

On this topic

A Contemporary History of the Korean Peninsula from an International Political Perspective

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The majority of Koreans, regardless of personal ideology, consider the stability of inter-Korean relations and peaceful reunification to be among the most important national interests. As can be seen from the history of inter-Korean relations, successive Korean regimes have recognized this and come up with a range of policies to address the problem. That said, there has been no shortage of times that under particular administrations and at particular moments in time these national interests have either faded, or the pursuit of these interests has become clouded due to political changes and events. Consequently, the development of inter-Korean relations had been delayed, resulting in mounting political, social, economic, and military burdens. Besides that, the meddling of the so-called great powers with interests in the Korean peninsula has had a considerable impact as well.

Recently, there has been a significant amount of discourse on the international politics of the Korean peninsula based on newly declassified documents. This is because it is now possible to make a systematic comparison and analysis of facts that were not previously revealed, due to the secrecy and sensitivity of the documents, and the uncovering of non-truths that were purported for political or ideological purposes. These previous unknowns can now be objectively

understood and judged, and the international political history of the Korean peninsula can now be rewritten. Furthermore, this objective analysis and judgment allows for a critical look at the history of South Korea's foreign policy and particularly its policies toward the North. This is especially meaningful in the process of creating a roadmap for current and future events on the Korean peninsula and of anticipating and preparing policies to handle domestic and outside variables likely to influence inter-Korean relations.

In an attempt to newly write the contemporary history of Korean peninsula from an international political perspective, this research focuses on analysis of the domestic and international factors influencing North and South Korea's foreign policies for peace and unification from 1960 to the present. In order to do this, North and South Korean policies are divided into four eras, and significant events and issues from each era are examined in turn. Through this analysis, the factors and the extent of their influence on North and South Korean foreign policy are explored in detail.

Sang-Yoon Ma examines international causes of South Korea's dramatic political changes and the accompanying shift in national policy priorities during the early 1960s. He narrates South Korean political history from the downfall of the Syngman Rhee regime to the establishment of the Park Chung-hee regime. Paying close attention to U.S. roles in Korea, he argues that U.S. policy functioned as a structural cause for the change of South Korea's national policy priorities from unification to economic development.

Seongji Woo explains South Korea's decision to open dialogue with North Korea in the détente period. He argues that changes in threat perception, regime characteristics, and the distribution of power between the two Koreas led the Park Chung-hee administration to a new North Korea policy. He suggests that at the height of inter-Korean dialogue, South Korea went so far as to study potential unification schemes secretly, despite bureaucratic infighting over the pace of rapprochement. According to Woo, the premature abortion of rapprochement can be explained by the absence of compelling forces. He also speculates that a severe reduction of perceived adversarial

threats could have driven the deepening of cooperation between the two parties.

Koo Kab-Woo reviews inter-Korean relations in the period from 1980 to 1997 during which Chun Doo-hwan, Roh Tae-woo, and Kim Young-sam led their respective governments. He argues that détente became more prevalent on the Korean peninsula, with various actors' choices intersecting with one another. He suggests the South and the North agreed on a new set of definitions for mutual recognition, albeit with limitations, in the 1991 South-North Basic Agreement. However, the situation broke down soon after, making the Korean peninsula problem an international issue. In 1994, the U.S. and DPRK had a breakthrough in the form of the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, which helped form minor fissures in the otherwise resilient and intact division system. Koo concludes that this failure shows that, despite changes in the international system surrounding the Korean peninsula, the division system will be extremely difficult to overcome unless each actor realizes a change of mindset and is willing to act positively in response.

Kun Young Park intends to reveal the truth of the alleged North Korean Highly Enriched Uranium Program (HEUP) that spawned the current nuclear crisis and greatly affected the contemporary history of the Korean peninsula. He has found that what North Korea had in October 2002 was not an HEUP and posed no serious and imminent threat to the security of the United States, thereby providing no rationale to scrap the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework. He suggests that North Korea should be condemned for its stalling behavior during October 2002, but argues that if the Bush administration had been more willing to make efforts to remove whatever equipment the North had, the second nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula would not have occurred and North Korean nuclear capabilities would not have increased as they have. Most importantly, this paper maintains that the Bold Approach, the Bush administration's version of the Perry Process, might have succeeded, thereby, bringing about a solution to the "peninsula problem" for the Koreans and the rest of the world.

The goal of this research is to retell and reexplore the truth of international politics of the Korean peninsula. This research, based on recently released documents and research, seeks to reveal previously unknown facts, expanding on the current knowledge of international relations surrounding the peninsular and offering a new explanation of inter-Korean relations and South/North Korean relations with great powers. It is hoped that this analysis can play a meaningful role in the search for the Korean peninsula's peace and unification and in the efforts to forecast the future of the peninsula.