

Dilemma of South Korea's Trust Diplomacy and Unification Policy

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Taking office, President Park promised to take new initiative of trust diplomacy with its neighbors. Dubbed as '*trustpolitik*,' the policy has aimed to bring peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia by forging a higher level of cooperation among nations built on trust. President Park has emphasized a need to rebuild trust with the isolationist regime in Pyongyang and open up dialogue as part of her two-track North Korea policy. At the same time, President Park drew up a blueprint for the reunification of the two Koreas, describing it as a huge opportunity for the local economy to leapfrog to a whole new level. And she proposed on laying the groundwork for unification through economic exchanges and humanitarian aid in Dresden Germany in March 2014. But the problem is President Park's trust diplomacy is met with strong suspicion from Pyongyang who criticized South Korea's unification as a plot to instigate a regime change, if not collapse, in the North. As the tension and mistrust remains high on the Korean Peninsula, South Korea needs to make it clear that the policy priority is to ensure peace and stability between the two Koreas. At the same time, South Korea needs to recognize different priority of North Korean motives among security, well-being, and self-esteem in order to develop effective strategy to build mutual trust with Pyongyang. It needs to continue to engage Pyongyang to build mutual trust and stable partnership first to achieve an eventual peaceful unification.

Keywords: *trustpolitik*, Korean unification, Korea Peace Process, Dresden Declaration, Unification Committee.

Introduction

From the very beginning, President Park Geun-hye emphasized trust as the most basic element of her administration's engagement effort with North Korea. She suggested that her government would pursue more cooperation and dialogue with Pyongyang to build mutual trust on the Korean Peninsula which, she believes, is the foundation of the Korean unification. The unification initiative by the Park government is partly driven by the concern of North Korea's regime stability. For the moment, the young Kim Jong-un seems to have consolidated his leadership by following his predecessors' model of personality cult, public appearance, on-site inspections in combination with brutal rein over party and military elites. At the same time, there are continuing speculation about North Korean contingency and regime collapse. And South Korea's new unification efforts are partly driven by such concern. The Problem is South Korea's unification initiative tends to intensify North Korean suspicion and mistrust between the two Koreas. It is important for the South Korean government to prepare for any contingency on the Korean Peninsula. However, the government should not send any wrong impression that South Korea is wishing for contingency to absorb North Korea. According to some scholars, motives in security, wealth, and self-esteem are driving factors for trust building in international relations. In this regard, South Korea needs to recognize the different priority of North Korean motives among the three in order to develop an effective strategy to build mutual trust with Pyongyang. This paper first takes a look at the situations on the Korean Peninsula. Second, it will discuss President Park Geun-hye's trust diplomacy with North Korea. Third, the dilemma of President Park's unification policy and growing mistrust in Pyongyang will be discussed. Fourth, based on the theories of three different motives for trust building in international relations, it will critically assess the problems of South Korea's trust building initiative with the North Korean regime.

Two Koreas and Peace on the Peninsula

The geo-politics of Northeast Asia has undergone fundamental change in the 21st century that goes beyond the demise of the Cold War environment in the 1990s.¹ It is more fundamental in a sense that the change is as radical as the one that took place in the late 19th century when the traditional order revolved around China for several centuries, was overturned by the arrival of Western imperialism and the rise of Japan. The Korean Peninsula was as at the center of this power transition that took place some 100 years ago. And the Korean nation finds itself again at the center of the 21st century power transition today. Amidst growing concern of China's rapidly rising economic and military power, some pundits have warned that the rise of China will heighten tension and rivalry with surrounding countries, including the United States, aggravate the conflicts and disputes within the region, and eventually lead to a hegemonic war.² The present situation shares many similarities with that which prevailed in Europe shortly before World War I and II. Others, however, argue that the likelihood of a hegemonic war in Northeast Asia, like that which occurred in the late 19th century, is quite remote.³ The relative stability of the geo-political situations in Northeast Asia, however, could be seriously

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1. In his latest book, Kissinger argues that the 19th century European balance of power politics is coming back to most visible in East Asia with the rise of China. Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).
 2. Aaron Friedberg, "The Future of US-China Relations," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 7-45; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 1-28, 360-402; John Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010), pp. 381-396.
 3. Stephen M. Walt of Harvard University has pointed out that no territorial ambitions by China, emphasis on economic development in the region, and nuclear deterrence makes the likelihood of a full-scale war between the world's superpowers remains low. Stephen M. Walt, "Good News: World War I is Over and will not Happen Again," *Foreign Policy*, February 8, 2013, http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/08/good_news_world_war_i_is_over_and_will_not_happen_again (accessed July 15, 2014).

disrupted by the lethal transformation of the North Korean threat. The totalitarian nature of North Korean regime based on its absolute reverence of Kim Il-sung and his family with armed provocations and continuing nuclear weapons program has never changed. Nevertheless, a series of recent events has resulted in elevating the North Korean threat to a new level. First, North Korea's successful launch of its long range missile followed by third nuclear test indicated deepening of its WMD capabilities and threats. Second, the rise of new and unproven leadership of young Kim Jong-un represents a new source of instability on the Korean Peninsula. The new two threats emerging from North Korea can be compared to the two sides of the same coin in terms of their close relationship to one another.

North Korea's third nuclear test, conducted on February 12, 2013, indicates that the North's nuclear capability has now reached a new level. Despite a lack of data to confirm the actual scale and characteristics of the nuclear test, it does appear that this latest round of tests was more advanced in terms of scale and capacity. Furthermore, if this experiment was made use of enriched uranium as assumed by many nuclear experts, North Korea's nuclear weapons capability has since moved beyond a mere symbolic stage.⁴ The test, combined with the successful launch of a three-stage long-range missile in December 2012, has led many to conclude that North Korea has made significant steps toward becoming an actual nuclear power with both bomb and its delivery systems.⁵ This is a landmark shift that not only alters the military balance between the two Koreas, but also the security landscape throughout Northeast Asia. North Korea's de facto nuclear

4. Siegfried Hecker, "What to expect from a North Korean Nuclear Test," *Foreign Policy* (February 4, 2013), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/02/04/what_to_expect_from_a_north_korean_nuclear_test (accessed May 22, 2014); Mary Beth Nikitin, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: Technical Issues," CRS Report to Congress (April 3, 2013).

5. John Harper, "USFK Chief: North Korea has Made Crucial Advance toward Nuclear Missile," *Stars and Stripes*, October 24, 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/usfk-chief-north-korea-has-made-crucial-advance-toward-nuclear-missile-1.310175> (accessed October 25, 2014).

weapons state status could not come at a worse timing as Pyongyang's leadership is going through a critical transition for its own survival. The passing down of power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un has further enhanced the feudal characteristics of the North Korean system. In particular, the emergence of Kim Jong-un, as the North's absolute leader while still in his 20s, has raised numerous questions about the future viability of the North Korean system. Despite initial worries, the power succession to a third generation of Kims appears to have been carried out in a stable manner. No visible disturbances or power struggles have emerged within North Korea and Kim Jong-un appears to have quickly seized the reins of power. The successful carrying out of its long-range missile test and third nuclear test is expected to further solidify the political power base of young Kim Jong-un.⁶

Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un's lack of political experience, as compared to his grandfather and father, and the perceptions of him as an inexperienced leader wielding absolute power, have contributed to a sense of uncertainty for the future of the North Korean system.⁷ The fundamental inability of the North Korean economy to show any sign of major improvement will only further worsen the inherent instability of the North Korean system over time. North Korea's nuclear program is expected to further derail the economic reforms that constitute the key to the survival of the North Korean system due to a strengthening of the sanctions imposed on the North by the international community. As such, the advancement of North Korea's nuclear capability has in essence become a tool to offset the weakness of the existing North Korean system. However, this situation has served to exacerbate a contradiction in which the economic survival of North Korea has been further eroded by the recent strengthening

6. Alexandre Mansourov, "Kim Jong Un's Domestic Policy Record in His First Year: Surprisingly Good," *38 North* (January 15, 2013), <http://38north.org/2013/01/amansourov011613> (accessed June 15, 2014).

7. Zachary Keck, "In Asia, Fears of North Korea's Collapse Grow," *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/in-asia-fears-of-north-koreas-collapse-grow> (accessed June 15, 2014).

of its nuclear capability. A flurry of political, military, and economic consequences on the Korean Peninsula caused by instability or collapse of North Korea will be even more serious than the potential threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons.⁸ The chaos that would result from a regime change, if not collapse of the North Korean regime will be the worst case scenario for the South as well as surrounding countries. The current state of North Korea is reminiscent of that of the Joseon Dynasty during the final days of the Daehan Empire, a time characterized by isolation and seclusion and a leadership power struggle to seize control from a vulnerable king. The competition between the surrounding powers to exert their influence over a chaotic Joseon, is in many ways not that different from the current power politics among the United States, China, Japan, and Russia over North Korean situation.

While today's nuclear North Korea might be doomed for an ultimate demise like the case of late 19th century Joseon dynasty, South Korea offers a very different story. The most vital difference between the Korean Peninsula of the 19th century and today is the remarkable ascension of South Korea's global capability and status. Although its geopolitical location assures that it is still surrounded by stronger powers, South Korea has now become the world's 15th-largest economy and the 12th-largest military power. The impressive quality of South Korea's national power is further enhanced when the qualitative strengths of the Korean economy and its military power are factored in. Along with being an advanced economy with a population of 50 million, and per capita national income of USD 20,000, South Korea is also the world's technology leader in such high-tech sectors and key industries as electronics, communications, semiconductors, automobiles, shipbuilding, steel, and construction. The Korean military is manned by an elite force of 600,000 troops that boasts high morale

8. Michael O'Hanlon, "North Korea Collapse Scenarios," *The Brookings Institution*, September 2009, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2009/06/north-korea-ohanlon> (accessed June 10, 2014); Priya Sethi, "If North Korea Collapsed," *The National Interest*, July 14, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/if-north-korea-collapsed-10868> (accessed October 5, 2014).

and cutting-edge weapons systems. In addition to defending the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's armed forces have contributed to global peace and stability through its active involvement in peacekeeping operations in more than 20 countries since the first dispatch to the Gulf War in 1991.⁹ Recently, the world wide *hallyu* (Korean Wave) boom, in the form of Korea's cinema, drama, and pop music, has served to markedly boost South Korea's soft power throughout the global community. The remarkable transition of South Korea within the past half century, which includes becoming the first nation to transform itself from an aid recipient to ODA donor today, with a mature democracy and its extraordinary economic advancement, has piqued the interest of many leaders in developing countries who seek to learn from Korea's success story.

The situation of the Republic of Korea thus differs greatly from the chaos and darkness that engulfed Joseon during its final days, and that of modern-day North Korea, a country devastated by its isolationist and oppressive policy. South Korea's successful hosting of such high-profile events as the Busan APEC Summit in 2005, G-20 Seoul Summit in 2010, and Nuclear Security Summit in 2012, have highlighted Korea's high-profile shift from the periphery to the center of the 21st century new international order.¹⁰ This noteworthy development of South Korea means that it now has the capability and duty to play an active role in the promotion of the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and the world overall along with other major powers.

Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as the most important priority of Korean diplomacy, will set the tone for defining the common interests and promoting cooperative diplomacy

9. "International Peacekeeping Operation," Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea, http://www.mnd.go.kr/mbshome/mbs/mnd_eng/subview.jsp?id=mnd_eng_020300000000 (accessed September 28, 2014).

10. Lee Sook-Jong, "South Korea as New Middle Power: Seeking Complex Diplomacy," *EAI Asia Security Initiative Working Paper*, September 2012, http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2012091211454078.pdf (accessed September 28, 2014).

with the four powers. The key factor behind the Korean Peninsula's peaceful situation is the maintenance of stable inter-Korean relations. South Korea's ability to show that it is making earnest efforts to stabilize inter-Korean relations will help to further bolster the status of South Korea as a responsible player on the Korean Peninsula, in concert with the surrounding powers. To this end, Korea ought to take the initiative to promote bilateral and multilateral efforts, together with the four powers, to stabilize the North Korean situation.

President Park's Trust Diplomacy

As the first female president elected in South Korea's modern history, Park Geun-hye faces, like most other leaders of major countries, tough policy challenges of addressing both domestic issues and foreign affairs. During her campaign, Park emphasized strengthening the social safety net for the poor and vulnerable in the midst of the global economic crisis and widening economic inequality. She promised a "second miracle on the Han River," by rejuvenating South Korea's slowing economy. Her policy will also pursue "economic democratization" in an effort to address the conglomerates' overpowering expansion at the expense of smaller businesses.¹¹

As for foreign policy, President Park promised to take new initiative of trust diplomacy with its neighbors. Dubbed as '*trustpolitik*,' the policy has aimed to bring peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia by forging a higher level of cooperation among nations built on trust. Trust, a core value for President's Park's overarching political philosophy, is an indispensable asset to foster cooperation not only among individuals, but also among nations. Trust is defined as "an asset and public infrastructure for international cooperation without which sustainable and genuine peace is not achievable."¹²

11. Presidential Candidate Park Geun-hye's Policy Briefing.

12. Yun Byung-Se, "Park Geun-hye's Trustpolitik: A New Framework for South Korea's Foreign Policy," *Global Asia* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 11-12.

Neither a utopian idealism that shies away from realpolitik nor a naïve political romanticism, *trustpolitik* comes from Korea's unique historical experiences as well as a hard assessment of the political realities on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia where trust deficit is most evident. As such the division and confrontation between the two Koreas still remain on the Korean Peninsula while North Korea's active WMD programs are complicating the nature of conflict in and around the peninsula. Building trust is also critical in addressing the "Asian paradox," which depicts the deepening imbalance between the increasing economic interdependence and backward political and security cooperation.¹³

Park's *trustpolitik* thus aims to solve two challenging security issues of inter-Korean rivalry and Northeast Asian rivalry. For this the Park administration pursues the Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI). First, building trust was seen as essential element in breaking the past vicious cycle of North Korean provocation, compensation, and more provocation. The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula will first ensure peace based on a firm and resolute security posture against any provocations from North Korea. At the same time, efforts will be made to promote the stable development of international relations. Instead of either easily accepting or helplessly enduring North Korea's self-indulgent behavior, it stuck to a consistent stance that Pyongyang has to respect international standards and norms and abide by its promises, or otherwise pay a penalty for broken promises. Second, building trust is also critical in addressing the security dynamics in Northeast Asia where the disparity between increasingly deepening economic interdependence and heightening conflicts surrounding historical and territorial issues seems to be intensifying. The NAPCI aims to transform the existing structure of mistrust and confrontation into one of trust and cooperation starting from building a consensus on softer, yet equally critical issues such as climate change, environment, disaster relief and nuclear safety. The

13. Ibid.

initiative seeks to gradually develop a habit of cooperation among regional players so that it may eventually contribute to addressing more serious security issues such as territory and history disputes.¹⁴

The Park administration sees the issues of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia as intimately interrelated. The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula and the initiative for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia are expected to reinforce each other.¹⁵ It says they have no illusion of building trust is easy. Trust cannot be built with only one side making the effort. In order to build more enduring and lasting trust, one party must clearly show the willingness to use robust and credible deterrence against breaches of agreements by the other party, while leaving open the possibility for constructive cooperation. And it requires time and patience to consistently apply principles of *trustpolitik* in the face of obstacles.

Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula

President Park has emphasized a need to rebuild trust with the isolationist regime and open up dialogue as part of her two-track North Korea policy. During the campaign, Park pledged to end the inter-Korean tensions that were prolonged under the hardline policies of her predecessor, Lee Myung-bak — a fellow conservative. During his five-year tenure, President Lee took uncompromising policy on North Korea's nuclear development, making denuclearization a priority over inter-Korean engagement. However, Lee's approach only invited an angry reaction from Pyongyang, which carried out two nuclear tests and three long-range missile tests since then. At the same time, inter-Korean tension reached a new height when the North Korean military sank a South Korean navy vessel and directed artillery fire at Yeonpyeong Island that killed a combined 50 South Koreans in 2010.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

While promising a strong defensive posture and retaliation against North Korean provocations, Ms. Park called for dialogue and easing animosity with North Korean leadership. In order to do so, she emphasized trust-based diplomacy. Noting that a lack of trust has long undermined attempts at genuine reconciliation between North and South Korea, Park proposed that Seoul would adopt a policy of "*trustpolitik*," establishing mutually binding expectations based on global norms.¹⁶ While Seoul must respond forcefully to Pyongyang's militarism and nuclear brinkmanship, it must also remain open to new opportunities for improving relations between the two sides. Trust could be built on incremental gains, such as joint projects for enhanced economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and new trade and investment opportunities. For this, proactive measures to enhance mutual trust were suggested. For example, humanitarian issues will be set apart from political issues, such as support for infants and the less-privileged in North Korea. South Korea will also expand infrastructure to improve North Korea's electric power, transportation, and communication networks, support North Korea's acceptance into international financial institutions, strengthen trilateral economic cooperation among South Korea-North Korea-China and South Korea-North Korea-Russia, help internationalize the Kaesong Industrial Complex, jointly develop North Korea's natural resources, and upgrade social and cultural exchanges. In order to push forward such working-level exchanges, Ms. Park suggested building an 'Inter-Korean Exchange Cooperation Office.'¹⁷ To discuss these proposals, she also suggested holding an inter-Korean summit.

Yet, once elected, the new president soon found herself facing a more urgent challenge coming from Pyongyang — North Korea's nuclear test and military crisis. A week before Ms. Park's election in December 2012, North Korea successfully launched what they called a satellite rocket into orbit. Then, two weeks before Ms. Park's inau-

16. Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust Between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (2011), pp. 13-18.

17. Presidential Candidate Park Geun-hye's Policy Briefing.

guration, North Korea conducted its third nuclear test in an underground facility. After the launch and nuclear detonation heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula, Park's leadership and her agenda to revive inter-Korean dialogue became challenged. In her inaugural address, President Park called North Korea's latest nuclear test "a challenge to the survival and future of the Korean people" and said North Korea will be "the biggest victim." President Park also issued a warning to Pyongyang that she will "not tolerate any action that threatens the lives" of the people and security of the nation. Calling on the North to stop wasting resources on nuclear and missile development, the new president in Seoul pledged to "move forward, step-by-step, on the basis of credible deterrence to build trust between the South and the North."¹⁸

Pyongyang did not wait long before it fired back to its Southern counterpart. In early March 2013, the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) declared that "the DPRK abrogates all agreements on nonaggression reached between the north and the south." Furthermore, it "totally nullifies the 1992 joint declaration on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."¹⁹ In April, the North Korean authority suspended the operation in Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) by withdrawing all its employees. After months of negotiation, North Korea agreed to reopen the KIC in September. By the year's end with surprising execution of Jang Sung-taek, Chairman Kim's uncle and closest aid in December 2013, North Korea's authority concluded that President "Park's (trust) policy surpasses that of the Lee regime in its crafty and vicious nature."²⁰

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula remained high as the South launched annual military exercises with the United States in February

18. "Full Text of the 18th Presidential Inauguration Speech," *Korea Net*, February 25, 2013, <http://www.korea.net/Government/Briefing-Room/Presidential-Speeches/view?articleId=105853>.

19. "DPRK Says to Server Hot Lines with S. Korea, Nullify Non-aggression Pact," *Global Times*, March 8, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/766845.shtml>.

20. Aidan Foster Carter, "Will a 'Good Season' Ever Come?" *Comparative Connection*, CSIS, January 2014, http://csis.org/files/publication/1303qnk_sk.pdf.

2014, described by Pyongyang as a rehearsal for an invasion against the North. In March, in a pointed protest at the exercises, Pyongyang carried out a series of rocket and missile launches, capped by its first mid-range missile test since 2009. The two Koreas soon traded artillery fire across the tense Yellow Sea border in the following week, after the North dropped around 100 shells across the maritime boundary during a live-fire drill. The exchange followed a North Korean warning that it might carry out a "new form" of nuclear test — a possible reference to a uranium-based device or a miniaturized warhead small enough to fit on a ballistic missile.²¹

The problem is the fundamental gap between the North and the South regarding the nuclear issue. Pyongyang sees its nuclear program as the ultimate guarantor of regime survival against the U.S. military threat. For that reason, the nuclear issue should and can be discussed only with Washington. Seoul sees North Korea's nuclear program as its gravest national security threat. Seoul wants to discuss and resolve the nuclear issue once and for all with Pyongyang so that the two Koreas can facilitate true peace and reengagement. But, Seoul's desire to resolve the nuclear issue has been ignored by Pyongyang, who seeks only bilateral talks with the U.S. Yet, Washington has no intention of recognizing North Korea as a nuclear state, which is exactly what Pyongyang wants as it demands nuclear arms control talks with the U.S. North Korea's nuclear provocations have only invited more sanctions from the U.S., which makes nuclear negotiation more difficult. As expressed earlier, in her inaugural address, President Park called North Korea's latest nuclear test "a challenge to the survival and future of the Korean people" and said North Korea will be "the biggest victim." President Park also issued a warning to Pyongyang that she will "not tolerate any action that threatens the lives" of the people and security of the nation. Calling on the North to stop wasting resources on nuclear and missile development, the new president

21. Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea Vows to Use 'New Form' of Nuclear Test," *New York Times*, March 30, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/31/world/asia/north-korea-promises-new-form-of-nuclear-test.html?_r=0.

in Seoul pledged to “move forward, step-by-step, on the basis of credible deterrence to build trust between the South and the North.” Unless either North or South Korea changes its position regarding the nuclear issue, the prospect of inter-Korean trust building remains bleak.

In April 2014, North Korea fired another 50 rounds of artillery shell near NLL and continued to provoke international community with launching its missiles in the following months. Experts believe that Kim Jong-un is not looking for a full-scale war with South Korea. The recent provocations may well be an attempt to consolidate his political position against growing populace contempt over worsening economic conditions. Pyongyang knows well enough that its old Soviet-style military forces are no match for the U.S.-South Korea combined forces. After all, the North Korean regime is not suicidal. But there is a growing risk of miscalculation. Kim and his military advisors may believe that their existing nuclear capabilities and missiles are sufficient to deter any meaningful retaliation from the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Young Kim’s inexperience, combined with power competition among military generals to solicit the new dictator’s favor, could trigger reckless provocations against South Korea. Even a small military provocation can easily escalate into a war on the Korean Peninsula, since South Korea, backed by the U.S., now has explicitly sworn retaliation beyond the level of the North Korean attack. More recently, Seoul has said it is considering military pre-emption if the threat is judged to be imminent. As such, the International Crisis Group, based in Brussels, issued an alert saying “in a worst-scenario, retaliatory responses to an accident during either side’s military exercises or a deliberate military provocation could lead rapidly to war with potential first-day casualties in the hundreds of thousands.”²²

22. “The Korean Peninsula: Flirting With Conflict,” *International Crisis Group*, March 13, 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/alerts/2013/north-korea-the-korean-peninsula-flirting-with-conflict.aspx>.

President Park’s Unification Initiative

While advocating trust building with the North, President Park seems determined to revitalize unification agenda among increasingly skeptical South Korean publics. President Park’s drive for unification came in early 2014. In her first official press conference in January, President Park drew up a blueprint for the unification of the two Koreas, describing it as a huge opportunity for the local economy to leapfrog to a whole new level. “(Re)unification is *daebak* [a jackpot],”²³ she said when a reporter asked for further details on preparatory measures for unification. “Some Koreans oppose (re)unification for fear the costs would be too high,” Park said. “I believe (re)unification would be a chance for the economy to make a huge leap.”²⁴ As an initial step toward thawing the frozen relationship between the North and South, Park proposed that during the Lunar New Year holidays later that month the two Koreas hold reunions of families separated by the division of the Korean Peninsula 60 years ago. “I wish that North Korea gets off on the right foot for inter-Korean relations with the reunions, thus forming a framework for the start of a new conversation,” she said. In fact, a week before Park’s remarks, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un signaled a new message to improve ties with Seoul in his New Year’s address on January 1, in which he urged South Korea to take reciprocal measures to end the verbal attacks each side has repeatedly made against the other and work toward improving ties. However, the jackpot drive did not get much positive reaction from the North. North Korean weekly overseas newspaper, the *Tongil*

23. The word “daebak” was initially translated as jackpot, but Cheang War Dae has officially translated the word as “bonanza,” but “jackpot” is used for consistency with the citations.

24. She cited investment guru and commentator Jim Rogers, who has repeatedly expressed his willingness to invest in North Korea on the upbeat outlook that reunification will be realized in five years and a unified Korea will emerge as one of the strongest economies in the 21st century. Seo Ji-Eun, “Unification May be a Jackpot, Park,” *JoongAng Daily*, January 7, 2014, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2983129>.

Shinbo, ran an article on the third page of its January 18 edition titled, “‘Unification Like the Jackpot’: What Is the Problem?” “The words of the leader of South Korea are not being admired; rather, they are facing the criticism and the ridicule of the Korean people,” the article said. “Park’s words are fueled by delusions about unification by absorption, by the hope for a sudden change in North Korea.”²⁵

Meanwhile, Park’s drive for Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula took a new stage when she proposed laying the groundwork for unification through economic exchanges and humanitarian aid in Dresden Germany in March 2014. Noting Germany’s unity as a model for a peaceful reunification, President Park urged the North to expand reunion of separated families and increase cross-border economic and cultural exchanges. She suggested that South Korea would invest in North Korean infrastructure building in transportation and telecommunication. For this, she proposed that the two Koreas would jointly establish ‘inter-Korean exchange and cooperation office.’²⁶ However, President Park’s proposal for unification met with harsh criticism from North Korea who called it the “daydream of a psychopath”. The North’s powerful National Defense Commission (NDC) spokesman noted that German reunification came about with the West absorbing the East and accused Park of begging foreign countries to help a unification in which South Korea absorbed the North. He denounced Park’s proposal, billed as the “Dresden Declaration” by Seoul, as “nonsense” full of “hypocrisy and deception.” “The fact that in that particular place, Park Geun-hye lashed her tongue about (re)unification gave away her sinister mind,” he said in a statement carried out by Pyongyang’s state media.²⁷

25. Choi Hyun-Jin, “N. Korea Criticizes President Park’s Comments Unification Being the ‘Jackpot’,” *The Hankyoreh*, January 21, 2014, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/620709.html.

26. “Full Text of Park’s Speech on North Korea,” *Korea Times*, March 28, 2014, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140328001400>.

27. Park Chan-Kyung, “North Korea Blasts Reunification offer as ‘Psychopath’s Daydream,” April 11, 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/n-korea-blasts-reunification-offer-psychopaths-daydream-031617683.html>.

Despite negative response from the North, South Korean authority’s drive for unification continued when President Park Geun-hye announced a much anticipated launch of a Unification Preparatory Committee in July 2014. “We have been preparing to start the committee since the announcement was made in February,” Park said during a meeting with her aides at Cheong Wa Dae. “This committee will help bolster people’s interest in the reunification, as it will explore ways to realize the much envisioned (re)unification.” Park urged security and foreign affairs-related officials to prepare comprehensive measures to back up the committee activities. The committee is set to provide a basic guideline and analyze related sources in preparation for unification. Park called for more proactive efforts toward promotion of the national unification. “As addressed in Dresden declaration, the government is in the course of promoting inter-Korean humanitarian, economic, and cultural cooperation,” Park added.²⁸ The committee would be headed by the President, composed of vice chairmen representing each government offices and private experts. At the same time, President Park said, “true peace can be achieved only under the solidified foundation of security, and a national defense should be top priority. We should establish a firm combat readiness to counteract against any kind of provocation from the North.”

Dilemma of Pursuing Unification and Building Trust

In her inaugural speech, President Park said that her North Korea policy would incorporate the best aspects of both the ‘principled’ approach of her conservative predecessor Lee Myung-bak and the

28. Park came with the plan toward the committee as a blueprint that could prompt the unification. She proposed the initiative in her first national address in January. She described such plan as “bonanza” for the nation and “blessing” for neighboring countries. The organization now has the name, Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation. Choi Hyun-Soo, “Unification Preparatory Committee Due Today,” *The Korea Times*, July 14, 2014, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/07/116_160995.html.

engagement efforts of her progressive ones, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. In doing so, she adopted trust diplomacy, dubbed as *trustpolitik*, in building a new relationship with North Korea. President Park emphasized that trust must be mutual and built up through a series of steps, from smaller and easier to larger and more difficult issues. To build mutual trust with North Korea, the Park administration suggested on economic and social exchanges as the first step to deepen mutual confidence between the two Koreas. At the same time, President Park placed great emphasis on maintaining a strong defense and deterrence against North Korea's military provocation.²⁹ Indeed, trust has been one of the most important values and principles that President Park often emphasized personally in her dealing with domestic politics and the people. President Park's focus on trust building as the most important basis for addressing inter-Korean tension and instability is shared by most experts. However, after two years of President Park's trust diplomacy with North Korea, there has been not much progress in building mutual trust between the two Koreas. In fact, Pyongyang seems to have grown increasingly suspicious of South Korea's real intention behind its trust diplomacy. In particular, President Park's drive for unification has only deepened mistrust between the two Koreas as the North Korean authority blasted the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation as nothing but South Korea's efforts to instigate unification by force and war.³⁰ The dilemma is that the more South Korea emphasizes inter-Korean reunification, the more North Korea becomes suspicious and distrustful towards its southern counterpart.

29. Gi-Wook Shin, David Straub, and Joyce Lee, *Tailored Engagement: Toward an Effective and Sustainable Inter-Korean Relations Policy*, Shorenstein APARC Policy Paper (Stanford University, 2014), pp. 19-20.

30. Lee Young-Jae, "North Korea Blasts the Unification Committee," *Yonhap News*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/politics/2014/07/25/0511000000AKR20140725113800014.HTML> (accessed September 22, 2014).

31. Henry Farrell and Jack Knight, "Trust, Institutions and Institutional Change: Industrial Districts and the Social Capital Hypothesis," *Politics and Society* 31, no. 4 (2003), pp. 537-566.

In social science, trust is defined as "a set of expectations held by one party that another party or parties will behave in an appropriate manner with regard to a specific issue."³¹ And trust is built by repeated compliance with rules and established expectations for behavior.³² According to Richard Ned Lebow, different theories focus on different elements of trust and cooperation in international relations.³³ Emphasizing the importance of international anarchy and security for states, realists posit that no one can trust others to support them when it endangers their security. At the same time, realists recognize that trust lies at the core of strategies to deter and compel certain behaviors of target countries. Communicating threat effectively and making enforcement credible are critical for successful deterrence. As for credibility, it depends on a reputation for defending past commitments as reputation is considered the principle source of trust.³⁴ For liberalists, states are motivated by wealth as well as security. Liberalists believe that institutions are the key to overcome anarchy and to build trust as a useful instrument for promoting cooperation among states. And often such institutions tend to be created and expanded more easily in economic and functional areas to become influential eventually in political issues.³⁵ Constructivists argue that domestic and international laws, symbols of social trust, are social phenomena deeply embedded in the practices, beliefs and traditions of societies.³⁶

Following the constructivists' view, Lebow argues that cooperation and trust depend on the value structure of society. Meanwhile, individuals and their societies are motivated by security (realism), wellbeing (liberalism), and self-esteem (constructivism).³⁷ Security,

32. Mark Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches," *Academy of Management Review* 20 (1995), pp. 571-560.

33. Richard Ned Lebow, "The Role of Trust in International Relations," *Global Asia* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 16-23.

34. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), Books 1 and 6; Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

35. Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Co-operation and Discord in the World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

36. Lebow, "The Role of Trust in International Relations," pp. 19-20.

wealth, and self-esteem are universal motives, but “their relative importance is culturally and historically specific.” In other words, different societies and countries may have different priority in those three motives. And “each of these motives generates a different approach to co-operation and conflicts.” As such, one must “map their distribution to explain and predict the extent to which trust among actors is likely to develop, as well as the specific ways in which it develops.”³⁸ In particular, quest for honor and standing would be an important driver for those who put top priority on self-esteem.

Lebow’s argument provides an important clue for understanding the dilemma of South Korea’s trust diplomacy and unification policy with North Korea. First, North Korea’s priorities among security, wealth, and self-esteem could be quite different from that of South Korea. Along with its focus on security vis-à-vis North Korean threat, South Korea’s national interest has been largely driven by its quest for economic development over the past decades. In fact, most South Koreans put first priority on their economic well-being and social welfare, and security is deemed critical as a condition for pursuing stable economic growth. Meanwhile, despite, or because of, its worsening economic situation, North Korea has emphasized regime security as its first national priority. Especially after the demise of communist bloc in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, it has pursued a military first policy with nuclear weapons development to ensure regime security. In March 2013, North Korea’s Kim Jong-un government announced the new ‘*byungjin*’ policy of parallel development of economy and nuclear weapons.³⁹ But, many believe that without giving up its nuclear program, North Korea cannot make any meaningful progress

37. Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

38. Lebow, “The Role of Trust in International Relations,” p. 21.

39. Cheon Seong-Whun, “The Kim Jong-un Regime’s “Byungjin” (Parallel Development) Policy of Economy and Nuclear Weapons and the ‘April 1st Nuclearization Law’,” KINU Online Series, April 23, 2013, [http://www.kinu.or.kr/upload/neoboard/DATA01/co13-11\(E\).pdf](http://www.kinu.or.kr/upload/neoboard/DATA01/co13-11(E).pdf) (accessed December 7, 2014).

in economic development given its isolation imposed by tight international sanction against the regime. As such, there is a stark imbalance between South Korea’s focus on economic well-being and North Korea’s focus on regime security. As a result, President Park’s emphasis on maintaining strong defense and deterrence against North Korea directly collide with North Korea’s military first policy and its claims for legitimate nuclear weapons development. Besides, President Park’s emphasis on building trust through economic and social exchanges is not much appreciated by Pyongyang whose first priority is yet to be given to economic wellbeing of the society.

Second, given its focus on security and wealth motives in dealing with North Korea, South Korea tends to ignore the self-esteem element of North Korea’s motives. The problem is that self-esteem may well be the most important driver of North Korean society and regime. The North Korean regime is governed by a personality cult of the Kim family and ‘*juche*’ ideology to support it. The Kim family has exercised absolute authority over North Korean society as a supreme leader. All North Koreans should follow the leadership with pride and self-reliant mindset under the banner of the ‘*juche*’ ideology. The North Korean regime and society take utmost loyalty to its leadership as the most important priority. National honor and pride have become the most important values to its society. In other words, out of the three motives, North Korean society attaches high value to self-esteem. Any measure that appears to criticize the leadership is regarded as the most serious crime subjected to harsh punishment. As such, when some South Korean civic activists sent leaflets critical of the Kim Jong-un leadership, the North Korean authority accused Seoul for destroying inter-Korean relations and threatened the possibility of war.⁴⁰

Third, South Korea’s push for unification directly clashes with North Korea’s two most important motives; security and self-esteem.

40. Yi Whan-yoo, “Anti-NK Leaflets Could Disrupt High-level Talks,” *Korea Times*, October 26, 2014, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/10/485_166978.html (accessed December 7, 2014).

Even though President Park highlights peaceful unification, the basic assumption is that South Korea should take the lead in the unification process so that a unified Korea would be free and democratic with a market economy. For Pyongyang's authority, such a vision basically denies the legitimacy (self-esteem) of the current Kim Jong-un regime and envisions dissolution of the North Korean state (security). As a result, President Park's proposal for trust building does not sound so convincing and trustworthy to the North Korean authority.

In sum, despite the relevance and good intention of President Park's trust diplomacy toward the North, mutual trust between the two Koreas remains very weak and fragile. South Korea's engagement proposals centered on economic and social exchanges is not well received by North Korea as it focuses more on regime security and self-esteem of its leadership. President Park's unification drive only deepened mutual mistrust between the two Koreas as Pyongyang became more suspicious of South Korea's intention. South Korea cannot and should not follow North Korea's different distribution of priority among security, self-esteem, and wellbeing. Yet, it needs to recognize the difference, and should try to map their distribution to come up with the best strategy to develop trust with its counterpart in Pyongyang. In particular, South Korea should take North Korean priority on self-esteem into consideration in its trust diplomacy with North Korea.

Conclusion

The two Koreas need to talk again. And South Korea should take the lead. Park's personal background may provide a certain advantage in dealing with North Koreans. As North Korea went through its second succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, Ms. Park, the daughter of President Park Cheong-hee — a counterpart to North Korean founding father Kim Il-sung — carries certain weight with the North Korean leadership. During the height of the Cold War, the senior Park sent South Korea's spy chief, Mr. Lee Hu-rak, to Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang in the early 1970s. The meeting soon led to the first

North-South Joint Communiqué of 1972 on the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, President Park visited Pyongyang in 2002 as a national assembly woman and had a personal meeting with Kim Jong-il. Despite escalated tension with Pyongyang, the Park Geun-hye administration granted permission to a private organization to provide a humanitarian aid package to North Korea, keeping with her two-track policy regarding the North. According to the Ministry of Unification, the medical package would help treat some 500 patients in North Korea suffering from multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis. Kim Hyeong-sik, the spokesman for the ministry, said "We look forward to this measure to help build trust between the North and South." Lately, the North Korean authority sent their athletes to 2014 Incheon Asian Game in this fall. And the dramatic visit of the North Korea's three most senior officials to the closing ceremony raised high expectation of resumption of dialogue between the two governments. However, the much anticipated talk was stalled again as the North Korean authority angrily accused the Park government for staging smear campaign of slandering its supreme authority with leaflets. Another year of on-and-off inter-Korean dialogue passes by. And the Korean Peninsula remains unstable and dangerous place. South Korea needs to continue its effort to engage North Korea with its *trustpolitik*. As Winston Churchill said, "to jaw-jaw is better than to war-war."

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