, and a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula. Finally, an agreement was made over these issues. The provision of the light water reactor was deferred to be discussed at an appropriate time, while the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime at an appropriate separate forum.

The September 19, 2005, statement was a great accomplishment, as North Korea committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards. Former minister of unification Lee Jong Seok described the statement as a "historic agreement to drastically change [the] security map on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia." He added that "if the statement had been implemented well, we could now see a permanent peace regime and a Northeast Asian multilateral security cooperation system in place."³⁰

29 . Dong Won Lim, in meeting with the author, July 2008.

30 Jong Seok Lee, *Peace on the Sword* (Goyang: Gaemagowon, 2014): 339.

However, an unexpected stumbling block rolled in, dashing hopes for an end to the North Korea nuclear issue by the implementation of the Joint Statement. On September 15, the US Treasury Department designated the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) in Macau as a financial institution of primary money-laundering concern. Subsequently, BDA froze North Korea's 50 bank accounts with deposits totaling \$24 million. North Korea reacted vehemently to the move, seizing the opening presented by BDA to advance its nuclear weapons program to a new and more dangerous phase.³¹ On October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, and several days later, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1718 to impose strong diplomatic and economic sanctions on North Korea.

North Korea's nuclear test and the departure of hard-liner senior US officials including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld brought changes of US policy toward North Korea. Ironically the nuclear test "gave Washington the opportunity to significantly alter the US approach to North Korea."³² US officials resumed direct contacts with North Korean counterparts in Beijing three weeks after the test and in Berlin in January 2007. Implementation agreements were made at the Six Party Talks in February, and early October 2007 when the second inter-Korean summit meeting was taking place in Pyongyang. The North Koreans agreed to disable all their nuclear programs by year's end and make a declaration of their past nuclear activities. In return, the United States agreed to remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and lift other sanctions, including the Trading with the Enemy Act against North Korea.

One of the greatest achievements of the Roh Moo Hyun government on its path toward reunification was active economic cooperation with North Korea on three major fronts; Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), the Mount Geumgang Tour project and linking cross-border roads and railways. These three cooperative projects contributed to reducing tensions and promoting peace on the Korean peninsula.

An administrative agency called Kaesong Industrial District Management Committee was established in October 2004 to manage registration of firms, labor supply and infrastructure including electricity and water. The first product came out of the KIC in December 2004. By the end of Roh's term, 65 companies were in operation with about 23,000 North Korean workers in the KIC. Mount Geumgang tours by land began in September 2003, and the total number of tourist to this beauty spot reached 1.7 million by the end of 2007. The construction to link roads across the DMZ in the west and the east of the Korean peninsula was completed in November 2004, and the railway linking on both sides was completed in December 2005. Joint ceremonies by the two Koreas to commemorate the first test run of trains on the cross-border railways took place in May 2007, and freight trains started operation across the border in December 2007.

The North's October 2006 nuclear test was seized on by conservative circles in South Korea as proof that the Roh government's engagement policy toward North Korea had failed. At National Assembly sessions, the opposition party strongly attributed the nuclear test to the failed engagement policy of the Roh government and demanded that it scrap the engagement policy, which the opposition had never favored to begin with. However, Unification Minister Lee Jong

31 Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Revised and Updated, 3rd ed.) (New York: Basic Books, 2014): 411.

32 Ibid., 417.

Seok made it clear that “though there could be some modification of policy reflecting the post-nuclear test situation, no change will be made in the basic tenets of the engagement policy.”³³

The Roh government’s endeavor to develop inter-Korean relations into the phase of national commonwealth, or a confederative structure nearly bore fruit during the second inter-Korean summit and ensuing implementing meetings between the two sides’ prime ministers. Yet the timing was bad. The summit meeting came too late in its term for the Roh administration to implement any agreement. However, the October 4 declaration was very comprehensive and specific, ranging from creation of a special peace and cooperation zone in the West Sea and a Joint Committee for Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation to promotion of humanitarian cooperation, including expanding reunion of separated family members.

A noteworthy institutional accomplishment of the Roh government was that the South Korean National Assembly passed the Law on Development of South-North Relations in December 2005, a few months after the Six Party Joint Statement was released. The law specified basic principles for developing inter-Korean relations, modalities for appointing delegations to inter-Korean dialogues and legislative procedures for inter-Korean agreements. By obliging the government to report to the National Assembly its plan to develop inter-Korean relations, the law laid a foundation for the government to pursue a long-term and bipartisan policy on North Korea and reunification. Regrettably, however, the Committee of Foreign Affairs and Unification of the National Assembly dominated by the conservative opposition party refused to discuss the government plans to develop inter-Korean relations in November 2007 after the October North-South summit had opened the door to progress.

During the Roh administration, there was a big gap between the United States and South Korea over dealing with North Korea. Relations between the two traditional allies became very difficult and uncomfortable. Roh wanted to engage the North Koreans but knew that Washington would be unhappy unless there was first progress on the nuclear issue. That’s why he was so unhappy when the North announced in February 2005 that it was a nuclear state, and why success at the Six Party Talks in September 2005 was such a relief, only to be dashed a day or two later when the United States announced the BDA measures.

Over the issue of frozen North Korean assets connected with the BDA affair, Roh met Bush in mid-November 2005 at the APEC meeting and asked him to lift sanctions connected to BDA, which had dealt a serious blow to the Six Party Talks. Roh pointedly even asked the US president whether it was “coincidence that the BDA action and the September joint statement came together,” according to an account by Jong Seok Lee.³⁴ Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin characterized it as “one of the worst meetings the two ever had.”³⁵

According to the former Unification Minister Lee, the BDA action by the United States prevented two “amazing achievements of the Roh government” for peace on the Korean peninsula—the September 19 Joint Statement and a tentative agreement with Pyongyang to hold the summit

33 Jong Seok Lee, *Peace on the Sword*, 512–13.

34 Jong Seok Lee, *Peace on the Sword*, 346.

35 Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas*, 410.

meeting in the fall of 2005—from bearing fruits.³⁶ BDA short-circuited Roh’s plans to move ahead with the North once progress on the nuclear issue left him freer to do so. Eventually, the United States backed away and transferred the frozen assets back to the North, but by then considerable time and a potentially useful window of opportunity for North-South progress had slipped away. Roh came close to accusing Washington of having wrecked his policy when he said in December 2006 that “if you look at it in a bad light, you may say [the US Treasury and the State departments] were playing a prearranged game.”³⁷

Although Roh expressed his resentment with the United States over the North Korean issues, he was well aware of the importance of the US-ROK alliance and, thus, decided to dispatch noncombat medical and construction units to Iraq and started negotiation for the free trade agreement with the United States. However, his relationship with President Bush was as bad as the one between President Kim Young Sam and President Clinton. Bush asked Roh to “conduct inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation in light of developments on the North Korean nuclear issue,”³⁸ while Kim had asked the Clinton administration to link US-North Korean ties with inter-Korean relations. Regarding the KIC, the US administration pressed the Roh government to slow down the pace of developing the industrial park. But when Unification Minister Chung Dong Young visited Washington in June 2004 and met with Secretary of State Collin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, he persuaded them to render cooperation. Specifically, South Korea needed US approval—stipulated in the US export regulations—for delivering equipment using US technology to the KIC.³⁹ Washington approved such deliveries.

During the Roh administration, there were many joint events with the North Koreans, including regular joint commemorative events held alternately in the North and South to celebrate the June 15 Joint Declaration and Korea’s August 15 National Liberation Day. North Korea dispatched a cheering squad numbering in the hundreds to the 2003 Summer Universiade in Daegu. Exchanges of visits by large groups across the border assured people of both North and South Korea of the homogeneous nature of the two Koreas and possibly of early peaceful reunification.

5. Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008-13)

The first-ever North Korean nuclear test became a central element in President Lee Myung Bak’s North Korea policy. As part of his election campaign platform, he announced his Vision 3000 through Denuclearization and Openness policy.⁴⁰ This plan linked inter-Korean economic cooperation with denuclearization in order, first of all, to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The “vision” rejected his predecessor’s engagement policy of unconditionally funneling massive humanitarian assistance to North Korea.

36 Jong Seok Lee, *Peace on the Sword*, 353.

37 President Roh’s remarks at the Standing Committee meeting of the National Unification Advisory Council, December 22, 2006.

38 Joint statement between the US and the ROK released at the conclusion of a summit meeting at the White House on May 14, 2003.

39 Dong Young Chung and Seung Ho Ji, *Unification in 10 Years* (Seoul: Salimteo, 2013): 90–100.

40 Presidential candidate Lee Myung Bak announced this policy on June 14, 2007, which meant if there was progress in denuclearization of North Korea and its opening to the international community, the Lee administration would assist North Korea in achieving its economic growth with \$3,000 of per capita income.

President Lee proclaimed “the policy of mutual benefits and common prosperity” at his address on July 11, 2008, at the National Assembly. Lee noted the importance of the 1991 Basic Agreement.⁴¹ In fact, his concepts of “benefits” and “prosperity” were developed from the two key words found in the Basic Agreement: “exchanges” and “cooperation.” As tools to pursue mutual benefit and common prosperity, the Lee administration used the three pillars of his vision for denuclearization of North Korea, the opening of North Korea and development of the North Korean economy.

Despite its priority on denuclearization, the Lee administration did not make much progress in the issue. Rather, denuclearization became more difficult because after North Korean leader Kim Jong Il’s stroke in August 2008, US-DPRK relations deteriorated, and on May 25, 2009, the North conducted a second nuclear test. Against this backdrop, the Lee government proposed a comprehensive package deal called a Grand Bargain, on September 21, 2009, to induce North Korea’s complete and verifiable denuclearization. The Grand Bargain outlines “big action for big action” between North Korea and the other five parties. Denuclearization measures would consist of North Korea’s irreversible steps from the initial stage, which would be linked to the corresponding measures (security assurances, normalization of relations and economic assistance) by the five parties.⁴²

Prior to the Grand Bargain proposal, Lee elaborated on August 15 about possible inter-Korean cooperation projects over economic, education, finance and infrastructure issues as well as improving the living standard if North Korea abandoned its nuclear weapons program. But North Korea rejected these proposals by repeating its old position that the nuclear issue should be discussed between the United States and North Korea. In addition, it insisted that a peace treaty should be concluded before denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Like his predecessors, Lee pursued a summit meeting with the North. The death on August 18, 2009, of former president Kim Dae Jung provided an opportunity for the two Koreas to have high-level talks in Seoul, both publicly and behind the scenes. After a chilly period in 2008 and early 2009 prompted in July 2008 by the killing by the North Korean army of a tourist at Mount Geumgang, things began warming up again in the summer of 2009, with Clinton’s visit to Pyongyang for the release of the two American journalists held in captivity in North Korea. DJ’s death provided an opportunity for the North to move that process one step ahead by sending a high-ranking delegation to Seoul. The North Korean delegates dispatched on the funeral mission, including Kim Yang Gon, head of the Department of the United Front, paid a courtesy call on President Lee on August 23, 2009, carrying a message from Kim Jong Il, and talked about a possible summit meeting.

On October 18, Kim Yang Gon and South Korean Minister of Labor Im Tae Hee met secretly in Singapore, where they reached a temporary agreement on holding summit talks within the year. The two Koreas held working-level meetings two times in Kaesong city in November to finalize the temporary agreements, but failed to reach any final agreement. According to Lee, the deal ended in vain because the North Koreans demanded too much compensation for the summit

41 KINU, *The Lee Myung-bak Government’s North Korea Policy* (Seoul: KINU, 2009): 10.

42 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, [http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read_engreadboard.jsp?typeID=\(September](http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read_engreadboard.jsp?typeID=(September) 15, 2015).

meeting, including delivery of 500,000 tons of rice and corn, and 300,000 tons of fertilizer.⁴³ But Im's explanation about the compensation differed from that of the president. According to him, the North Koreans agreed to something similar to the German *Freikauf* (free trade of political prisoners and material aid) approach. In this case, South Korea would provide food assistance in return for North Korea's humanitarian gestures regarding South Korean prisoners of war still in the North, abducted person and separated families.⁴⁴

Secret talks between the two Koreas on a summit continued but ultimately founded. The heads of the two sides' security agencies met to discuss the idea of another inter-Korean summit. According to Lee, a senior official from the South Korean National Security Agency visited Pyongyang in July 2010 and discussed a summit meeting and modalities for North Korea's expressing regret over the sinking of *Cheonan*, an ROK navy corvette that the North torpedoed in March 2010 with the loss of 46 sailors. In turn, a high-ranking North Korean security official visited Seoul on December 5, 2010, shortly after the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island.⁴⁵ It was alleged by the spokesman for the National Defense Commission of North Korea on June 1, 2011, that secret talks between senior officials of the two Koreas took place again in May 2011 to discuss an inter-Korean summit meeting.

It seems to me that the Lee Myung Bak administration could not move ahead in engaging with the North Koreans for two reasons: first, because of the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents, which were the most serious military attacks on South Korean citizens and territory since the Korean War, and second, due to wishful thinking that the North was near collapse after Kim Jong Il's stroke in August 2008. Senior officials in Seoul thought Kim would not last long and that they should be prepared for any contingencies as the regime imploded.

In retaliation for the sinking of the *Cheonan*, South Korea imposed sanctions on North Korea on May 24, 2010, banning all inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation except joint venture at Kaesong. Six months later, on November 23, North Korean artillery shelled Yeonpyeong Island in the West Sea. Two soldiers and two civilians were killed. Regarding North Korea's motivation for the two provocations, Lee denied an allegation that his hard-line policy toward Pyongyang should be blamed. He referred to a history of North Korean provocations including naval clashes in the West Sea and the first nuclear test during the Kim and Roh administrations. He attributed the provocations to internal problems in Pyongyang, but provided no details.⁴⁶

The Arab Spring, including the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and in Egypt in January 2011, and pro-democracy protests in China in 2011 fed Seoul's wishful thinking on a possible collapse of the unpopular dictatorship in the North. On September 25, 2012, Lee told members of his National Unification Advisory Council that "unification will come just like a thief" and that "the wind of democratization is blowing now and no country in the world can resist it."

43 Myung Bak Lee, *President's Time 2008–2013* (in Korean) (Seoul: Random House Korea, 2015): 335.

44 Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas*, 444. Minister Im's interview with a South Korean monthly magazine, *Shindonga* 641 (February 2013), 88–90.

45 Myung Bak Lee, *President's Time 2008–2013*, 355–356. Minister Im said the Lee government tried talks three times to agree on a summit meeting. His interview with *Shindonga* 642 (March 2013), 130–31.

46 Myung Bak Lee, *President's Time 2008–2013*, 353.

The Lee government shifted policy focus from “managing division,” or “development of inter-Korean relations” to reunification preparations. In his commemorative speech for the Liberation Day in August 2010, Lee stressed that “a new paradigm in inter-Korean relations should aim at peaceful unification, transcending management of division,” and proposed the establishment of “peace community,” “economic community” and “national community.” These “community” ideas were intended to put into practice the Korean National Commonwealth Unification Formula.⁴⁷ Lee suggested that a broad discussion take place regarding realistic preparation for reunification, including a “unification tax.” Preparation for reunification became a priority for the Ministry of Unification in the last two years of the Lee administration. The ministry spent millions of dollars contracting research on peace, economic and national communities and on estimates of reunification cost. At the same time, the government started raising funds for reunification. President Lee donated his monthly salary to the fund and his cabinet members naturally followed his lead. In December 2010, the Lee government submitted to the National Assembly a draft law to create an account for the reunification fund. As of today, however, the bill has not yet been reviewed by the parliamentarians.⁴⁸

Most inter-Korean festive events to commemorate the June 15 Joint Declaration and the August 15 Liberation Day have evaporated, partly due to the Lee government’s reluctance to respect the Joint Declaration and largely due to the May 24 sanctions. A key issue that has divided the North and South Korean governments over the past eight years has been whether to respect the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Joint Declaration. Conservative circles in the South did not support these two legacies of the progressive governments. President Lee showed his distaste for the two declarations by attempting to abolish the Ministry of Unification upon his election in late 2007. The minister of unification was in charge of chairing preparatory meetings attended by related ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and Economy, for the 2007 summit talks as well as for implementing the October 4 declaration.

IV. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Seeing Germany unified, many Koreans believed a peaceful reunification would be possible on the Korean peninsula. But Germany and Korea are more different than they are similar. Therefore, Germany’s experiences might not be useful for South Korean reunification policy. As Egon Bahr noted, however, “unification would not be a single act but a process with many steps and stops.” Thus, despite differences, we can draw a very important lesson for South Korea. The reunification policy should remain consistent and hopefully bipartisan despite changes of government. In particular, the South Korean government, National Assembly and civic society should build consensus on key elements of reunification policy, that is, inter-Korean dialogue, humanitarian assistance and alliance relations.

All South Korean presidents since Roh Tae Woo have accepted the Korean National Commonwealth Unification Formula as an official reunification formula. The Basic Agreement, the “sunshine policy” of Kim Dae Jung, the October 4 Joint Declaration of Roh Moo Hyun, and Lee Myung Bak’s proposal for peace, economic and national community were all fundamentally

47 Ibid., 363–64.

48 President Park Geun Hye showed a negative response to the fund and bill, thus dampening efforts by the Ministry of Unification to raise funds for reunification.

based on Roh Tae Woo's reunification formula. In addition, there was consistency in terms of goals of their reunification policies despite differences in policy direction or implementation. All governments have aimed at inducing change both in the North Korean regime and society. In terms of direction, the conservative governments under Kim Young Sam and Lee Myung Bak resorted to pressure and containment to bring a North Korean regime undergoing serious economic difficulties to its knees. Their policy focused more on reunification than management of division or improvement of inter-Korean relations. Meanwhile, the governments under Roh Tae Woo (conservative) and Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun (liberal) pursued engagement with North Korea, expecting gradual changes of the regime and society.

Why was their policy different? The first reason has to do with different expectations on the future of North Korea. Presidents Kim Young Sam and Lee Myung Bak thought it was more likely that North Korea would collapse soon, and so they put greater stress on preparation for reunification rather than on the development of inter-Korean relations. Presidents Roh Tae Woo, Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun believed that North Korea would gradually change, probably and hopefully following the Chinese or Vietnamese model, if they could effectively influence the regime's policy choices by creating the right environment. Thus, their policy placed priority on engaging North Korea to improve inter-Korean relations, something that would inevitably promote chances of reunification. At the very least, they believed that a wide range of agreements and cooperation between the North and South and establishment of a peace mechanism would bring the two Koreas to the phase of a Korean commonwealth, which would be tantamount to reunification.

Nevertheless, the choice was not only in Seoul's hands. The North Korean regime also affected the South's policy direction. South Korean governments tended to react to North Korea's behavior instead of taking proactive action pursuant to their strategy or grand design. For instance, North Korean provocations such as sinking the *Cheonan* resulted in poisoning the atmosphere for inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation.

In addition, the US policy for North Korea has been a wild card in shaping South Korean policy for North Korea and reunification. Discord arose between the conservative government in Seoul and the liberal administration in Washington and vice versa over dealing with North Korea. The Bush administration's policy of seeking regime change in North Korea slowed the pace of reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas.

Second, different reunification policies had much to do with partisan interest and ideological division in South Korea. Thus, in order to secure consistent, bipartisan reunification policy, domestic political culture—which tends to be confrontational and uncompromising—should be changed. Put another way, “a unification-friendly political system” needs to be created. In addition to deep ideological differences, political circles in Korea are so fractured by region, blood and school that consensus or compromise can hardly be achieved in the National Assembly. To change such a culture, the election system itself will have to be revised so that one party cannot dominate a specific electoral district. The current “winner takes all” election system gives rise to a zero-sum game in politicking. A German-type electoral system, under which one party can hardly win a majority in a district and is required to seek a coalition with another party (or parties) to form a ruling government, should be seriously considered.

When political culture supports coalitions or partnerships, the chances for bipartisan policy on critical state affairs, including reunification, are improved. For instance, a five-year plan and annual plan for developing inter-Korean relations pursuant to the Law on the Development of Inter-Korean Relations should be discussed and agreed on at the National Assembly. The Korean national commonwealth has survived as an official reunification formula under six different governments since its birth in 1989, “because the four parties agreed to the formula at the National Assembly.”⁴⁹

The South Korean government should work out a sustainable plan for developing inter-Korean relations pursuant to the relevant law that is supported by all political parties. In this context, the plan should contain three key elements for reunification policy.

The first key element is that channels for dialogue between the two Koreas should always remain open. “Even sworn enemies would not shoot each other while they are talking.” This is a German old saying that Lothar de Maiziere, the last prime minister of East Germany, wants to tell leaders of both North and South Korea.

The North Koreans tend to use dialogue to extract assistance or political gains from South Korea and other countries. Therefore, they usually set preconditions for coming to talks or they propose talks after fomenting tension or creating a crisis to raise the ante. For these reasons, skeptics, arguing “no talks for talks sake, gain the upper hand over proponents for dialogue.”

Nevertheless, for several reasons, South Korea should open dialogue channels, whether public or secret, particularly at this juncture when the situation in North Korea is foggy and unpredictable.

- (1) South Korea needs to diversify the means of collecting information regarding North Korea. But that does not mean official and unofficial channels of communications with the North Koreans should be taken lightly. Experience has demonstrated that these channels are one of the most useful sources of information.
- (2) Dialogue is a very useful means of understanding each other, thus avoiding misunderstanding and miscalculation. When relations remain tense and hostile, conflicts are more likely to happen.
- (3) The two Koreas need to recognize each other as they are. In particular, wishful thinking of the collapse of the North Korean regime should be avoided, although contingency plans should be quietly prepared to cope with various scenarios. When the two Koreas are engaged in dialogues, slandering of the other side—a constant problem—diminishes.
- (4) North and South Korea can prevent neighboring powers from intervening in the process of reunification. If there is no channel for dialogue between the two Koreas in case of contingency taking place in Pyongyang, stakeholding countries might intervene, greatly complicating the reunification process. South Korea can claim the principle of self-determination, but that would not be persuasive without inter-Korean dialogue to discuss specific steps toward reunification. The German experience seems especially relevant on this point.

49 Hongkoo Lee, in meeting with the author, September 2015.

The second key element is that South Korea should continue to provide humanitarian assistance to North Korea. The Lee Myung Bak administration discontinued large-scale rice and fertilizer assistance, allegedly over concerns that such aid might be diverted to feed the military and consequently prop up the Kim regime. Furthermore, the Lee government raised the bar for humanitarian assistance by South Korean NGOs, which were allowed to deliver only selected items even for vulnerable portions of the population, including children.

It should not be ignored that the South Korean government has legal responsibility for feeding hungry North Korean people. According to its constitution (Article 3), South Korea has claimed sole representation over the North Korean population. Thus, the North Korean people should be treated as South Korean nationals. North Korean defectors are received into South Korea as South Korean nationals, just as the East German defectors during the Cold War enjoyed West German citizenship. Some experts argue that South Korea may be able to intervene in an emergency in North Korea to protect its own nationals pursuant its constitution. In the same vein, South Korea is responsible for feeding the North Korean people suffering from hunger.

In addition, humanitarian assistance should be provided to the North Koreans for the sake of facilitating democratic reunification. In terms of self-determination, North Korean citizens have the right to decide their own future. Nothing would be better than having North Korean citizens decide to be unified with South Korea when given a chance to vote for reunification. To this end, the South's North Korea policy should be geared to win the hearts of the North Korean people. The North Korean regime has spared no efforts to infuse hostility into their hearts against South Korea and the United States. But by providing humanitarian aid, South Korea should turn their hostile sentiment into a sense of affinity as the same nation with the South. Such assistance will not only help loosen their hostility or fear of the South Koreans, but also help educate them about better living conditions in the South.

In terms of reunification cost, the price would be high for a unified Korea to cure malnutrition, physical disabilities and other afflictions of the younger generation in North Korea, unless South Korea provides medical, nutritional and other necessary assistance to them now.

The third key element is that South Korea should strengthen its traditional alliances with the United States and Japan, while improving relations with China and Russia. Unlike Germany, South Korea need not gain formal or legal "approval" for its reunification from these powers. Nevertheless, the South should increase diplomatic efforts to win their diplomatic and financial support for reunification. No one would deny that the friendliest ally to support reunification is the United States. South Korea should increase bilateral consultation with the Washington regarding strategies to achieve reunification and possible emergency scenarios, including ways of handling nuclear weapons in North Korea.

It is no less important to explain to the neighboring countries how Korean reunification will satisfy their national interests. China is concerned about a potential flow of North Korean refugees and possible movement of United States forces up to its border with Korea. In this regard, it would be beneficial to promote public diplomacy by creating an advisory group for reunification, either multilateral or bilateral, composed of former senior officials or celebrities from the above-mentioned four powers.

If future South Korean governments pursue a coherent policy of promoting these three elements, mutual trust and the sense of community will be enhanced between the two Koreas, ultimately advancing a democratic and peaceful reunification.

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