

## **The Attitude of the United States towards the Unification of the Korean Peninsula\***

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This essay examines the attitude of the United States towards the Korean unification. First, this essay begins with looking at different ways to achieve the unification: North Korean federal system, South Korean confederate system, North Korean contingency and South Korea peacefully absorbing North Korea. Secondly, the author examines the U.S. position towards the Korean unification. The author compares the U.S. positions in the German and Korean unification cases. Lastly, a more specific attitude of the United States towards the Korean unification is examined: the U.S. attitude towards the Korean unification, the future of the Korea-U.S. alliance after the unification, the interests and concerns of the U.S. in the unification, etc. In the final section, the author provides some policy suggestions for the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

**Keywords:** Korean unification, Federation, Confederation, Contingency, German unification, ROK-U.S. alliance

### **Introduction**

As the Korean unification issue becomes one of the hot topics in Korea nowadays, diplomatic ties with neighboring countries are also pivotal issues. Among many, the United States is the most important country that has significant influence on the Korean unification. During the Lee Myung-bak government, the U.S. and Korea agreed upon the principles of the Korean Peninsula, which is that the two countries support a “peaceful unification based upon market economy and free

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\* This essay represents the author’s personal viewpoint and does not represent the official view of Korea National Diplomatic Academy.

democracy.”<sup>1</sup> During the Park Geun-hye government, the two countries agreed upon a “peaceful unification based upon free market economy, democracy, and denuclearization.”

Despite these agreements on the Korean unification between the two countries, it does not seem that the U.S. position on the Korean unification is very supportive. With the rise of the Chinese capabilities, the United States focuses on emphasizing the alliance and expresses concerns about the frictions of the U.S.-Japan-Korea trilateral relationship. Recently, the United States has been supportive of Japan because Japanese security policy coalesces with the strategic objective of the United States, and the U.S., at the same time, has expressed concerns over the consolidation of the Korea-China relation. Under this complex balance of power situation in which many countries in Northeast Asia vie for strengthening their capabilities, the possibility to realize the Korean unification seems less than a wishful thought. Countries would prefer maintaining status quo and would be against the moves towards the Korean unification, and the U.S. position for it would be no exception.

In this background, this essay attempts to examine the U.S. positions on the Korean Peninsula. First, the author examines possible scenarios to achieve the Korean unification. This includes unification approaches historically developed by the two Koreas, North Korean contingency, and German unification formula. Second, the essay examines the interests and concerns the United States has on the unification, along with the future mechanism of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Lastly, the essay provides some policy suggestions for the Korean unification.

1. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, “Joint vision for the alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea,” June 16, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-vision-alliance-united-states-america-and-republic-korea>.

## Scenarios for the Korean Unification

### *Approaches of Confederation/Federation*

#### South Korean Approach of Confederate System

Historically, South Korea has been supportive of the Korean unification by confederate system. In 1972, the two countries announced the “July 4 North-South Joint Communiqué,” which provided the principles of the unification — independence, peace, and national unity. In 1982, the Chun Doo-hwan administration proclaimed the “national reconciliation and democratic reunification measures” and stated that “the unification should be achieved based upon the principle of national self-determination and upon democratic process and peaceful method which could reflect opinions of entire nation.”

In September 1989, the Roh Tae-woo administration presented one national community unification plan and presented independence, peace, and democracy as unification principles. According to this plan, the two Koreas would enact the national community charter, build a transitional system of North-South confederate system, coordinate detailed processes and methods for unification within the confederate system, and finally achieve a unified state by a general election.

Based upon the one national community unification plan, President Kim Young-sam presented the national community unification plan, which consists of three phases: reconciliation and cooperation phase, North-South confederation phase, and unified state phase. Later on, the Kim Dae-jung administration presented the republic federal system or three-phased unification plan. According to this plan, the first phase is North-South confederation, the second phase is the republic federalism and the third phase is unified Korea. Also, this plan pictures the unified Korea as based on liberal democracy and market economy.<sup>2</sup> President Kim Dae-jung accepted the idea of the national

2. Lim Hyunjin and Jung Youngchul, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea: Dialectics of Division and Unification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2005), pp. 32-46.

community unification plan after his inauguration as a president.

There are two characteristics of the South Korean unification policies. The first is that it sets the South Korean system of market economy and democracy as an ultimate objective of the unification. The confederate approach aims to continue the two-state/two-system as a part of the transition, thereby achieving unification ultimately. That is, this approach first intends to achieve economic integration based upon two different political systems.

The second characteristic lies in its functional approach. The functional approach has an assumption that two countries would pursue economic integration by way of their nonpolitical interests, which would ultimately spill over into political integration. This approach is helpful in achieving unification, and was also a valid argument undergirding the European integration. But what should be noted is that the functional integration would not automatically spill over into political and military integration. There need extra efforts to be made in achieving integration both in political and military terms.

### North Korean Approach of Federal System

The North Korean unification formula is a federal system. According to this approach, there should be measures in political and military aspects first. That is, the unification process is possible only after political and military issues are settled. According to this approach, the two Koreas should build the status of one-state/two-system, which is subsequently followed by political integration. Based upon this idea, in 1980, North Korea presented its unification plan called the Democratic Confederate Republic of Koryo in the 6th Congress of Korean Workers' Party. This plan states that "the North and South Koreas would admit and accept each other's ideologies and systems as they are, based upon which the North and South would bring about a democratic unified government in which the two Koreas would equally participate. The two Koreas would create confederate republic that share the same privileges and responsibilities of the two Koreas

and undertake regional self-governance respectively under such ideologies and systems, by which they ultimately achieve unification."<sup>3</sup>

There are two characteristics of the North Korea's unification policies. First, it is a federal approach that prioritizes political and military issue-solving. It presents as basic conditions of the unification the withdrawal of the U.S. forces in Korea, the peace treaty between the United States and North Korea, etc. That is, the North Korean federal approach argues that the two Koreas should solve the political-military issues first, and then proceed to expanding exchanges in economic, social, and cultural aspects. Second, the approach does not presume unification as a monistic one-system state. It first admits a federal system as a consummate stage of unification and leaves the systemic integration issue as an assignment to be solved for the next generation.<sup>4</sup>

Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il in the inter-Korean summit meeting in 2000 agreed that there existed common elements between the South Korean confederate system and the North Korean low level of federation. Both of these approaches share that they all pursue incremental and phased unification. But both of them have problems in achieving political integration. The North Korean federal approach does not present specific ways to achieve political integration after the two Koreas achieve unification of one-state/two-systems. There remains a task of how a federal state with two different systems can manage a unified state. The South Korean confederate approach presumes the objective of unification as one-state/one-system, but this objective is not easy to achieve based upon a functional approach.

### ***Unification by North Korean Contingency***

OPLAN 5029 categorizes North Korean contingency into six typologies of unstable situations: regime change resulting from an accident

3. South Korea, Board of National Unification, "The 6th Party Congress Central Committee Project Unity Report" (in Korean), *Chosun Workers' Party Congress Data Collection*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Board of National Unification, 1988).

4. Lim and Jung, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea*, pp. 72-75.

that happens to Kim Jong-un, civil war by coup d'état, a hostage situation involving South Korean nationals, large-scale escape of people from North Korea, leak of North Korean WMD like nuclear and biochemical weapons and large-scale natural disaster. During the Cold War period and early post-Cold War period, there was a scenario that suggests South Korea absorb North Korea when a contingency situation happens within the North. But this is not a realistic scenario anymore. In the early post-Cold War period, the United States was enjoying its superpower status. Under this background, when the North Korean contingency happens, it was more likely than now that the United States would intervene in the North along with the South Korean troops, as the Chinese power was not as significant as now, thus enabling South Korea to absorb the North to achieve unification. But the current Northeast Asian situation, in which the United States and China balance with each other around the Korean Peninsula, does not make the U.S. intervention simple.

Under this circumstance, if a contingency happens in North Korea, the United States would leave South Korea to take a leading role and it would take a supporting role.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, if a contingency happens within the North, the United States would hesitate to intervene assertively unless there emerges a risk in controlling WMD within the North. In contrast, China would be intervening in North Korea in order to control North Korean refugees and WMD. In addition, there is also a possibility that China would attempt to build a pro-Chinese regime in post-contingency North Korea.<sup>6</sup> If the United States is hesitant about intervention and Chinese intervention is very assertive, it would not be easy for South Korea to intervene independently.

The South Korean intervention is not easily accepted by international law. That is, the fact that the two Koreas simultaneously became member states of the United Nations in 1991 can be a legal basis

5. Bruce Klingner, "New Leaders, Old Dangers: What North Korean Succession Means for the U.S.," *Background*, no. 2397 (Heritage Foundation, April 7, 2010), p. 13.

6. Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).

based on which the two Koreas are separate and independent states, and this makes the South Korea intervention a violation against the UN Charter.<sup>7</sup> According to the UN Charter Article 2(4), "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."<sup>8</sup>

The most active state in intervention is China,<sup>9</sup> which would attempt to build a refugee camp in the border area between China and North Korea so that it could control and manage North Korean refugees. Even though it can be regarded as a dead letter,<sup>10</sup> there still exists a bilateral treaty between China and North Korea that calls for guaranteeing China's automatic intervention when North Korea is involved in a military conflict. Even though North Korea does not request Chinese intervention, China could use the bilateral treaty to justify its intervention. Furthermore, there exists a possibility that, with an excuse to stabilize the contingency situation, China could

7. Park Hwee Rhak, "A Realistic Analysis and Task on North Korean Contingency and the Unification" (in Korean), *National Security* 16, no. 4 (2010), p. 72.

8. Even though there would exist many perspectives that could justify South Korea's intervention in the North Korean Contingency, they are not sufficient enough to grant to South Korean government a privilege to intervene over other neighboring countries. For more argument, see, Hong Seong-Phil, "When North Korea Fails: Legitimacy of Intervention under International Law with focus on the Possible Actions by South Korea" (in Korean), *Seoul International Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (2012), pp. 262-266; Park Hwee Rhak, "An Analysis on Logics and Tasks for the South Korean Military Intervention into a North Korean Sudden Collapse" (in Korean), *Journal of International Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015), pp. 44-50; Hong Hyun Ik, *International Intervention and Preparations and Responses of South Korea to North Korean Contingency Situation* (Seongnam: Sejong Institute, 2013), pp. 13-18.

9. For more explanation for Chinese intervention, see Soh Cheehyung, "Chinese Intervention against North Korea's Situation of Sudden Change and Countermeasures," *Policy Studies*, no. 180 (Spring 2014), pp. 87-90.

10. Recently many Chinese experts have argued that China-North Korea bilateral treaty is no more effective, but this attitude of China is easily changeable according to Chinese strategic calculation. Refer to <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2011/08/31/0200000000AKR20110831233252014.HTML>.

proceed to Pyongyang area and establish a pro-Chinese regime.

In this case, the U.S. and China can have a deal so that the contingency would lead to maintaining a status quo, and for this purpose the United Nations could be a legal player to address this situation. One interesting fact is that the U.S. would not strongly object to Chinese intervention. One U.S. policymaker mentioned that the U.S. does not have strong intention and capabilities to intervene in North Korea when a contingency happens. Currently, the U.S. wants South Korea to take the leading role in intervention, with the U.S. supporting the South Korean military. If China intervenes and takes care of refugee and WMD problems, the U.S. would allow Chinese intervention, as China would take care of the U.S. concerns instead.<sup>11</sup>

As explained, it is not easy for South Korea to lead the North Korean contingency situation to the Korean unification. The U.S. and China officially support the unification, but at the same time none of them does not want the other party to have more influence on the Korean Peninsula than itself. Under this balance of power situation, the North Korean contingency would make these countries choose to maintain status quo of the Korean Peninsula.

### **South Korea Peacefully Absorbing North Korea**

This approach is similar to the way German unification has been achieved. According to this approach, the unification process begins with the two Korean peoples sharing a cultural similarity and the North Korean people having a favorable identity towards the South's system. Like in the German case, this approach considers the unification to be accomplished based upon the South Korean system through the process of a general election. That is, the South would ultimately absorb the North peacefully.

The North Korean people's pro-South Korean identity is an important element even during the North Korean contingency. As mentioned, when the contingency happens in the North, China would be

11. An Interview in Washington, D.C.

active in its intervention. If North Koreans are favorable to the South Korean system or feel that they share the same national identity with the South, then the degree of the North Korean people's antagonism to China would be high. This approach would be the most contributive to the U.S. interest, and also would be most contributive to the post-unification maintenance and development of the ROK-U.S. alliance system.

Currently, the biggest concern about two Korea's unification approaches — whether it is confederate or federal — is political integration. This in fact has been the problem in the Yemen case. The Yemen unification has not been achieved with North and South Yemens deepening their economic, cultural and social exchanges. Rather, the arbitration of the Arab League member states was significant in achieving the unification. Afterwards, two Yemens have achieved the first-phase unification, which was the federalist unification by the proportional representation system. Several years later, in a general election, the voting outcome came out to be favorable to North Yemen, and the South Yemen politicians opposed the outcome. Subsequently, they mobilized force to change the outcome which was suppressed in the end. This led to the second-phase unification which has been accomplished by the force mobilization.<sup>12</sup> The Yemen case has signified that the unification without socio-cultural connectedness would be fragile.

The political integration is an important endpoint and a hurdle at the same time to be overcome. In order to achieve this, socio-cultural connectedness is very important. Actually, the West German unification policy of so-called "New Eastern Policy (*Neue Ostpolitik*)" has focused on building socio-cultural connectedness. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in January 1990 in Leipzig, East Germany, 200,000 East German people participated in a large-scale anti-communist protest and demanded the German unification.<sup>13</sup> Also, when a free

12. Lim and Jung, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea*, pp. 293-294.

13. Hwang Byungduk et al., *German Peaceful Unification and the Twenty Years' Development after the Unification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2011), p. 173.

general election was held in East Germany in March 1990, the outcome of the election in which 93.4 percent of the East German people participated, was the victory of Alliance for Germany. The conservative election coalition Alliance for Germany, which was composed of Democratic Awakening (DA), the German Social Union (DSU), and the CDU (East), tried to solicit votes by promising freedom and prosperity based on the West German model. The Alliance turned out to be the clear winner with 48 percent of the vote.<sup>14</sup>

## The United States and the Korean Unification

### *German Unification and the United States*

The German unification was achieved by integrating two Germanys politically, and what was important in the unification process was to make the East German people have aspirations for the West German system through economic cooperation and exchanges. That is, the Chancellor Willy Brandt's New Eastern Policy has contributed to changing the East German people's identity to be West Germany oriented. The result was that, in the East German general election for the German unification, the majority of East German people voted for "Alliance for Germany" which insisted on early unification. The result was the German unification with West Germany's initiative.

During the German unification process in Europe, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the former Soviet influence was diminishing and the United States was increasing its power. Under this circumstance, the United States supported the German unification as the unified Germany could be an important element for the U.S. interest. In the European Summit speech, President Bush reconfirmed the U.S. support for the German unification and announced four principles of the

14. German Historical Institute, "Images — End of the GDR and Unification," modified date unknown, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=3067](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=3067).

German unification:

- (1) The United States should support true German self-determination without endorsing any specific outcome;
- (2) Unification must be consistent with Germany's membership in NATO and the EC;
- (3) Moves toward unity should be gradual, peaceful, and step by step;
- (4) On the issue of postwar borders, all should respect "the principles adopted in the Helsinki Final Act recognizing the inviolability of frontiers in Europe, and allowing for the possibility of peaceful change."<sup>15</sup>

In July 1990, the Chancellor Kohl and Secretary General Gorbachev reached a compromise, which allowed Germany to retain its NATO membership. In exchange, it agreed to disarmament and offered economic aid to the Soviet Union. Some of the important points of the compromise are:

- (1) With unification of Germany, the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers with respect to Germany as a whole and Berlin will be terminated.
- (2) The Soviet Union will withdraw its troops from the GDR, but will have left German territory by 1994 at the latest.
- (3) The United Germany will reduce the size of the army to 370,000 troops within three to four years.
- (4) United Germany will not produce, own, or possess ABC weapons, and will remain a member of the nonproliferation treaty.<sup>16</sup>

At that time, the United States supported German unification under the condition that Germany remains in NATO and EC. The United States insisted to the Soviet Union that unless Germany remains in

15. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 113.

16. German Historical Institute, "Result of the Kohl-Gorbachev Talks (July 15-16, 1990)," *One Germany in Europe 1989-2009, German History in Documents and Images*, modified date unknown, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=3012](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3012).

NATO, Germany will be neutralized and make no attempt to possess nuclear weapons. The United States promised to the Soviet Union that the NATO troops would not be stationed in the eastern territory of Germany until 1994. There existed the U.S. interests in the German unification. First, the eastern German territory would develop economically, which would contribute to the increase of the U.S. export to Germany along with the U.S. investment. Second, the two plus four agreement (Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany) described that NATO troops devoid of German troops would not be stationed in the former East German territory until the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Germany also will not produce, own, or possess ABC (atomic, biological, and chemical) weapons. Thus, the German unification would increase the U.S. influence within NATO. Third, the German position on the CSCE (regional institutionalization, expansion of security functions, etc.) would conflict with the U.S. position. The United States wanted to enlarge the role of NATO rather than CSCE, which would be enabled by the German unification.<sup>17</sup>

At that time, the priority of the U.S. position on the German unification was to keep Germany within NATO. The former Soviet opposed the German unification, but could not express its position assertively due to the end of the Cold War and the strong support of the United States. In this situation, the Soviet priority changed to economic aid.

Nowadays in Northeast Asia, due to the rise of China and the decrease of the U.S. influence, it is not clear whether the U.S. would support the Korean unification as actively as it did in the German unification. And also, it is not clear what would be the Chinese position. In the German unification case, Germany promised to the former Soviet Union that it would not deploy Western troops to the former East German territory until 1994 in order to persuade the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. It also promised that Germany within NATO would not pose a direct threat to the former Soviet Union, so that it

17. Paul E. Gallis and Steven J. Woehrel, "Germany after Unification: Implications for U.S. Interests," (CRS Issue Brief, Congressional Research Service, February 20, 1991).

would smooth down the Soviet opposition to the German unification.<sup>18</sup> In order to achieve the Korean unification, diplomatic efforts as such should be made towards the United States and China.

### ***The U.S. Position towards the Korean Unification***

Historically, the U.S. has been supportive of the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Presidents Bush and Clinton supported the peaceful unification based upon "terms acceptable to the Korean people." In 2009, President Lee Myung-bak and Barack Obama announced the Joint Vision for the Alliance in which both presidents supported the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula based on the principles of free democracy and a market economy.<sup>19</sup> In 2013, President Park Geun-hye and Barack Obama announced that they would foster "peaceful unification based on the principles of denuclearization, democracy and a free market economy."<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding, it is not certain whether in reality the U.S. would support the Korean unification as it did in the German case. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, there are several priorities the U.S. has on its policy towards the Korean Peninsula: 1) prevent horizontal proliferation; 2) stop vertical proliferation; 3) denuclearize; 4) make plans for contingencies; 5) promote engagement; and 6) improve the situation for the North Korean people.<sup>21</sup> That is, the United States' priorities lie in preventing North Korea's nuclear proliferation

18. Kim Kyuryoon et al., *The Future of the Korean Unification and the Expectations of Four Neighboring Countries* (in Korean) (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2013), p. 62.

19. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea."

20. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America," May 7, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/07/joint-declaration-commemoration-60th-anniversary-alliance-between-republ>.

21. Jack Pritchard and John Tilelli, "U.S. Policy towards the Korean Peninsula," (Task Force Report, Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010), pp. 43-44.

and denuclearizing North Korea, and if these priorities are met, there is no reason for the U.S. to be active in supporting the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

This makes more sense under the current Northeast Asian situation. In the case of the German unification, the demise of the Soviet Union, the united Germany and the NATO expansion have brought about the increase of the U.S. influence and interests. However, in Northeast Asia, due to the rise of China, it is uncertain whether the Korean unification would be helpful in increasing the hegemony of the United States in this region. Also, due to the current solid relationship between Korea and China, there emerges a U.S. concern that the unified Korea could be pro-Chinese rather than pro-American. This would make the United States choose the status quo of the Korean Peninsula over the unification.

### ***The Future of ROK-U.S. Alliance after the Unification***

The future of the post-unification ROK-U.S. alliance will be determined by how the unification is achieved. If the unification is achieved by confederate/federal approaches, the alliance can be less cohesive and the U.S. forces can be withdrawn to the United States. The role of the alliance can be very limited and it will take time for the alliance to take a new role, if any. Thus, this essay will confine the debate of the future of the alliance within the scenario of the unification achieved by the South Korean initiative.

Even when the unification is initiated by South Korea, there would be many changes in the alliance mechanism. An alliance consists of attitudinal and behavioral aspects.<sup>22</sup> The attitudinal aspect includes alliance rationale, threat perception, alliance objective, etc. The behavioral aspect includes military command structure, military strategy, defense-cost sharing, base relocation, etc. The unified Korea should

22. Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), pp. 93-94.

make a new alliance roadmap with the United States, which will be another alliance transformation. That is, the two countries should discuss new common strategic objectives, followed by new military roles, missions and capabilities of the alliance.

First, the object of the threat perception of the ROK-U.S. alliance would be shifted from North Korea to regional and global entities. As the North Korea threat disappears, the alliance should focus on regional operation of the alliance. In this case, it is not clear whether the alliance should include China as a potential threat or not. Also, the two countries would determine their common strategic objectives. Regardless of China factor, the alliance's strategic objective will be to maintain regional peace and stability.

Second, the two countries should make a new alliance roadmap in the operational aspect. In this case, the size and allocation of the U.S. forces, strategic flexibility and military command structure will be major issues.

In the behavioral aspect, the new alliance roadmap should include military command structure, size and location of the U.S. forces in Korea (USFK), etc. On the military command structure, there would be no more need for the South Korean military to leave its wartime OPCON in the hands of the USFK. Recently, the U.S. and Korea agreed on the condition-based OPCON transfer. If the unification is achieved, there is no more North Korean threat. Along with the wartime OPCON transfer to the ROK military, the two countries would not feel the necessity to maintain the Combined Forces Command. The two countries' military command can maintain its separate command structure, as in the U.S.-Japan alliance, and they would only need a coordination or liaison center in preparation for the time of emergency. In this case, for the purpose of maintaining regional order and stability, the U.S. force's strategic flexibility would be an open policy option in order to cope with regional and global threats more swiftly.

Another important thing is the size and location of the USFK. Due to the change in the U.S. military strategy and the disappearance of the North Korean threat, the ground force size of the USFK will be decreased. Also, due to the Chinese opposition, it would be reasonable



not to deploy the USFK to the former North Korean territory. Only the unified Korean military would reside in the northern territory of the peninsula.

### **The U.S. Interests and Concerns on the Korean Unification**

The U.S. interests in the unification of the Korean Peninsula would be as follows:<sup>23</sup>

- (1) The major U.S. interest in the peninsula is to remove or prevent the proliferation of WMD and long-range missiles. In a contingency situation, the U.S. concern is to prevent the North Korean WMD from spreading outside the Korean Peninsula. The unification would enable the prevention of the North Korean nuclear proliferation. That is, the unification contributes to the strengthening of the NPT regime.
- (2) The unification based on market economy would contribute to the U.S. economic interests. The former North Korean territory would need the U.S. investment, which would also be helpful for the U.S. economic interest.
- (3) The unification based on market economy and liberal democracy would work as a momentum for the United States to spread its major values globally.
- (4) The ROK-U.S. alliance after the unification would take new roles and missions, which maintains regional order and stability. The alliance would be a new asset for the U.S. rebalancing policy to Asia, and would contribute to maintaining the U.S. global hegemonic status.

23. Robert Ellsworth, Andrew Goodpaster, and Rita Hauser, Co-Chairs, *America's National Interests: A Report from The Commission on America's National Interests* (Washington D.C.: Report for The Commission on America's National Interests, July 2000); U.S. Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asia Pacific Rim: Report to Congress* (Washington D.C.: Department of State, 1992); CSIS Working Group, "A Blueprint for US Policy towards a Unified Korea," (CSIS Working Group Report, CSIS, August 2002); Peter Murphy Lewis, "U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Korean Peninsula: An Anti-Unification Policy or Just Too Many Uncertainties to Account For?" *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007); Cha Du Hyeogn, "An American Perspective on the Korean Unification: Opportunities and Challenges" (in Korean), *Journal of Global Politics* 3, no. 2 (2010), pp. 43-44.

- (5) As the all-out warfare situation disappears, the U.S. would not have a necessity to make OPLANs be prepared for it. Nowadays, the U.S. is shifting its defense strategy due to the defense budget decrease and sequestration. The two warfare strategies have disappeared in the 2012 defense strategic guidance. In this situation, the removal of the warfare situation in the peninsula would be a huge benefit to the United States.

Notwithstanding, there are several concerns of the United States about the unification. First, the United States is wary of the possible weakening of the ROK-U.S. alliance due to the unification. The unified Korea would need to think about a new security policy devoid of the North Korean threat, and the U.S. forces in Korea might have to be curtailed or withdrawn back to the United States considering the unified Korea's relationship with China.

Secondly, the possible weakening of the Korea-U.S. alliance would be detrimental to the current U.S. rebalancing policy towards Asia. Now the United States' rebalancing towards Asia is not implemented substantially due to the U.S. economic and budget situations. According to the 2014 QDR report, the U.S. is in the process of ending two wars, curtailing defense budget, and considering its Asia policy from the long-term perspective. That is, the United States plans to deploy 60 percent of its naval forces by 2020, and it expects much contribution from its allies in this region. In this respect, the possible weakening of the Korea-U.S. alliance after the Korean unification would be no little concern to the United States.

Third, the United States is concerned about the unified Korea taking a neutral status between the United States and China. This would invalidate the U.S. security provision and its nuclear umbrella to the Korean Peninsula which would make the unified Korea feel unstable in security terms. As has been the U.S. concerns during the German unification, the unified Korea might pursue its own independent military capabilities including nuclear capabilities.

### Conclusion: Policy Suggestions

Northeast Asian countries prefer status quo over the Korean unification. The United States is no exception. Nevertheless, the United States is more favorable to the unification than other neighboring countries. It is not because the U.S. interests in the Korean Peninsula do coalesce with those of two Koreas. It is rather because of the geographical reason. As the U.S. is situated far from the peninsula compared to other neighboring states, even though the unification is not a vital interest of the United States, the U.S. reservation on the unification is comparatively weaker than that of other states.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese position towards the unification is that it supports "peaceful, independent, incremental, and denuclearized unification." It supports "peaceful" unification because it would be favorable to Chinese economic development, "independent" because the unified Korea should not lean to the United States, "incremental" because the unification should not hamper regional stability, and "denuclearized" because the unified Korea should abandon North Korea's nuclear weapons and should also not depend on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. In sum, China opposes pro-U.S. unification of the Korean Peninsula.

This requires the Korean government to get prepared for the unification discreetly. First, the North-South relationship should focus on the unification process. Germany has been bound by the Potsdam agreement in which France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed upon the military occupation and reconstruction of Germany. Later, this agreement was superseded by the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (the two plus four agreement) in which the Four Powers renounced all rights they held in Germany and allowed a united Germany to become fully sovereign. There needed four countries' approvals for the German unification. However, Korea is not bound by any treaty that prevents the unification. If the two Koreas agree upon the unification process, neighboring countries have no options but to agree on it.

24. Lewis, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward the Korean Peninsula," p. 107.

In regard to this, Victor Cha mentioned:

The major powers ... simply prefer the known status quo to an unknown and potentially destabilizing future. ... Nevertheless, were the two Koreas to begin a process of unification tomorrow, it would be wholly within the interests of the major powers to support it without prevarication. This is so because any actions to the contrary would risk making an enemy of the newly united and more powerful Korea. Thus, while the impetus for changing the status quo is not likely to come from the major powers, Koreans can be assured that once they start the process themselves the external powers would be obliged to support it, not out of affinity, good will, or loyalty, but because it is in their respective interests to do so.<sup>25</sup>

Second, a more assertive policy towards unification should be chosen over a peaceful management of the divided country. A peace treaty is needed to terminate the armistice of the Korean War, but not an indispensable requisite for the unification. A peace treaty also incurs a lot of expenses. That is, North Korea has been demanding the withdrawal of the USFK in order to conclude a peace treaty, which is not easy under the current security situation.

Even though six parties have agreed that they would discuss further on how to conclude a peace treaty, it is not an easy process because the parties have different positions and interests. The United States' position is that there should be the North Korean denuclearization before concluding a peace treaty. The Chinese position is that once a peace treaty is concluded then all other problems including denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula would be solved. Thus, rather than sticking to an unproductive debate on a peace treaty, a more active unification policy should be undertaken.

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25. Victor Cha, "The Continuity behind the Change in Korea," *Orbis* 44, no. 4 (2000), pp. 591-592.

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