

## INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS IN NUCLEAR POLITICS

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*This article aims at explaining the changes in inter-Korean relations since the inauguration of the new administration in South Korea in 2008. By focusing on leadership, regime, and social factors in the two Koreas, the article emphasizes the social dynamics that are shaping inter-Korean relations despite the nuclear dispute. In the political realm, a tough stance toward North Korea's nuclear ambition by the South's government has created a sense of frustration within the North Korean leadership, causing tension and conflict with the South. In the social realm, however, both Koreas have been pressured by political and economic hardship and a growing sense of crisis among their citizens. From that latter perspective, however, the prospects are that the two Koreas will move toward more cooperative behavior. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United States will be important in achieving that outcome.*

**Key words:** North-South Korea relations, Korean unification, East Asian politics

### **Overview of Inter-Korean Relations in the Past Year**

It is well recognized that following the installation of the Lee Myung-bak administration in February 2008, inter-Korean

relations have become increasingly deadlocked. Although a conciliatory mood seems to have been created after August 2009, the Lee administration has been very cautious about resuming a dialogue with the North's government. The speed and scope of changes in inter-Korean relations that have occurred as a result of the change of government in South Korea differ according to specific sublevels within the inter-Korean relationship structure. Three of these sublevels are of particular importance and are examined in this overview of inter-Korean relations: authority-level relations, civil-level relations, and economy-level relations.

First, following the election of Lee Myung-bak, authority- or government-level dialogue was entirely discontinued and a verbal battle ensued between the two Koreas. Criticizing the South's government as "fascist," North Korea declared "all-out confrontation" against South Korea on January 17, 2009. On January 30 North Korea proclaimed the "invalidation of political and military agreements" between the two Korean states. Even on the complex and important topic of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), an ongoing project that requires continual government-level discussion, intergovernmental dialogue has been closed.

Second, while authority-level relationships have been curtailed, inter-Korean civil relations have continued, albeit heavily influenced by the current political environment. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with North Korean counterparts continue to be able to visit Pyongyang. Some North-South cooperative projects, for example a venture aimed at editing a North-South Korean dictionary and another that provides medical support, continue without any serious difficulties. Although the number of visits to North Korea and the volume of support provided by South Korean NGOs have decrease since the beginning of 2009, small-scale and working-level visits are still going on. However, opportunities for South Korean people to visit North Korea have been dramatically reduced by the cessation of the Keumgangsan resort area and KIC tours.

Third, economic relations continue within the Kaesong Industrial Complex as well as in low-level economic cooperation by small-size firms from South Korea. More than 100 corporations

from the South are working with more than 35,000 North Korean laborers in the KIC under a “joint-management measure.” In 2008, the volume of production at the KIC was \$250 million. However, following the joint U.S.-South Korea *Key Resolve* military exercise, relations at the KIC worsened, becoming critical following the arrest and imprisonment of a South Korean worker there.<sup>1</sup> On May 15, 2009, North Korea abrogated the inter-Korean agreement on the KIC. However, the North’s government released the hostage in August and normalized the KIC dispute in September 2009.

Based on this brief overview, it is reasonable to conclude that inter-Korean relations have worsened since the start of the Lee administration. Although on some levels inter-Korean relations continue as before, the negative impact caused by the freezing of relations at the government level has spread from the political realm to the social and economic realm. It seems that inter-Korean relations have been enormously changed by their conflict over the nuclear issue in recent years, and it has been deeply influenced by domestic changes in various realms in each society.

In this respect, we need to classify the diverse aspects of the changes and conflicts that have occurred in both Koreas in recent years. What is the main reason for this dramatic change? Who should be blamed for the worsening of inter-Korean relations? The progressives point to President Lee’s policies, while, unsurprisingly, the conservatives blame North Korea’s hostility for causing the change. This article aims at explaining the change in inter-Korean relations by focusing on leadership, regime, and social factors in the two Koreas.

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1. When Minister of Unification Kim remarked on March 19, 2008 that “it is not possible to expand KIC without settlement of the North Korea nuclear issue,” North Korea within a week drove South Korean government personnel out of the KIC. On March 27, North Korea launched a short-range missile into the West Sea area. Thus did the first round of confrontation start.

**Leadership: Lee and Kim after 2007***Lee Myung-bak's Policies: From DOT to MPCP*

President Lee Myung-bak, since the outset, has criticized the so-called "Sunshine Policy." As an election policy he was politically successful in labeling the Sunshine policy—the common policy pursued by the previous two South Korean governments toward North Korea—as a failure. Lee consistently emphasized that North Korea policy should be changed to one based upon principles of reciprocity and national consensus. He also pursued the strategy of strengthening the Korea-U.S. alliance, immediately expressing an aggressive posture toward North Korea. Further, he attempted to weaken the ministry of unification by giving priority to the foreign ministry in the management of policy pertaining to North Korea. Similar to the practice of "Anything But Clinton" (ABC) that Republicans pursued in the U.S. Congress in the late 1990s, Lee's policy of reversing the previous Roh Moo Hyun administration's North Korean policies was termed "Anything But Roh" or ABR.<sup>2</sup>

Lee has been very cautious in reviewing proposed and ongoing projects agreed to at previous inter-Korean summits. His administration regards the ten years of the Sunshine policy as a "lost period" during which inter-Korean relations moved in the wrong direction. Instead, the Lee administration has stressed its own "Denuclearization-Openness-Three Thousand" policy, or DOT. DOT was mostly concerned with creating a "strong link" between denuclearization and economic cooperation, although a few months into President Lee's government a revision made the policy slightly milder. The Lee administration stressed the strategic initiative within DOT that aimed to help North Korea raise its annual per capita income to \$3,000 within ten years. But of course any materialization of such economic support would

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2. Here the Roh Moo Hyun administration stands not only for "Peace and Prosperity" (2003-2007), but also for the overall engagement policy pursued by the previous administration, namely, Kim Dae Jung's Reconciliation and Cooperation Policy (1998-2002).

be dependent upon North Korea giving up its nuclear ambitions. Another aspect of the DOT policy was the idea of "opening." However, this was understood by the North as a demand by the South for the North Korean regime to "marketize" and "democratize."

It was unfortunate that the Lee government found itself facing the Keumgangsán crisis in the midst of huge mass demonstrations over the agreement with the United States to renew imports of beef. Even before the Keumgangsán incident happened, the popularity of the new government had already decreased rapidly to under 20 percent, and President Lee almost had to make a public apology for his North Korea policy. The highly unusual and unexpected incident at Keumgangsán was considered the first test case for the Lee government on North Korean policy, providing him with an opportunity to change his stance. Following the incident (which involved the death of a South Korean tourist who was shot by a North Korean soldier after walking into a prohibited military zone in the early hours of the morning), Lee proposed to the South Korean National Assembly the possibility of inter-Korean dialogue. However, any dialogue would be dependent on a North-South joint investigation of the incident and the introduction of new security measures for the Keumgangsán resort. North Korea responded by blaming the South Korean tourist involved for causing the incident and rejected the need for any further investigation or changes to security arrangements. The resulting disagreement continued to escalate, with both sides refusing to moderate their respective positions. The failure to come to any sort of agreement was a critical moment in the formation of a North Korea policy under the Lee administration.

In contrast with his earlier actions, President Lee has more recently advanced a new policy toward North Korea, one of so-called "mutual benefits and common prosperity" (MBCP). An important aspect of this policy is the insistence that denuclearization is not an absolute precondition for the implementation of the many economically beneficial elements of this initiative, such as the "3,000 dollars" promise. In addition, the government has

shown, through a variety of measures, that it respects the spirit of agreement between the two Koreas as stated in the June 15 and October 4 declarations.<sup>3</sup> It has repeatedly highlighted Lee Myung-bak's "sincere" calls for inter-Korean dialogue, such as on April 17, June 6, July 11, August 15, and September 22, 2008.

However, despite the Lee administration's insistence that its policy is conciliatory, the unification ministry has openly and formally stated that the current government's stance toward North Korea is much harder when compared with other recent administrations in Seoul. In addition, the Lee government has reversed several policies that the last two administrations had maintained toward North Korea in the areas of human rights, humanitarian assistance, visits to North Korea, tourism, and leaflet dispersion. For example, it has proactively raised the issue of human rights in North Korea in the United Nations and has stopped the provision of humanitarian assistance such as food and fertilizer. In regards to access to North Korea for South Koreans, tourism to Keumgangsan has ceased, and Seoul has tightly controlled visits to North Korea by South Korean organizations. Within South Korea, the Lee administration has restricted other organizations involved in the unification movement. Finally, unlike the previous administrations, it has tolerated the sending of leaflets into North Korea by conservative NGOs, has allowed North Korean defectors to publicly transmit political testimony, and has conducted full-scale participation in U.S.-Korea joint military drills and PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative).

Since September 2009, the Lee administration has also proposed a so-called "grand bargain" with North Korea to solve the nuclear problem. Under the "grand bargain," the South demands that the North give up in advance critical parts of its nuclear program, including the weapons themselves, in exchange for a huge

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3. Furthermore, in implementing the policy of mutual benefits and common prosperity (MBCP), the ROK government will heed the following ground rules: a pragmatic and results-oriented attitude, firm principles and flexible approaches, national consensus, and balance between inter-Korean and international cooperation. See [www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pgname=POLpolicy](http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pgname=POLpolicy).

assistance package (such as the “three thousand project”) that the North badly needs for reviving its sluggish economy. It is curious, however, that the word “grand bargain” was left out of the president’s 2010 New Year’s address, which gave rise to speculation that the Lee administration might show strategic flexibility to promote inter-Korean dialogue, such as holding a North-South summit in 2010.

*Kim Jong Il After 2007*

Kim Jong Il has been leader of North Korea for nearly two decades. In contrast to South Korea, where the political leadership changes every five years, North Korea’s top leadership has been stable and unchanged. In that sense 2008 was very special in terms of political stability in Pyongyang, when the North Korean leader suffered from serious health problems.

In 2007 Kim Jong Il agreed to hold a second North-South summit in Pyongyang between himself and President Roh Moo Hyun, which resulted in the signing of the October 4th Agreement. Leading up to this summit, there were a number of planned projects for developing the North that could materialize only with South Korean financial support. For Kim Jong Il, the summit and subsequent agreement were important not only for the future benefits they might bring, but also for the symbolism of working for peace, which therefore gave legitimacy to the Great Leader’s no doubt difficult decision to accept economic assistance from the South.

Leading up to Lee’s inauguration and in the early stages of his presidency, indications from the North suggested that Kim Jong Il expected the Lee administration to continue the cooperative policies of the former administrations. Although in his 2007 New Year’s Address, Kim harshly criticized Lee’s Grand National Party, North Korea in general had a relatively positive attitude toward South Korea following the October 2007 inter-Korean summit. During the presidential election campaign, which involved two leading conservative candidates, Lee Myung-bak and Lee Hoi-chang, both of whom fought for right-wing votes, North

Korea focused on the arch-conservative Lee Hoi-chang, whose campaign centered on the need for harder-line policies toward North Korea. The criticism of Lee Hoi-chang was a veiled message to Lee Myung-bak that he should continue the conciliatory policies of the previous progressive administrations. When Lee Myung-bak was elected to the presidency, it was for this reason that North Korea had high hopes that they would receive economic assistance from the South, based on the October 4th Agreement, and that the relationship would continue as under the previous administrations.<sup>4</sup>

Lee Myung-bak's rejection of the previous administration's North Korea policy and his subsequent strategy toward North Korea of "benign neglect" is likely to have created a sense of disappointment within the North Korean leadership. The North Korean leadership had laid out a vision for the rapid improvement of the lives of its people. The announced aim was to build a "strong and prosperous nation by the year 2012" based on the expectations that arose from the earlier Sunshine policy and subsequent proactive engagement policies of the Roh administration. Despite the change in administration and policy in the South, North Korea remains as eager as ever to develop its economy, and in as short a period as possible. Against this background, it is likely that North Korea will continue to try to press South Korea to act according to its original expectations of assistance and engagement. There is also evidence that Kim has eyed reform in Vietnam with interest. In summary, North Korea's continuous stress on realizing the provisions of the October 4th Agreement demonstrates Kim Jong Il's interest in encouraging economic development in North Korea. However, it is recognized that any economic reforms implemented by the North Korea regime would be contingent on guaranteed regime survival.

However, until now, Kim Jong Il has neither driven marketi-

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4. We found this favorable sentiment toward President Lee among North Korean cadres in Kaesong even in late April 2008, when both Koreas were caught up in conflict. They boldly said, "President Lee is a kind of 'hot man,' like a bulldozer, so that he could do something great for developing inter-Korean relations if he wants."

zation nor changed the existing policy that allocates the bulk of resources to the defense and heavy industries.<sup>5</sup> North Korea is very reluctant to embrace Chinese-style reform and opening policies, and is extremely resistant to the idea of globalization.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the North Korean leadership is interested in industries such as the information technology sector. By developing this core specialty, North Korea aims to achieve two goals at once. North Korea sees the opportunity of developing industries such as software and hardware, missile technology, and space technology as part of a “blue ocean strategy”—“taking off in one sweep” to achieve both military and commercial goals at the same time. It is also likely that North Korea will enlarge or develop further special economic zones in the Rajin-Sunbung area, Sinuiju, Kaesong, and Keumgangsan, and tourist districts in Nampo, Wonsan, Chongjin, and Mount Baekdu.

Perhaps the most critical issue in North-South relations in 2008 was the health of Kim Jong Il. The severity of Kim’s illness would have likely created a strong sense of crisis and emergency within the North Korean leadership. Following Kim Jong Il’s illness, the influence of the North Korean defense ministry seems to have increased. The National Defense Commission (NDC), as seen at the 12th Supreme People’s Assembly, was consolidated, suggesting possible preparations for a leadership succession.

Kim’s illness has given rise to significant levels of discussion as to whether the next leadership succession in North Korea will

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5. We have to remember that North Korea deliberately tried to evenly disperse industrial facilities nationwide, to protect them from being paralyzed in wartime. North Korea has pursued a regional self-reliance system since the early 1960s. This has been done to improve its defense capabilities in line with Kim Jong Il’s ideas. He had developed a county-based self-reliance strategy in 1964 to defend the system in case of war. In the post-cold war era, North Korea has furthermore resorted to the self-reliance strategy of local mobilization. In this sense, the idea of a sociopolitical organism of *juche* thought has been applied not only to social organization but also to economic institutions.

6. North Korea criticized globalization in South Korea as “an unpatriotic act to leave the South Korean economy and market to monopolistic foreign capitalists.” (North) Korean Central Broadcast System, January 6, 1995.

be a hereditary one. The general consensus is that one of Kim Jong Il's sons will eventually take over the leadership of North Korea. A North Korean textbook, which details the process by which power succession should take place in North Korea, suggests that the election of the next leader should take place while the Suryong, or Great Leader, is still alive and that this new leader should be selected from the next generation. Following this idea, if the successor to Kim Jong Il is to come from the "next generation," it is quite possible that one of the Great Leader's sons will become the next North Korean president. Evidence had suggested that Kim's first son, Kim Jong-nam, has support from among the older generation in the party and cabinet while the third son, Kim Jong-eun, is favored by a younger generation that is more predominant in the military and the intelligence agency.<sup>7</sup> As things currently stand, the third son, Kim Jong-eun seems to be the front runner.

As his health recovered, Kim Jong Il rapidly moderated his position on relations with the South. In order to become a "strong and prosperous nation" by 2012, he needs economic and political assistance from South Korea and the United States. Such a high anticipation of help from the capitalist states was well expressed in Kim's New Year's address in 2010, notwithstanding the continued firm stance on denuclearization. However, North Korea cannot expect too much from South Korea or the United States, because it is too risky to entrust the North's fate

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7. With regard to the succession issue, it is a primary concern whether the monolithic leadership system is maintained or a collective guidance system is newly introduced. Many North Korean specialists in South Korea forecast that the monolithic leader system will be sustained in real power or at least in the form of symbolic reign. This opinion is generally supported by many North Korea intellectuals who defected to South Korea. This is because current North Korean cadres in power have been educated to accept it and because the idea of a unitary leadership prevails in North Korean political culture. Therefore, even when a collective leadership system is newly introduced to control the country in real terms, the monolithic leadership system will still be used to secure national support. The Kim family may be revered as a royal family, but the government may be managed by a collective leadership, such as the National Defense Commission (NDC) or the Workers' Party.

to either of them. Closer ties with China would seem to be a safer bet.

### **Social Change in the South and the North**

#### *South Korea: Civil Society and the North Korea Problem*

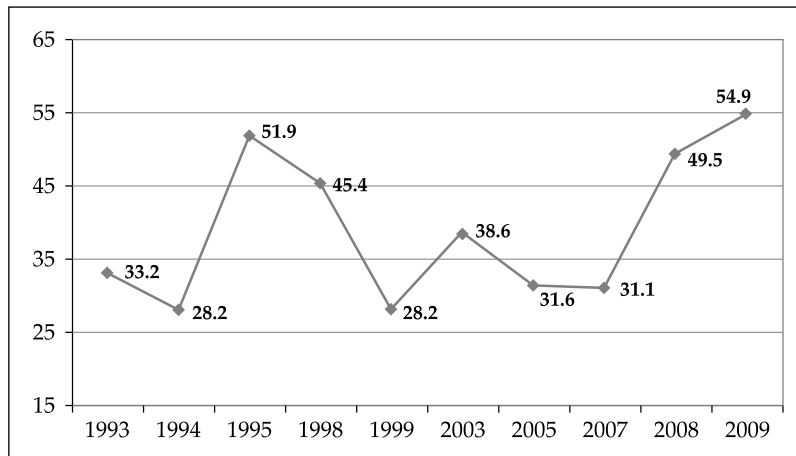
South Korean civil society became active following democratization in 1987. During the last decade under Presidents Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, the process of democratization continued, while the development of the Sunshine policy remained at the top of the agenda. The 2007 election, however, showed that issues relating to North Korea would no longer be a top priority for the electorate. Economic and other domestic concerns replaced them. During the decade of the Sunshine policy, ordinary people in the South came to understand the complexity involved in North Korean issues. However, over the same period there was also increasing skepticism and criticism about the direction of inter-Korean relations and inter-Korean projects.

A number of key incidents are important in understanding such changes in civil society, the most important of which was North Korea's nuclear test in 2006. The nuclear test created huge tensions in the South. Where progressive groups in the South had previously been able to make conciliatory gestures to the North, the nuclear test made any display of positive sentiment increasingly difficult. It brought about political disputes between progressives and conservatives. It has even caused splits among the progressive groups. Attitudes toward North Korea among progressives have lost their special meaning as a criterion of behavior. The incident at Keumgangsan described above added to the progressives' difficulty. For many South Koreans, the callous response of North Korea to this tragic incident was very difficult to comprehend.

According to an annual survey carried out by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University, conservative opinion among South Koreans has increased

since 2008. Positive responses to the statement “unification is necessary” fell to 51.6 percent in 2008 from 63.8 percent in 2007, while they increased slightly to 55.8 percent in 2009. In response to the statement, “early unification is desirable even at any cost,” a mere 9.2 percent and 8.6 percent responded positively in 2008 and 2009 respectively.<sup>8</sup> This shows a clear decline in the zeal for unification among South Korean citizens.

Figure 1. Critical Attitude Toward North Korea: “It Does Not Change”



Overall, year on year, negative popular sentiment toward North Korea has increased. The critical assessment that “North Korea has not changed” increased from 31.1 percent in 2007 to 49.5 percent in 2008, and then to 54.9 percent in 2009. Positive responses to the question “I will never trust the Kim Jong Il regime” increased sharply from 37.8 percent in 2007 to 50.3 percent in 2008, an increase of 12.5 percent. Mistrust of the North Korean regime has dramatically increased. Interestingly, the negative views toward the North are held across all age groups and

8. Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS), *Annual Survey on Unification 2008* (Seoul: IPUS, 2008) and *Annual Survey on Unification 2009* (Seoul: IPUS, 2009).

regions—those in their twenties and fifties, as well as those in Seoul, Choongchung, and Cholla. While conservatives continued to express negative feelings toward the North, many progressives withdrew their support for the North Korean leadership.

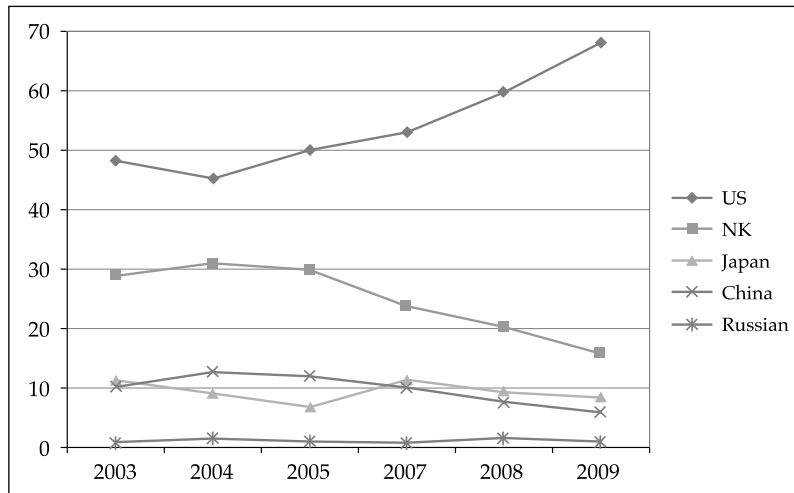
In the same context, negative attitudes are increasing on the issue of humanitarian assistance to North Korea. Support for the continued provision of humanitarian assistance was evenly divided in 2008: Around 44 percent of people surveyed supported it and 44 percent wanted to end humanitarian assistance. However, positive opinion decreased to 18.9 percent in 2009 while the negative figure remained firm. Those who held the view that assistance should be discontinued stated that they did not believe goods were being distributed to ordinary citizens inside North Korea.

South Korean interviewees demonstrated their strongest anti-North Korean opinions on questions related to the Keumgangsan incident. When posing the question “who or what is to blame for the Keumgangsan incident?” the majority of responses, 44.7 percent, pointed to North Korea in 2008. The next-largest response on the question of responsibility was hostile inter-Korean relations (25.1 percent), the particular tourist involved (22.2 percent), and the Hyundai Asan Corporation (which runs the Keumgangsan complex) at 7.7 percent. 62.9 percent of respondents said that tourism to Keumgangsan should not resume until North Korea complies with the South’s demand for a joint investigation.

Whereas favorable impressions of North Korea decreased from 23.8 percent to 20.3 percent year on year, positive views of the United States increased from 53.0 percent in 2007 to 59.9 percent in 2008, and then to 68.2 percent in 2009. Interestingly, this improvement in the image of the United States was particularly evident among Korean youth. Among those in their twenties, there was an increase in the favorable view from 46.7 percent to 57.4 percent, and then to 60.4 percent, during 2007-2009. Given these large shifts in attitudes, it can be posited that there is a driving factor causing this change, which we suggest is the North’s nuclear test.

Given the sense of crisis in North-South relations, we would

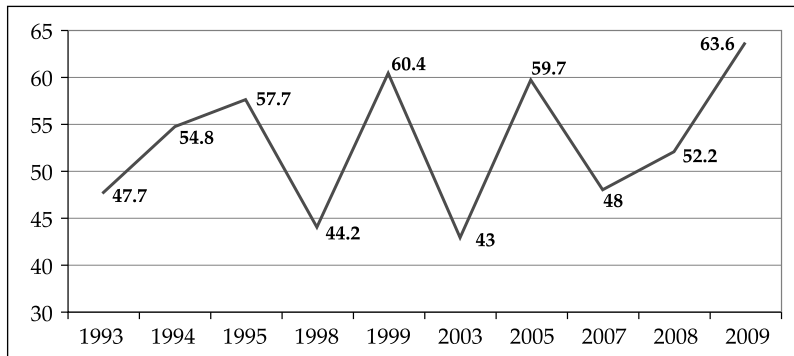
Figure 2. To Which Country Do You Feel Closest



expect an increased public fear about the possibility of hostilities. When asked whether they thought that there was potential for a military provocation from the North, affirmative replies increased from 52.2 percent in 2008 to 63.6 percent in 2009. This is mainly due to the North's second nuclear test in May 2009 and the deterioration in North-South relations. From past surveys, peak "fear levels" are reached when around 60 percent of respondents conclude that war is a real possibility. (Expectations of peace are highest when around 40 percent of respondents conclude that there is a high possibility of military provocation from the North.) The July 2007 survey response, in which 56.8 percent of interviewees expressed concern over a military provocation from the North, reflected heightened tension among the South Korean population as a result of the North's first nuclear test, although the inter-Korean summit and the October 4th Agreement reduced that level of concern to 48 percent. However, this fear level again increased to 52.2 percent in September 2008, and then to 63.6 percent in August 2009.

Looking at more recent survey data, it seems that the Lee administration has been successful in persuading the population

Figure 3. Crisis Feeling: "War May Break Out"



that North-South relations have been negatively impacted by the failure of the Sunshine policy and the belligerent and uncooperative attitude of the North Korean government. However, Lee Myung-bak seems to have failed in suggesting alternative policies to manage the remaining problems that exist on the Korean peninsula. The current South Korean government continues with the dictum, "firm principles and flexible approaches." However, the results suggest that it has been overly firm on principle, particularly the principle that the measures of the previous administrations should be superseded, and markedly inflexible in its approaches. As a result, the Lee administration has not been able to create an effective alternative to the conciliatory policies of the last two governments in order to successfully address the current issues concerning North Korea. Nor has it been able to deal with the growing ideological conflicts over North Korea among many in the South.

#### *North Korea's Dilemma: Reverse and Unstable*

The policy that allowed for market activities in North Korea was introduced in July 2002 but was repealed in 2005. In October 2006, North Korea conducted its first official nuclear test, which was followed by the second nuclear test in May 2009. These were probably expressions by the North of their worries about the

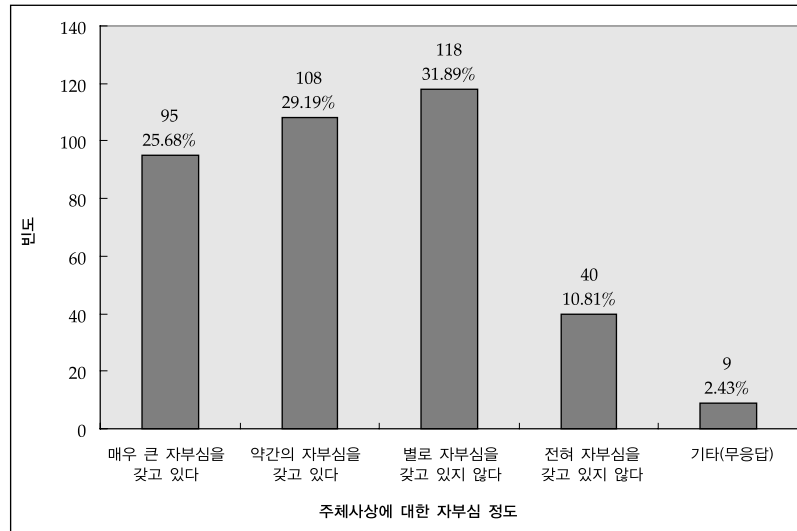
creeping influence of South Korea's economy and culture through the Kaesong Industrial Complex and other human contacts. The strong provocation toward the South may not just have been a reaction to the international situation; it may also have reflected growing sociopolitical unrest within North Korean society. For example, the distribution of leaflets in North Korea by South Korean NGOs became a contentious issue in South Korea because of the tension it was creating between the two governments. The leaflets were sent to the North using balloons. For the ordinary citizen in the South, it was perhaps perplexing to see the North Korean government launch such bitter criticism of small-scale actions by South Korean NGOs. However, the reaction of the North is evidence that the leaflets, containing new information and very critical commentary on the "Great Leader," Kim Il Sung, were having some impact on North Korea society. To the North's administration, such actions represented the beginning of a potentially destabilizing trend through which social unity would be eroded and the position of the North's political royalty endangered.

It is said that there are frequent and diverse informal human contacts across the North Korean-Chinese border. These continue to grow as a result of such things as the proliferation of illegal mobile phones. There is a continuous flow of North Koreans who cross the Chinese border in both directions. Others make the journey from the North to South Korea, necessarily via third countries. This continual movement of people provides a ready supply of information about life outside North Korea, including for example routes of escape and opportunities that might await them in final destination countries. Increasingly, North Korean refugees who have successfully made it to South Korea are active in a range of activities that aim to "help North Korean brothers" or "democratize North Korea." This growing movement of North Koreans in the South working to destabilize the North deeply concerns the Northern regime, and this can explain its deep sensitivity regarding South Korea's policies on human rights and political and economic "opening."

It is also worth mentioning here that the power of the North's *juche* ideology seems to have decreased in recent years.

In 1994, around 80 percent of North Korean citizens stated a belief in the official ideology.<sup>9</sup> However, this figure fell to around 64 percent in 2008 and to 54.9 percent in 2009, of whom 26 percent expressed “strong pride” and 29 percent “some pride.” 42.7 percent expressed “no pride for *juche* ideology,” constituting 32 percent of respondents who had “not much pride” and 11 percent who had “no pride at all.”<sup>10</sup>

Figure 4. Pride in *Juche* Ideology Among North Korean Citizens in 2009



Kim Jong Il has been losing popularity throughout the past ten years. According to a 1998 survey of 1,694 North Korean refugees in China, only 8 percent expressed criticism of the Kim Jong Il leadership. However, negative sentiment toward his leadership had increased to 26.1 percent in 2008 and then to 28.1 percent in 2009.<sup>11</sup> It seems likely that Kim Jong Il can currently

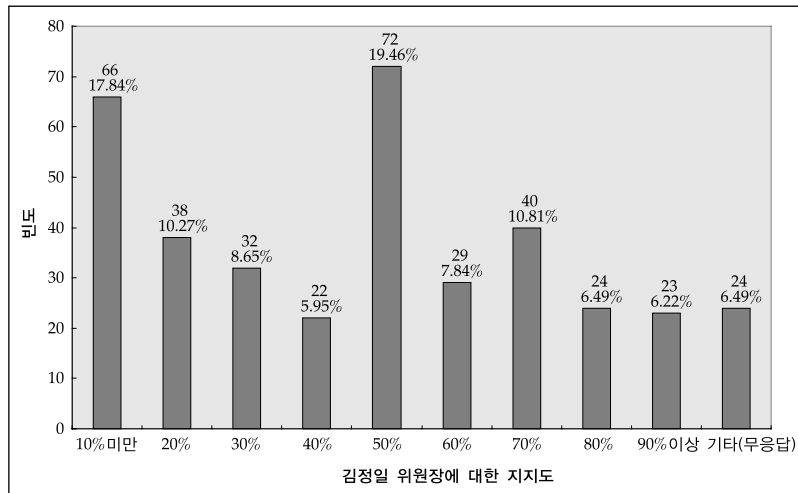
9. Philo Kim, *Current State on Internalization of Juche Ideology* (Seoul: KINU, 1994).

10. IPUS, “Survey on 370 North Korean Defectors” (August, 2009), and “Survey on 297 North Korean Defectors” (July, 2008).

11. Ibid.

command the support of around or slightly less than 50 percent of the North Korean population.

Figure 5. Approval Rating of Chairman Kim Jong Il in 2009



The Kim Jong Il regime mobilizes its citizens through the party and military institutions with slogans such as “military-first politics” and “building a strong and prosperous nation.” Military-first politics is defined in North Korea as a policy of “attaching importance to the military and giving primary effort to strengthening military power.” This is claimed as a unique characteristic of the Kim Jong Il leadership. The military has been regarded as the main force of North Korea’s socialist revolution and the role of the military has been increasingly stressed as the communist bloc has crumbled. Given that many of the current party, military, and National Security and Protection Agency (NSPA) cadres have direct experience of the Korean War, they carry a deep sense of injustice and victimhood and harbor deep hatred of the United States and its so-called imperialism on the Korean peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

12. There are still many victims of the Korean War among North Korea’s

Nevertheless, it remains important for North Korea to improve its economic situation to ensure regime survival and to allow Kim Jong Il's successor to secure political support and legitimacy. In moving toward this goal, the North regime initiated currency reform in November 2009, which devalued the old currency by 1:100. Since the central government has no money to revive the sluggish economy, it had to devise a form of shock therapy that amounts to extorting their citizen's money.

North Korea will also have to try to improve diplomatic relations with the United States. However, North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear ambition for economic rewards only. North Korea continues to demand talks with the United States on its nuclear-weapons program while refusing to accept any conditions relating to the abolition of nuclear facilities or programs. Given the stance of North Korea, short-term progress will be dependent upon a switch in U.S. policy from denuclearization to nonproliferation. The current position of North Korea demands that the United States should first proceed with normalization and conclusion of a peace treaty before beginning any negotiations for the dismantlement of the North's nuclear programs and weapons. In return for returning to the negotiation table of the Six Party Talks, the communist government also demands a lifting of UN and especially U.S. sanctions.

## **Prospects**

### *Understanding North Korean Thinking*

North Korea continues to demand the fulfillment of agreements reached under previous administrations between the two Koreas. North Korea continues its rhetoric of criticizing the South Korean authorities for disregarding the June 15 and the

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leaders. About 40 percent of party cadres, and more than 85 percent of military cadres experienced the Korean War, or *jeon-sa-ja* and *pi-sal-ja sung-boon* in Korean.

October 4 declarations. North Korea has stressed in the New Year's address of 2010 that it has tried very hard to maintain good relations with South Korea, and that it firmly believes in developing inter-Korean relations further. The North's government has proposed inter-Korean dialogues in a very active manner entering 2010. Such a surprise announcement by North Korea makes the South Korean government embarrassed about how to respond properly.

Understanding the North Korean mode of thinking is crucial to predicting and understanding their actions. Firstly, North Koreans, and particularly those who go on to hold positions in the government and military infrastructure, receive an education that encourages one-dimensional, highly conditioned thinking. Strong similarities in skill and styles can be seen across all leaders and cadres. In this sense, there is a simplicity to North Korean policy makers' mode of operation, much of which comes from the military characteristics of the North Korean system—its reliance on military traits and behaviors such as strong leadership, martial spirit, and strategies and tactics. The leadership is a top-down command chain system. The so-called “system of monolithic thought” in North Korea resembles most systems of military command where there can be no deviation from the accepted line. Even the words used by the North Korean leadership, for example *chae-gae* (system), confer the meaning of a generalized framework much like that of a military organization. North Koreans have become accustomed to this monolithic leadership and military-style system where those in the lower levels of the organization are expected to obey the dictates of those in the upper level. The highly centralized, top-down command system is the most prominent characteristic of the North Korean leadership.

Secondly, one of the more particular methods of negotiation and problem solving used by the North Korean leadership stems from the idea of a “central link” strategy. This is also true within some military organizations. The central link (*joong-sim-go-ri* in Korean) refers to something that is the core, the most important part, of any problem. North Koreans have been edu-

cated to view natural or manmade events in a simple, uncomplicated manner. No matter how complex a social or political event may be, the “central link” suggests the existence of one key aspect which, once identified, can resolve the whole question. In North Korean literature, it is often referred to as the “seed” (*jong-ja*). The most salient example of the central-link thought process at work can be seen in the Banko Delta Asia (BDA) incident. This thought process led the North Korean leadership to believe that if the United States had had any intention of recognizing or accepting the Kim Jong Il regime, it would have eventually allowed the North Korean government to access its funds.

The central link is seen as a litmus test of cooperation for larger scale issues. While this sort of behavior seems legitimate and justifiable to those in the North Korean leadership, to those outside of North Korea it can be perceived as a strategy of brinkmanship. North Korean leaders and cadres have been encouraged to believe that no matter how complicated a social or political problem may be, the answer is simple and always accessible. This problem solving method is common across all those schooled in North Korean educational institutions and needs to be fully understood if negotiations with the North hope to achieve results. All North Korea’s cadres have been educated and trained in this method of solving problems.

#### *Military-first Politics*

Next, the military spirit and military-first principle are strongly emphasized. We should remember that it is a system with a military orientation dominated by military values. The leaders officially acknowledge and maintain a system of “military-first politics,” and military values rule North Korean society. The system of military values was consolidated in the process of establishing a unitary leadership in the 1960s. It was established on the basis of a “battle spirit” that was encouraged throughout society, in schools, hospitals, and companies. Civilian members of society are urged to follow the “spirit of soldiers.” We have seen these “battlefield” slogans (*jeon-too-jang*) in

places such as the Pyongyang Hospital. The slogans are visible in every department and on every floor. Furthermore, there are clear parallels between the actions of the military and government and how the population is encouraged to think and act. For example, the stubborn adherence by the North Korean government to its nuclear policy reflects the message of self-reliance or *juche*, namely, that material items are the only guarantee of security and survival.

Fourth, by looking at the actions of the North Korean government through this "military prism," the strategies, tactics, and actions of North Korean policy makers may seem less unusual. For example, the tactic of "forestalling" (*ki-sun-jae-ap*) is one of the basic tactics in battle. It has been used by the North Korean authorities not only in governmental dialogue but also in negotiations with NGOs on the issue of humanitarian assistance. Others include crisis diplomacy, "mutual trust and confidence-building first" policies, "cooperation first, exchange later" policies, and the tactics of manipulating neighboring countries such as South Korea. All these devices are taken from the military.

#### *Next Steps*

What will be the next step? It is difficult to forecast the future of inter-Korean relations. North Korea's second nuclear test and the difficult situation in the Kaesong Industrial Complex make the situation more problematic than ever. The changing mood in both South and North civil societies might be another influencing factor. Needless to say, mutual trust and cooperation between the two Koreas is essential not only for peace on the Korean peninsula, but also for peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

The experience of the past ten years should have taught us that inter-Korean exchange and cooperation are normal and desirable. The recent abrupt breakdown in relations has created abnormal and unstable conditions in the region. It has also brought about a feeling of crisis and instability among South Korean citizens. This sense of vulnerability among South Koreans may be the factor that ultimately leads to the withdrawal of popular

support for the Lee administration's North Korea policy. It is very unfortunate that the South Korean government has not managed to develop sufficient leverage through its relationship with the North to manage the North's preemptive moves. However, the Lee administration needs to find a way to resolve the two-year deadlock. The current idea that "waiting is also a tactic" is not a viable or responsible long-term option.

The Lee administration needs to support the NGOs as much as possible. For example, it needs to allow more visits by South Korean citizens to North Korea, and it needs to resume the Keumgangsan tourism project on the precondition that Hyundai Asan receives security guarantees for participating tourists from the relevant North Korean agencies. As exchanges continue at an NGO level, the administration should seek to send a high-level envoy to restore government-level dialogue. It is widely reported that both Koreas had met three times in a third country to discuss holding another inter-Korean summit, but the idea vanished because the South required acceptance of a "grand bargain" as a condition of hosting the summit.

Against this background of reestablishing links, South Korea needs to take steps to prepare an action plan for realizing the policy of mutual benefit and common prosperity (MBCP). Any action plan may include, for example, support for projects aimed at modernizing elements of the North Korean economy as well as cooperative measures with international financial institutions. Most importantly, to support these other proposed efforts, South Korea must develop and establish a so-called "technique of dialogue" that will form the basis of all future contacts and negotiations. Understanding and managing the negotiation process itself is a crucial step toward stable and ongoing inter-Korean dialogue. South Korea frequently loses out in negotiations because of poor communication between negotiators in inter-Korean negotiation forums. A better understanding of the North Korean mind would bring tremendous rewards, particularly in the realm of negotiation. This process is possible and indeed relatively straightforward, as detailed above. In developing these skills in negotiation, South Korea can then exert more confident leader-

ship in instigating and energizing negotiations with the North.

Given that the division of the Korean peninsula was caused by the actions of the former Soviet Union and the United States, the two countries need to take more responsibility in the task of achieving reconciliation and the ultimate unification of Korea. Most South Korean citizens have great expectations for the role of the United States in ending military confrontation on the peninsula. For this reason, we strongly support the establishment of a bilateral diplomatic relationship between the United States and North Korea. The improvement in U.S.-North Korea relations will offer a chance to resume inter-Korean dialogue and increase political and cultural ties. Toward this end, for example, it is possible that the North Korean national symphony orchestra may be invited to the United Kingdom and to the United States on a tour of friendship. More than ever before, a concerted and brave effort is required from all involved parties in order to maintain peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

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