

# Peace and Unification of the Korean Peninsula Seen from a Utilitarian Rational Conservative Perspective: *Beyond the Twenty-First-Century Version of the “Conquer-the-North” Stance*

JUNG Taehern

## Abstract

*Today on the Korean peninsula, ideas that are very similar to seventeenth-century views on loyalty to Ming and conquering the northern barbarians are rampant to the extent of déjà vu. Joseon’s insistence on loyalty to Ming and the “conquer-the-north” policy in the seventeenth century closed opportunities for domestic reform and led to the collapse of the nation. The twenty-first-century version of the “conquer-the-north” stance and anti-North policy are very likely to contribute to the conflict between the United States and China on the peninsula as well as to the hostile confrontation between the two Koreas, which would only result in damaging the lives of South Korean people. Given this, it is vital to widen the areas in which the interests of the South Korea-United States-Japan bloc and the North Korea-China bloc overlap. When the peninsula becomes a place where economic interest relations of various nations are intertwined, North Korea cannot but move to a phase of disarmament and tread the road to change.*

**Keywords:** “conquer-the-north” stance, anti-North Korea, new Cold War, peace, coexistence, community of interest

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## Introduction

Your Majesty, one cannot bear death, but one can bear humiliation  
. . . There is no limit to what the powerful can do to the powerless,  
and there is no boundary to what the powerless can do for survival  
. . . Let the great humiliation of Your Majesty embrace all people.  
Please bear with it to open a new beginning (H. Kim 2007, 341-  
342).

This is how novelist Kim Hun depicted the scene in which Choe Myeong-gil appeals to King Injo at the Namhansanseong Fortress in the mid-winter of January 1637, surrounded by Qing soldiers. Did they really “open a new beginning” after King Injo suffered the humiliation on Samjeondo island? I cite this to talk about conflicts between a good cause and personal gain. A cause is subjective and ideological, while benefits are objective and real. But when personal gain exceeds the individual level and relates to national security and peace among people, there can be no other more valuable cause.

In the twenty-first century, Korea faces the formidable task of establishing a peace structure on the peninsula. The first solution for this task is the flexible alteration of the dominant ideology. In this aspect, the tragic situation of the seventeenth-century Korea holds important lessons. As the dominant ideology at the time was impervious to change, Korea lost several opportunities to reform, consequently setting up a pretext for the colonization of the nation two centuries later.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Zhou dynasty, China regarded itself as the center of the world and its neighboring tribes as barbarians. The Chinese-barbarian dichotomy was imbued with both self-pride and fear, as symbolized by the Great Wall. This dichotomy was adopted by the founders of the Joseon dynasty, who incorporated themselves into the China-

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1. Lee Samsung (2009) compares inter-Korean relations and Northeast Asian circumstances of today to the political situation of the seventeenth century, and also compares the Chinese-barbarian relations to the U.S.-South Korea alliance (S. Lee 2009, 114).

centered hierarchy built upon Joseon's investiture-tributary relationships with China.<sup>2</sup> This was the conventionally accepted mechanism of foreign relations in medieval East Asia.

The Chinese-barbarian dichotomy offered a thoroughly subjective mode of perceiving the outside world. By the time of the Injo Restoration, Joseon elites' thoughts on the Chinese-barbarian dichotomy was consolidated into the ideology of *jaejo jieun* 再造之恩 (gratitude and indebtedness to the Ming dynasty for saving Joseon from collapse) for China's aid in the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592; this view settled into a prevailing conceptual framework of international relations. This prevented the Joseon elites from pondering over why Ming sent troops to Joseon during the Japanese invasion or coming up with a new way of thinking, which resulted in their inability to assess the impact of the rise of barbarians (Later Jin and Qing) on Joseon from a practical utilitarian standpoint. The notion of Korea as "little China" that emerged after the fall of Ming gave rise to insistence on the possibly unrealistic expedition to Qing called *bukbeol* 北伐 ("Northern expedition"). This insistence only functioned as an ideology for domestic politics to ascribe the failure to fulfill the duty of achieving national prosperity and welfare to outside forces by creating an external enemy and reinforcing the class system, which showed signs of dissolution.

Today, on the Korean peninsula, ideas that are very similar to the seventeenth-century views on loyalty to Ming and conquering the northern barbarians are rampant to the extent of *déjà vu*. Just as advocates of the dogmatic Chinese-barbarian dichotomy refused to negotiate with the barbarians and turned a deaf ear to the need for preparation against foreign invasion based on the *jaejo jieun* ideology, the U.S.-worshipping toadyism of today, based on sentiments of gratitude for the United States, is laden with anti-North Korean sentiments and disregards South Korean national values and peace without any consideration of how the South can reconcile North Korea. The twenty-first-century version of the conquer-the-north stance and

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2. Korea was supposed to send periodic tributary missions to China while receiving investiture from the Chinese emperor in medieval times.

anti-North policy, which lacks an objective understanding of North Korea and contemporary international circumstances and overlooks the pursuit of practical gains, only contributes to the aggravation of a new Cold War between the United States and China on the Korean peninsula, making the two Koreas into satellite countries of the G2.

This paper compares seventeenth-century Joseon and modern Korea from a conservative perspective and then assumes a historical point of view to examine the problems of Korean conservatives' chauvinistic understanding of the outside world, which is trapped in unrealistic subjectivity and dogmatic notions.

### **Destination of the Naïve “Conquer-the-North” Policy in the Seventeenth Century and the Collapse of the Nation**

#### *Qing Invasion and Joseon's Insistence on Loyalty to Ming*

A society's dominant ideology can concentrate the energy of the members of the society if it can change according to the changing reality. In Europe, Christianity persisted as dominant religion, as European Christian churches responded effectively to the changes of the period by continuing to reinterpret the Bible. The launch of the Joseon dynasty with the attitude of worshipping Ming China in the late fourteenth century was, in a sense, the result of a progressive response to the changing climate of the Ming replacing the Yuan dynasty in China. In contrast to the Goryeo dynasty's understanding of the developments of international circumstances, demonstrated in its dependence on the declining Yuan dynasty and conservative response to social change, the Joseon dynasty established Neo-Confucianism as the dominant ideology underlining social reform. Indeed, the elites of Joseon dynasty boasted flexible reformist in the fifteenth century.

However, the governance capacity of Neo-Confucianism reached its limit two centuries later, as revealed by the Joseon royalty and elites' lack of national defense consciousness and their inability to

wage war. The replacement of both the dominant ideology and existing elites was more likely than ever. King Gwanghaegun's utilitarian diplomacy, his tightrope diplomacy between Ming and Later Jin by which the ravages of war were avoided at a time when invasion was fully justifiable, could have offered crucial momentum to such a replacement.

However, King Gwanghaegun's utilitarian diplomacy backfired and delivered a fatal blow to him, as the *yangban* class rejected it on the pretext of not wanting to collaborate with the barbarians (O 2001, 114). Worship of and loyalty to Ming was such an absolute value deeply engrained in the Joseon *yangban* class that they thought they could disobey even the King, should it be violated (Kye 2007, 32). In fact, the *yangban* had a dire need to justify internal hierarchical order by establishing the consciousness of external vertical order into the minds of Joseon people. Such justification would form the basis of the rationale of domestic governance that commoners must serve and revere the *yangban*, regardless of which factions they might belong to, in accordance with the principle of heaven (O 2001, 106, 111-112).

When abstract ideology dominates reality, the ideology is detached from reality and becomes dogmatic. The dominant elites of Joseon were content even without proper preparation for potential invasions by Later Jin-Qing. When Qing invaded Joseon in 1636, King Injo had to endure the humiliation of the ritual of surrender (kneeling down three times and making nine bows) on Samjeondo island in January 1637. The king's reckless external policy against Qing, rather than spurring discussions for reflective future policy, resulted in no more than the Joseon people's hostility towards Qing.

The seventeenth-century Joseon elites held fast to the maintenance of the class system in domestic policy as well, but neglected to execute policies to maintain and strengthen the system's foundations. The Daedongbeop (Uniform Land Tax Law), introduced in the first year of King Gwanghaegun's reign, took over 100 years to implement, as there was vehement resistance from conservatives who claimed that tributary burdens on ruling-class landowners would undermine the development of the nation. In order to overcome the

aftermath of Japanese invasion, King Seonjo selected meritorious officials based on their assistance to him in the war, while King Gwanghaegun selected officers based on their service to the war; the two kings' applications of meritocracy were significantly different (Han 2007, 203). The Injo Restoration was a struggle for hegemony in which those mindful of the security of the King and the ruling class overpowered reformists, who advocated the security of the nation and the people.

*The Creation of an External Enemy and Evasion of Internal Reform: Pretext for the Collapse of the Nation*

While in detainment as a hostage in Shenyang, Qing China, Joseon's crown prince Sohyeon saw the real Qing in person. Sohyeon acquired a realistic and utilitarian perspective on international affairs through many personal involvements such as his border-crossing trip with Qing forces in 1644 to Beijing through the Shanhaiguan pass. He was introduced to scientific knowledge, including the Western calendar and astronomy, and returned to Joseon in 1645 with books and a globe. As the heliocentric theory broke down the closed world view of Christianity in Europe, new materials and natural science knowledge could potentially change Joseon's world view. In the seventeenth century, European missionaries had already begun to pursue "Manchu studies" (Elliot 2010). King Injo and the Westerners' faction regarded Sohyeon as a political threat, and the possibility of reform evaporated with the suspicious death of the crown prince.

The notion of Joseon as Little China, advocated by King Hyojong after the fall of Ming, was succeeded by desires to conquer the northern barbarians and revenge Qing in order to remain grateful and loyal to Ming, Joseon's savior from Japanese invasion. But this was a fictitious foreign policy that could not be realized. In domestic politics, however, ruling forces advocated this attitude to evade their responsibilities of national prosperity and wellbeing and to strengthen their dominant power by creating a common external enemy. While Qing was unable to entirely suppress the legacy of Ming until the second

half of the seventeenth century, e.g., the Revolt of the Three Feudatories (1674), the naïve policy seeking to conquer the northern barbarians closed opportunities to reexamine international circumstances and drive domestic reform.

During the reign of King Jeongjo in the late eighteenth century, a more realistic view postulated that Joseon was not indebted to Ming because Japan's invasion of Joseon had posed a threat to Ming as well (Han 2007, 219-220). After King Jeongjo passed away and the nineteenth century dawned, Joseon had the last chance for a great transformation as it entered modernity. Unfortunately, however, the beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by reactionary politics. In the Sinyu Persecution of 1801, the conservative Byeokpa faction purged the Sipa and Namin factions, which had emerged as reformative political forces during King Jeongjo's era, for their Christian faith. This was, of course, a justification to eliminate the reformists.

The supporters of the conquer-the-north stance had the tendency to blame others rather than to attempt to recognize and fix internal problems. Their attitude weakened the elites' capability to experiment with diverse ways of maintaining power as well as the society's power of autonomous change. In the end, while neighboring countries underwent whole-scale transformations in the late nineteenth century (e.g., Qing's Tongzhi Restoration and Japan's Meiji Reform), Heungseon Daewongun's exclusionist policy hindered Joseon from gaining an objective understanding of the contemporary international circumstances and the available political choices (Kang 2007, 331).

As a result, King Gojong and the then ruling modernization faction (*gaehwapa*) were trapped in the traditional view that regarded the populace as ignorant. To the ruling forces, the driving power of people, spreading like wildfire, was considered an unforgivable revolt of the inferiors. They did not realize that the massacre of their own people by Japanese troops was, in fact, an imperialist invasion which would imperil them as well. Peasant warriors, who had already once experienced invasion and knew the reality of war, pledged allegiance to the king by committing to safeguarding him (Bae 2000, 4), but the king himself did not devise new strategies to incorporate them into

his power base. Confucian intellectuals understood the reality of imperialist invasion but regarded it only as a crisis of feudal order. Also, the enlightenment movement led by reformist Confucian scholars considered peasant soldiers and righteous warriors as targets of subjugation until the last days of the Korean Empire. Eventually, the Joseon dynasty—the last Korean Empire—lost sovereignty, unable to productively assemble internal capacities.

### **The Twenty-First-Century Version of the “Conquer-the-North” Stance: *Discovering One’s Identity through the Enemy***

#### *Dysfunction of the Anti-North Stance: Denial of Self-Introspection and Change*

A downfall of the anti-North Korea stance is that excessive focus on denouncing North Korea undermines the values that South Korea must adopt and advance. It is also difficult to pursue practical gains when the North Korea policy is fixated on hostile ideology. Accusing North Korea at the expense of weakening the leverage South Korea could have only makes it more difficult to secure gains in the reality of international politics.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the anti-North Korea stance, a byproduct of the risks associated with the presence of a strong enemy, formed the identity and foremost value of South Korea. It operated as a serious obstacle in efforts to solve and change the problems and fallacies of Korean society throughout the democratization process and offered a backdrop in which the long-standing dictatorship could be maintained. Needless to say, economic development, which could have been accelerated via democratization, was delayed.

With the fall of the socialist bloc in the 1980s and the growing gap in the economic power of the two Koreas, it was widely accepted that the South had won in the race of the two nations. However, the anti-North Korea policy in the South Korea continues to invoke hos-



tility in domestic politics and functions as a rationale for extreme resistance against North-South reconciliation. Nothing has changed in the nature of the anti-North Korea stance. South Korea still defines its identity through the existence of North Korea, the enemy. South Korea blames the closed feudal monarchism of North Korea; but in reality, the South is hostile to any efforts that can nurture the environment of change in North Korea. This attitude only helps to sustain and strengthen the feudal monarchism of the North. The anti-North Korea sentiments, which are emotional and thus inherently violent, operate in a different dimension from logical anticommunism.

In the seventeenth century, the conquer-the-north stance dominated domestic politics by spreading the abstract and fictitious notion of Little China after the disbanding of Ming, its object of worship. In contrast, the anti-North Korea stance of the twentieth century featured high levels of self-satisfaction and stability with the presence of a clear object of loyalty, the United States.

Despite the time difference, the anti-North stances of the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries have many things in common. Both define the adversary based on their respective subjective values, and the ruling elites of both time periods had a weak sense of responsibility regarding the lives of citizens. For example, women who returned to Joseon after being taken hostage to Qing in the Manchu invasions were condemned as wanton women; and a former South Korean president who escaped the Korean War deceiving and deserting the people was transformed into an anticommunist activist upon his return to Seoul, whereas the people who had no means to leave were accused as collaborators after he returned. It is quite common for state power to take advantage of the rationale of national security for political gains and purposely employ the North Korea factor in elections (security commercialism), despite its duty to work for the elimination of war threats and the advancement of economic stability, peace, and wellbeing.

*The South's Erroneous Conception of the North and Disregard of Real Benefits and Causal Relations*

1) Excessive Handout as a Verbal Tactic to Incite Anti-North Korea Sentiments

The term “excessive handouts,” which has served to exacerbate anti-North Korea sentiments in the South for the past 10 years, refers to the biased view held by some South Koreans regarding giveaways to the North. This perspective overlooks the even greater utilitarian gains that the South can reap from providing material aid to the North. It is reinforced by the lack of a utilitarian understanding that reduced security risks on the Korean peninsula will boost the South Korean economy and that the incorporation of North Korean economy into the South will create new momentum for the South’s economic growth. Such a perspective also prevents its upholders from learning from the Kumgangsán tourism project, which was launched in 1999 and raised South Korea’s credit by two grades by attracting many foreign investors, who had been reluctant to invest in South Korea since the economic crisis. The risk posed by North Korea is what keeps South Korea’s credit rating low (ranked from 24th to 32nd in the world) even though it is the 10th to 15th greatest international economic power.<sup>3</sup>

South Korea’s GDP hovers at roughly US\$ 1 trillion and North Korea’s at US\$ 15 billion. For the past ten years, material aid totaling US\$ 2.2 billion<sup>4</sup> was given to the North; on an annual basis, 0.0002 percent of the GDP was given away to the North in aid. Most of the aid was given in the form of commodities such as rice and fertilizer.

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3. *Newsis*, “Korea International Trade Association, ‘Korea’s Credit Rating Undervalued Compared to its Economic Power,’” October 24, 2010.

4. North Korean aid given throughout the last decade accounted for 10 percent of the 2006 annual national defense budget of US\$ 22.5 billion during the last period of the Roh Moo-hyun Administration, or 1 percent of the national defense budget of the last ten years. The 2006 national defense budget of 22.513 trillion won is converted roughly to US\$ 22.5 billion at the exchange rate of US\$ 1 = 1,000 won (ROK Ministry of National Defense 2006, 79).

About US\$ 1 billion in monetary aid has been given so far, including prepayments for the Hyundai collaborative projects, Kumgangsan tour fees, and wages of the Kaesong Industrial Complex employees, which should be considered business expenses rather than aid.

All of the aid given to date, whether for aid or economic cooperation purposes, has been related to the North's actions. Rice and fertilizers were given to facilitate reunions of separated families, while Kumgangsan tourism and the Kaesong Industrial Complex are directly connected to easing military tension and promoting peace through economic cooperation near border regions. The North withdrew its 6th and 64th battalions by about 10 km to the northwest in order to develop the industrial complex in the frontline Kaesong area.<sup>5</sup>

The termination of loudspeaker radio broadcasts from South to North Korea was part of the attempt to improve inter-Korean communication and prevent accidental clashes of North and South Korean vessels in the West Sea. The South's permission of the passage of North Korean ships through the Jeju Channel was a win-win deal for both Koreas, as it was granted in exchange for permission for South Korean vessels bound for China and Russia to pass through the North's waterways and South Korean airplanes bound for the United States and Russia through Northern airways.

As revealed in the attack of Yeonpyeongdo island on November 23, 2010, which was North Korea's first attack on South Korean territory since the Korean War, expenses for national defense and expenses for peace are two sides of the same coin. Talk of the need to increase the defense budget after the incident indicates that it is a matter of choice to use the same amount of money for peace or for firearms.

Labeling North Korean aid as handouts without attempting a precise calculation of the actual given aid might have covert intentions. National security does not come without a cost, and neither does peace. Perspectives viewing aid to the North as excessive handouts

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5. *Pressian*, "If the Special Peace and Cooperation Zone in the West Sea were to be Established," November 28, 2010.

fail to see that an annual investment of US\$ 200 million in peace money will return to South Korea as benefits of even greater size and ensure the enhanced stability of the peninsula.

## 2) The Theory of North Korean Collapse

The Lee Myung-bak administration appears to firmly believe that conditions are ripe for unification by absorbing the North, as sudden changes have been occurring in the North due to Chairman Kim Jong-il's ailing health and the North's prolonged economic hardships. This belief may explain why expressions such as "strategic patience" and "waiting" are used in the current administration's North Korea policy. President Lee's mention of a unification tax in his Independence Day address on August 15, 2010 also implied that the administration is considering unification under the South's control.

U.S. Ambassador to Seoul Kathleen Stephens' cable report on the meeting between Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Hyun In-taek, South Korean Unification Minister, was recently made public by a website known as *WikiLeaks*. According to Stephens' report, Hyun said that Chairman Kim Jong-il won't likely live beyond 2015 and Korea and the United States must act swiftly for the unification of the peninsula in the event of a sudden fall of North Korea.<sup>6</sup> Ambassador Stephens also recounted that, in February 2010, then South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Chun Yung-woo said, "North Korea has collapsed economically and politically, and will fall within two or three years after the death of Kim Jong-il"; Chun "dismissed the prospect of China's military intervention, noting that China's strategic economic interests now lie with the United States, Japan, and South Korea."<sup>7</sup>

In a cable to the U.S. Department of State on January 12, 2009, Ambassador Stephens wrote that "Lee's more conservative advisors and supporters see the current standoff as a genuine opportunity to

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6. <http://38north.org/2011/02/wikileaks-reveals-south-korean-hopes-not-north-korean-realities/>.

7. *Hankyoreh*, "WikiLeaks Reveals U.S. Embassy Cables," December 1, 2010.

push and further weaken the North, even if this might involve considerable brinkmanship.” The cable also noted that “President Lee remains quite comfortable with his North Korea policy and is prepared to leave the inter-Korean relations frozen until the end of his term in office” and that it was likely that the continued psychological war would last.<sup>8</sup> These documents show that the Lee administration’s North Korea policy is based on assumptions of the North’s collapse and unification under the South’s control.

It is unknown on what grounds the President’s top foreign relations and security advisors believe that China will not intervene in the event of the North’s fall. Perhaps they expect that the North Korean army, one million soldiers strong, will surrender without resistance in the event that the South Korea-U.S. allied forces advance to the North. According to the cables recently divulged by *WikiLeaks*, the discussion regarding a North-South Summit meeting at the end of 2009 seemed to be less concerned about prospects of enhancing peace and inter-Korean relations on the peninsula than with preparations for a sudden change in North Korea. In sum, it is hard to find an orientation of peace in the Lee administration’s North Korea policy.

It was 16 years ago that the view advocating the fall of North Korea first surfaced. This view was particularly rampant around 1994 following the collapse of the socialist bloc, the death of Chairman Kim Il-sung, and the loss of 200 million North Korean lives from starvation as China turned a cold shoulder to North Korea. The Kim Young-sam administration applied full-scale pressure on the North, predicting on its collapse within three years. North Korea is obviously still in existence. Then, the next logical step to take is to figure out why North Korea has not collapsed. Unfortunately, however, views supporting the North’s collapse and persisting predictions that it soon will have hindered us from recognizing and responding to the objective reality.

The current economic condition of North Korea is much better than it was 16 years ago when the North Korean collapse theory was

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8. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, “MB to Let South-North Relations Freeze,” November 30, 2010.

first put forward. Moreover, it has made a nuclear declaration. China has made ineffective South Korea's blocking policy and UN sanctions against North Korea. But the Lee administration's North Korea policy continues to desire its collapse. *The New York Times* commented on the South Korean government's perception of North Korea as revealed through *WikiLeaks*: "It may be rooted more in hope than in any real strategy." In the *WikiLeaks* documents, a Chinese expert was warned that "the United States will be deceiving itself once again, if it believes that the North will implode after Kim Jong-il's death," adding that the released diplomatic reports on North Korea "are long on guesses and short on facts."<sup>9</sup>

The combination of South Korea's policy of hostility toward North Korea with security threats to North Korea by the United States, often dubbed the "military-industrial complex," accelerated the North's development of nuclear weapons and reinforced its feudal monarchy. Such a relationship only serves to augment threats to the lives of South Korean people and the peace of the peninsula.

### 3) Excessive Giveaways and the North's Nuclear Development

Criticism that South Korea's excessive handouts helped the declining North bounce back and even develop nuclear weapons is a familiar one in South Korea. However, the root cause of the North's nuclear development should be identified in a realistic perspective in order to objectively analyze and respond to the situation and succeed in the denuclearization of North Korea.

The U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework was signed in Geneva in 1994 at the brink of a U.S. attack on the North, which could have potentially turned the Korean peninsula into a war field of destruction and massacre. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who spearheaded the signing of this agreement, said in November 2006 that the George W. Bush administration's claim that North Korea cheated or reneged on a 1994 agreement with the U.S. to freeze its nuclear pro-

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9. *Nocut News*, "WikiLeaks, 'Spark' South Korean Diplomacy Crisis . . . Embarrassing the Blue House and Government," December 1, 2010.

gram is “completely false and ridiculous,” and that the Geneva agreement was “observed pretty well by both sides. . . . It lasted until 2002 when the United States in effect abandoned that agreement and branded North Korea as an axis of evil.”<sup>10</sup>

Colin Powell, the dovish Secretary of State during the George W. Bush administration’s first term in office, said that in April 2003, his effort to engage North Korea in dialogue was botched repeatedly by neo-conservatives, including then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who remarked that “the goal of the United States is the collapse of the North Korean regime, not to have dialogue with it.”<sup>11</sup> Powell also recounted that then Vice President Dick Cheney “regarded the six-party talks as a venue for the United States to make impossible demands to North Korea under the support of the other four nations.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, in February 2003, President Bush warned Chinese President Jiang Zemin that if the North Korean nuclear issue were not to be resolved through diplomatic channels, the United States could take decisive action to raid North Korea.<sup>13</sup> It is inevitable that the North felt strongly about developing nuclear arms as a means of self-defense under such circumstances, which is exactly the argument of North Koreans.

Before one claims that North Korea wants to prolong the process of negotiation to secure more time to develop nuclear weapons and that South Korea and the United States have been deceived by the

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10. Jimmy Carter made this remark in an interview with Bloomberg TV on November 3, 2006 ([http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=102x2594263](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=102x2594263)).

11. *Hankyoreh*, “Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell,” October 14, 2006 (A biography of Colin Powell written by Karen DeYoung, Associate Editor at *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2006).

12. *Hankyoreh*, “Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell,” October 14, 2006 (A biography of Colin Powell written by Karen DeYoung, Associate Editor at *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2006).

13. President Bush’s warning came right after Jiang Zemin effectively rejected the U.S. proposal for joint action in the North Korean nuclear issue during the U.S.-China summit talk held at the Crawford ranch in Texas in October 2002. Bush wrote about his deep dislike of Kim Jong-il in his autobiography *Decision Points* (2010) (*Pressian*, “Bush, ‘Warned China of a Possible U.S. Raid on North Korea,’” November 10, 2010).

North's tactics for the past 20 years, one should check how many times negotiation took place in a true sense during the last two decades and whether there has been a case in which a serious negotiation phase lasted for at least two or three years. It is a fact that the North's nuclear capacity froze when negotiations were in progress and increased when negotiation broke down and returned to a stand-off state.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton underscored that "The 1994 Geneva Accords were clearly successful in freezing North Korea's nuclear weapons development."<sup>14</sup> The virtuous circle between North Korea-U.S. relations and South-North relations lasted only for a year in 2001. The next year, it was cut short with the inauguration of the Bush administration. The Geneva agreement broke down as President George W. Bush labeled North Korea as part of the "axis of evil" along with Iran and Iraq in his 2002 State of the Union Address. The Joint Statement of September 2005, by the six nations (China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia, and the United States) that participated in the six-party talks in Beijing on North Korea's nuclear program, reached a deadlock amid the U.S. financial sanctions on North Korea. In 2006, North Korea reacted with its first nuclear test. The next year, the Bush administration's North Korea policy shifted gears after defeat in the midterm congressional elections, and a negotiation phase resumed for a year, only to be aborted again in 2008 with the launch of the Lee administration in South Korea. Within the following two years, North Korea conducted its second nuclear test and built a modern uranium enrichment facility with centrifuges.<sup>15</sup>

The normalization of relations (lifted sanctions, diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and Japan, and security guarantee) in return for the North's abandonment of the nuclear program is not impossible or unreasonable. Indeed, such a negotiation was attempted in the 1990s and, with the accord of September 19,

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14. <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1349685/posts>.

15. *Pressian*, "'North Korean Nuclear Bomb': The Real reason for its 'Strike of Yeonpyeongdo Island' is. . .," November 26, 2010.



2005, such normalization was highly realizable since it would benefit North Korea as well as South Korea.

A simple-minded assumption that South Korea's excessive hand-outs led to North Korea's nuclear development, and conversely, that the North Korean regime would have fallen and the nuclear problem resolved without aid from the South only drives North Korea into a permanent nuclear state. As long as the North feels serious security threats, it will undoubtedly do whatever it takes to possess nuclear arms, no matter what kinds of sanctions may be imposed. The starting points for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue are: 1) to understand that the key factor for nuclear development is perceived security threat; 2) to resume the six-party talks as soon as possible to present prospects for peace agreement and North Korea-U.S. diplomatic relations; and 3) to give North Korea security assurance by improving inter-Korean relations.<sup>16</sup>

## **The Twenty-First-Century Version of *Jaejo Jieun* to a New Cold War on the Peninsula**

### *The Cost of the South Korea-U.S. Alliance*

Trapped in the twenty-first-century version of *jaejo jieun* attributing national gratitude towards the United States, the Lee administration claimed that the participation of the United States' sanctions against North Korea after the Cheonan Incident was only for the purpose of fulfilling the duty of the United States as an ally to South. In the early

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16. The Chinese case teaches us a valuable lesson. China made a determined move by conducting nuclear testing in 1964 for regime security in the midst of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation and China-Soviet conflict. China switched to a reform and open-door policy not during the closed-door era in response to the United States and Soviet pressure, but after the normalization of relations with Japan (1972) and the United States (1979). After attaining regime security during the Mao Zedong era, China adopted a reform and open-door policy and a collective leadership system in the Deng Xiaoping period. Modern history shows that nuclear threat led to a nuclear defense.

aftermath of the Cheonan Incident, the United States was adamant about not connecting the incident to North Korea. However, it soon abruptly changed its position and took advantage of the situation for its national interest. Among other things, the United States was able to easily solve the nagging issue of relocating the U.S. military base in Hutenna, Japan. The Japanese Foreign Minister announced his agreement to the U.S. stance on the Hutenna base in order to maintain the deterrent of U.S. forces in Japan over East Asian security uncertainties created by the Cheonan Incident. At the same time, the U.S. Senate issued a “Resolution Supporting Increased Market Access for Exports of U.S. Beef and Beef Products” (May 27, 2010), allowing the U.S. greater access to the Korean market. At the South Korea-U.S. summit talk held on June 27, 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama announced his plans to advance the resolution of disagreements on the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries by November 2010 and accepted the South Korean government’s request for the United States to postpone the return of wartime operation rights to South Korea until December 2015—originally scheduled for April 2012—for the reason of insufficient preparation. In return, South Korea would increase its share of the financial costs supporting the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea and import U.S. weapons of astronomic worth. The resolution of FTA disagreements implies pressure on South Korea to open its beef and automobile markets. In the midst of South Korea feeling indebted to the United States and reactionary military drills underway in the West Sea in the presence of U.S. aircraft carrier George Washington, renegotiation of the FTA began on December 3, 2010, dubbed by critics as excessive handouts to the United States. Even Lee Hoi-chang, President of the Liberty Forward Party, expressed concern, claiming it to be an unfair negotiation.

The 2 + 2 meeting of Foreign and Defense Ministers between South Korea and the United States, held after the UN Security Council presidential statement concerning the Cheonan Incident on July 9, 2010,<sup>17</sup>

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17. The UN Security Council issued a presidential statement that it unanimously condemns the attack which led to the sinking of the Cheonan (para. 7); “In view of the findings of the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group . . . which concluded

announced plans to impose an additional financial sanction against North Korea and conduct a South Korea-U.S. joint military exercise (“Invincible Spirit,” July 25-28, 2010). This immediately induced China’s reaction that “the entrance of U.S. aircraft carrier George Washington in the West Sea is against China’s security interests.” Thus, the U.S.-China conflict over the Korean peninsula intensified. The Lee administration let the Foreign and Defense Ministers accountable for the Cheonan Incident remain in office without repercussions and praised the nation’s solid alliance with the United States, dubbing it a diplomatic success.

Soon after the Invincible Spirit drill, Robert Einhorn (Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control, U.S. Department of State) and Daniel Glaser (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, U.S. Department of Treasury) visited South Korea. At a time when South Korea was mainly concerned with financial sanctions against North Korea, they made an unexpected request: to support the U.S. Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act which would take effect upon President Obama’s signature on July 1, 2010, besides the UN resolution. Sanctions on Iran would be at the highest level and include the closure of the Seoul branch of Iranian Bank Mellat.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile,

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that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was responsible for sinking the Cheonan, the Security Council expresses its deep concerns” (para. 5); and “The Security Council takes note of the responses from other relevant parties, including from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which has stated that it has nothing to do with the incident” (para. 6) (*Yonhap News*, July 9, 2010). Unlike the South Korean Foreign Ministry’s assessment that it was a “diplomatic feat” and a “satisfactory outcome” (*Hankyoreh*, July 10, 2010), the UN Security Council reflected the North Korean claim in the statement over opposition from some countries, including China, by saying that “The Security Council . . . encourages the settlement of outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula . . . to resume direct dialogue and negotiation through appropriate channels . . .” (para. 10). In a sense, the Security Council tried to curb additional tough measures against North Korea to be exerted by South Korea, the United States, and Japan.

18. *Hankyoreh*, “U.S., Pressure South Korea to Join in Iran Sanctions,” August 3, 2010; and *JoongAng Ilbo*, “Einhorn, Request South Korea to Close the Seoul Branch of Iranian Bank Mellat,” August 4, 2010.

Mohammad Reza Bakhtiari, Iranian Ambassador to Seoul, pressured South Korea that participation in the U.S.-led sanctions on Iran would negatively impact Korean businesses operating in Iran.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for such a severe policy toward Iran during this time was, to some extent, for U.S. domestic politics, as the Obama administration was conscious of hard-line conservatives and Jewish lobbyists in gearing up for the midterm congressional elections in November 2010 and Obama's presidential reelection in 2012. To South Korea, Iran is its largest Middle Eastern market. Its trade volume with Iran reaches US\$ 10 billion a year and exports are approximately US\$ 4 billion. Engrossed in the twenty-first-century version of conquer-the-north attitude and gratitude toward the United States, the Lee administration's strategic error resulted in the loss of practical gains and placed Korea in a difficult situation of having to choose between resisting the United States or sanctioning Iran. Trapped by a foreign policy dedicated to alliance with the United States, the Lee administration was unable to resolve the Cheonan Incident through its own negotiation with North Korea. This was the price that the Lee administration had to pay for involving the United States without an objective evaluation of the situation and using the incident for gain in domestic politics by bringing about an avalanche of criticism against North Korea.

If tension continues on the Korean peninsula, the United States can continue to maintain South Korea as the largest importer of U.S. weapons while staging tactics of verbal pressure and arms demonstrations against North Korea. As a result, South Korea will have to burden tremendous costs and, in bad cases, may have its sovereignty violated in various facets. Heightened tension between the two Koreas is desired by the U.S. military-industrial complex, which exercises tremendous power in U.S. domestic politics regardless of which political party is in power. As the military-industrial complex became a virtual center of the U.S. manufacturing industry after the U.S.-origi-

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19. *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, "Interview with Iranian Ambassador to Seoul Mohammad Reza Bakhtiari," August 7, 2010.

nated financial crisis in 2008, it is expected to make efforts to bolster its influence. If a country cannot avoid being used by another as Korea is by the United States, then it should have enough diplomatic savvy to be able to use the situation to its favor. South Korea, however, seems content with being used.

*Illusions of South Korea-China Relations Caused  
by the Anti-North Korea Policy*

At the South Korea-China summit meeting (April 30, 2010) held in Beijing immediately after the Cheonan Incident, South Korea was confident that China would take part in sanctioning North Korea. However, China did not even inform the South Korean government of Chairman Kim Jong-il's scheduled visit to China within three days of the summit. The South Korean government's diplomatic approach to China over the Cheonan Incident disregarded the changed North Korea-China relations; South Korea was filled with ungrounded confidence, self-centered interpretations, and subjective hopes in accord with South Korean conservatives' subjective view of North Korea within South Korean society.

North Korea-China relations experienced a cessation of dialogue when China joined the UN Security Council's sanctions on North Korea after the North's first nuclear test in 2006. However, China's North Korea policy made a complete direction shift in August 2009. China had intense internal discussions on the direction of its North Korea policy after the North's second nuclear test in July 2009. The traditionalists, who gave priority to its blood alliance with North Korea, overwhelmed the strategists, who underscored North Korean denuclearization and China's position in the international community; China established a new framework of China-North Korea relations in which the issues regarding North Korea as a nation and the North's nuclear crisis were considered two separate issues to be approached differently. With the resurgence in the importance given to blood relations, the improvement of China-North Korea relations became a firm guideline of the Communist Party and the government

of China (H. Lee 2010b). Accordingly, Wu Dawei, China's Vice Foreign Minister, and Dai Bingguo, State Councilor, visited North Korea in August and September 2009, respectively. In a visit to North Korea in October 2009, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao promised large-scale economic aid and visited the grave of Mao Anying, Mao Zedong's eldest son who died in North Korea during the Korean War.

China's new North Korea policy is based on its utilitarian judgment that the instability of North Korean regime resulting from exacerbated China-North Korea relations would pose a greater threat to China than the North Korean nuclear issue. China effectively accepted Kim Jong-un as the next North Korean leader, a decision that was semi-formalized in the 3rd Representatives Conference of the North Korean Workers' Party (September 28, 2010).<sup>20</sup> Inevitably, China still has political intentions to bring down the rising perception of North Korean threat, which provides an excuse for the U.S. military-industrial complex to pursue the establishment of a missile defense system against China as well as to boost China's international reputation by pulling North Korea into the six-party talks, which China touts as a diplomatic achievement of Hu Jintao. This seems to be the reason why China keeps promoting the "peace and stability of the Korean peninsula" and appears to take the side of North Korea even after the attack of Yeonpyeongdo island as reactionary responses to South Korea's repeated requests for China to cooperate with sanctions on North Korea.

China's utilitarian approach is in stark contrast to South Korea's policies, which are so focused on criticizing the North's father-to-son inheritance of power that important outstanding issues and potential practical gains are sidelined. Indeed, the South Korean government's perception of international circumstances seems very strange, judging from the U.S. State Department cable reports made public by *WikiLeaks*. In February 2010, just before the outbreak of the Cheonan Incident, then South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Chun Yung-woo told

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20. According to a report by state-run Xinhua News, Chairman Kim Jong-il asked on October 11, 2010, for Chinese President Hu Jintao to visit North Korea, and in return, Hu Jintao invited the new leadership of North Korea, including Chairman Kim, to visit China (*Yonhap News*, October 11, 2010).

U.S. Ambassador Kathleen Stephens the following: “China is ready to face the new reality that North Korea has little value to China as a buffer state. . . . Young leaders of the Chinese Communist Party no longer regard North Korea as a useful or trustworthy ally. . . . It is expected that China will not make a military intervention in the event of a North Korean collapse, considering that China’s strategic economic interests now lie with South Korea, the United States, and Japan, and in a meeting with two senior Chinese officials, they expressed their view that Korea should be unified under the South’s control.”<sup>21</sup>

According to a *WikiLeaks* cable, the Chinese government made a secretive attempt in April 2009 to have three-party talks involving China, the United States, and North Korea to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue instead of resuming the six-party talks discontinued in 2008.<sup>22</sup> However, this proposal was rejected by the lukewarm response of the United States. It is doubtful whether the U.S. government informed the South Korean government of China’s proposal. Even if China’s intentions were made clear through its actions in the aftermath of the Cheonan Incident, President Lee neither rebuked his top diplomatic and security advisors for making errors in the China policy nor changed his policy direction; instead, he carried out a rather limited reorganization of his diplomacy and security advisors by appointing Kim Sung-hwan, then Top Presidential Secretary for Diplomacy and Security, as the new Foreign Minister, and Deputy Foreign Minister Chun Yung-woo as Presidential Secretary for Diplomacy and Security.

On June 24, 2010, *Guoji xianqu daobao* 國際先驅導報 (International Herald Leader), a flagship newspaper of the Xinhua News Agency representing the views of the Chinese government, listed on its homepage a special report on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Korea War. It claimed that North Korea started the Korean War, but soon deleted the article within hours of posting it (*JoongAng Ilbo*,

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21. *Yonhap News*, “China Said to Have the Capacity to Contain 300,000 Refugees in a North Korean Crisis,” November 30, 2010.

22. *Hankook Ilbo*, “China, Propose 3-Party Talks to the U.S., Sidelining South Korea,” December 1, 2010.

June 25, 2010). The South Korean press covered this incident widely, commenting that the view that North Korea initiated the war, which had never been acknowledged by the Chinese government, was spreading in the Chinese academia (*Yonhap News*, June 25, 2010). However, this seems to be only wishful thinking on Korea's part. Although China has never clearly specified its position on the issue of who caused the Korean War, its true perspective is disclosed in the response of Qin Gang, Deputy Spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, that "We already reached a clear conclusion. What is important now is to take history as a mirror so as to build a better future."<sup>23</sup> China intervened in the Korean War even if it is true that North Korea started it, as South Korea and the Western world believe. China and North Korea held grand celebrations in July 2010 to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which was signed in July 1961. The Treaty still has a clause of "automatic intervention in times of emergency." Considering this, if North Korea collapses, or if South Korea and/or the U.S. advance into North Korea, then it seems likely and natural that China would intervene again. In order to prevent such a situation, it is imperative that all parties concerned should work for stability and peace of the Korean peninsula.

China is currently aggressively driving forward the China-North Korea Economic Cooperation Project to transport natural resources inland from northeast China via the North Korean ports of Rajin and Cheongjin. With the approval of the Changjitu Development Zone project by the Chinese State Council in November 2009, natural resources and grains in the Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces would be transported via the Hunchun-Rajin-Shanghai airway and the Tomun-Namyang-Cheongjin-East Sea waterway, linking China's southern region with other Northeast Asian nations. China's security of North Korean ports Rajin and Cheongjin is a realization of the idea of *qua-jing* 過境 economy (transborder economic activities), which has been pursued for 18 years to promote China's engagement with Russia and

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23. [http://article.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?ctg=13&total\\_id=4268932](http://article.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?ctg=13&total_id=4268932).



North Korea, beginning with the construction of the Hunchun Special Economic Zone (*Yonhap News*, July 22, 2010). North Korea-China economic cooperation, which is being accelerated due to mutual interests, no longer relies on short-term aid and is changing under mid-to-long term development schemes such as projects and infrastructure building operations (H. Lee 2010a).

The Lee administration's North Korea policy and diplomacy with the United States and China only increases North Korea's dependence on China and lends to the success of China's Northeast Borderland History and the Chain of Events Research Project (alternatively, Northeast Project). North Korea tried to avoid becoming a satellite country of China by reaching out to South Korea with the Kumgangsán tourism project in 1998. Additionally, the Kaesong-Sinuiju railroad repair project was agreed upon by the two Koreas in the North-South Joint Declaration of October 4, 2007, excluding China despite its longstanding interest in the project. However, China was able to undertake the project after the Lee administration rendered ineffective the June 15 Joint Declaration of 2000 and the North-South Joint Declaration of October 4, 2007.

### *A New Cold War on the Peninsula Caused by the Two Koreas*

North Korea and China reacted vehemently to the July 2010 announcement of the 2+2 Foreign and Security Ministers Meeting to conduct the largest-ever South Korea-U.S. joint military exercise. The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued five statements of opposition in July alone, claiming that the presence of the U.S. aircraft carrier *George Washington*, which has an operational radius of hundreds of kilometers, in the West Sea is effectively an aggression on China. China's CCTV News aired scenes of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in drill, which was very unusual (*Pressian*, July 21, 2010).

Around this time, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton disclosed tension with China at the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting on July 3, 2010, asserting that "the United States has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and

respect for international law in the South China Sea.”<sup>24</sup> The United States began to curb China, which emerged as a superpower after the 2008 financial crisis, and launch a preventive attack in order to use the limitations on China favorably in domestic politics.

*Renmin ribao* 人民日報 (People’s Daily) of China refuted Clinton’s assertion in an article titled “China has risen as a superpower in the international scene. Is the United States prepared for it?” (*JoongAng Ilbo*, July 30, 2010). In time for the Invincible Spirit exercise, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army conducted large-scale air transport and military force deployment drills (July 26-27, 2010) and held “Advance Defense 2010,” a joint exercise involving 12,000 interception soldiers under the Shandong, Henan, and Jinan Military Commands. Yang Yi, Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies at the National Defense University of China, asserted that “no island chain can lock up China,” and that “the United States must face the development of the Chinese naval force.”<sup>25</sup>

In a meeting on August 11, 2010, occasioned by the visit of South Korean representatives to China, Wang Jiarui, who is responsible for China’s Korean Peninsula policy as Director of International Liaison in the Communist Party of China, expressed concerns that increased tension from the South Korea-U.S. military exercise could ignite clashes of even greater scale. *Jiefang junbao* 解放軍報 (Liberation Army News) of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army asserted its stance that China should respond to the military drill. Michael Glenn Mullen, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retorted, “The Yellow Sea is an international body of water and the United States always reserves the right to operate in those international waters.”<sup>26</sup>

For some time, the United States made proposals to China to discuss a cooperation scheme in the event of sudden changes in North Korea after Kim Jong-il’s death, but China rejected the American proposal and reignited the six-party talks. Mutual distrust between the

24. [http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=12030](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=12030).

25. *JoongAng Ilbo*, “Chinese Military General Says, ‘the U.S. Can’t Lock Up China,’” August 4, 2010.

26. *JoongAng Ilbo*, “Wang Jiarui and Mullen, China-U.S. Conflict,” August 14, 2010.

two countries was beginning to build. While the United States thought that China's intention was to maintain the Kim Jong-il regime and tolerate its nuclear possession, China believed that the U.S.'s North Korea policy was to execute a regime change.<sup>27</sup> This mutual distrust further deepened in the aftermath of the Cheonan Incident, and China came to believe that South Korea and the United States were trying to set up a blockade against China. According to China, North Korea expressed its intention to return to the six-party talks without asking for sanctions to be lifted after the UN Security Council Presidential Statement in July 2010; the United States continued in the direction of rejecting North Korea, implementing a sever North Korea policy, and making attempts to besiege China using developments in South Korea. It is important here to note that China's perception of South Korea as a causing factor increases the likelihood of its sanction against South Korea. Accusations by China's state-run media following the South Korea-U.S. joint military drill in the East Sea were targeted towards South Korea.

If South Korea insists on taking advantage of its alliance with the United States amidst an intensifying U.S.-China confrontation, the United States will use South Korea as a frontline carrier of its global strategy and China will be able to impose an economic sanction on South Korea. Unless South Korea observes the developments of U.S.-China competition for limited hegemony and develops a realistic survival strategy, Korea will be manipulated by the G2 and forced to face difficult situations similar to the U.S. pressure to join the sanction on Iran.

Some scholars view the current Northeast Asian situation as the advent of a new Cold War.<sup>28</sup> But in the twenty-first-century global system built on interdependence, the United States has no option but to cooperate with China in various areas such as the war on terror,

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27. *JoongAng Ilbo*, "Michael Green, Is It a New Cold War?" July 31, 2010.

28. An exemplary view of the reinforcement of a new Cold War structure would be one in which, to deal with the capitalist crisis and unusual practices of the militarist regime, the United States would transfer the forces withdrawn from Iraq to Northeast Asia to contain and fight back the rising power of China (Kim Min-ung, "Obama's Risky Choice," *Pressian*, July 29, 2010).

the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, finance, economy, climate change, etc. G2 cooperation will not be easy if conflicts are confrontationally structured as in the Cold War period. However, it is likely that the United States will attempt to keep China in check if American hegemony is threatened. In response to this, China has switched from a strategy of waiting for peace to garnering strength in anticipation for the right time to intervene and actively fix problems and defend itself.

U.S.-China relations will continue to alternate between cooperation and confrontation. Possibilities of China-U.S. cooperation lie in the fact that additional U.S. sanctions on North Korea were put in motion in an administrative order instead of in legal form, despite the U.S. claim that “there is no need to hurry to return to the six-party talks” (*Yonhap News*, August 19, 2010). This move was a device planned for a quick reaction in case the dialogues resumed so that the situation could be easily manipulated by the U.S. executive branch.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, while engaging in a back-and-forth battle of statements with the United States, China sent Wu Dawei, Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Affairs, to North Korea to discuss how to “establish stability and peace on the Korean peninsula and resume the six-party talks” (*Newsis*, August 20, 2010). North Korea announced that “a complete consensus has been reached on various issues of common interest, including regional developments, friendly North Korea-China relations, continuation of the six-party talks, and denuclearization of the peninsula” (*Yonhap News*, August 20, 2010). This shows that both the United States and China expressed the possibility of switching to a process of negotiation even amidst a standoff following the Cheonan Incident. However, during the most recent period from late 2010 to early 2011, the U.S.-China relations have been in a deadlock. Despite North Korea’s repeated requests for dialogue, the United States has been pressuring North Korea to first engage in inter-Korean dialogue if it wants to resume the six-party talks, and

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29. *Yonhap News*, “U.S. Comments on Wu Dawei’s Visit to North Korea,” August 20, 2010.

South Korea is keeping its severe North Korea policy in place, insisting that North Korea can return to the six-party talks only after it apologizes for the Cheonan Incident and confirms its intention to abandon its nuclear program. Under these circumstances, North Korea disclosed the existence of uranium centrifuges and attacked Yeonpyeongdo island in November 2010. The North's actions can be interpreted as pressuring the United States to choose between dialogue and confrontation, while declaring to suspend official relations with South Korean authorities for the remainder of the current administration's term in office.

Such actions by North Korea brought about the outcome that South Korea and the United States reinforced their hard-line North Korean policies, as demonstrated by the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises in the West Sea (November 28–December 1, 2010) in which nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier George Washington participated, unlike in earlier exercises conducted in September 2010 after the Cheonan Incident. On November 29, 2010, President Lee issued a statement on the Yeonpyeongdo Incident in which he defined the Sunshine Policy<sup>30</sup> as humiliating to South Korea for submitting to the threats and requests of the North. Meanwhile, the South Korean government's dependence on the United States deepened. According to a *Wall Street Journal* report, the South Korean government “had refused to discuss a delay in eliminating auto tariffs, thinking that Mr. Obama was so weakened by election losses that he would accept almost everything to close a deal on a free trade agreement with South Korea, but now, over concerns that its relationship with the United States is in jeopardy after the attack of Yeonpyeongdo island, one of the most serious provocations since the Korean War, it agreed to a five-year delay in lifting tariffs proposed by the United States.”<sup>31</sup>

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30. The Sunshine Policy refers to the policy previously pursued by the South Korean government that emphasized peaceful cooperation, seeking short-term reconciliation with the North as a prelude to eventual Korean unification. This policy was in effect until Lee Myung-bak's election to presidency in 2008.

31. *Pressian*, “Korea, Make Surprising FTA Concessions Due to Yeongpyeongdo Island,” December 9, 2010.

As confirmed in the G20 Summit meeting held in Seoul in November 2010, U.S.-China cooperation on issues such as exchange rate, trade, environment, and security weakened in the midst of the milieu that the China threat factor began to receive wide attention from international society in place of war on terrorism. Before the G20 Summit, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton took a tour of eleven countries in the Asia and Pacific regions, employing all means of diplomacy, defense, and development (*JoongAng Ilbo*, November 18, 2010). To China, this was seen as a diplomatic block against it. Thus, the notion of being “blood allies” as emphasized in North Korea-China relations is, in part, a product of the United States’ and China’s competition for hegemony.

Noticeably, after North Korea’s attack on Yeonpyeongdo island, China and the United States have emerged as the main actors in the resolution of problems of the Korean peninsula. After the meeting between Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo and President Lee on November 28, 2010, which was arranged on China’s last-minute request without advance notice (a diplomatic impropriety), proposed to hold an emergency meeting among the heads of six-party talk delegations in Beijing, despite opposition of South Korea and the United States. In addition, it was known that the sudden cancellation of the South Korean army’s K-9 live-fire drill on Yeonpyeongdo island, scheduled in December 2010, was due to U.S. opposition.<sup>32</sup>

Since 2010, the two Koreas have been causing crisis onto themselves by aggravating U.S.-China confrontation. U.S.-China relations become further exacerbated regarding inter-Korean relations. This only builds up military tension and weakens South Korea’s position within the framework of the six-party talks. When the U.S.-China competition for hegemony shifts from a phase of confrontation to cooperation, South Korea’s reliance on the United States will continue to make a passive actor manipulated by others in the unfolding situations.

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32. *Dong-a Ilbo*, “The U.S. Expresses to South Korea Opposition to Firing Drill on Yeonpyeongdo Island,” December 4, 2010.

## **Hope for Change: From a Naïve Anti-North Korea Stance to a Growing Awareness of Peace and Coexistence**

### *A Sign of Hope: Separation of Conservatism and Reactionism*

An urgent task for Korean society is the establishment of proper conservatism. A prominent feature in modern Korean history is that conservatism has been conceptually misused for several decades and has a weak identity as a political entity of its own, being swayed by reactionism.

In general, conservatism accepts changes that have already taken place but posits a different stance regarding changes and directions for the future. Even a conservative woman holds an outlook, albeit a conservative one, based on an awareness of what women have gone through in the past, not on an image of women of the Joseon period. Twenty-first-century conservatism should acquire two virtues. Firstly, it should be able to consider institutionalized democratization as an asset, a pivotal social change accomplished in the second half of the twentieth century. Secondly, it should be able to deal with North Korea based on democratic capacity and with the full confidence of a superior economic power while also preparing for initiating the unification of the peninsula and peace in the Northeast community.

However, South Korean reactionaries of today led North Korea to promote nuclear development by provoking the North's awareness of security risks and reinforcing its feudal monarchy. Although their actions only harm the stability of South Korea, they justify their existence through such actions, creating a vicious cycle of conflict between the two Koreas. They are still hostile to democratization and nostalgic for the bygone era of the military regimes. They rely on an anti-North Korea stance<sup>33</sup> rather than reflect in earnest on the results of the June 2010 election, which vividly show what their constituents want. The

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33. Attending the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi, then Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan commented on the local election results of June 2, 2010, in an interview: "If they like [North Korea] so much, they should go to North Korea and live with Kim Jong-il" (*Hankyoreh*, July 24, 2010; *Money Today*, July 24, 2010).

seventeenth-century conquer-the-north stance based on loyalty to Ming refused change and introspection and slipped into a reactionary ideology, eventually causing the fall of the nation. Contemporary reactionary's toadyism towards the United States, anti-North Korea stance, and complacency with the antagonistic division of the nation can hardly give rise to vision and imagination for the future of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asian peace.

The left-right polemics in South Korean society, which is an important factor leaving conservatives at the disposal of reactionaries, provides the backdrop for the Lee administration to continue to think that that mere propaganda to eliminate leftists will consolidate supporters even without developing visions for the long-term advancement of the nation. Conservatives should be able to distinguish themselves from reactionaries to exit the paradoxical vicious cycle of feedback that is supported by the assertion that "In the long term, nothing is more certain to erode the bases of the Kim Jong Il regime, and to help 'normalize' it, than expansion of 'Sunshine' policies" (McCormack 2006).

The anti-North Korea stance, the twenty-first-century version of the seventeenth-century conquer-the-north stance, is subconsciously internalized by the older segment of the South Korean society under the unique historical context of North-South confrontation that it can disappear only when the older generation, which cannot possibly overcome it, disappears.<sup>34</sup> What is important is that South Korean society should change so that conservative capacity of common-sensible and utilitarian thinking overpowers reactionary sentiments that deter peace and the pursuit of practical gains.

Conservative ideas are mostly based on realistic outlooks emphasizing practical gains and stability over abstract logic and ideals. Con-

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34. The term "hostile dependent relations," which is often used to describe inter-Korean relations, represents a political engineering concept of hostile confrontation between the two Koreas, but does not seem to correspond to the reality of the Korean peninsula. This is because reactionaries in South Korea are less likely to make use of political engineering for their purpose than to be taken by fanatic anti-North Korea perceptions.



servatives may attempt negotiations with North Korea if the need arises. A severe North Korea policy, which increases security risks, can inflict a lot of harm on the South Korean economy, since the size of the economy has grown phenomenally for the past 20 to 30 years and the financial market is open. Perception of an economic crisis due to security risks under heightened tensions between the two Koreas is strongest among the rich, who possess stocks and real estate. While many of the rich take relief in the anti-North policy, it will not take long for them to realize that the establishment of North-South relations on the principles of peace and coexistence will exert a direct and decisive influence on their own interests.

Today, many products made in processing factories in North Korea as well as farm and fishery produce enter the South Korean market via small-to-medium companies and subcontractors of large companies. This is possible only because of the price competitiveness of these products. If North Korean policy continues to be severe, it will negatively affect prices, which will in turn have the greatest damage on ordinary people.

As the Korean traditional phrase “rice is heaven” shows, food is such an important part of people’s lives. Conservatives, in the true sense of the word, should try to transform North Korean society by creating an environment in which North Koreans can appreciate and sympathize with the values of South Korea. Among the many forms of aid to North Korea, rice is likely the least costly means to transform North Korean society. Currently, in South Korea, five years’ worth of rice supply is kept in storage, incurring astronomical fees. Due to the lower quality from long storage periods and a potential negative impact on the price of the government purchasing rice from farmers, this supply will be eventually tossed into the sea or used as animal feed. There is no utilitarian gain in this.

A sign that people have begun to consider inter-Korean relations with a utilitarian perspective first appeared during regional elections, which took place on June 2, 2010. The politics of Northern Winds, employed by conservative politicians to take advantage of the Cheonan Incident, backfired. The election results were not due to progressive

choices by the voters; rather, the election was the outcome of conservatives starting to differentiate themselves from the reactionary North Korea policy, which would render difficult the subsistence of people. The ruling conservative party lost in many regions: Gangwon-do province, formerly a conservative support base; Goseong-gun county, whose local economy was negatively affected by the halt of Kumgangsán tourism project; Paju, a city closely connected to the Kaesong Industrial Complex; and Incheon and Ganghwa, located near the site where the corvette *Cheonan* sank in the West Sea. With intensifying North-South tension and threats of war, constituents in their twenties, who are potential draftees, and middle-aged and elderly people, who would be negatively affected by falling stock prices and national credit ratings, took action to impede reactionary North Korea policies and the low-security management capacity of the ruling party.

*Korean People as the Main Actor for the Establishment of Peace on the Peninsula*

At present, the two Koreas are incorporated separately into the structure of China-U.S. confrontation. Despite the collapse of the Cold War regime, twenty-first-century Northeast Asia is still locked in the early twentieth-century framework of confrontation between inland and maritime forces. If confrontation between China and the United States escalates to war, the Korean peninsula will be its battlefield, just as was the case a century ago.

Twentieth-century contradictions of world history are concentrated in the Korean peninsula; conversely, this means that the Korean peninsula holds the keys to opening a new horizon of world peace and harmonious coexistence in the twenty-first century. It should be noted that there are ample opportunities on the peninsula to choose and assemble various ideologies in a practical and utilitarian perspective rather than to apply them dogmatically.

The actors to establish peace on the Korean peninsula are the people living on it. A fundamental ideological shift is necessary to discard the idea that the peninsula is, and will always be, the target of the

external policies of neighboring superpowers.<sup>35</sup> This is, paradoxically, proved by the Lee administration. The current state of inter-Korean relations is the outcome of the Lee administration's severe policy toward North Korea, which initially restrained the Obama administration's North Korea policy to remain passive in a strategic waiting mode and then return to a hostile policy. In contrast, the Kim Dae-jung administration's North Korea policy was attained in the midst of a great deal of conflict with the Bush Administration.

In the international environment, interest relations promoting war (e.g., the military-industrial complex) coexist with pacifist interest relations. A series of achievements were made even under the Cold War regime, including the July 4 Joint Communiqué of 1972, and the 1985 North-South Red Cross talks as well as numerous social and cultural exchanges. These achievements were responses to the trend of pacifism in international society. The U.S. military-industrial complex, growing in importance after the 2008 financial crisis, and Japanese far-rightists, taking advantage of the theory of North Korean threat (the Japanese version of the conquer-the-north theory), foster a negative environment for peace on the Korean peninsula. More amicable cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan may also contribute to raising the value of South Korea to the U.S. military-industrial complex. On the other hand, neighboring powers hope for the expansion of opportunities in which their physical capitals enter international markets through the stabilization of the peninsula. China does not want instability on the peninsula because of potential negative impacts on its economic growth. However, at the same time, it wants a stable divided structure of a status quo.

The international climate surrounding the peninsula can produce

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35. Social science research on this topic presents a scientific analysis framework of consciousness of and response to the circumstances and developments surrounding the Korean peninsula. What is lacking in the framework is that South and North Korea are generally seen as passive entities. A shift in the research method is needed so that even an entity devoid of absolute power to control the surrounding environment can be an active agency if it has a clear understanding of its surroundings and the capacity to examine itself with vision.

very different outcomes depending on how the actors adjust to or utilize it. Paradoxically, China's hegemonic foreign policy and Japan's conservative tendencies warn those who label exchange between the two Koreas (which is preconditioned not to be based on normal exchange relations) as excessive handouts and wrongly wish for the collapse of North Korea. In the event that the current North Korean regime collapses, the Korean peninsula could become a war field rather than a unified nation. Conversely, the international circumstances can provide momentum to the creation of a new model of North-South relations. The agents who can make the international order profitable for the establishment of stability on the Korean peninsula are none other than the inhabitants of the peninsula. As long as the two Koreas demonstrate their consistent desire for peace, it is not easy for neighboring powers to disagree.

### **Conclusion: Peace of Northeast Asia Based on Common Interests Initiated by the Two Koreas**

The starting point for the establishment of peace on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia in the twenty-first century is North-South cooperation and the exchange of people, materials, money, culture, and academic discussions. Designing the blueprint for a unified Korea can begin after the preconditions are met.

For the past decade, North-South exchange and cooperation has opened a new paradigm of inter-Korean relations but clearly has limitations. It is a clear fact that exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas are limited as long as North Korea feels that its national security is threatened. Even if the South is willing to provide unlimited aid, the North-South cooperation has a Maginot line, that is, a limit to the degrees of change that the North can accept so as to control the effects of the cooperation on its system. In order to overcome this rudimentary stage of cooperation and establish international exchange conducive to reconciliation and cooperation, the North should be free from security threats.

It is vital to widen the areas in which the interests of the South Korea-United States-Japan bloc and the North Korea-China bloc overlap. In this regard, the Kaesong Industrial Complex, in operation since December 2004, 59 years after national division, has a significant meaning that North Korea chose South Korean capital for external investment. North-South economic cooperation can function as a lever in the construction of a peace system. Although operation of the Kaesong Industrial Complex faces difficulties under the Lee administration, it is the product of a business deal with gains for both sides, not an excessive handout.

If this process of North-South economic cooperation expands and the Seoul-Sinuiju railroad and East Sea railroad can reach Europe via the trans-China railroad and the trans-Russia railroad in the future, economic distribution networks can be established at home and abroad, which can help turn a hostile confrontation zone into a peace zone. The key to the resolution of national division lies in full-scale exchange and cooperation to intertwine the two sides to the extent that neither can think to terminate their relationship. Inter-Korean relations have not yet reached this stage. The Lee administration cannot close down the Kaesong Industrial Complex despite the Cheonan Incident and the raid on Yeonpyeongdo island because the livelihoods of 121 small to medium companies, workers, contractors and subcontractors, and their families are at stake.

In international relations, peace is established when interest relations are intertwined (Jung 2010). North Korea should attract investment capital from Japan, Taiwan, China, the United States, and even nations in as far as Southeast Asia and West Asia to become a place where economic interest relations of various nations are entangled. Then, North Korea can move to a phase of disarmament. The North Korean regime cannot but tread the road to change. The Korean peninsula can be one step closer to establishing a regime of peace on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Seoul must take the initiative to change its international relations policies regarding the peninsula, based on a flexible understanding of North Korea and a utilitarian perspective of pursuing practical gains.

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