

Reunification and Korean Foreign Policy

Donald S. Macdonald

From the time that Korea fell under foreign domination at the beginning of the twentieth century, its people's demand was for independence. When liberation from Japan came in 1945, and Korea was divided into two occupation zones, the demand became not only independence, but unification. Unhappily, nominal independence came at the price of division between two contending ideologies and two military blocs. An attempt at unification by force resulted in war, which ravaged the peninsula and reinforced the division.

Since the armistice of 1953, the destiny of Korea has been pursued by two contending states. Both of them have developed political, economic, and military power that would have been unimaginable when Korea was first opened to the outside world in the late nineteenth century. Both have professed devotion to the cause of reunification; but they have sought international prestige and support in fierce competition with each other, each denying the other state's legitimacy.

It now seems probable, with the end of the Cold War and the reversal of the two Korean states' relative economic strengths, that Korea will be unified in the twenty-first century. Perhaps, as South Korean President Roh Tae Woo has suggested, it may come earlier. However, although outside forces were largely responsible for the division of Korea, internal forces must be largely responsible for putting Korea back together again—because both

Koreas want it that way, and because other countries have little reason or opportunity to further it (and in some instances might have reasons to oppose it). In terms of foreign policy, the question for Korea is how to tap external forces to reinforce the movement toward reunification, or, at minimum, how to keep them from disrupting that movement.

An additional problem for the future is how to maintain Korea's national independence, which collapsed in 1905 before the military and economic might of a resurgent, modernizing Japan and was regained only by the action of the superpowers after Japan's defeat. The problems of reunification and independence are related, because national unity is necessary for both, and because one of the most important arguments for reunification is that it would strengthen Korea's position toward the outside world.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Korea's international relations relate to both unification and independence.

II

The goal of Korean international relations, like those of any country, is to optimize the country's national interests. These interests include the assurance of national independence and security, and the maintenance and increase of the material and psychological well-being of the nation and its citizens. In the case of Korea, the achievement of reunification constitutes another major national interest, but it clearly takes second place to security and well-being. In fact, it is an interest only insofar as it furthers security and well-being.

The potential benefits of reunification are both psychological and material. Psychologically, the unification issue—in addition to its linkage with the emotional problems of divided families and of ethnic and territorial unity—is related to the larger issues of nationalism and patriotism. These are significant elements of national strength, as will be discussed below. Materially, reunifi-

cation would increase Korea's capacity for effective international relations because (a) the country would speak with one voice instead of two discordant voices; (b) the single reunified nation would have double the size and 150 percent of the population of South Korea (or three times the population of North Korea); (c) the natural resource base, while still modest, and the larger domestic market would strengthen a unified Korea's economy and somewhat lessen its dependence upon foreign markets and materials; (d) the reunified country would have clearly defined and defensible borders; (e) the burden of supporting enormous military forces would be lessened.

At the same time, reunification would clearly entail both material and social costs, as the German experience demonstrates. Estimates of cost run as high as 500 billion U.S. dollars. The strain of re-assembling two Korean societies, organized on entirely different principles for nearly fifty years, would be very great. It should also be recognized that some of the expected benefits can be realized without unification, through reduction of tensions—such as family reunions, inter-Korean trade, and reduction of military expenditures. Nevertheless, the benefits of reunification, in both domestic and international terms, appear to outweigh the costs—particularly if these costs can be reduced or stretched out by a gradual approach.

III

Both Korean states have important strengths to back up their international relations: diligent, well-educated work forces; highly-organized and disciplined political, military, and economic institutions; and proven records of economic development, making effective use of foreign assistance (although the development record of the North Korean command economy has faded since the 1970s, while South Korea's record, based upon exports and interdependence with the market-oriented international economy, has burgeoned since the mid-1960s). Moreover,

the historical record shows that Korea, despite the military might of both states that is a heritage of the Korean war, has never been an aggressor nation. This fact, together with Korea's moderate size and the identification of both Korean states with the developing world, give Korea advantages over the great powers in exploiting present and future opportunities for international trade and investment in the Third World.

On the other hand, Korea—even reunited—has serious weaknesses in its position toward the outside world. It is surrounded by three larger and stronger powers, among whom it is always a potential bone of contention. It has a history of domestic disunity that makes it vulnerable to outside forces; the present division of the country is only the most recent demonstration of Korea's propensity for factional rivalry and strife at the expense of national unity.¹ Koreans have been accustomed to regard their country as small and weak, and to seek the help of powerful outside forces to accomplish what they believe they cannot do by themselves. Korean dependence on outside sources of supply, a consequence of the peninsula's dense population and paucity of natural resources, makes it vulnerable to external economic pressure, as demonstrated by current North Korean energy shortages and the chronic, massive South Korean trade deficit with Japan. The Korean people, despite a century of exposure to foreign penetration, are still inclined to be inward-looking and suspi-

1 Korea has been a unitary state for a thousand years; nevertheless its traditional eight provinces, five of them subdivided in 1895, have been a territorial expression of regional differences in culture, dialect, and outlook that in recent years have come to play a major role in South Korean politics—and may have an implicit role in North Korean politics as well. One aspect of German reunification that has never been referred to in the Korean case is its federal nature. Five of the states of prewar Germany were reconstituted in East Germany, and these states were admitted to the Federal Republic. Given the move in South Korea toward autonomy for provinces, cities, and counties, one possible unification formula might involve a quasifederal state in which the North Korean provinces (now nine in number, to match the number in the South) and province-level special cities would be able to preserve their socialist regimes, and in which the various provinces would have latitude to express different collective personalities.

cious of strange people and customs. Korean energies and resources have been dissipated in the military and diplomatic confrontation between the two states.

The consequence of all this, despite the growing influence of both Koreas on the international scene since 1948 and their recent establishment as United Nations member states, is a self-reinforcing derogation of Korean national stature: the Koreans feel defiantly inferior, notwithstanding all the progress they have made, and the world confirms their assessment.²

IV

The historical record demonstrates the impact of some of these Korean weaknesses.

In regard to the Korean propensity to look to foreign friends for support, the problem, in Lord Acton's oft-quoted phrase, is that in the modern world, nations have no friends—only interests. Perhaps this was not always so. Korea's historical relationship with China was based upon an extension of Confucian familial ties, under which China provided benevolent protection of Korea but (until imperialist rivalries led China to assert hegemony from 1884 to 1894) did not meddle in domestic Korean affairs.³ But when imperial China was defeated by upstart Japan in 1895, Korea willy-nilly became part of the harsher international order of nominally equal sovereign nations that had evolved in the West.

2 A former tutor of Kim Il Sung, Il Peter Alexandrovich, is quoted as saying recently to South Koreans, "Americans, British, Russians, Chinese, Japanese—they treat us like a second rate, colonial people." Daniel Sneider, "Kim Il Sung's Soviet-Korean Tutor Belies Dictator's Wartime Record." *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 July 1992, p. 6.

3 For a discussion of Korea's place in the Confucian international order, see M. Frederick Nelson, *Korea and the Old Order in Eastern Asia* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1964).

The initial Korean response to the new environment, rather than to prepare for defense, was to cast about for alternative elder brothers. Pro-Chinese, pro-Russian, and pro-Japanese factions contended at court, while successive Japanese, American, and Russian military advisers trained handfuls of ill-equipped soldiers. As late as 1904, Confucian scholars at the Korean court memorialized the throne against abandoning the traditional Confucian orientation. When Japan defeated imperial Russia, no choice remained, and Korea fell under Japanese rule.⁴

The development of the nation-state in Europe and America was accompanied by the emergence of popular patriotism. People came to feel an emotional affinity for the political systems of their states, as distinguished from ethnic, community, or family ties, or loyalty to the person of the ruler. Both elites and masses were thus motivated to go to war if necessary to defend their systems and their national boundaries. Oppressed European minorities in the nineteenth century developed a sense of nationalism centered in shared ethnic identity, and demanded states of their own. It was this process that inspired Woodrow Wilson's doctrine of self-determination of nations.

In Korea before the Japanese occupation, notwithstanding a strong and proud sense of ethnic identity, the people had a very weak sense of affinity toward their political system. Far more than in Europe, their loyalties were personal, not institutional, and a century or more of dynastic decline had undermined support for the royal house. Family, factional, and regional loyalties had precedence. In these circumstances, to mobilize the nation for effective defense against outside forces would have been extremely difficult, even if it had been tried. The Koreans watched helplessly as Chinese, Russian, and Japanese forces vied for hegemony over them.

4 For a review of Korea's troubles during the imperialist era, 1876 to 1905, see C.I. Eugene Kim and Hangyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

Resentment at the forty-year Japanese occupation of Korea led to the development of modern nationalism among the population. This nationalism fueled the unarmed countrywide uprising in 1919 to demand independence from Japan; the formation of the Provisional Government in exile in China; and a number of nationalist movements within Korea (all suppressed, sooner or later, by the Japanese Government-General). However, nationalist leaders were unable to combine their energies effectively in the struggle for independence.

In considerable measure, this inability was due to the power and efficiency of Japan, which denied the Koreans any hope for achieving independence in the absence of outside intervention. The hope of such intervention, based on Woodrow Wilson's advocacy of self-determination, encouraged the March First Movement; but, as the Koreans soon discovered to their sorrow, Wilson's doctrine was intended for the nations within the defeated states of World War I, not in the victorious ones such as Japan. In part, however, the weakness of the independence movement was also due to the ideological divisions and personal rivalries among the Koreans—evidence that family, group, and community continued to take precedence over the nation as a whole.⁵ The same weakness had been manifested in the sixteenth century, when factional rivalries impeded Korean defense against Japanese invasion.

Poverty and misgovernment in Choson Dynasty Korea, reported by foreign observers from the late nineteenth century on, created a negative impression of the country. The United States government—informed by the social Darwinism prevalent at the time—all but welcomed the Japanese takeover in 1905, and was the first to withdraw its diplomatic mission. Other governments followed suit. Korea dropped below the diplomatic horizon for the next generation.

5 See Chong-Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

When World War II came, Syngman Rhee and other exiled nationalists saw the likelihood of Japan's defeat and Korea's reemergence, and argued strongly for international recognition. However, squabbling, unrealism and chicanery among exiled nationalist leaders had alienated both the United States and the Soviet Union, and led the United States to refuse to recognize any existing Korean leader or group as representing the Korean people. The ideas of trusteeship and military occupation were nurtured by the American conviction that the Koreans were not fit to govern themselves. It was for this reason that Japan, a defeated enemy but a respected state, was permitted its own administration, while "liberated" Korea was placed under the military government of two adversarial world powers.

It is frequently overlooked that the division of Korea was due not only to the U.S.-Soviet agreement to establish two separate occupation zones, but also to weakness and division of the Koreans. Their weakness, given the years of Japanese occupation, was inevitable. Their division, however, was a continuation of the factional rivalries and ambitions for power that had for so long characterized Korean politics—intensified by the ideological split between Left and Right, communists and anti-communists. Perhaps this, too, was inevitable; exiled nationalist movements everywhere appear to have the same problems. But it is significant that the Korean communists and their sympathizers readily followed the Soviet directive to reverse their position and support trusteeship in the midst of the anti-trusteeship demonstrations of late December 1945, while Syngman Rhee a short time later, reflecting conservative American anti-communist views, demanded a separate Korean state in the south.⁶ Both

6 On Soviet relations with Korea in 1945, see Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea 1945-1947* (Oxford, England: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), pp. 143-144. On Syngman Rhee's support for a separate regime, see Donald S. Macdonald, *U.S.-Korea Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance; the Twenty-Year Record* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p. 115, and Robert Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1954). It should be noted that U.S. policy officials were divided on the subject

positions made effective discussion of a unified transitional Korean regime virtually impossible.

Once the division of Korea was established, each Korean state looked to a protective "elder brother" in the old Confucian tradition. Syngman Rhee's entire foreign policy was built upon his relation with the United States, from which he constantly sought ever-larger grants of military and economic aid.⁷ He aspired to reunify Korea under his control by force with American support, but could not persuade the United States to go along with him. American counsel to broaden Korean relations with the world went largely unheeded until the end of his administration in 1960.

Similarly, North Korea in its early stages looked to the Soviet Union as its elder brother and protector; and the Soviet Union, unlike the United States, supplied it with the weapons and training needed for forcible reunification of the country. But when United Nations intervention pushed North Korea out of the South, the Soviet Union deserted it—as the United States had deserted the South before the war. It was the newly-victorious Chinese communists who came to its aid, preventing the reunification of the country under United Nations auspices as had been briefly planned and expected. As the Sino-Soviet confrontation heated up, Kim Il Sung was able to play the two countries off against each other and thus to achieve a considerable measure of independence for the North. The South had no alternative other than the United States (Japanese support being unthinkable for either Korea) and thus continued in a state of theoretical independence but practical dependence.

of Korea's future, with the Department of State until 1947 supporting negotiation with the Soviet Union for a unified Korea; and that Syngman Rhee, although he counted almost exclusively on the United States for his support, was no American puppet.

7 Donald S. Macdonald, *U.S.-Korea Relations from Liberation to Self Reliance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p. 112.

Since the mid-1960s, South Korea has moved a long way toward becoming master in its own house. This movement has been based largely on its amazing economic growth, which has brought it to the verge of full industrialization and has made it a significant actor in the world economy. Its economic progress, contrasted with North Korea's stagnation of recent years, has enabled South Korea to support its own enormous military establishment (which had been dependent upon American aid for many years) and even to pay some of the costs of the American forces stationed in Korea. Economic progress has also earned for South Korea a considerable measure of respect among the world's nations, which until a decade or so ago tended to dismiss the Republic as an American puppet (a view assiduously cultivated by North Korea). With new self-confidence and with an enhanced international reputation, South Korea has cast off its shell and reached out to the world.

However, South Korea—even with its large, well-equipped, and battle-tested armed forces—remains psychologically dependent on the United States because of the continuing threat from North Korea.⁸ Whether or not the remaining U.S. infantry division and air division in Korea are militarily essential for defense, their presence is still desired by seven out of ten South Koreans (according to a recent poll) because of the insurance these forces provide against North Korean attack. This dependence is likely to continue so long as the confrontation between North and South continues at present levels.

8 The author has elsewhere pointed out that even the anti-Americanism of radical students and intellectuals in South Korea is a sort of backward expression of dependence: for this group, all Korea's misfortunes can be heaped upon the head of the Americans, who thus become a scapegoat to relieve the Koreans of their own responsibility. Donald S. Macdonald, "American Imperialism: Myth or Reality." *Korea and World Affairs* 10, No. 3 (Fall 1986). For a recent survey of student opinion on relations with the United States, see Research Memorandum, Office of Research, United States Information Agency, 25 February 1992, "Korean University Students' Views on Korean Society, the U.S."

In a curious, reverse way, North Korea also remains dependent upon the United States, because the presence of American forces on Korean soil provides such a convenient means of rationalizing the mobilization of the population as a defense against the imperialist menace.

V

Independence, in the modern world, is more a state of mind than an objective reality. Every people wants to consider itself independent, as the breakup of the Soviet empire and the fractionation of Yugoslavia so eloquently demonstrate. In actuality, however, interdependence among nations is virtually a universal condition today, and the most advanced nations, in general, are the most interdependent. Even North Korea, with all its emphasis on self-reliance, is suffering because of the termination of concessional trade with the Soviet Union and China. South Korea has built its whole program of economic growth upon export to foreign markets; and, lacking domestic sources for most of its essential raw materials, it must import in order to export, as well as to meet the growing demands of its own population. Thus its fortunes are closely linked to those of the world economy.

Nevertheless, the sovereign independence of nation-states remains an important component of the modern international order, and seems likely to continue so for the foreseeable future. Every state must have the means to protect its people from foreign threats to their security and prosperity, whether the threat be military, economic, or psychological. Any elementary textbook on international relations will list the resources that a nation needs to protect itself—diplomatic skill, military and economic strength, scientific and technical competence, and so on. Among these resources, surely the most important is the unity of the people and their support for their country's political, economic, and social system and leaders. A perception of national independence, and the willingness to defend it, are key psycho-

logical elements in this support. Patriotism and independence are inseparably linked, as are patriotism and the perceived legitimacy that the political system enjoys.

The history of Korea, briefly summarized above, suggests that the nation's past problems have been due in large part precisely to the absence of patriotism. During the long period of Confucian relationship to China, patriotism was an extraneous idea. The traumatic encounter with imperialist rivalries and Japanese conquest, while it engendered a fierce nationalist feeling akin to xenophobia, did not produce either national unity or patriotism. The governments of South Korea from 1961 to 1987 were not regarded by the population as legitimate. The great majority of South Koreans look upon the North Korean government as illegitimate, as they are taught by their government to do, and North Koreans are taught to regard South Korea the same way. Moreover, despite the protestations of their leaders, some Koreans—especially among students and intellectuals—seem still to doubt their independence.

True independence will not come to Korea—North, South, or both together—in the eyes of the Korean people until their perceived dependence upon the presence of American forces is eliminated. The only way to eliminate it is by reducing the intensity of North—South confrontation to a level at which the people truly believe that they can provide for their own defense. Such reduction of tension, of course, is also an essential step toward reunification.

Eliminating dependence on American forces (which does not necessarily mean their total withdrawal) is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the achievement of a perception of independence either by the people or by their leaders. The forty-seven-year preoccupation of each half of Korea with the threat from the other half has not only engendered military dependence on outside powers, but has also prevented Koreans from developing any valid concept of self-defense against the larger world outside the peninsula. Koreans still tend to regard their country

as yakso ("small and weak"), when in fact South Korea alone ranks twentieth in gross national product among the world's nations and is twelfth largest in international trade—and, if reunited, would have the twelfth to fourteenth largest national product.⁹

It is true that even a united Korea with any imaginable military and economic base could not defeat any of the three huge nations that surround it either militarily or economically, let alone a combination of them. On the other hand, Korea could certainly develop the capability for inflicting unacceptable damage on any would-be attacker. Moreover, its three neighbors, as well as the United States, have a vested interest in the stability of northeast Asia. So long as these nations were persuaded that no one of them could co-opt Korea as a target of expansion or a base for attack, and so long as they were all convinced that a military or economic attack on Korea would have dire consequences, such an attack would be very unlikely. It is through such principles that the independence of Switzerland, a nation far smaller than Korea, has been assured.

VI

Korea's long-term future as an independent nation, therefore, rests on its capacity for credible self-defense, both military and economic; and upon the perception of its neighbors that no one of them could turn Korea into a base for military or economic aggression. Its security can also be enhanced by development of a broad range of relations of mutual economic and political benefit with as many as possible of the world's nations.

Credible self-defense requires a strong base of military and economic strength and popular support for the regime. This support depends upon the perceived legitimacy of the regime

9 Nicholas Eberstadt and Judith Banister, "Korean Reunification in the German Mirror," *Asian Outlook* (Taipei) 27, No. 1 (November-December 1991), p. 47.

and upon the strength of the people's patriotic attachment to the institution of the state, as well as the people's belief that the nation has the strength, capacity, and will to preserve itself. The continued division of the country weakens all these factors. It follows that if the two Korean states genuinely desire to assure their future security and prosperity, they must not only enhance their people's perception of Korean strength, but must also pay more than lip-service to the cause of reunification. As one scholar notes:

If...the reunification process is not seriously pursued by the divided parties themselves, while the role of third parties is becoming more prominent, the principle of self-determined unification by Koreans is likely to become impaired.¹⁰

Whether reunification is being "seriously pursued by the divided parties themselves" has been, at least until recently, a matter for some doubt. Both Koreas have put forward formulae for unification, but until very recently they seemed designed more for domestic and foreign propaganda effect than for meaningful negotiation—reminiscent of the grandiose formulae for general and complete disarmament put forward by the Soviet Union and the United States in the early days of the Cold War. The most recent unification proposals of the two sides do indicate some degree of convergence; but the diplomatic contacts between the two sides, from their beginning in 1971 to the current series of talks at the prime minister level, have not even begun to address the specifics of the unification process.¹¹

To begin with, it is clear that no foreign country is particularly eager for Korean reunification, nor likely to work for it, although various states may for diplomatic reasons associate themselves

10 Tae Dong Chung, "Korea's Nordpolitik: Achievements and Prospects." *Asian Perspectives* 15, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1991), p. 173.

11 For an analysis of unification proposals, see B.C. Koh, "A Comparative Study of Unification Plans: The Korean National Community versus the Koryo Confederation." *Korea Observer* 21 (Winter 1990), pp. 437-455.

with the unification formulae of one or the other Korean state.¹² On the other hand, the major powers will work for the reduction of tensions in Korea, because of their interest in the stability of northeast Asia. Since the reduction of tensions is an essential precondition for reunification, then the policies of both Koreas, as a part of the drive for reunification, should be aimed at encouraging participation of the major powers in the tension reduction process. Given the international quality of the Korean war and the Armistice Agreement, such participation is both necessary and appropriate. Among possible forms of participation would be the substitution of an international force along the Demilitarized Zone for the presence of U.S. forces as a deterrent to hostilities, and international observation or verification of force reductions or other arms control arrangements.

A multilateral guarantee for the independence of a unified Korea would be another useful way in which foreign countries could support unification. Although the real power of such a guarantee would be marginal, it would help to reassure a nervous Korean public at a time of transition. Such a guarantee would be particularly relevant if Korea were to opt for neutrality or nonalignment, as some authorities have proposed.¹³

Additionally, reunification must be perceived as a process, and not a single apocalyptic event.

If the approach toward the unification of the two Koreas can be defined as one that goes through the reduction of tensions, a peace settlement, and an accumulation of contacts between the South and North, then South Korea's improving relations with the Soviet Union and China can be viewed as the creation of

12 See Donald S. Macdonald, "The Role of the Major Powers in The Reunification of Korea," *Washington Quarterly* 15, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 135-154, esp. p. 147.

13 See In Kwan Hwang, *The United States and Neutral Reunited Korea: Search for a New Basis of American Strategy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), and Lhee Ho-jeh, "The Prospect of Neutralized Reunification of Korea," in *Korea: The Year 2000*, Han Sung-joo and Robert J. Myers, eds., *Ethics and Foreign Policy Series*, Vol. 5 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America and Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs), pp. 105-118.

favorable conditions, which should lead toward a peaceful settlement, based on the recognition of reality.¹⁴

VIII

North Korean foreign policy contains a strong positive element of self-reliance, but this element has been combined with a kind of exceptionalism—the assertion that North Korea is somehow better than and different from the other nations of the world—and with a radical anti-imperialism that may appeal to like-minded leaders in such states as Cuba, but is most unattractive to the states most likely to provide meaningful trade and assistance. Until recently, it has rejected all forms of foreign participation in the reduction of tensions, and has demanded withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea as a precondition for discussing reunification. Moreover, North Korea has discouraged international cooperation through its unconventional diplomatic behavior.

North Korea employs a variety of covert and overt tactics, including massive propaganda efforts depicting the South Korean government as an illegitimate puppet of U.S. occupation, to weaken international and domestic support for South Korean President Roh Tae Woo and the U.S. military presence in the peninsula....Since the late 1960s, North Korea has deployed specially trained agents and military personnel to conduct terrorism against South Korea.¹⁵

North Korea in recent years has shipped large quantities of sophisticated weapons to states like Syria and Iran, including SCUD missiles, in defiance of the international accord on such shipments.

14 Chung, "Korea's Nordpolitik," p. 153.

15 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, *North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength* (Washington, D.C.), October 1991, p. 50.

Whether from real fear of aggression by the South and the United States, or from its own aggressive intentions against the South, or as a means of mobilizing its own population, North Korea has been engaged since the early 1960s in a massive military buildup, and more recently has also endeavored to strengthen itself through the covert development of nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding its adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, until this year it evaded signature of the required agreement on inspection of nuclear facilities.

North Korea has shown some signs of opening toward the world since 1980, including the passage of a joint venture law in 1984; endorsement of three-way talks among the North and South and the United States (refused by both South Korea and the United States); since 1990, an effort to normalize relations with Japan (somewhat surprising in view of North Korea's official anti-Japanism); and, in 1991, membership in the United Nations together with south Korea, after years of maintaining that only united Korea should be admitted. The effort at normalization with Japan has made little progress because of Japan's concern with nuclear proliferation; but if North Korea abandons its weapons program and accepts inspection, normalization may proceed, with its concomitant economic benefits. North Korea seems to have shifted its position on the U.S. force presence, no longer requiring complete withdrawal as a condition for proceeding with unification or tension reduction negotiations.

However, North Korea has rejected the idea of an international conference on reducing tensions, such as originally suggested by Henry Kissinger in the 1960s and most recently proposed by South Korean President Roh Tae Woo. As for North Korea's principal allies, although Mikhail Gorbachev, as President of the Soviet Union, was speaking in terms of an East Asian security arrangement, which might have included the two Koreas, China has sided with North Korea against an international conference, supporting North Korea's position that the Korean question is

one for the Koreans themselves to solve without outside interference.

Moreover, North Korea's unification formula remains unrealistic in foreign eyes because it calls for sweeping institutional measures at the top, before the necessary trust and confidence are established between the two sides. The North seems to have no interest in obvious confidence-building measures, of which many have been proposed by the South, such as reestablishment of communications and trade and family visits. Invitations for North Korean representatives to observe South Korean and American military maneuvers have all been refused or ignored.

The changes in North Korea's foreign policies are probably due primarily to the collapse of the communist bloc and its concomitant adverse political and economic consequences, as well as to North Korean economic difficulties since the mid-1970s. Whether they reflect any real shift in North Korea's attitude toward the world remains to be established; and their relevance for the reunification process is marginal at best. Nevertheless, they offer hope that the North may be more amenable to cooperation with the regional powers in the future-especially if the North's rigid ideological position softens in response to the worldwide trend toward pragmatism noted by Robert Scalapino, in which "performance, not faith, has become the hallmark of legitimacy."¹⁶

South Korea, on the other hand, has gained immensely in the breadth and sophistication of its international relations. It is recognized by over 125 nations, and has diplomatic missions in many of them; it is a member of the United Nations and all its specialized agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank; it has played an active role in negotiations of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Its two-way foreign trade in

16 Robert A. Scalapino, "Pacific-Asian Political Trends in the 1990s." *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 22, No. 3 (Autumn 1991), p. 368.

1991 totalled \$72 billion, putting it among the top twelve trading countries of the world, and this trade is becoming increasingly diversified, diminishing the country's dependence on American and Japanese markets. The massive flow of foreign aid during the post-Korean war period, primarily from the United States, ended in the mid-1970s; and in recent years South Korea has undertaken a modest foreign aid program of its own.

South Korean President Roh Tae Woo's statement of 7 July 1988 and his speech to the United Nations in October 1988, according to one authority, "marked a watershed in North-South relations." These and subsequent policy statements have been eloquent expressions of South Korea's openness to the world.¹⁷

Korea's most impressive foreign-policy accomplishment has been its Northern Policy, first put forward in 1983 but made a centerpiece of South Korean policy since 1987, during the administration of President Roh Tae Woo.¹⁸ Under this policy, the Republic has established full diplomatic relations with virtually all former communist countries despite the shrill protests of the North at "betrayal" by its former comrades, and has pledged a \$3 billion program of trade and investment to the former Soviet Union. The Northern Policy, explicitly undertaken in large part to further the reunification process, has been accompanied by repeated overtures to North Korea for negotiation, and the formulation of a new reunification formula which, by starting with small confidence-building steps, appears realistic and workable in contrast to that of the North.

Nevertheless, South Korea also has impediments to the unification process. The long Cold War North-South confrontation engendered deep suspicions and fears of North-inspired espio-

17 Roh Tae Woo, *Korea: A Nation Transformed; Selected Speeches* (London: Pergamon Press, 1990), esp. pp. 3-10, 59-61, 76-83; Ohn Chang-il, "Military Talks in Korea," in *The Korean Peninsula; Prospects for Arms Reduction under Global Detente*, William J. Taylor, Jr., Cha Young-Koo, and John Q. Blodgett, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p. 177-178.

18 Chung, "Korea's Nordpolitik," p. 152.

nage, subversion, and incitement to rebellion, leading to highly restrictive legislation such as the National Security Law, and repression and condemnation of any utterance or action not deemed supportive of the South's political regime. The fears and suspicions were not unfounded; North Korean propaganda overtly supported rebellion in the South, and covertly attempted to stimulate and encourage it. In the light of South Korea's greatly increased strength, prosperity and freedom, and its new self-confidence, the old Cold War restrictions appear somewhat anachronistic. Yet a significant segment of south Korean elite opinion continues to support them.

Two emissaries of radical student and intellectual movements in the South, who defied the law in going to North Korea in the cause of unification and were feted there, were jailed upon their return and have remained in prison ever since, while the North Korean agent who assisted in the destruction of a South Korean airliner and its passengers in 1987 has been amnestied and released. South Korea continues to hold several hundred political prisoners, according to human rights organizations such as Asia Watch and Amnesty International;¹⁹ North Korean propaganda has severely attacked the restrictive laws and the holding of prisoners; the North, of course, is a far worse violator itself.²⁰

A weakness in the foreign policies of both Korean states is their continuing competition in international relations. Twenty years ago this year, on July 4, 1972, the two Koreas managed to agree on a joint declaration stating three principles for the achievement

19 According to the National Council of Churches of Korea Human Rights Committee Report, "1140 prisoners of conscience were officially arrested and prosecuted in 1991.... At present there are 1103 prisoners of conscience in South Korea (495 students, 334 workers, 85 opposition persons, 20 publishers, 40 soldiers and policemen, 7 farmers, 5 teachers, 96 long-term prisoners and 20 others." *Korea Update* (The Korea Church Coalition for Peace Justice and Reunification), Issue No. 105, January, 1992, p. 7.

20 See *Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)* (Minneapolis, Minn., and Washington, D.C.: Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee and Asia Watch, 1988).

of unification: "through independent efforts" without foreign interference, peacefully, and through "great national unity."²¹ Yet up to now there has been no evidence of great national unity in the two states' foreign policies, not to speak of their attitude toward each other. Even without formal political unity, it should be possible for the two Korean states to work out a *modus vivendi* in which they complement and support each other in their foreign policies, laying aside the zero-sum competition of past years to work for the good of Korea as a whole.

IX

In conclusion: the reunification of Korea is a useful and perhaps necessary step to assure the independence and prosperity of the Korean people for the long term. Yet ideological differences and power rivalries continue to obstruct real progress, even after the end of the Cold War that caused the division of Korea in the first place. There is little or nothing that foreign countries can do about these differences and rivalries. However, foreign countries do have a contribution to make in the reduction of tensions and in the assurance of future Korean independence. Since reduction of tensions is an essential step in the unification process—which must be viewed as a process and not as a single event—there is an international dimension in the process. The foreign policy of both Koreas should aim at recognizing and capitalizing upon this dimension.

The principal ways in which foreign powers can assist in Korea's reunification and long-term independence include technical advice on arms control arrangements and confidence-building measures, drawn particularly from the European experience; the creation of a regional atmosphere that promotes a Korean sense of security and willingness to embark upon the

21 South-North Joint Communiqué, July 4, 1972; text cited in *Handbook on Korean-U.S. Relations* (New York: The Asia Society, 1985), pp. 375–376.

reunification process; participation in certain tension-reduction steps such as international inspections and international peacekeeping forces, as may be requested by the Koreans; and eventually, the provision of capital and technology for the rehabilitation of the North Korean economy, the cost of which, in the short run, will be beyond the resources of the Koreans themselves.

For successful conduct of its international relations, Korea—either divided or united—needs the unified support of its people, which in turn requires legitimacy of the political regime and a heightened sense of patriotism—of love of country, as distinguished from ethnic pride and identity, and of willingness to accord a higher priority to national interests, even at the expense of family, factional, and local interests, than has traditionally been the case. It is of the utmost importance that Koreans not be vulnerable to outside blandishments, or to feelings of subservience to foreign powers, such as caused Korea's international problems in the past. Since the division of Korea has itself been a cause, as well as a result, of disunity and the questioning of legitimacy, it follows that national unity and loyalty will be greatly reinforced by reunification.

For the sake of the security and prosperity of the Korean nation, as well as for the cause of unification, it is time for both Korean states to apply the principle of great national unity to their international relations—even before the unification process gets underway. The result would be to increase the prestige and influence of Korea on the world scene, even while it remains divided, and to hasten the day when the nation will be reunified.