chapter eleven

Unification Policies and Strategies of North and South Korea

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The unification policies of North and South Korea have changed little from the days of the cold war era in both official lines and basic premise. The "new dètente" between the two Koreas, which was to follow from the planned summitry between South Korean President Kim Young Sam and North Korean President Kim Il Sung, was the casualty of the latter's sudden death in July 1994. Since then, instead of working toward peace, the frigid cold war atmosphere has returned to the Korean peninsula. Implementation of the historic Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between the South and the North, signed 13 December 1991 and promulgated on 19 February 1992, has also proven to be more difficult than anticipated.[1] Not surprisingly, the strategic goals of Seoul and Pyongyang remain far apart and irreconcilable despite official posturing and rhetoric.

In discussing the unification policies of North and South Korea, it is useful to differentiate between the official government policies and plans on the one hand and the underlying strategy on the other.[2] Whereas the official policy deals with the formal unification plans and programs put forward by the governments of North and South Korea, as articulated and presented to the public, the underlying premise reflects the strategic thinking regarding what the government leadership intends to do in achieving the stated policy goals of Korean reunification.

North Korean Unification Policy and Strategy

Pyongyang's unification policy, under the Kim Jong Il regime in 1996, has not changed from that formulated before the death of his father in 1994. Since no statement on the reunification issue is personally attributed to Kim Jong Il, there is no way of ascertaining what the current leader thinks about Pyongyang's unification stance and policies. The New Year's address, which served the useful purpose of deciphering the DPRK's official policy under Kim Il Sung has now been abandoned and replaced by an impersonal joint editorial to mark the new year by several newspapers including the Korean Workers' Party organ. Kim's North Korea is currently preoccupied with the question of assuring the regime's survival, rather than with charting a new unification policy to suit the post-cold war security environment of the new era. The underlying strategy of North Korean unification policy continues to include fostering revolution in the South. Instead of opening inter-Korean dialogue with the Kim Young Sam government, to make headway on the reunification issue, Pyongyang refuses to talk with Seoul and appears to be more interested in destabilizing the South's democratic society. The incidence involving the North Korean submarine incursion into South Korean waters and grounding in the east coast in

September 1996, and accompanying infiltration of armed agents to the South, is the latest manifestation of this policy of fostering revolution in South Korea.

The ways to achieve this policy objective are two-fold: to continue direct talks with the United States on bilateral issues, without involving South Korea in the process, thereby acquiring the claim of legitimacy for the DPRK; and to drive a wedge between the United States and the ROK, thereby accomplishing the strategic objective of forcing the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from the South. Short of accomplishing these aims, Pyongyang appears to offer concessions on peripheral matters, such as agreeing to attend the briefing session of the four-party peace talks proposed by U.S. President Clinton and ROK President Kim at the April 1996 Cheju Island summit.

That Pyongyang's unification policy remains intact under Kim Jong Il is clear from reading the joint editorial of three newspapers on 1 January 1996 which states that "(T)he historic cause of national reunification will surely be accomplished because we have the most just reunification programme indicated by Comrade Kim Il Sung, the eternal sun and father of the nation, and our party guides the nation-wide struggle for the country's reunification."[3] The editorial also asserts that "(T)he three principles of independence, peaceful reunification, and the great national unity, the Ten-Point Programme of the Great Unity of the Whole Nation, and the proposal for founding the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo, which were advanced by him (i.e., Kim Il Sung), are the banner of genuine patriotism and a just and reasonable reunification programme common to the nation."[4] Referring more specifically to Pyongyang's unification policy, the joint editorial continues that "(O)ur party's stand for reunifying the country in a peaceful way remains unchanged" which, put in capsule summary, reflects the strategy of forging the united front campaign.

"Reunifying the country in line with the three principles is possible only by the confederation formula," continues the editorial, "(A)ll the compatriots in the north, south and overseas must unite closely as the same nation, regardless of ideology, idea and system, and join in the struggle to establish a confederal state independent, peaceful and neutral, that is a reunified state involving the whole nation."[5] Pyongyang is fostering a united front campaign strategy to build its support base in the south and among the overseas Koreans. In this sense North Korea in the post Kim Il Sung era continues to adhere to the policy of reunification on its own terms, i.e., the strategy of "hegemonic" reunification of Korea.

For the failed policy on reunification, Pyongyang blames the Seoul government's policy and the absence of what it calls "a new peace mechanism" between itself and the United States. "(W)e must maintain the stand of national independence, reject the separatism forces' dependence on outside forces, flunkeyism and treachery and defend the dignity and independence of the nation" thereby pointing its finger at the Seoul government for doing all of these evil deeds. Then, also pointing its finger at the United States, it claims that "(W)hat should be resolved first in ensuring peace and security in the Korean Peninsula and realizing its reunification is to establish a new peace mechanism between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. If such a peace-keeping system is set up, the situation of the Korean Peninsula will be relaxed and the north-south agreement implemented smoothly. And it will favorably affect the reunification of Korea."[6]

Pyongyang's "Ten Point Platform" on Korean Unification

Since North Korea under Kim Jong Il refuses to deviate from the established policy line, as laid down by his father, we need to know exactly what the senior Kim had to say about the reunification issue.

Pyongyang's new unification strategy was unveiled by Kim Il Sung in his ten-point proclamation on Korean unification in 1993. This statement has become a kind of Kim Il Sung's political will for Kim Jong Il and his followers to carry out Korean reunification in the post-Kim Il Sung era. Although the strategic calculus and premise underlying this "new" policy remains the same, this policy pronouncement contains an element of realism and flexibility. A moderate and reasoning tone and self-righteous and self-defensive rhetoric are combined, for instance, in the pronouncement. The latter used to be the prevailing tone that characterizes earlier pronouncement on Korean reunification in the cold war era. The tone of moderation, however, may reflect Kim's apprehension that North Korea may not successfully withstand the external shocks emanating from the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his 1992 New Year's address, Kim Il Sung condemned as nonsensical the "unification by absorption" or "prevailing over communism" policies attributed to South Korea.

Included in the ten-point platform of Pyongyang's unification policy stance are the following:

1. A unified state, independent, peaceful and neutral, should be founded through the great unity of the whole nation.

2. Unity should be based on patriotism and the spirit of national independence.

3. Unity should be achieved on the principle of promoting co-existence, co-prosperity and common interests and subordinating everything to the cause of national reunification.
4. All manner of political disputes that foment division and confrontation between fellow countrymen should be stopped and unity be achieved.

5. They should dispel fears of invasion from the South and from the North, prevailing over communism and communization altogether and believe in and (have) unity with each other.

6. They should set store by democracy and join hands on the road to national reunification, not rejecting each other for the difference in isms and principles.

7. They should protect material and spiritual wealth of individual persons and organizations and encourage them to be used favorably for the promotion of great national unity.

8. The whole nation should understand, trust and unite with one another through contacts, travels and dialogues.

9. The whole nation in the North and the South and overseas should strengthen solidarity with one another on the way to national reunification.

10. Those who have contributed to the great unity of the nation and to the cause of national reunification should be highly esteemed.

Some of the old themes Pyongyang repeated in its 1993 proclamation include "the unity of the whole nation," "the spirit of national independence," practicing "democracy," and strengthening "solidarity" among Koreans in the North, South, and abroad. Appearing afresh are such eye-catching themes as to promote "co-existence, co-prosperity, and common interests" (point 3), to "dispel fears of invasion from the South and from the North" (point 5), and to "trust and unite with one another through contacts, travels and dialogue" (point 8) in that order, instead of "dialogue, contacts and travels".[7]

Conspicuously lacking in the 1993 proclamation—an absence that might signify a new approach and new thinking on Korea's future by the DPRK leadership—are the accent on "urgency" and the counsel on "immediate" steps toward reunification of the country.[8] In his 1991 New Year's address, Kim Il Sung defended the confederation plan as both "fair" and "the only and quickest way . . . to reunify the country peacefully."

Pyongyang's Strategy on Korean Reunification

This platform was subsequently adopted by its legislative body during the fifth session of the ninth Supreme People's Assembly on 7 April 1993.[9] What has been included in Kim Il Sung's "Ten-Point Platform" is the official policy line (*kongsik ipjang or myongbun*) of the DPRK on Korean reunification, which references only surface phenomenon and masks the underlying strategic calculus and consideration (*naebu jonryak* or *jinsim*). This dualistic mindset became clear when Kim Il Sung's ten-point program was presented to the parliament by DPRK Premier Kang Song San who opened his remarks by mentioning ROK President Kim Young Sam's "alleged" reference in his inaugural address that "no ally is better than the nation."[10] Yet, he also presented four preconditions for resuming inter-Korean dialogue, which clearly were politically almost impossible for the Seoul government to accept:

> 1. The south must give up its policy of reliance on foreign powers. It must not rely on the United States and Japan politically, militarily and economically; instead, it must regard solidarity between the same ethnic group as more important.
>
> 2. The south must express its determination to oust U.S. troops from the south.
>
> 3. The south must suspend forever joint military exercises with foreign (U.S.) troops.
>
> 4. The south must pull itself out from under the U.S. nuclear umbrella.[11]

The overall impression one gets from reading Pyongyang's ten-point proclamation on Korean reunification is thus mixed: flexibility in official platform but consistency in its strategic calculation.

The strategic goal of North Korea's "hegemonic" reunification policy remains unchanged. The means through which to achieve North Korea's unification policy objectives, as already noted, is to engage in a dialogue

with the United States rather than with the South Korean government of Kim Young Sam. Pyongyang's strategic goal, not surprisingly, is to create a wedge between Washington and Seoul, so as to undermine the U.S.-ROK alliance, and to force the U.S. troop withdrawal from the South. After successfully negotiating with the United States on the nuclear deal-making, by using its nuclear card with skill and tact, Pyongyang now relies on such bilateral issues of negotiation as the MIAs and missile technology control regime. Pyongyang's foremost strategic goal is to acquire bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the United States on a host of other important issues including the peace treaty and normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States.

South Korean Unification Policy and Strategy

Seoul's unification policy and strategy, as articulated by President Kim Young Sam's address and statement, has also remained the same as in the cold war era. Because South Korea successfully attained a democratic transition from an authoritarian rule, the newly elected civilian government of Kim Young Sam initially enjoyed popular support and legitimacy. However, in the absence of new ideas and vision on the reunification issue, other than what it inherited from the previous regimes, the Kim Young Sam government may suffer from the stigma of failed policies on unification and inter-Korean relations. During the first four years of President Kim's five-year term, his administration's North Korea policy has been plagued by what one newspaper critique calls "dauntless initiatives and subsequent disenchantment."[12]

Seoul's Unification Policy Initiatives

In his inaugural address on 25 February 1993, President Kim Young Sam stated that "(N)o ideology or political belief can bring greater happiness than national kinship." After proposing a summit with his counterpart in North Korea, President Kim urged "(L)et us open our hearts and discuss the future of the Korean people" (because) "I truly believe that we, as one people, will be able to resolve the issues that divide us."[13]

Despite being preoccupied with the domestic policy of launching a reform agenda, President Kim used the occasion of addressing the PBEC (Pacific Basin Economic Conference) meeting in Seoul, on 24 May 1993, to announce a "new diplomacy" that was to be more future-oriented in so far as the reunification issue was concerned. His government, to achieve the goal of unification, "will pursue the policy of peaceful coexistence, joint prosperity and common welfare with North Korea" and "will move from the initial step of reconciliation and cooperation to the next phase of

Korean commonwealth, and to a final stage of a unified nation of one people and one state."[14] The Kim Young Sam government was preoccupied with the task of how to strengthen and build upon the existing unification measures that he inherited from the Roh Tae Woo government but changing it in the direction of adjusting to the new and changing post-cold war environment surrounding the Korean peninsula.

The Kim Young Sam government promised to work hard in realizing its ambitious master plan to form a Korean commonwealth within his five-year tenure. A new unification policy team, led by Han Wan-sang who was appointed deputy prime minister in charge of unification policy administration, was appointed. However, its mishandling of delicate matters of inter-Korean negotiation, such as the return of a convicted North Korean agent on humanitarian grounds without quid-pro-quo, led to a heightening of public criticism and ended up as a short-lived tenure of the reformist team.

The possible opening for President Kim Young Sam on the reunification issue came from an unexpected source via the mediation of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter who visited Pyongyang in June 1994. The new President came close to the realization of his ambitious goal on a new policy initiative when he reached an agreement with North Korean president Kim Il Sung in June 1994 to hold a historic inter-Korean summit to discuss a wide range of pending issues. However, anticipated inter-Korean rapprochement proved short-lived with Kim's sudden death in July 1994. Because of the Seoul government's insensitivity toward the mourning of Kim's death, subsequent inter-Korean relations have taken an irreversible downturn.

President Kim Young Sam's own unification policy, apart from the Korean commonwealth plan that he inherited from the previous regimes, did not become known until after the death of the North Korean leader in 1994. On 15 August 1994, during his address to commemorate the 49th anniversary of Korea's liberation, President Kim Young Sam presented his new "Unification Formula for the Korean National Community."[15] In his address, President Kim proposed "a three-stage unification formula for building a single national community" that "calls first for reconciliation and cooperation between the South and the North, next for forming a Korean commonwealth and lastly for completing a single unified nation-state." This formula, in short, "is designed to ultimately build a single nation-state after going through interim stages of integration," as he put it, and "(T)he path to unification must also be the path to democracy and prosperity." In unveiling this "Three-Stage Unification Formula for

Building a Korean National Community," President Kim also articulated his political philosophy on leadership and unification policy.

"The basic philosophy behind our quest for unification," according to President Kim, "is centered on the values of freedom and democracy" and "(T)he unification process should be focused not on how to distribute power but on how to enable our people to live together." As he sees it, "(E)fforts toward unification should be concerned not so much with developing a hypothetical structure of a unified state as with building a national community within which all Koreans can live together" and "(U)nification should be grounded on the values of freedom, democracy and well-being for all, rather than on any ideology focused narrowly on a specific class or group." By articulating his philosophy of liberal democracy that underlies his unification proposal, the Seoul government has it known to the world and the post-Kim Il Sung North Korea that the ultimate purpose of achieving reunification via its unification formula is to realize the united Korea that upholds the ideology of liberal democracy.

Since the address, telecast live, was the first major occasion to publicize the Seoul government's policy on unification, it is possible that many of the same points could have appeared in the scheduled summitry with the North Korean leader. "It will not be possible to unify the South and the North overnight," says Kim, "because the two parts of Korea have been locked into mutual hostility and distrust for as long as they have consistently pursued distinctly different ideologies and markedly different political and social systems." But, as Kim emphasizes, "(U)nification should be a gradual and phased process of building a single national community."

Five specific measures are undertaken by the Kim Young Sam government to promote the causes of Korean reunification. These include, according to the ROK publication: building the foundation for an autonomous civilian unification movement; energizing a nation-wide educational program on unification; strengthening the public education on unification; promoting research activities on the unification issue; and fostering the public consensus on the unification issues.[16]

Seoul's Strategic Moves on Inter-Korean Relations

The North-South Korean summit that never materialized, though brokered by Jimmy Carter, could have brought about far-reaching consequences for North-South Korean relations. With the failed opportunity to realize rapprochement and peace through a North-South summit, the Seoul government has undertaken several policy initiatives of engaging North Korea in working toward improved inter-Korean relations. One was the commit-

ment to underwrite the bulk of expenses for the project of constructing two light-water reactors in North Korea, as part of the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, in exchange for North Korea's freezing of its nuclear weapons project.[17] The other was Seoul's decision to offer 150,000 tons of rice (worth $200 million) to help alleviate North Korea's food shortage following the 1995 floods that severely damaged crop land. This followed an agreement reached in Beijing, in June 1995, between two representatives of North and South Korea over rice aid to the North.

President Kim's strategy to bring about a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, by offering rice to the North, unfortunately did not succeed. A South Korean ship transporting the rice was forced to hoist a North Korean national flag, which enraged the Seoul government. After the North apologized for its action, Seoul resumed the rice shipment. However, the inter-Korean exchange hit another snag after Pyongyang detained a South Korean sailor on spying charges, resulting in an indefinite postponement of inter-Korean dialogue. The dream of buying off North Korean policy-makers with rice proved to be unrealistic.

In 1996 Pyongyang started raising tensions on the Korean peninsula by ordering its soldiers into the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in an effort to nullify the Korean Armistice Agreement. North Korea's provocation in the DMZ made Seoul and Washington work out a new initiative which was aimed at establishing a peace regime on the Korean peninsula. The policy on four-party talks was unveiled during the Cheju Island summit on April 16 between President Clinton and President Kim. The plan calls for the involvement of North Korea, South Korea, the United States and China in the discussion regarding replacing the Korean Armistice Agreement. This joint proposal is meant to be a long-term initiative for the establishment of a peace structure on the Korean peninsula, not a short-lived overture even if Washington hinted that they can offer additional measures and the economic aid that Pyongyang will need.

The September 1996 North Korean submarine incursion into South Korea's east coast, however, dampened the progress of resuming inter-Korean dialogue and negotiation. Even the implementation activities of KEDO regarding the reactor construction were temporarily halted, although Seoul was considered unlikely to back away from its commitment to honor the terms of U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework. Seoul insisted that Pyongyang should first apologize for sending a submarine into the South in flagrant violation of the Korean Armistice Agreement. When the crisis atmosphere died down, with the passage of time, there was hope that the unfortunate incident could somehow provide a useful occasion for resuming inter-Korean dialogue on the unification issue.[18]

South Korea's unification policy and strategy has been geared more toward accommodating crises and events rather than consistently upholding its set policy objectives and guidelines. With the remainder of his five-year term, President Kim's administration needs to implement its North Korea policy in a prudent and consistent manner, without succumbing to political temptation, such as responding to hardliner's pressures and manipulating it for domestic political purposes.

Conclusion

Since the end of the cold war in global politics, with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the external environment surrounding the Korean peninsula has changed drastically but no measurable improvement has been registered to bring about the reunification of North and South Korea. That this potential and possibility for realizing Korean reunification are unmet is unfortunate from the standpoint of promoting peace and security on the Korean peninsula. This failure has less to do with the lack of desire and willingness on the part of the Korean people to reunify their divided country than with the failure by the political leaderships of the two Koreas to work out a specific and workable political settlement based on a compromise formula of give and take. The reality is that whereas the situation is favorable to the South, with the collapse of the communist bloc, it is unfavorable to the North. The South is more active and anxious in its desire to resume dialogue with the North while the latter is less secure and confident to do so psychologically, unless the situation improves politically in the days ahead.

The timing for resuming inter-Korean dialogue and negotiation, from the strategic point of view, has not been right for the North. The South must learn to be patient and more discrete with its policy toward the North. In diplomacy, there is time to act and there is time to wait. It will be a matter of time before the reunification issue is taken up as the mainstay of inter-Korean relations. Pyongyang considers that it is not the right time to resume dialogue and negotiation with Seoul. So long as the Pyongyang regime refuses to interact with the Seoul government, the South should not go out of its way to try to impress and appease the North. Instead, Seoul should learn to be more patient by making its intention and readiness to help the North clear.

So long as inter-Korean relations remain one of rivalry and confrontation, rather than of genuine rapprochement and cooperation, no prospect of restoring peace is likely to come about. The North Korean submarine intrusion into South Korea indicates a serious security problem and danger of renewed armed clashes. If war comes to Korea, it will be so because of inci-

dents like this getting out of hand. The unification policies of North and South Korea should be developed, in reaction not to crisis events but in accordance with upholding the basic principles of interest, philosophy, and values. Korea remains frozen in the cold war glacier, as it were, but the time will come when the climate changes. When the new season arrives, reunited Korea will come to play a constructive role so as to make contributions toward the larger community of nations, regionally and globally, instead of the two halves wrestling with each other on ideological grounds. For reunification to succeed, both halves must be convinced of strategic and direct advantages rather than domestic political benefits.

notes for chapter eleven

1. For the text of this agreement, see Young Whan Kihl, ed., *Korea and the World: Beyond the Cold War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994): pp. 343-346. Also, Kihl, "The Politics of Inter-Korean Relations: Coexistence or Reunification?" Ibid., pp. 133-152.

2. Whereas the official policy line represents *kongsikjok ipjang* or *myongbun* in Korean, the strategy is the domain of *naebu jonryak* or *jinsim*. The former is the official and formal line, the latter is an unofficial and informal position. These are the Korean equivalency to the Japanese usage of the terms *tatemae* and *honne*.

3. "Let Us Advance Vigorously in the New Year, Flying the Red Flag," the joint editorial of *Rodong Shinmun* (the organ of the ruling Workers' Party), *Choson Inmingun* (the People's Army), and *Rodong Chongnyon* (the Socialist Working Youth League), as reprinted in Korea and World Affairs vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1996): pp. 107-111.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 111.

6. Ibid., pp. 110-111.

7. Whereas Seoul typically advocates dialogue first, followed by travels and contacts, Pyongyang has accentuated contact first, followed by travel or dialogue.

8. This analysis and interpretation of the 10-point platform is taken from Kihl, *Korea and the World*, pp. 148-149.

9. "DPRK President Proposes 10-Point Platform for Great Unity of Korean Nation," *Korean Report* [Tokyo], no. 272 (April 1993): pp. 1-6; also see *North Korea News* [Seoul], no. 679 (19 April 1993): pp. 1-2.

10. This reference does not appear in the English-language text of Kim Young Sam's inaugural address. See the text in *Korea Times*, 26 February 1993, p. 2, as reprinted in *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1 (April 1992): pp. 141-145.

11. *Vantage Point* [Seoul], vol. 16, no. 4 (April 1993): p. 13.

12. Son Key-young, "Seoul's North Korea Policy in Disarray Amid Rosy Dream, Disenchantment," *Korea Times*, 29 October 1996, pp. 19, 22, 38.

13. Inaugural address of President Kim Young Sam. The text of his address appears in *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1993): pp. 141-145.

14. Kim Young Sam, "A New Diplomacy," (address before the Leaders Forum of the 26th PBEC International General Meeting, Seoul, 24 May 1993) appears in *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1993): pp. 343-347.

15. The text of President Kim Young Sam's address, on the occasion of the 49th anniversary of national liberation day, appears in *Korea and World Affairs* vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 1994): pp. 568-572.

16. *T'ongil Paekso 1994* (Unification White Paper 1994) (Seoul: ROK Ministry of National Unification, 1994): pp. 87-138.

17. Young Whan Kihl and Peter Hayes, eds., *Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: The Nuclear Issue and the Korean Peninsula* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).

18. The assumption here is that Pyongyang will acknowledge its error and give assurance that no armed provocation against the South will occur. On 29 December 1996, Pyongyang eventually issued a statement of regret over the submarine incident, thereby reducing tension on the Korean peninsula.