

Northeast Asia and the Trust-building Process: Neighboring States' Policy Coordination

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South Korea's policy toward North Korea should embrace the diverse interests of the South Korean society, the North Korean regime and the general population, as well as the neighboring countries such as the United States and China. For the past twenty years, South Korea's diplomatic authorities have experienced difficulties in gaining widespread support. At times, this had led to 'South-South conflict,' and diplomatic conflict between South Korea and the United States or between South Korea and China, regarding their respective policy differences in addressing North Korea issues. Compared to former North Korea policies, the Trust-building Process has its strength in gaining widespread interest from the relatively diverse stakeholders because confidence-building is a verified diplomatic policy in the international community, and also because it aims at more indisputably fundamental values compared to other values such as co-existence, peace, and unification. It has achieved widespread support from the traditional bilateral diplomacy with the U.S. and China, as well as from multilateral diplomacy. In particular, the core principle in the implementation of the Trust-building Process is the 'Alignment policy,' which highlights the balance between the importance of South-North Korean relations and international cooperation.

Key words: Park Geun-hye administration, Trustpolitik, Trust-building Process, North Korea policy, international cooperation

Introduction

North Korea's nuclear problem began with the start of the post-Cold War era and has not been resolved despite various political attempts. North Korea's strategy of promoting nuclear development, which shows its tendency to adopt extreme survival measures, has been the biggest obstacle in developing inter-Korean relations and realizing

peace on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, a series of crisis situations that North Korea incurred during 2012 and 2013 have transformed the dimension and contents of North Korea's nuclear problem. Alongside its nuclear development, North Korea has mentioned that "the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was the last command of Kim Il Sung, presenting a somewhat strategic ambiguity on its nuclear issue. However, North Korea's Constitution in April 2012 has shown that it has more or less dropped its strategic ambiguity by proclaiming itself as a nuclear state.

In particular, North Korea's strategy of creating a volatile crisis environment after its third nuclear test in February 2013 has increased the public's level of skepticism regarding North Korea's denuclearization and peace on the Peninsula. In addition, on March 31, at the General Assembly of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party, it was announced that North Korea would pursue 'a parallel policy of economic growth and nuclear development.'¹ North Korea is responsible for its nuclear development and the resulting absence of peace on the Peninsula. Given that North Korea has chosen to pursue nuclear weapons as a survival strategy in the post-Cold War era, and the fact that the threat imposed by nuclear weapons, by its very nature exceeds the regional territory and affects international security issues, and finally North Korea's judgment that conditions of routinized tensions on the Peninsula works in favor of its survival has emphasized the role of South Korea and the United States, along with the international community, in resolving this issue.

The Park Geun-hye administration has expressed its clear intent to promote a new and creative approach termed the 'Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula' to move beyond the 'nuclear age.'² Although it will not be easy, the policy aims to build trust with North

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1. *Yonhapnews* (in Korean), "North Korea's Adoption of A Parallel Policy of Economic Growth and Nuclear Development," March 31, 2013.
 2. Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust Between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2011; Cheon Seong-Whun, "Trust-the Underlying Philosophy of the Park Geun-hye Administration," *Korea Chair Platform*, CSIS, May 6, 2013.

Korea and promote peace on the Peninsula while simultaneously deter North Korea's roguish behavior. However, given the nature of North Korea's nuclear development briefly explained above, South Korea's North Korea policy will only be successful under the provision that neighboring states and the international community also cooperate together. In this context, this paper will explain the new situation brought forth by North Korea's nuclear pursuit and Northeast Asia's new security environment. Then it will examine the current government's broad foreign policy and the core meaning of the Trust-building Process, and finally it will analyze the importance of policy coordination among South Korea's neighboring countries. Regarding the latter point, President Park Geun-hye's Northeast Asia policy termed Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative will be dealt with. Finally, this paper will point out some areas of concern related to the cooperation of neighboring states.

New Dimensions brought forth by North Korea's Nuclear Issue and Northeast Asia's Security Environment

Two observations can be made regarding the security environment on the Peninsula at the time the Park Geun-hye administration took office. The first is that North Korea's nuclear issue has entered a new level of complexities, and the second is that the possibility of conflict between the U.S. and China has increased, making South Korea's unification diplomacy toward the two states more important than ever.

Regarding the first point, in April 2012 North Korea stipulated in its Constitution that it is a nuclear state, and during the following year has devised strategies aimed to heighten tensions in a manner that was never before seen throughout the entire post-Cold War era. In particular, North Korea's third nuclear test that took place on 12 February, just two weeks before the inauguration of President Park Geun-hye and one day prior to President Obama's State of the Union speech, has shifted the dimension of the Korean Peninsula's security

environment. North Korea has invested much of its national power in changing the Northeast Asian security environment to its favor, with the aim of stabilizing the Kim Jong-un regime early in his rule. Unsurprisingly, the U.S., China, Japan and other states with a vested interest in the Northeast Asian region are also working to restructure the security environment to favor their respective national interests.

For twenty years after the end of the Cold War, two arguments have repeatedly surfaced every time North Korea's nuclear issue came into the limelight. The first is the view that the realization of the Korean Peninsula's denuclearization depends on South Korea's efforts and policies. The other is that whether North Korea abandons its nuclear weapon depends entirely on North Korea's will and has little or nothing to do with South Korea's efforts.³ It can be stated that these two conflicting arguments have coexisted during the past twenty years. When viewing the ideological character of the two arguments, the former is a relatively progressive perspective, and the latter a more conservative one. The position of the former argument emphasizes that the international community led by South Korea and the U.S. can resolve North Korea's nuclear issue through their policies. In the context of the present situation, it means that if South Korea adopts a proactive engagement policy, and the U.S. suggests normalizing relations with North Korea and agrees to discuss a peace system, North Korea will take corresponding steps. Conversely, conservatives claim that North Korea's longtime intention has always been to acquire a nuclear state status, and it is moving step by step according to its set timetable with no regard to the actions taken by the outside world. In a realistic sense, after North Korea's third nuclear test, more and more people in the South Korean society appears to be interpreting North Korea's nuclear issue from the latter's stance.

Next, regarding the increasing role of the United States and China, the so-called Group of 2 (G2), the new order in Asia and the

3. Park Ihn-hwi, "Alliance Theory and Northeast Asia," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 322-323; Christoph Bluth, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2011), Ch. 6.

international community cannot but be an important variable when it comes to the problem on the Korean Peninsula. Actually, although power politics is not an uncommon characteristic of international politics following the modern international relations, it is clearly distinct from the past 19th century European order, 20th century Cold War order, and the unipolar order in the post-Cold War era.⁴ For the G2, more than any other cases of power politics, it is evident that both 'cooperation and conflict' coexist between the two. Given that issues concerning the Korean Peninsula are probably the highest points of contention between the two states, the influence of China and the U.S. on the Korean Peninsula will increase in accordance with China's rise.⁵ Therefore, an important point concerning the Korean Peninsula is that as South Korea gains more freedom over the North Korea problem, the influence imposed by China and the U.S. will increase correspondingly. Therefore, a situation arises in which South Korea's ability to prevent the interests of the U.S. and China from clashing, and manage the three states' views on North Korea is becoming a vital task.

Among the various options the U.S. has in its efforts to resolve North Korea's nuclear problem, the prevalent perception that the U.S. is unlikely to resort to using military options is an example that shows the complex nature of the North Korea problem. There was a period during the Clinton administration where military options were seriously considered, but at present, not many people would argue that the U.S. would launch a surgical strike on North Korea. Although there are multiple reasons, the most notable is that there exists a certain trade-off between resolving North Korea's nuclear problem and Northeast Asia's security and order, making it unlikely for the U.S. to resolve North Korea's nuclear problem at the expense

4. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 40-50.

5. David Kang, "The Security of Northeast Asia," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 1-21.

of Northeast Asia's order and security.⁶ In other words, in a situation where a military strike on North Korea would trigger an unpredictable response from not only North Korea but also China, the U.S. military option is highly unfavorable, especially in light of China's rise.

In consideration of the security environment on the Korean Peninsula, the Park Geun-hye administration claims that a vicious cycle of 'promise and annulment' that has distinguished inter-Korean relations since the Korean War is due to the lack of a minimum level of trust in each other's actions. Therefore, the Park administration states that amidst continuing inter-Korean tensions and when trust is at an all-time low, the time is ripe to implement the Trust-building Process.⁷ Actually, in the post-Cold War era, Northeast Asia's security environment has improved slightly and many attempts have been made to better inter-Korean relations. The Park administration explains that despite such efforts, the reason why inter-Korean tensions persist is because a 'trust' infrastructure had not been established. In particular, it is known that President Park Geun-hye has a firm belief that the South Korean government's previous approaches, both hard-line policies and the engagement policy termed the 'Sunshine Policy' have failed to induce genuine changes in North Korea.⁸

The 'Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula' was established in this context. Despite North Korea's roguish behavior and extreme tensions in inter-Korean relations, the majority of people in South Korea wish for an improvement in inter-Korean relations, and prefer South Korea's North Korea policy to be one of peace rather than physical sanctions in order to build a foundation for peace on the Peninsula. Skepticism regarding North Korea's nuclear abandonment has been increasing and some have even called for South Korea's nuclear possession. However, 'the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula' is the South Korea government's clear objective, and the

6. Park Ihn-hwi, *ibid* (2013), p.323

7. Park, *ibid* (2011), p. 14.

8. Park, *ibid* (2011), pp. 14, 15.

citizen's belief that peace on the Peninsula should be established through a peaceful and mutually beneficial way has not changed.⁹

The Park Geun-hye Administration's Trustpolitik

Trustpolitik: Significance and Context

The Park Geun-hye Administration has presented the 'Trust-building Process' for the Korean Peninsula, the 'Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative' for the Northeast Asian region and 'Global middle-power diplomacy' for the international community. These three policies have in common that they place 'trust,' a value oriented principle as its core. On the global diplomatic stage characterized by unlimited competition, the abstract value of trust as a principle of diplomatic policy has been subject to controversies on whether it is realistic or feasible to apply to a country none other than North Korea. The type of 'trust' emphasized by the Park administration does not refer to trust in a general sense, but to a trust in reference to strategic considerations and diplomatic relationships.¹⁰ In particular, trust in inter-Korean relations specifically refers to 'enforcing trust' reflecting the distinct security situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula. According to an article in *Foreign Affairs*, trust is defined as the power to force an agent taking part in diplomatic relations to choose institutionalized relations to seek out more benefits.¹¹ The context of President Park's philosophical perception lies in her philosophical perception of the current situation in the global diplomatic environment. The diplomatic environment in the 21st century is one in which the traditional diplomatic measures such as force, coercion,

9. Gallup Korea, *Gallup Report* on the "The Korea's Public Opinion after the third North Korean Nuclear Test," Feb 22, 2013.

10. Yun Byung-se, "Park Geun-hye's Trustpolitik?: A New Framework for South Korea's Foreign Policy," *Global Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 5-10.

11. Park, *ibid* (2011), p. 15.

persuasion and appeasement is insufficient to achieve global peace and stability. Instead, new diplomatic measures and principles such as trust, mutual understanding and reciprocal interests contribute to regional and global peace as well as the peace of individual states. For instance, issues regarding the environment, starvation, human rights, climate change, disease, etc. should be solved fundamentally through mutual trust and consideration, as well as a sense of solidarity, not through power or influences.

Thus the trustpolitik envisioned by the Park administration is not a naïve diplomatic principle that calls for blinded trust or mercy towards South Korea’s counterparts. Rather, it is based on an increasingly common recognition that a new principle is needed to address diplomatic relations among states in today’s complex global diplo-

Figure 1. Park Administration’s foreign strategies by regions and means¹²

| Policy Levels | Policy Areas | Policy Means |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Korean Peninsula | Developing inter-Korean relations | ‘Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula’ |
| Northeast Asia | Traditional bilateral diplomacy | ROK-U.S. alliance, ROK-China, ROK-Japan, and ROK-Russia relations |
| | North Korea’s nuclear issue | Six-Party Talks (acquiring limited independent flexibility) |
| | Major pending issues | Mini-multilateralism |
| | Overcoming the Asia Paradox | Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Plan |
| International community | Multilateral diplomacy | Middle-power diplomacy, ODA and Cultural diplomacy |
| | Economic diplomacy | Respecting existing FTA, “Economic-friendly diplomacy” |

12. For more specific discussion regarding this subject, please see Park Ihn-hwi, “Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative: Issues and Roadmap,” International Conference organized by Sejong Institute, Sep 5, 2013

matic environment, a primary example being the value of 'trust.' Because 'trust' contains strategic implications, the practice of trustpolitik can be applied flexibly depending on how it is applied to certain regions. In other words, trust at the level of the Korean Peninsula, trust at the regional level of Northeast Asia and trust at the global level have different strategic emphasis and characteristics. Figure 1 shows the different policy tools of the Park Geun-hye administration in terms of different regional levels.

Trustpolitik: Theoretical Background

It is highly difficult to explain Trustpolitik with a specific framework for theoretical analysis. One must also be cautious in attempting to identify the theoretical background of trustpolitik. However, the Trust-building Process, which is the application of trustpolitik to the Korean Peninsula, is comparably easy in terms of identifying the framework for theoretical analysis. This is because unlike regional or global diplomacy, there is a single subject, which is North Korea, and because it concerns inter-Korean relations, South Korea's political and theoretical flexibility is somewhat respected. From this perspective, the discussion on the theoretical context of trustpolitik will be limited to an explanation of the theoretical context of the 'Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.'

It can be said that the primary theoretical foundation of the Trust-building Process is the Confidence-building theory. If prior confidence-building theories developed with focused on military aspects, trustpolitik tends to be relatively more relevant in explaining complex and multi-faceted fields so that it can be applied to the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the international community.¹³

The core argument of the confidence-building theory that emerged

13. Theory of confidence-building measures is one of the major theories of international cooperation, which developed in the context of the Cold War. Refer to Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York; Basic books Inc., 1984); Kenneth A. Oye, "Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (October 1985), pp. 1-24.

in Europe is that among agents who harbor mutual animosity and benefits, cooperative measures in the field of the military can be formed, which will then become the basis to deter military actions. In the long run, such deterrence mechanism will lead to trust among the agents. Therefore, an important policy measure to foster peace, in the confidence-building sense, is to focus on the military aspect of interstate relations. In particular, because this theory was built up during the Cold War, it is aimed mainly at transforming hostile military operations to predictable situations and thereby weakening or terminating belligerent intentions. Thus, the confidence-building theory states that the prediction mechanism on the counterparts' behavior operates to minimize the expected advantages that might result from military actions, ultimately facilitating trust. As such, the confidence-building theory is one theoretical tool to explain various political efforts to transfer a bipolarized Cold-War system into a cooperative international system.

Given that the confidence-building theory focuses on turning hostile forces to co-existing forces and maintains 'peaceful co-existence' as its ultimate objective, it is necessary to devise more comprehensive and sophisticated theoretical tasks to achieve Korean unification and Northeast Asia's communal trust. Compared to the confidence-building theory, the Trust-building Process has the premise that mechanisms for establishing peace is more multi-faceted. This has two implications. One is that the participants nurturing trust must be more multi-dimensional to include government, civilian, civil society, individuals, international organizations as well as regions like the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia and the international community. Once the development of inter-Korean relations reaches a certain level with the government's initiative, the extent of participants should be broadened to take advantage of the momentum. Additionally, the division of Korea has been influenced indispensably by the external factors, and therefore requires an interactive structure between Korea and Northeast Asia and between Korea and the international community in the course of trust-building.

Significance of Trust and Process

Based on the theoretical background and ideal of trustpolitik, the following will discuss the meaning of 'trust' when it is converted to policy. Individual states and regions have different ways to understand and define peace according to their own historical background, and political and economic features. From the view of European traditions, in a broad sense, peace allows social members to realize their own interests. It embraces the dimension of emancipation as well as political liberty and economic affluence among social members. In the meantime, peace in some regions such as many of the African countries which lack societal security is defined as the minimum conditions of survival and protection from extreme violation of human rights.¹⁴

In this sense, the realization of peace on the Korean Peninsula should reflect its regional specificity to a full extent. Trust, therefore, is a core factor in constructing the peace of Korea based on specific regional features. In the history of inter-Korean relations, tangled with the numerous promises and declarations between both Koreas, emphasis was placed on 'reciprocal interests,' 'rules of the establishment,' and 'will of the leaders' with the intention to achieve peace. Each of them, however, foundered for various reasons into a vicious cycle which led to the realization that we had been poor at trust-building, the most crucial factor to achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁵ It suggests that the Trust-building Process should focus on securing 'trust' than any other components in inter-Korean relations.

Simply speaking, 'process' means gradual and incremental steps to peace. President Park stated in the last presidential election that small components of peace amount to a large peace through gradual

14. Regarding the various meaning of peace and security see, Alan Collins, *Contemporary Security Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David P. Barash and Charles P. Webel, *Peace and Conflict* (London: SAGE Publications, 2009)

15. Choi Jin-wook, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 23-30.

phases at any levels and the ultimate trust and peace accumulate for the relative process in the long term, unlike some values such as interests or promise which could flicker out by chance.¹⁶ She added that although trust is not as tangible as a specific incident or accomplishment in some task, trust is a stable value that requires a gradual process.

The view that trust and peace between the two Koreas must be obtained gradually is gaining more persuasion as North Korea increases its tension-building behavior. With North Korea's increasing determination to develop its nuclear weapons and corresponding skepticism among the public whether North Korea will abandon its nukes, improvement in inter-Korean relations and peace on the Peninsula will require sophisticated and varying strategies. As stated above, as the significance of the roles of the U.S. and China increases, it will be important to gather the two states' interests in a gradual but progressive manner.

Pluralistic Features of the Trust-building Process

Until now, previous South Korean governments have promoted a variety of different North Korea policies, which, as mentioned earlier, have mostly failed to bring genuine changes to North Korea. One important reason is the existing conflict among various stakeholders. That is, coherent and efficient policies are difficult to implement because there are an excessive number of the stakeholders. The pluralistic characteristic of the Trust-building Process focuses on this point. In general, states establish and implement their policies in various fields such as education, macro-economy, environment and culture, etc. These individual policy fields have their own target audience for policy implementation. However, unlike other policy fields, the target audience of the North Korea policy is greatly diverse.

Thus South Korea's policy toward North Korea should embrace

16. Ministry of Unification, *Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula* (in Korean), pp. 6-7 (Aug 2013).

the diverse interests of the South Korean society, North Korean regime and the general population, and neighboring countries such as the United States and China, in order to draw their support.¹⁷ South Korea's diplomatic authorities have experienced difficulties in gaining their widespread support for the last twenty years. At times, this had led to 'South-South conflict,' and diplomatic conflict between South Korea and the United States or between South Korea and China, regarding their respective policy differences in addressing North Korea issues.

Compared to former North Korea policies, the Trust-building Process has its strength in gaining widespread interest from the relatively diverse stakeholders because confidence-building is a verified diplomatic policy in the international community, and also because it aims at more indisputably fundamental values compared to other values such as co-existence, peace, unification. As mentioned above, the strength of the Trust-building Process lies in its ability to coordinate various stakeholders, which is important given that a North Korea policy cannot be a short-term plan but instead be based on the premise that it will be continued in the long run.

In conclusion, the Trust-building Process is meaningful in that it aims for 'Peace on the Peninsula and eventual unification' as its ultimate goal, and pursues policy completion that can be promoted and applied at any state of the policy process. It is well-known that inter-Korean relations have been marked by cycles of 'promise and annulment.' An important reason for such breakdown of progress lies in the fact that inter-Korean relations have not been institutionalized. The Trust-building Process is expected to embrace multi-dimensional factors in South Korea's North Korea policy in order to maintain its consistency without retreating from existing agreements.

17. Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), Ch. 8; Bluth, *ibid* (2011), Ch. 5; Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2007)

Neighboring States' Policy Coordination

The Importance of the Trust-Building Process and International Coordination

The Trust-building Process has not yet aroused conflict in domestic politics because it is less controversial compared to past governments' North Korea policies. This is probably because there is a general consensus among the public regarding the application of 'trust,' a value-oriented subject, to policies toward North Korea. In addition, the Trust-Building Process has been receiving widespread support from the international community. The Trust-building Process started to gain international support through the ROK-U.S. summit and the ROK-China summit last May and June, respectively. Moreover, the government has been successful in promoting its trust-based policies and has gained support from the international community through the G20 summit in Russia and 2013 APEC summit in Indonesia. The Park Geun-hye administration has gained widespread support from its traditional bilateral diplomacy with the U.S. and China, as well as from multilateral diplomacy.

North Korea's nuclear weapon is at the core of the North Korea problem. The international nature of the nuclear issue makes it difficult for the Korean government to resolve it unilaterally. Thus, policy coordination with the international community, including the U.S. and China is crucial.¹⁸ Past administrations have always been aware of this aspect and still have had difficulties in pushing forward their North Korea policy. However, it should be noted that the Trust-building Process has achieved international support with relative ease, due to its less-controversial nature compared to past governments' policies.

In particular, the core principle in the implementation of the

18. Bruce Klingner, "The U.S. Should Support New South Korean President's Approach to North Korea," *Backgrounder*, the Heritage Foundation, April 11, 2013.

Trust-building Process is the 'Alignment policy.'¹⁹ The Alignment policy highlights alignment in two aspects. The first is the alignment of 'security' and 'exchange and cooperation.' In the case of North Korea's provocative actions, stronger emphasis should be put on security. Similarly, when North Korea is seeking dialogue and changes, more active support for exchange and cooperation should be promoted. Another aspect of the Alignment policy is the balance between the importance of South-North Korean relations and international cooperation. Whether to put emphasis on either inter-Korean relations between South and North Korea or international cooperation between Korea and the international community should be determined more flexibly, according to current issues and situations.

Policy coordination with neighboring states, including the U.S. and China, is one of the fundamental preconditions to successfully implement the North Korea policy. This is because the Trust-building Process emphasizes the importance of policy coordination in its implementation. However, when it comes to North Korean issues, key states define their national interest according to their own interest structures and all have different views on the desirable development of inter-Korean relations and peace on the Korean Peninsula.²⁰ Therefore, the Park administration is faced with a difficult task of leading and building an international consensus on policies toward North Korea. How to achieve policy coordination in line with the neighboring states is a tough task. This is because although the Trust-building Process bears desirable political aim and principles, each key state expects to secure a leading position in resolving the North Korean issue and building peace in East Asia.

19. Ministry of Unification, *ibid*, p. 12

20. Scott Snyder, "Prospects for Sino-American Policy Coordination toward North Korea," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2012), pp. 21-44.

The Korean Peninsula and the ROK-US Alliance

During the process of resolving the North Korea problem and building peace on the Korean Peninsula, the R.O.K-U.S. alliance has been South Korea's most essential diplomatic asset. The core issue of the North Korea problem at present is its nuclear weapons. Thus, policy coordination with the U.S. is a necessary precondition for peace-building on the Korean Peninsula. The two pillars of approaching the North Korea problem include: the nuclear issue and normalization of the North Korean society. The current Korean and the U.S. governments are willing to help out and lift various sanctions in order to encourage changes in North Korea, only if it demonstrates a more genuine attitude toward issues, including denuclearization.²¹ This does not mean, however, that denuclearization should be the utmost precondition to develop diplomatic relations with North Korea.

The previous Lee Myung-Bak administration's political stance called for steps to resolve the nuclear issue as a precondition to improving inter-Korean relations. The current Park administration is well aware of the problems of such political stance and tries to avoid the total suspension of inter-Korean relations due to a stalemate on the issue of denuclearization. However, it is clear that at least minimal denuclearization efforts must precede the development of inter-Korean relations and the U.S.' diplomatic contact. North Korea is expected to demonstrate actions which exceed the expectations set forth in the 'February 29 agreement' which was agreed between the U.S. and North Korea in early 2012.²² Therefore, such situation reflects the current level of policy coordination between South Korea and the U.S.

North Korea has been engaging in an 'offensive dialogue proposal' toward South Korea and the U.S. since last summer, which could be understood as part of its repeated request for immediate 'dialogue

21. Scott Snyder, "Anniversary of Six Party Talks," CFR Blog, September 19, 2013.

22. Yonhapnews, "It is not right time to resume six-party talks," September 10, 2013.

without preconditions.’ An interesting point here is that China is supporting North Korea, whilst its political strategy toward North Korea is yet to be fully understood. In principle, although South Korea and the U.S. support the ‘Six-Party Talks,’ their current position is that no Six-Party Talks will be held until North Korea clearly expresses its stance on its nuclear problem. The Park administration emphasizes that although it wishes for meaningful and practical discussions in the Six-Party Talks, it will utilize ‘mini-multilateralism’ among South Korea, the U.S. and China to address urgent issues. The U.S. government agrees with this strategy.

In retrospect, the South Korean and U.S. governments have expressed different views on North Korean issues despite their strong diplomatic relations. Although the two governments share the ultimate goal of resolving North Korean issues and building peace on the Korean Peninsula, they each emphasize different strategic approaches. However, as of yet no such discord has been exposed between the Park and the Obama administrations. On May 8, the two presidents pledged for a mature development of R.O.K-U.S. relations on the 60th anniversary of the R.O.K-U.S. alliance. This includes a ‘global partnership,’ which aims for a joint resolution of global problems and closer cooperation schemes to tackle problems in Northeast Asia as well as on the Korean Peninsula. Although the two governments may express different opinions on certain issues such as the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON), atomic energy agreement, R.O.K-U.S. cost sharing, etc., these issues are to be resolved through diplomatic agreements and will work to strengthen the alliance.

The Korean Peninsula and Korea-China Relations

China is South Korea’s most important partner in handling North Korean issues, and yet it is also its biggest barrier. As the term G2 implies, China, along with the U.S. has become the most influential state in the international community. With China’s rise, it will try to exercise leadership in East Asia. Therefore problems dwelling on the Korean Peninsula is of great importance to China’s diplomatic

interests.²³ The biggest change in the 'history of North Korea's nuclear issue,' which has lasted for almost twenty years now, has been the increased importance of the 'China variable.'

Despite the R.O.K-U.S. alliance, South Korea's most fundamental diplomatic asset, it must consider the 'China variable' when dealing with North Korea issues due to its distinctive geographic condition. In particular, the previous Lee Myung-Bak administration was criticized for the unintentional consequences of neglecting R.O.K-China relations. As a result, majority of people expect the Park administration to maintain a diplomatic and strategic balance between the U.S. and China.²⁴ The Korea-China summit held last June well reflects both citizens' expectations and the administration's diplomatic concerns. Indeed, the Park administration's diplomatic gestures will not induce China to suddenly give up on North Korea and support South Korea's policies toward North Korea. However, the current administration has requested that China prevents North Korea's further aberrations such as provocations or additional nuclear tests, based on their thorough understanding of South Korea's North Korea policy.

Fortunately Xi Jinping, the new leader of China's 5th generation of leadership inaugurated early this year, appears, at least for appearances sake, to take a slightly different political stance in terms of its policy towards North Korea. China has shifted its position from the ambiguous stance of the past to clearly supporting the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, actively supporting the Trust-Building Process. However, there are various interpretations of China's change in stance. Some have argued that China's current strategy is only a temporary, rather than a permanent change.

Regardless of such discussions, the South Korean government

23. Narushige Michishita, "Playing the Same Game: North Korea's Coercive Attempt at U.S. Reconciliation," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2009), pp. 139-52; Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2005), pp. 35-48.

24. David Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of the Trust-Building on the Korean Peninsula," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), pp. 10-11.

has requested two things. First, it requested that China shows its 'firm and consistent stance on the Korean Peninsula's denuclearization' and the second is that China commits to 'Korea-China cooperation in order to induce changes in North Korea'. In fact, the denuclearization of North Korea is impossible without China's cooperation. The Trust-building Process designs a close and cooperative scheme aimed for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a variety of new channels for reaching agreements, including the existing Six-Party Talks. China's political assistance is a prerequisite to achieve tangible results. Furthermore, China's role is significant in terms of promoting an active engagement policy toward North Korea, as it exerts huge economic influence on the North Korean economy. The Trust-building Process suggests a 'South-North-China Trilateral Cooperation,' in which the three nations engage in large development projects in North Korea when a certain level of trust has been nurtured between South and North Korea.²⁵

Problems on the Korean Peninsula and the Role of Japan and Russia

Japan's role in resolving problems on the Korean Peninsula has been quite limited over recent years. Japan's capacity to handle North Korea issues and policy coordination has decreased somewhat due to its domestic circumstances including major earthquakes, as well as the diplomatic frictions with South Korea. The restoration of R.O.K.-Japan relationship in a positive and cooperative way is an important precondition for peace to settle on the Korean Peninsula. First of all, the U.S.' Northeast Asia strategy is based on the premise that South Korea, the U.S. and Japan have cooperative diplomatic relations. This is well-reflected in the recent actions taken by the U.S., in which it supported Japan's movement toward obtaining the right of collective self-defense regardless of neighboring states' concerns while simultaneously valuing the R.O.K.-U.S. alliance.²⁶ Therefore, a cooperative

25. Ministry of Unification, *ibid*, p. 22.

26. Beina Xu, "The US-Japan Security Alliance," *Backgrounder*, Council on Foreign Relations, September 20, 2013

R.O.K-Japan relation is a necessary condition for South Korea's alliance-centric policy toward North Korea.

Additionally, Japan itself has a keen interest in promoting economic diplomacy with North Korea. In fact, Prime Minister Mr. Koizumi visited North Korea twice during his term and came close to improving Japan-North Korea relations. It is hard to grasp Japan's intent to improve its relations with North Korea, other than economic benefits. However, it is clear that South Korea needs to take advantage of Japan's stance in terms of international cooperation for the opening of North Korea. Japan has been very cooperative during the past Six-Party Talks and has respected the South Korea, U.S. and Japan's policy coordination on North Korea issues. Therefore, improving R.O.K-Japan relations is an urgent task needed to promote the Trust-building Process.

Meanwhile, Russia is no longer the global player that it had been during the Cold War period. Instead, during the past twenty years, it has maintained its identity as a European nation. The interesting point here is that the Putin administration, which successfully returned to power in April 2012, declared its interest in the development of the Russian Far-East. The essence of this strategy is to utilize the under-developed region of Far-East Russia as a growth engine, seeking to exercise more powerful diplomatic influence in the Northeast Asian region.²⁷ The Park administration should make tactical use of Putin's Northeast Asian strategy especially given that the Trust-building Process has already gained Russian support through the Korea-Russia summit.

President Park has mentioned during the Korea-Russia summit that she plans to build a railway connecting the Korean Peninsula and Eurasia while the Korea-Russia pipeline project that passes through North Korea is still a valid policy option. The 'Trans-Korea Railway' development plan and the 'Russian Gas Pipeline Construction Project' are expected to be powerful engagement policies toward North Korea, regardless of the volume of economic benefits they

27. Fiona Hill and Bobo Lo, "Putin's Pivot: Why Russia Is Looking East," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2013.

bring. In particular, one of the core demands from the Park administration is that North Korea behaves in accordance with the 'global standard'. If North Korea is to join such projects, it would be a great opportunity for them to start accepting the global standard in its international relations.

The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative

Lastly, the Park administration's 'Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative' needs to be looked at very carefully. In essence, the administration has expressed a keen interest in addressing the conflicts in Northeast Asia (in a broad sense, East Asia) through diplomatic means. President Park's regional diplomacy in Northeast Asia is grounded in a 'trust-based diplomacy,' which goes beyond the geographic range of the Korean Peninsula.²⁸ Specifically, the value-centric, trust-based diplomacy points out the coexistence of two paradoxical situations: increased economic interdependency, and the conflicts and hostility arising from distrust. It highlights that Northeast Asia's paradoxical situation needs to be fixed in order to settle peace and recover trust in the region. In addition, it highlights the need to have the right methodological framework to gradually upgrade the level of institutionalization in the region through the 'Seoul Process,' in which it draws lessons from the development of Europe's regionalism.

At this stage, the 'Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative' is a specific policy tool, well reflecting the Park administration's values, views and political stance. The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperative Initiative corresponds with the 'Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative and extended cooperation with Eurasia,' which is the government's 127th project among the 'Thirteen Strategies for Implementation,' published by the '18th Presidential transition committee' last February 22.²⁹ The Park administration called for

28. Choi, *ibid* (2013), pp. 27-28.

29. Choi Kang, "Purpose of Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative," International Conference organized by Sejong Institute, Sep 5, 2013.

international understanding and support through an active promotion of the initiative to foreign figures visiting South Korea and through the R.O.K-U.S. summit held on May 8 and the R.O.K-China summit held on June 27. However, detailed information on the initiative's vision, strategies, road-map, principles of implementation, etc. are yet to be known at this point.

Still, a general analysis of the Initiative can be made with respect to three issues. First, in terms of the 'participants,' the new initiative is expected to include all of the states in Northeast Asia, including Mongolia and the participants of the Six-Party Talks. On top of this, states and international organizations that have a stake in Northeast Asia and can contribute to solving Northeast Asian issues, such as India, Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, the EU, UN, etc. are also to receive a certain institutional right to participate.

In terms of agendas, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative no longer emphasizes the importance of hard security, which includes disarmament or arms-control. Rather, it highlights the overriding cooperation on issues of 'soft security,' including non-traditional security issues such as transnational crimes, environment, climate, energy, natural disasters, nuclear security and cyber-terror, etc. Possible outcomes of the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative in line with the agenda could be considered in terms of the "culture of cooperation." Until a certain level of the cooperation is achieved, a gradual approach needs to be adopted, rather than directly focusing on the contents and outcomes of the initiative, in order to facilitate the accumulation of culture and convention of cooperation.

Last but not least, the Initiative can be analysed in terms of the level of institutionalization. It needs to identify itself as a 'lax institution' in order to prevent participants' from feeling repelled. Framing itself as a 'consultative committee among states that share common interests' can be considered in order to promote cooperation in possible areas based on common interests, instead of having official regulations similar to international organizations or institutions dedicated to security dialogues. Of course, the "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Organization" or "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Summit"

could develop into official organizations for this aim. Another point to be considered is regarding the establishment of relations among already existing institutions. The U.S., China and Japan have different visions and plans on regionalism in order to maximize their own national interests. Thus, the new initiative should not focus on the replacement of the existing institutions. Should there be a renewed setting of relations among those institutions, a strategy that highlights their complementary relationship needs to be adopted.

Lastly, Park administration's Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative is presumed to bear two objectives: 'peace and stability in Northeast Asia' and 'addressing the problems on the Korean Peninsula.' Therefore, a concrete strategy that connects these two objectives must be established. Because North Korea's denuclearization is the source of security unstableness on the Korean Peninsula as well as in Northeast Asia, a soft-security centric driving force should be embedded in the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative. However, how the Park administration's efforts, including its desire to resume the Six-Party Talks or discussions via 'mini-multilateralism,' are connected to the Initiative should be assessed from a macro-perspective.

Moreover, during the early stages of the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative which would touch upon various issues such as socio-cultural exchange and human rights issues, there will be conflicts of interest with the North Korean government. The lesson learnt from North Korea's past behaviour is that North Korea has a tendency to relate every relevant issue to security issues in order to build up a crisis situation. Thus, strategic plans need to be prepared in order to address such possible responses. In addition, a more detailed strategy on the revitalization of China's development plan of East-North Three in North-East China Province and Russia's new Far-East development plan needs to be established in order to identify how the Northeast Asia Cooperation initiative will be linked to the international community's engagement policy toward North Korea.

Conclusion

It is often assumed that, in most of cases, a political leader who wins the election devises policies and establishes national strategies with the aim of maximizing one's political assets. It can be said that President Park would prefer national policies that reflect, in general, her values of trust, promise, and consistency. It is a natural judgment in a society where national leadership is elected through nation-wide support.

Compared to policies in other fields, the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula has received recognition for having rooted itself successfully. In terms of cooperation with neighboring states in Northeast Asia, the Park administration's trustpolitik which will be implemented in the Northeast region contains three important agendas which must be thoroughly analyzed and approached strategically. First is South Korea's identity as a Northeast Asian state. This distinct nature makes security in the Northeast Asian region a vital interest, and thus presents a task whereby South Korea must accurately identify what its interests are in the region. Second, South Korea must have an accurate understanding of the structural environmental changes which can limit its political autonomy, especially as it takes on the role of forming new power relations with the U.S. and China. Pursuing the U.S. and China's reciprocal interests is, in a general sense, the correct course of action, but will lead South Korea into a much more complex and difficult situation as it executes its policies. The last agenda is whether South Korea should combine its North Korea policy with its Northeast Asia policy. In terms of appropriateness, South Korea is well aware that resolving North Korea issues should be connected to peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. However, a comprehensive Northeast Asia's engagement policy toward a state that possesses nuclear weapons for survival purposes cannot but be a difficult national task.

On one hand, the creative and strategic aspect of the Trust-building Process is highly commendable, but there are still issues that must be addressed to further improve the Park administration's North Korea policy. In particular, the time is ripe to clearly identify and propose

policies to address the issue of establishing a cooperative system among neighboring states in order to bring the Trust-building Process to fruition. Requesting the voluntary participation of diplomatic parties to nurture trust is a well-intended direction, but will present various problems in the implementation process. In addition, while South Korea requests the neighboring states' cooperation in terms of building trust; it is also necessary to evaluate how South Korea itself can show how it has changed from its past ways. In general, given that the application of a value-oriented matter, trust, into diplomatic policies has been set as a national task, South Korea is now faced with high expectations and corresponding difficulties, requiring demonstrations of strategic sophistication and flawless execution.

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