

## **The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy**

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The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula can be seen as a shift in the North Korea policy paradigm. As to the North Korea policies in previous governments, discussions were mainly about policy measures, which included military force, negotiations, sanctions and strategic patience. However, the Trust-building Process emphasizes that it is upon trust where policy measures can have more stable and lasting effect, and inter-Korean relations can develop sustainably. Assertive retaliation against North Korea's provocations is not aimed at the North Korean political system, but its actions. There are three policy goals: to normalize inter-Korean relations through political and military confidence building, and through socioeconomic exchanges and cooperation; to realize a reliable peace on the Korean Peninsula, and thoroughly prepare for any uncertain political situations; and to establish a cornerstone for unification. Instead of moving too quickly or too slowly like in the past, the Trust-building Process would allow South Korea to deal with inter-Korean relations at a rate constant with the level of trust that is built with North Korea.

**Key Words:** Park Geun-hye government, Trust-building Process, trust, trustpolitik, alignment

### **Introduction**

For the last six decades, two Koreas have been in a state of mutual mistrust and confrontation. As the Cold War had ended two decades ago, the optimistic view that an era of reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas seemed close at hand was hard to deny. However, inter-Korean relations developed quite differently from what many people had expected at the end of the Cold War. Amidst growing uncertainties in North Korea, such as food shortages, contin-

uation of the military-first policy, and the nuclear issue, debate over Seoul's policy toward North Korea has intensified. Although it is widely accepted that the strained inter-Korean relations mainly stems from the nature of the North Korean regime, and the ultimate goal of South Korea's North Korea policy is unification, there are significant differences in opinions when it comes to sharing the perceptions, policy tools, and short-term goals regarding North Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to theorize and systemize the Trust-building Process, which is the key element of the Park Geun-hye administration's policy toward North Korea. To that end, a series of Park Geun-hye's press interviews, remarks, speeches, her platform booklet during the presidential campaign, and the Ministry of Unification's 2013 report to the President were analyzed. According to the Saenuri Party's presidential platform booklet dubbed as "The promise that can change the world" (201 commitments in 20 areas — pledges related to the policy toward North Korea and unification (pp. 354-365) — are comprised of four parts as follows: 1) ensure the protection of the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea and national security; 2) resolve the North Korean nuclear issue through multilateral negotiation based on deterrence; 3) normalize inter-Korean relations through the Trust-building Process; and 4) start with "small unifications," then move on to a grand unification. In short, Korean unification is to be pursued through building mutual trust based on firm security.

Overall, the Trust-building Process aims to normalize inter-Korean relations by building political and military trust, developing social and economic exchanges and cooperation, and further solidifying the existing peace. Subsequently, the process of building an economic community founded on actual peace and, ultimately, achieving political unification is covered separately. In reality, however, the Trust-building Process and the post-peace-settlement stage are on a single continuum of policy execution. As the objective of all policies toward North Korea

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1. Arguments of the progressive governments with regards to Seoul's North Korea policy can be found here: Korea Peace Forum, [Lost Five Years, Back to the Engagement Policy] (Seoul: Samin 2012) (in Korean).

is the peaceful management of division and eventual unification, policy toward North Korea and unification are interconnected by default.

The Trust-building Process proposes the major direction for Park Geun-hye administration's policy toward North Korea, but it will be greatly affected by North Korea's response and the political situation in Northeast Asia. Above all, public support will be the most influential variable in carrying out the policy.

This paper attempts to systemize the Trust-building Process in terms of its background, main concept, goal, basic structure, implementation strategy, and agenda. Among these, the definition, goal, and basic structure can be clearly understood by existing documents, and there would be no difficulty in interpreting the policy stance. However, the implementation strategies and specific tasks are to be perfected through more discussions and debates, and even those must be adequately modified in accordance with new developments.

## **Why does South Korea need the Trust-building Process?**

### ***Vicious Cycle of Mistrust and Confrontation in Inter-Korean Relations***

Inter-Korean relations have been in a state of confrontation and animosity for more than six decades. Although at times there appeared to be some progress made, it was ultimately not sustainable, and was quickly set back. This is mainly due to the lack of trust, which explains why historical events such as the Joint Declaration on July 4, 1972, Basic Agreement in 1992, two North-South summit meetings in 2000 and 2007 all failed to make irreversible progress in the inter-Korean relations.

Seoul's unprecedented engagement policy from 1998 to 2007, known as the Sunshine Policy, has failed to change North Korea partially because North Korea was not confident in its regime stability and was concerned of possible "absorption" by the South. North Korea chose to implement the military-first policy instead of reforms and

opening, and to develop nuclear weapons for regime's survival. Therefore, even a dramatic increase in the inter-Korean economic cooperation under the Sunshine Policy was not able to ensure sustainable peace or irreversible progress in the inter-Korean relations. In other words, unilaterally seeking an active engagement policy such as large-scale inter-Korean economic cooperation, without enough inter-Korean trust, led to high levels of anxiety and fragility.

On the other hand, the Lee Myung-bak administration maintained "strategic patience" as its North Korea policy, and faced criticisms of being negligent toward North Korea without any sincere attempts to deal with the North Korean issue, especially in the face of growing insecurity and need for tension alleviation.

There are high expectations for the Park Geun-hye government to reach a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. The need for sending a special envoy to Pyongyang and providing a large-scale of economic aid to North Korea is also being voiced. However, the current inter-Korean environment does not favor one silver-bullet approach to the North Korean issue. South Korea's negative perception toward the North has only been exacerbated by North Korea's third nuclear test. North Korea is also seeking bilateral talks with Washington first, rather than improving inter-Korean relations.

Economic cooperation with North Korea and providing economic support to the regime may temporarily ease the tension on the Peninsula. However, this would not necessarily guarantee a sustainable peace or improvement in inter-Korean relations. Without trust, any progress in the inter-Korean relations would be short-lived, and thus, rebuilding trust should be the top priority in setting any North Korea policy.

### ***Inconsistent North Korea Policy***

The Trust-building Process is also necessary in order to maintain a consistent North Korea policy. Frustrated by the faltering state of inter-Korean relations, incoming governments in South Korea often completely reversed their predecessors' North Korea policies. The swinging from one extreme to the other in Seoul's North Korea policy

tended to bring various negative impacts on inter-Korean relations.<sup>2</sup>

Any revision to Seoul's North Korea policy requires ample time and efforts to make the new policy understandable, and to garner domestic and international support. Moreover, those that supported previous policies are less likely to support the new policies, making it even more difficult to have a consensus on the new policy. The total negation of previous policies often brings about governmental reorganization and the reshuffling of personnel, which could hamper the decision-making process. Moreover, such repetition of sharp policy changes can encourage North Korea to influence South Korea's policy orientation toward those more favorable to the regime. In fact, the regime intervened in South Korea's recent presidential elections through threats of further provocations in trying to pressure the South Korean government. For example, during the 2012 presidential elections, North Korea was highly critical of presidential candidate, Park Geun-hye<sup>3</sup> and went so far as to threaten South Korea by conducting a long-range missile test in December 12, 2012, the third nuclear test in February 12, 2013, and withdrawal of North Korean workers from Kaesung Industrial Complex in March 2013.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Increasing Uncertainties in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula***

In the next five years, greater uncertainty and changes in the Northeast Asian order and the international community are expected. Thus, a

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2. Korean Peninsula Forum. [Inter-Korean Relations 3.0: Peace and Cooperation Process on the Korean Peninsula], 2012 (in Korean).

3. After the presidential candidate, Park Geun-hye announced her policy direction for diplomacy, security and unification, on November 5, 2012, North Korea made a very critical statement saying, "it is an even more confrontational North Korea policy than the previous government . . . there were none before who explicitly expressed one's confrontational motivation and ambition for absorption unification." Spokesperson for North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, *Yonhap News*, November 9, 2012.

4. North Korea has declared that we are on the verge of War. National Defense Commission Spokesperson's statement. *Yonhap News*, January 2, 2013.

more proactive approach in dealing with North Korean problem is needed.

### Uncertainties in North Korea<sup>5</sup>

Despite the rather quick hereditary succession of power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, uncertainties in the stability of new regime have not yet been confirmed. There are no signs of overt in-fighting for power or public mass protest against the regime. China's support is also greatly enhancing the stability of Kim Jong-un regime.

However, uncertainties in the stability of Kim Jong-un regime are not yet totally resolved, mainly for two internal reasons. First, the sudden disappearance of a figure with absolute power causes a power vacuum in any political system, which may threaten the stability of the regime. Change of leader could be even more dangerous in countries like North Korea, where much of stability and leadership depend on an absolute leader. Second, the level of stability also depends on how well the new young leader, Kim Jong-un, can respond to challenges such as chronic economic hardship, social disorders, and external pressures.

The policy direction of the Kim Jong-un regime also reflects the dilemma it is faced with. First, the 'strong and prosperous nation' policy inherited from Kim Jong-il has self-contradicting aspects. While the utmost priority it proposes is building a strong economy, this directly clashes with building a strong military. Domestically, building nuclear weapons and missiles hinders the regime from prioritizing resource distribution to enhance the people's welfare, while externally it constrains any inflow of foreign investment.

Second, there is a paradox in the prospects of reform and opening. Unless the regime reforms and opens up, its legitimacy becomes even more precarious, and even if it does, the continuity of regime is not guaranteed as witnessed in the political transition in Eastern European countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this

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5. This subsection is based on Dr. Han ki-bum's unpublished thesis.

regard, although the Kim Jong-un regime talks about change, such change only extends to tactical and superficial aspects, while diversity and plurality of the society is even more suppressed by the extensive use of public security.

The third dilemma is the paradox of self-determination. Although North Korea asserts that nuclear weapons and satellites have made them safer in the midst of strong powers, it has in fact led to further isolation from the international community and greater dependence on China for its subsistence. While being cautious about China's rise and seeking improvement in relations with the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, its nuclear and long-range missiles serve to impede any fundamental breakthrough in their relationships. Thus ironically, the means for self-determination are effectively hampering North Korea's self-determination.

One will have to see whether North Korea can escape from its dilemmas. However, North Korea's current policies cast a worry in that the regime's dilemmas could become exacerbated, both in terms of socio-economic and political instability in the long run.

### Uncertainties in Northeast Asia

Increasing competition among nations in Northeast Asia is a major challenge that South Korea must address and overcome rather than avoid. The rivalry between the U.S. and China, as well as the territorial disputes between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are becoming more intense than ever.

Chinese military provocations in the South China and East China Seas in 2010 have made neighboring states become insecure, which brought them to align closer to the United States. China also had to pay for the costs of its ambivalent attitude in response to North Korea's provocations in 2010 — sinking of the Cheonan warship and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island — which caused a backlash from South Korea.

The alliance network under the Obama administration has become all the more important as the decline of U.S. power as a hegemonic

state is more likely than not.<sup>6</sup> The U.S.-ROK alliance has become even more important under the “pivot” to Asia policy in the light of China’s rise. North Korea’s nuclear weapons program tends to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance and prevent South Korea from making closer bonds with China.

China, having experienced opposition from regional neighbors for its previous irresponsible wielding of power, is trying to show more responsibility in responding to North Korea’s third nuclear test in 2013.<sup>7</sup> China has not only supported the UN Security Council Resolution 2094, but also placed sanctions on North Korean banks in China, and heightened the control on China-North Korea commodity trades by enforcing tighter border control, thereby sending a strong message to North Korea.<sup>8</sup> However, it would be premature to assume a fundamental change in China’s overall policy toward North Korea.

### Public opinion in South Korea

The Trust-building Process is also necessary in order to ease the tensions on Korean Peninsula and alleviate security concerns of South Koreans’, especially after the incidents of Cheonan warship and Yeonpyeong Island. According to a national survey conducted by KBS (Korea Broadcasting System) in August 2012, 79.3 percent of South Koreans expressed concerns about security, which may be caused by North Korea’s provocations. Therefore, they want the government to manage the current state of inter-Korean relations peacefully rather than raising tensions or putting the North Korean issue aside.

North Korea’s third nuclear test on February 12, 2013 and following provocative statements increased threat perceptions. Among the South

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6. Joseph S. Nye, “The Future of American Power: Dominance and Decline in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 6 (November/December 2010).
  7. Jisi Wang, “China’s Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds its Way,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (March/April 2011), p. 75.
  8. Chinese authorities have banned tourism to North Korea, and placed a 20kg limit on the commodities that each person can carry into North Korea, which used to be over 50kg per person.



Korean public, 68.5% expressed support for South Korea developing its own nuclear weapons program, and 67% expressed support for reintroducing U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Public interests toward the right to peaceful use of reprocessed nuclear fuel and enriched uranium, which are prohibited by the Korea-U.S. Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, have also increased.

## **What is the Trust-building Process?**

### ***Definition of Trust***

The importance of trust was also mentioned in the past inter-Korean relations. However, it is the Park Geun-hye government that has first brought the word “trust” to the forefront of the government’s North Korea policy. The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula can be seen as a shift in the North Korea policy paradigm. As to the North Korea policies in previous governments, discussions were mainly about policy measures, which included military force, containment, negotiations and strategic patience. However, in the Trust-building Process, intangible infrastructure, trust, is being newly highlighted.<sup>10</sup> The Process emphasizes that it is upon trust that policy measures can have more stable and lasting effect, and the inter-Korean relation can develop sustainably.<sup>11</sup>

There are many things to be managed and dealt with in the inter-Korean relation; for example, North Korea’s denuclearization, South-North economic cooperation, humanitarian aid to the North, prisoners of war, and separated families. Trust alone would not solve all the

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9. *Hankyung (Korean Economy Paper)*, February 22, 2013.

10. Francis Fukuyama, *TRUST: The Social Values and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

11. The relation between policy measures and trust in the North Korea policy context is similar to the relation between skills and fitness in sports. Fitness (trust) alone can hardly guarantee winning, however, stronger the fitness easier it becomes to acquire and practice new skills (policy measures).

problems, nor would the absence of trust hinder making any progress. Even in antagonistic relations, project cooperation is possible as long as mutual benefits exist. However, the more trust there is, the quicker the inter-Korean problems will be resolved. For example, in regards to the humanitarian aid, as the trust builds up, there will be less pressure to establish a distribution monitoring system. This is similar to commercial transactions in that the more trust exists between the transacting parties the less is the need for lawyers, formal contracts, and collaterals.<sup>12</sup>

For the past 20 years, South Korean governments have employed diverse measures and postures like bilateral talks, the Six-Party Talks, sanctions, negotiations, and strategic patience to resolve North Korea's nuclear development, but without much fruition. Meanwhile, North Korea went on to stipulate itself as a nuclear power in its constitution. However, as trust increases, the need for thorough inspections in denuclearization process will become less, and hence, the denuclearization process can be accelerated, which, in turn, enhances the mutual trust — creating a virtuous circle. Thus, efforts to build trust must be continued, while demanding denuclearization as a precondition to any dealings with North Korea. Therefore, severing communications and dragging the North Korean problems cannot be the most sensible course of action.

Trust has the following characteristics. First, trust means gradually moving onto next phases, like stacking bricks, through series of verifiable conducts.<sup>13</sup> Trust cannot be built by some dramatic events on a few occasions. Trust building requires time, and lower the existing trust is, the more we should guard against prompt and gasping build of trust. However, inter-Korean relation steadily built on trust would have a low chance of deteriorating.

Second, trust is an intangible infrastructure that promotes effectiveness in North Korea policies by, for example, reducing policy implementation costs while broadening the possible scope of policies.

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12. Fukuyama, *TRUST*.

13. Korea News Editors' Association debate, *Yonhap News*, July 16, 2012.

Third, the degree of trust is an indicator of progress in inter-Korean relations. As the degree of trust increases, the size of inter-Korean economic cooperation can also grow, and vice versa, the lower the trust, the less is the chance for cooperation.

Fourth, trust does not mean unilateral or unconditional concessions without appropriate verifications, and it is even less about forgetting or compensating for North Korea's provocations in the past.<sup>14</sup> Any further provocations by North Korea will further deteriorate the level of trust, which is already at a very low point. In such security-threatening incidents, firm responses must be shown.

Fifth, trust not only alludes to the inter-governmental trust between the South and North, but also to the trust manifested by the international community and the Korean people. It is difficult to expect great progress in inter-Korean relation if the inter-governmental trust, when it exists, is not accompanied by the trust of the international community and, especially, of the people.

### **Three Goals**

#### **Normalization of Inter-Korean Relations**

In the current state of inter-Korean relations, most of the communication channels have been disconnected. The requests for a quick resolution of humanitarian issues, as well as the resumption of cooperative projects are increasingly being demanded. The normalization of inter-Korean relations by building trust through exchanges and cooperation on all levels of politics, military, and socio-economic areas is the top priority of the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

#### **Sustainable Peace**

The second goal of the Trust-building Process is to make peace on the

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14. Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011).

Korean Peninsula that is reliable and sustainable by thoroughly preparing for any uncertainties. Toward this end, North Korea must stop its provocations, become a responsible member of the international community, and raise its people's welfare by not developing nuclear weapons but by focusing on economic development. Meanwhile, South Korea's North Korea policy must also develop. Seoul must pursue an "aligned" North Korea policy that goes beyond the false dichotomy of seeing "dove" or "hawk" as an either-or choice. Through transparent policy making and execution, South Korea must garner the public's support for its North Korea policy.

### Cornerstone for Unification

The third goal of the Trust-building Process is to lay the cornerstone for eventual unification. The process after building trust is to build economic cooperation that has political unification as the ultimate goal. However, it would be difficult to make a clear cut between the process of building trust and the process of forming an economic entity with political union as the ultimate goal.

Unification should not be pushed off to a far future. We must not wait for the unification, but must take steps toward the unification.... We will eventually achieve unification through building an economic community based on a sustainable peace.<sup>15</sup>

Unification means going beyond forming a community involving mutual recognition, exchanges and trade. It must be not only *de facto* unification, but also *de jure* unification ("legal unification") based on a liberal democracy. The management of division can be achieved with consistency under the clear goal of unification. The vision for unification is like a lighthouse that shines the direction for policy and unification. When the leader's will is focused on unification, he or she can also garner the people's efforts and international cooperation behind the vision.

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15. Park, "Trustpolitik and a New Kind of Korea."

## **Policy Direction for the Trust-building Process**

### ***Irreversible Progress in inter-Korean Relations based on Firm Security and Mutual Recognition***

The Trust-building Process is based on firm security. North Korea's nuclear and conventional threats should be deterred by a strong and reliable force. All policy means should be considered with consultation with the international community in case the deterrence fails. Assertive retaliation against North Korea's provocations is not aimed at the North Korean political system, but its actions.

I will take a firm grip on security issues. Furthermore, I will pursue a sustainable peace based on trust and cooperation. North Korea must give up provocations, and become a responsible member of the international community. It must improve its people's welfare not by building nuclear weapons but by developing its economy. We will persuade North Korea to make right decisions.<sup>16</sup>

South Korea wants to build trust with North Korea, and believes this is possible. Seoul does not seek to negate North Korea's political system, nor does it pursue the regime's collapse. It is impossible to build trust with North Korea while constantly and severely pressuring the regime.

The Trust-building Process was proposed to answer the fundamental question of how South Korea can stop the vicious cycle of confrontation and animosity with North Korea and make irreversible progress in inter-Korean relations.

In order to stop the vicious cycle of confrontation between the two Koreas, it is necessary to return to the basics, i.e., trust. The vicious cycle of confrontation between the two Koreas seems to be due to a lack of trust. Inter-Korean relations is at its lowest level of trust at the moment. Ironically, however, this is the best time to actually start building trust.

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16. Park Geun-hye, "Trustpolitik and a New Kind of Korea" (speech on the policy direction for diplomacy, security, and unification, Seoul, November 5, 2012).

### ***A Constant Approach in Improving Relations***

During the Sunshine Policy, South Korea was too eager to improve inter-Korean relation, and unilaterally moved to provide large-scale economic aid to the North first, while expecting positive responses from the regime later. Despite this, the threat of provocations and the risk of political agreements being broken by North Korea remained because a reliable degree of trust was not successfully built. However, it was also not a sensible course of action to link North Korea's nuclear problem to all other inter-Korean issues and thereby remain stagnant on all levels of inter-Korean relations.

Hence, instead of moving too quickly or too slowly like in the past, it would be desirable for South Korea to deal with inter-Korean relations at a rate constant with the level of trust that is built with North Korea.

### ***Harmony between Inter-Korean Trust, National Trust and International Trust***

An effective North Korea policy can be pursued only when inter-Korean trust, national trust and international trust are all in harmony. The underlying problems rise from a lack of trust between North and South Korea. Thus, building trust must be the top priority. However, building trust in inter-Korean relations cannot be fulfilled only by one-sided effort; it can only be achieved through mutual efforts with North Korea's cooperative response. If North Korea does not positively respond to South Korea's endeavors to build trust, international support may be necessary while securing alternative strategies. Above all, South Korea needs support from the international community in the process of building trust.

In the past, the Sunshine Policy failed to win support from the U.S., whereas the Lee Myung-bak government had difficulties in gaining support for its North Korea policy from China. As China's GDP has increased by leaps and bounds such that the gap with the U.S. had narrowed by half, the strategic value of North and South

Korea has deflated, and China is worried about the powerful advent of the U.S.-ROK alliance in the case of a South Korea-led unification. Therefore, Beijing is actively supporting the stability of North Korea. South Korea is deemed as the chief ally of the U.S. in terms of its policies toward Asia. The most important factor in enforcing a North Korea policy is gaining cooperation from the U.S. and China.

Building inter-Korean trust will never be successful if it is not approved by national trust among the people. The belief that inter-Korean relations can be improved by actively providing aid to North Korea, as well as through inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation since the end of the Cold War, has withered in part due to North Korea's lack of positive response but also because of South Korea's excessive desire for improvements. In spite of North Korea's nuclear weapons development and military threat, the government's overestimation of inter-Korean trust and lack of trust from the international community led to such failure. Above all, a transparent implementation of policies is necessary so that efforts to build inter-Korean trust can be supported by the international community and gain the trust of the nation.

### ***Harmony between the Management of Division and Preparation for Unification***

An effective North Korea policy must align the peaceful management of division and preparation for unification. However, Seoul's North Korea policy has faced extreme conflict for the last 15 years due to fundamental differences in perceptions toward unification. The progressive governments in South Korea aimed at settling down the coexistence of the North and South while putting the issue of unification aside into the far-off future. Conversely, the conservative governments emphasized the necessity of unification, but the strained inter-Korean relations made unification unrealistic.

In fact, South Korea's unification policy since the end of the Cold War takes the functionalist approach of 1) unification toward a liberal democracy and market economy, and 2) gradually achieving unification stage-by-stage through reconciliation and cooperation. These include

both the division of management and preparation for unification.

Seoul's North Korea policy starts from the management of division, in terms of managing the status quo of inter-Korean relations, and ultimately aims to break the deadlock in inter-Korean relations, as well as promoting reconciliation and cooperation. However, pursuing the goal of management of division for its own sake should be avoided. Instead, South Korea should put forward the goal of unification and minimize any confusion in the process. Obviously, overemphasizing and raising the voice on the goal of unification would backfire against the management of division, but insisting on the goal of coexistence of the North and South while concealing the goal of unification would not be desirable either. Unification would be practically impossible, if North and South Korea did not share one common political system and ideology.

Lastly, contingency plans must be made thoroughly. It is not worthwhile to fight over the likelihood of North Korea's collapse. If such chance exists, needless to say, we must be prepared for it. The reason why the United States, Japan, Russia, and even China are all preparing for the collapse of North Korea is not necessarily because they believe such chance of happening is a lot higher than South Korea believes, but because the sudden change is expected to have a huge impact on us all.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Comprehensive Approach with Alignment***

Alignment is the core value of the Trust-building Process. Alignment does not necessarily mean a middle-ground between the soft-line and hard-line approaches. It means being flexible to situational needs in alignment with confrontational issues. It calls to go beyond the dichotomized thinking between 'hawk' and 'dove,' and objectively analyze the pros and cons of each approach and employ them in

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17. Jinwook Choi, "New Paradigm in Unification Discussion: From Division Management to Unification Preparation," Jinwook Choi, ed., *Korean Peninsula and the Neighboring Powers* (Seoul: Neulpumpplus, 2010).



accordance with impending situations in optimizing the positive aspects.

South Korea's policy toward North Korea should be accomplished comprehensively with alignment between North Korea and its people, inter-Korean cooperation and international cooperation, as well as in the various fields such as politics, military, economy, and society, while running parallel with the formation of domestic social consensus.<sup>18</sup> Exchanges and cooperation in those fields should not be bound by incidents, and should be fulfilled comprehensively with alignment. If security is overstressed, then exchanges and cooperation can be stunted in trying to fix the division of the two Koreas. Conversely, if exchanges and cooperation are hastily pushed forward, then security considerations may be held back. Moreover, overemphasis on inter-Korean relations may harm international cooperation, and there is a limit to improving inter-Korean relations merely by international cooperation.

In President Park Geun-hye's address to the Joint Meeting of U.S. Congress, she suggested the "Northeast Asia Peace Cooperation Plan" (Seoul Process), which pursues multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia and improvement of inter-Korean relations. It will first concentrate on humanitarian and non-political areas such as disaster relief, environmental issues, and nuclear safety. As the level of trust gradually builds up, it will then focus on political and military problems such as denuclearization.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Happiness of the People***

During the Cold War, it was believed that Seoul's North Korea policy should take a state-centered approach or a politics-centered approach. After the end of the Cold War, however, Seoul's North Korea policy took a functional approach in which exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas could lead to building a socio-economic community, and ultimately a political community. However, South Korea's major concern

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18. Korea News Editors' Association debate, *Yonhap News*, July 16, 2012.

19. *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 10, 2013.

was the North Korean regime rather than its people.<sup>20</sup> This basically arose from the absence of a civil society in North Korea, but efforts to increase bonds among the North and South Korean people were insufficient as well. Efforts to increase affinity included providing humanitarian aid to North Korea, supporting the improvement in shortages of food and daily necessities, and giving greater consideration for North Korean defectors.

Trust is a sort of intangible infrastructure between the North and South, which will contribute to the psychological integration between the people of the two Koreas, and thus, forming a trust-based society even after unification. “Laying the foundation for a happy unification,” which is one of the five government’s main policies, puts the people’s happiness rather than governmental interests as the main driver and concern in forming a North Korea policy.

## **Implementation Strategy and Tasks for the Trust-Building Process**

### ***Basic Structure***

The sharp economic gap between North and South Korea has been the most important factor in determining how South Korea deals with North Korea. Whether conservative or progressive, South Korean governments regarded their economic superiority as the most important policy means. From a progressive perspective, economic aid and cooperation can lead North Korea to embrace reforms and opening. From a conservative perspective, economic pressure can help change North Korea’s

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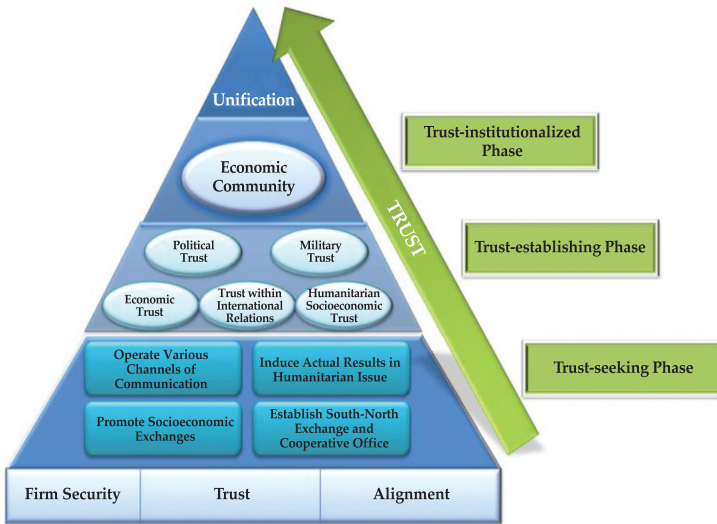
20. This is because in the past, political, social, and ideological movements were all state-centered, and the importance of the state and its sovereignty were emphasized as we went through the independence movement period. However, after the Cold War, idea of a social community-centered unification rather than a state-centered one became prevalent. In other words, this is a shift in the unification paradigm in that once the South and North form an economic entity and social community, then, eventually, political union will follow.

behavior. However, both conservative and progressive policies ultimately turned out to be ineffective. Economic superiority alone is not an effective policy means. However, it can be effective when it is combined with a significant degree of trust. It is desirable to combine economic cooperation between two Koreas together with a reliable degree of trust. It would not be appropriate to provide North Korea substantial economic aid without a reliable degree of trust.

The Trust-building Process can be implemented in three stages:

1. Ice-breaking efforts to make a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations should be de-linked to North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and other political situations like North Korea’s apology on the sinking of the Cheonan warship and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. These include opening various channels of dialogue and providing humanitarian aid to the North. Above all, previous agreements between North and South Korea should be abided by.
2. Military and political confidence can be built, which can be reached as trust is built and North Korea denuclearizes.
3. An economic community between the two Koreas can be established based on mutual trust.

Figure 1. Trust Pyramid



The North and South are still in the first stage of trust-building. Efforts to reopen channels of communication can be initiated despite the absence of apologies for the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents. Nutritional aid for North Korean infants could also begin right away. However, the persistent denial of the responsibilities over the two incidents without assurances that the provocations will not occur again will limit the scope of trust building.

In order to move onto the second stage of trust-building, some visible progress on denuclearization will be one of the important determining factors. The degree of trust can be built and enhanced separately and independently on different areas of trust, but all areas must constantly be worked on simultaneously.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

#### **Political and Military Trust-building and Complementary Development of Socioeconomic Exchanges and Cooperation**

To keep one's promise is the most important aspect of building trust. Observing the agreements of the former governments is to practice the spirit of mutual respect. Yet, details can be adjusted to suit the reality. Specifically, for a more stable and predictable inter-Korean relationship, it is important to build trust by proceeding with realistic measures that are easily reachable. These must precede any grand discourse or large-scale projects.

By enhancing inter-Korean economic and socio-cultural exchanges, national homogeneity must be recovered and trust must be steadily established. Moreover, social exchanges need to be promoted in various fields including academics, religion, and more.

While economic cooperation and exchanges will be predominant during the early stages of trust-building, there are limits to them if they are not backed by political and military trust. The most important aspect of building political and military trust is North Korea's denuclearization. High-level strategic dialogues with China's new leadership must begin, and international opinion must be united by strengthening

the diplomacy toward the middle powers that share the same goal of the denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea's nuclear program cannot and will not ever be condoned. It is necessary to convince the North that it will have much more to lose and suffer if denuclearization is delayed, as well as to clearly convey the message that greater cooperation with the international community and South Korea will be possible so long as it abandons its nuclear weapons. Under close cooperation with the international community, the firm commitment to realize North Korea's denuclearization should be continued through "strong deterrence and multi-faceted negotiations."

The success or failure of the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula will be decided based upon the firm will and leadership of the leader, as well as a consistent North Korea policy. Both North and South Korea should sincerely implement the Trust-building Process and forge a specific plan to effectively carry out the policy.

### Improving the Living Standards of North Korean Residents

Public opinion polls showed that the biggest issue in the task of unification is enhancing the rights and welfare of North Korean residents. If the transparency in distribution of aid is guaranteed, humanitarian aid (nutritional aid) will continue to expand, regardless of the changing political circumstances.<sup>21</sup> In addition, in order to redress the problem of separated families, reunion meetings will be held on a regular basis, and exchange of recorded videos will be actively promoted. Moreover, recovering prisoners of war and abducted individuals will be pursued as one of the top priorities. The North Korean Human Rights Act will be passed in the earliest opportunity, and if the government comes to an impasse in inter-Korean relation, the efforts of scholars, media, and civil rights group will be supported as side channels to promote the government's efforts.

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21. It is important to specifically decide at an early stage when, what kind of items, how much, and how to monitor the humanitarian aid.

The unification that I envision will provide opportunities for North Korean residents to live happy lives. In order to enhance the quality of lives and universal rights for those in North Korea who will lead the Era of Unification along with us the North Korean Human Rights Act will be enacted, and cooperation with the United Nations as well as the international community will be strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

### Expanding the Values of a Peaceful Unification and Building its Foundation

Unification must be substantially prepared by concentrating the public's efforts, as well as cooperating with the international community.<sup>23</sup>

Public interest and the will to bring about unification is the impetus needed to draw international cooperation and concentrate the public's efforts. The vision and values of unification must be widespread in order to overcome the negative image unification has, such as involving high costs and invoking social disorder. Unification is the surest means of eliminating threats on the Korean Peninsula, and it may also bring about economic prosperity and a rise in international status. In addition, unification will also contribute to the peace and prosperity of Northeast Asia.

The international community's awareness that the North and South were originally one country and therefore must be re-united should be continuously affirmed. A consensus on the notion that "the unification of the Korean Peninsula is pivotal to Northeast Asia's peace, stability and prosperity" must be reached and repeatedly emphasized in the South Korea-China-Japan Summits.

Furthermore, in order to lay a cornerstone for peaceful unification, educational, financial, legal, and institutional preparations must be accompanied.

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22. Park, "Trustpolitik and a New Kind of Korea."

23. *Ibid.*

### Establishing strategic flexibility

When setting North Korea policies, it is advisable to categorize the policies into three general parts in order to maximize strategic flexibility: humanitarian part, principled part, and strategic part.

First, humanitarian aid, which is provided regardless of the changing political circumstances, includes providing necessity goods, clothes, medical items, and nutritional aids for infants and pregnant mothers. Such nutritional aids include vitamins, biscuits, and powdered milk, and is distinguished from fertilizer and food provisions.

Second, the principled part includes issues of North Korea's human rights, denuclearization, and apologies for the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents. It also includes refusing to give monetary profits to the North in return for their mere participation in governmental and non-governmental level inter-Korean talks, including inter-Korean summits. Although the failure to settle these issues does not necessarily mean a deadlock in inter-Korean relations, these areas should never be forgotten, but repeatedly raised.

Third, the strategic part involves responding to political situations with flexibility. Organizing and prioritizing the terms we demand of North Korea and distinguishing the terms we could concede depending on North Korea's stance is necessary. The terms agreed in the October 4th Inter-Korean Summit should be included, and the negotiations should proceed in light of the changing inter-Korean relationship.

### Strengthening Infrastructure for North Korea Policies

It is difficult to produce immediate and visible results when it comes to North Korea policies. In particular, it is even more challenging if one attempts to persistently abide by one's principles. However, simply because the immediately visible results are absent, the efforts to build necessary infrastructure for North Korea policies and strategies should not fade.

Preparations must be made for future opportunities and threats by carefully establishing well-thought out strategies and by investing

in high quality aid, both material and humanitarian. A specific plan must be devised regarding the demands that will be made of North Korea, and provisions that will be granted during inter-Korean summits. In order to do this, experts in the field of North Korea policies, information, and inter-state communication must be maintained and reinforced, while efforts must be made to establish and expand the network of scholars, media, civil groups, as well as groups linked to the government. Above all, a close cooperative system must be maintained between North Korea policies control towers and respective governmental departments.

### ***Tasks Ahead for Each Phase***

#### Trust-seeking Phase

- ***Operate Various Channels of Communication***

In order to establish trust, it is necessary to operate various channels of communication, as well as express a positive view that the doors of communication are open for North Korea. Through non-governmental organization (NGO) visits and Red Cross conferences, strained relations will soothe and give way to more reunions of separated families and larger humanitarian aid, also allowing the suspension of operations needed for communications between governmental authorities. If North Korea changes its position regarding the Yeonpyeong incident and the death of a tourist at Mount Kumgang, a meeting can be arranged to resume tours on Mount Kumgang and economic cooperation.

It is unnecessary to rule out the possibility of a summit meeting. However, rather than trying to hold summit for its own sake as some kind of political event, which has had many disappointments, it is advisable to take a more gradual approach and establish strategies that can slowly but continuously improve inter-Korean relations throughout the five-year presidency.



- *Humanitarian Aid for North Korea*

The young, elderly, and vulnerable groups are to be prioritized, and for that end, cooperation with the UN, UNICEF and the international community should be strengthened. As inter-Korean relations develop, aid can be extended to reduce homelessness problems and lack of necessity goods. For example, projects that can be taken into consideration include: transferring agricultural technology through cooperation with local governments; inducing participation of local authorities to solve housing problems; and alleviating the shortage of necessity goods by building large distribution complexes in Chul-won or Dandong.

- *International Cooperation to bring about Changes in North Korea*

In order to bring changes in North Korea, it is without doubt that cooperation with China and Japan, as well as the international community is needed. For instance, providing aid to trigger the inflow of foreign technology and capital in the primary industries such as underground resources, forestry and fisheries, as well as aid to raise experts in the field of market economy by arranging overseas training can all be considered. Aid will be provided so that educational programs aimed at training North Korean experts in overseas can be expanded to countries like Indonesia and Vietnam, similar to the existing programs operated in Sweden and Australia. It is also possible to provide indirect aid to the North via giving economic support to international NGOs that focus their activities on North Korea. Out of the 46 international organizations of which both North Korea and South Korea are members, working bilateral or multilateral consultative groups will be promoted on those that focus on specialized and functional cooperation.

- *Promoting Social and Cultural Exchanges*

Systematized cooperation will be arranged in the fields of health, medicine, and green growth (agriculture, forest 'greenification,'

weather). To expand economic cooperation, the Kaesong Industrial Complex will be developed into the International Industrial Complex. In addition, the establishment and co-development of a South-North Joint Company will be promoted. To consistently develop and systematize inter-Korean economic cooperation and social exchanges, the establishment of a South-North Exchange and Cooperative office in Seoul and Pyongyang will also be promoted.

- *Public consensus*

It is necessary to build an infrastructure for North Korea policies based on public consensus. For example, a special committee for South-North communication can be established in the South Korean National Assembly, or the National Unification Advisory Council can be reorganized to be comprised of opinion leaders from all levels of society so that it is true to its purpose of listening to public opinion and expanding policies. The activities of a “Unification Jip-hyun-jun” (tentatively named after “research centers” built in the courts during the Choseon Dynasty) consisting of experts on North Korea, unification, and international politics acting as a political advisory body, will also be invigorated.

### Trust-establishing phase

As trust builds up, and steps toward denuclearization are taken, the Vision Korea Project will be promoted to create even developments on the Korean Peninsula, as well as an economic community.

- *Expanding infrastructure in North Korea*

To enhance North Korea’s economic growth, aid will be provided in strengthening North Korea’s infrastructure, including electricity, transport, and communication. South Korea supports North Korea’s endorsement of international investment from major international financial organizations.

- *Strengthening Trilateral Cooperation between South-North-China, South-North-Russia, etc.*

Establishing special economic zones, distribution complexes in border regions, cross-border gas pipes, railways, and developing cross-border routes to the North Pole will be actively promoted.

- *Increasing the level of South-North communications*

With the progression of the denuclearization process, the level of talks will gradually increase, and discussions on implementing the established agreements will commence. Talks at the Prime Minister level will be held, and a South-North Military Joint Commission, South-North Reconciliatory Joint Commission, South-North Committee on Exchange and Cooperation will be launched. A summit meeting will also be considered at an appropriate time. A hot-line will be established to prevent accidental military confrontation.

#### Trust-institutionalization phase

As peace is already settled in this phase, a verification system to check North Korea's nuclear disarmament and arms control would have been established, and peaceful relations are further consolidated. Inter-Korean summits and working-level talks will be held on a regular basis. In this trust-institutionalization phase, political unification is to be brought forth based on a South-North economic community. A mutually complementary economic cooperation between the two Koreas and further development of the North's economy will be pursued.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

There are no fantastic slogans or dramatic visions in the Park Geun-hye government's North Korea policy. It is not looking for artificial differentiations from the previous governments, nor is it attempting

some dramatic events to attract people's interests. The Park Geun-hye government's North Korea policy was overshadowed by North Korea's provocations which started even before the government's inauguration. Security concerns dominated inter-Korean relations and, thus, it was not easy to speak out fresh attempts to build trust with the North. Moreover, there were few opportunities to intensively discuss what the Trust-building Process meant.

The Park Geun-hye government's North Korea policy is distinct from those of the previous governments.' The Trust-building Process seems to be a new paradigm for policies aimed at North Korea. Trust is a new concept in South Korea's North Korea policy. South Korea's economic superiority has been the major policy leverage against the North since the end of Cold War; for instance, weighing how much economic aid should be provided to the North, or whether economic pressure is necessary.

The Trust-building Process differs from previous North Korea policies by putting emphasis on the importance of individuals' happiness. The Park Geun-hye government's "Happy Unification" respects the quality of individual lives of a unified Korea as the top priority, while previous governments presented dramatic slogans on state-levels such as "Great Economic Power" or "First Class Country." For the Trust-building Process, it is important to cultivate relationships between peoples in the South and the North, support North Korean settlers in South Korea, and aid a psychological integration between the North and the South in prospect of future unification. The Trust-building Process can be a model for inter-Korean cooperation that establishes sentimental and cultural solidarities between the two parties.

Can the Trust-building Process operate regardless of North Korea's nuclear weapons and provocations? It is skeptical whether government-level inter-Korean relations would make remarkable progress in the near future.

However, the Trust-building Process is not impossible even without North Korea's positive responses. It has already achieved some affirmative results such as reducing disagreements within South Korea as to its North Korea policies, and the Process garnered support from

the United States and China as well.

Trust building efforts should continue, and opening various channels for communications with North Korea is what the Trust-building Process pursues. This is, in a way, a deviation from demanding denuclearization as a precondition to dealing with other inter-Korean issues. The real crisis of the Trust-building Process is not North Korea's provocations but an end of communications. It is very difficult to build trust without continuous mutual exchanges and conferences. As inter-Korean trust builds up, a number of formerly unthinkable breakthroughs may come about, such as North Korea's denuclearization, or even a peace treaty.

There is not much that South Korea can do, however, if North Korea is not really ready to talk, as it was the case for the first few months after the inauguration of the Park Geun-hye government. Holding inter-Korean talks for its own sake or providing a large-scale of economic aid to prompt visible results may in fact cause greater harm on trust building. Progress made by such artificial ad-hoc events would soon evaporate. Therefore, it is important to make gradual progress through verifiable ways that have long-lasting effects.

The Trust-building Process reserves commenting on the legitimacy of North Korea's regime, while firmly responding to North Korea's bad behaviors or provocations against South Korea. Needless to say, any North Korea policies would fail if the North persists to take a hostile position against the South.

Finally, the Park Geun-hye government is pursuing the normalization of inter-Korean relations through the Trust-building Process and, at the same time, "substantially preparing for Korean unification." Such approach hopes to end the long controversies overseeing the division management of the Korean Peninsula and the preparation for Korean unification as an either-or choice.<sup>24</sup>

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