

International Politics and a Search for Unified Korea

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Abstract

This chapter searches for a unification model for Korea assuming a big bang implodes or explodes on the Korean Peninsula sooner or later. Amidst the prolonged deadlock of the six party talks, Pyongyang insists to hold a bilateral talks with Washington while the latter says it must be discussed in the framework of six countries talks. The UN General Secretary addressed on July 29, 2009 in New York that he would visit Pyongyang to bridge US-North Korea's bilateral relations, which is only likely to make Korean unification cross the river of no return for long periods to come. The road to Korean unification cannot be also easy as long as four big powers (China, Japan, USA and Russia) perceive respectively as if a unified Korea may contribute to disturb the balance of power among themselves. As an alternative to disengage the four powers from their perceived stakes in Korea without fear that the balance of power in the region will be tipped against any of them, a "temporal neutralization" for Korea is proposed by suggesting that it can serve as a beneficial institution to all concerned parties in the region. Neutrality is offered to overcome existing international power politics surrounding the peninsula. When the world develops into more peaceful and cooperative future beyond any further ideological and military stripe, Korea may no longer be of concern to others for its siding in politics. Under the current circumstance, however, the idea of a unified "neutral Korea" can only likely buy all round supports from its neighbors.

"Sapiens qui prospicit (the wise sees the future)".

Key Words

Neutrality, Peace, Politics, PSI, Reunification, Security

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1. Introduction

Korean wish for national reunification entails thinking out on both the course and political form of the unified Korea, that could be achievable under current international security architecture provided by those stake-holding powers – China, Japan, the United States and Russia in the region. A stable international institution is yet uncertain or absent with no credible and stable mutual deterrence mechanism to speak of among them, in particular when a big bang occurs on the peninsula.

Even if an imminent implosion is to break out to derive the North's regime into sudden collapse, the fate of the peninsula will evolve unexpectedly depending on the political dynamics of those powers with their footings on the peninsula. Preparing for the future of Korean Peninsula is just as closely interrelated with as coping with the future policy directions of those neighboring nations inclusive of China, Japan, the United States and Russia in the Northeast Asian region. More importantly, as there has been changing shifts in the distribution of both international economic and military power in Northeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula has gone through many times of being experienced "like a shrimp caught in the middle of contest of strength among giant whales". Just as they used to be, so in future would China and Japan be hard to tolerate if the peninsula comes to closer to any one of them militarily and politically, while the U.S. and Russia will not of course shrug off their stakes on the future course of the unified Korea. Indeed, a future unified Korea can be a hot but important spot no neighboring power wants to give up its solidarity and influence. This international politics makes it further difficult for the two Koreas to get unified and to stand alone, as long as the world is yet divided in military confrontation as well as in mutually conflicting state egoism. This is why a future Korea preparing for reunification must seriously have a lot of thinking out on both its political stance and security architecture in East Asia.

History teaches us that a life course, whether an individual or a nation, is not realized as it is planned by the individual or the nation. As it is said in the Scripture, "In his heart a

man plans his course, but God determines his steps (Proverbs 16:9)”¹. But it is equally important for a nation to design for its future course in tandem with neighbors under given surrounding conditions and then to leave the reply (decision) to the heart of Heaven.

To frame for the future political path of a unified Korea, it is worth considering the power game (power relations) or respective foreign policy stances of neighboring nations in the region. With taking such major external factors into consideration, the nation (Korea) has to search for the best political system option available for itself. The choice may be less than ideal, nor peaceful road, but once one solid national stance is chosen as a second best, it will be the one that Koreans have to live up with in the whirlwind of history.

If all neighbor countries were in harmony one another observing such common stances as non-interference, respect for fair economic competition, and promotion of democracy and individual freedom of life, free mobility across the borders, and free from ideological confrontation, then they would not need to concern so much about future course taken by a unified Korea. But the Korean peninsula has a geo-strategic position for serious concern of those four powers if it is reduced to a matter of pie equally demanded by them. The issue lies in the reality that Korean geopolitics could be very in-eclectically leaned to any one party or pair of these countries.

In following sections, we will briefly review respective perceptions as well as relations of four powers (China, Japan, the United States, and Russia) surrounding the Korean Peninsula and suggest the possible outlet for the two Koreas not only to realize national reunification but also to survive in the stormy waters of cool international politics.

History shows that border wall between any two nations is originally attributed to acute interest conflicts and clashes between any two groups of people. The sources of both peoples’ conflicts and clashes are many-folded, including a matter of “live and die” related with land, food, water, and shelter availability. The rise and fall of different communities repeat due to such background factors as ethnicity and cultural similarity (or diversity), differing stage and level of civilization, ways of life management, political, economic and

¹ “To man belong the plans of the heart but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue” (Proverbs 16:1)

social ideological norms, and a non-remediable breakdown of congruence among leaders, and power rivalry even within the same ethnic boundary as well. However, the mankind is always looking for a “way to mutual peace” that will help secure the mutual benefits in place of physical clash or war. One device is keeping frequent individual and commercial intercourse. Many proponents of globalization today believe that the spread of international transactions would lead people to recognize the mutual benefits that could come from open trade and exchange among nations.

One stumbling block could today be a counter-favoritism kept hold largely on two ideologies footing in socialism and capitalism. Capitalists believe individual-based free competition and private ownership system would ensure the most powerful tool to enhance economic efficiency and best alternative to social ownership and state interventionism. Supporters of democracy and capitalism thus perceive open trade, transparency, and enhanced human rights as the best sure road to enhance “peace and harmony” in the world. On the other hand, socialists put more weights on “equity” than “efficiency” and believe that “peace and harmony” would come only after the ‘arrival of socialism’. Of course, many modern socialists, like contemporary Chinese but for the North Koreans, agree in principle that frequent intercourse and trade among different nations and people would contribute to mutual understandings and benefits. However, as long as the respective ideological perceptions among neighboring countries are not narrowed one another, those nations would find it difficult to converge to “common ground for peace and harmony”, if not impossible at all.

Unless the existing deviancy is not eliminated, to say the least, a compromise on the Korean issue between socialist countries (China, Russia) and capitalist countries (the United States and Japan) remains yet a rugged hill for Korea to encounter.

2. Four Gangs’ Tug-of-War Politics and the Korean Peninsula

This section will briefly review the four powers’ interrelations as well as their respective policy pursuits in the East Asian region focusing on their stakes on the Korean Peninsula.

Firstly, China has had historically a large relation with Korea in the east, and particularly developed far closer ally relation with North Korea since 1950s. To China, the Korean Peninsula is like its vermiform appendix which needs not to care at all when its health condition functions good, but very painful if something goes wrong with it. As long as it hinges at the Chinese far east-south edge, the Peninsula can serve at least as a good buffer zone against any external attack thrusting from the Pacific side, say, Japan and the United States. In other words, Korea is a good physical shield for the mainland China from whirlwind from the pacific east.

To some lesser degree, the value of Korea is similar to Russia, too. This ligament remains intact over time. The solid family-like relation between North Korea, China and Russia lies in that they are footed on the common root of political ideology, that is, international communism. This does not, of course, rule out that there are no other conflicts (i.e., Sino-Soviet border disputes and the North leadership's general distrust of Chinese etc.) between them, but it implies that the three countries share the common ideological "state system". The past relation was so well manifested during the Korean War (1950-53). Neither China nor the Soviet Union was prepared to allow the entire Korean Peninsula to fall into the American orbit. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese joined the North Korean forces in the war to push back the South Korean forces backed by the United States under the aegis of the United Nations. The Soviet Union provided huge military and economic aids to North Korea over both pre-and post-Korean war periods. Their shared relation of today is not much different from yesterday, as often experienced in Chinese and Russian opposition votes against such initiatives brought by the United States and Japan through the U.N. Security Council to punish any misbehaviors of North Korea. There is no wrong in the old saying that "a crab keeps closer side with a lobster" in the marine animals' battle under the waters. Nonetheless, Russia appears to becoming increasingly tired of backing up the North Korea's defiance linked with nuclear proliferation risks.²

² Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said on June 11, 2009 that Moscow shares "the frustration and concern of all UN Security Council members over North Korea's nuclear and missile tests. He said, "We are clearly facing a situation which poses clear proliferation risks. We are doing it (sanctions talks in UN against

As already mentioned elsewhere, North Korea posed its stern position by publicly hinting that it would renew its nuclear bomb and missile test unless the United Nation Security Council would apologize immediately for the Council's non-binding presidential statement (April 29) denouncing North Korea's long-range missile launch of April 5, 2009. Quite unexpectedly, at the time when the South Korean society was engulfed with shocks and mourns for its former President Roh Moo-hyun's tragic suicide³, North Korea triggered a new underground nuclear test at 9:45 on May 25 in Kiljoo, Ham-Kyung-pukto, North Korea⁴. It is unknown this time but usually the North used to notify its past serious arsenal tests to Beijing in advance. China has positioned its "opposition to any nuclear test" in the neighborhood. After this second successful nuclear test, however, Beijing did not yet make any immediate comment on the North's unprecedented defiance contrary to other nations' shocked responses.

With the North's second nuclear test, China must face a policy dilemma internationally as regarding whether it would or would not oppose any U.N. Security Council's move to strengthen penalties and sanctions against the North. But the likely odds for China might be its absentee in UNSC vote, arguing that new rounds of sanctions against North Korea would work ineffective. North Korea's detonation of this second nuclear arsenal is serious

North Korea's May 25th second nuke test) with a very heavy heart,... because having sanctions is not our choice. But some political message must be sent." (quoted from AP report appeared at The Japan Times, Friday, June 12, 2009, p.1.)

³ Roh Moo-hyun, 62 in 2009, who served his five year term as South Korea's president ended in February 2008, was reported to kill himself by leaping from a cliff behind his rural home early dawn on May 25, 2009. He left a note in his personal computer: "Don't blame anybody. Please cremate me. And please leave a small tombstone near home." He was under prosecutors' investigation on suspicion that his family took about \$6 million in bribe from a company CEO, tarnishing a reputation he tried to nurture of being a reformer who insisted to make a clean Korean society. As a president, he pushed political changes that sought to harmonize Southern politics with those of the North. He initiated without success to abolish the South's draconian National Security Law which the North consistently wanted to abolish. He went to Pyongyang in October 2007 for a talk with Kim Jong-il, a second summit meeting of leaders of the divided peninsula.

⁴ At the very moment when Seoul was in funeral mourns, Pyongyang staged its second nuclear bomb experiment at the same location where the first nuclear test of the North was made on October 9, 2006. In response to the North's provocative action, South Korean government announced on May 26, 2009 that South Korea will immediately participate in the PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative) pact (proposed by President George W. Bush on May 31, 2003) which aims at stopping international trafficking and transfer of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

enough for the U.N. Security Council to call for stricter sanctions against North Korea than ever before, although, as always, the prospect that they are likely to deter it from further provocations is not bright. The UNSC's move is always frustrated because both China and Russia are reluctant

China's traditional alliance with North Korea dated back to the Chinese sponsorship of Kim Il-sung's anti-American and anti-Japanese stance before and after World War II. Even more than Russia, China has maintained a warm official friendship with North Korea through most of its existence. The long-standing close relation like "lips and teeth" cannot be expected to break off any time soon as "China and North Korea are close neighbors linked by mountains and rivers". The friendship cemented in blood during the Korean War period (1950-53) has grown in the course of the protracted struggle against their common potential enemies, U.S. and Japanese capitalists, even after Beijing's pragmatic shift of its foreign policy began since the early 1970s. Chinese leadership has often alluded to the western world that "China has some influence but it does not have the kind of relationship where it can tell the North Korean leadership what to do." However, Beijing has been providing the largest material and diplomatic support to North Korea, whether or not the North shows gratitude to its benefactors in Beijing. In spite of the leverage that China can use to force the North leadership to respond when it sees the need, China does not any of these things now while publicizing that North Korea is a sole sovereign nation. China has repeatedly refused to exert its economic leverage for other political ends to the North, arguing that the political and economic realms should remain separate. It is not easy to read the shrewd reasons behind Chinese dual faces on the matter of the Korean Peninsula.

One obvious reality is that Beijing wants to keep the Korean Peninsula within its close distance of full influence for the sake of its security shield against its potential adversaries, the United States and Japan. If North Korea collapses with its 23 million people, China will be faced with a tough decision if it has to dispatch the People's Liberation Army into North Korea. This dispatch would meet up with the South Korean or U.S. armies heading north for which a prior compromise requires to be arranged among them to avoid physical clashes. China also needs to make some preventive arrangements with both South Korea

and the U.S. to control North Korea's stocks of deadly weapons as well as North Korean rush into China's northeast as refugees.

China must be much concerned with possible future problems to be brought by increasing numbers of Koreans in addition to Korean ethnic residents, which together will outnumber Chinese in China's northeast regions which were mostly territories of old Korean ancestors until AD 915.

China's position may or may not pose one of big stumbling blocks lying in the rugged road ahead of not only the Korean reunification but also a unified Korea's policy direction to consider inside the unification box. The question which country – China or America – will make the 21st century its own will no doubt influence the future path of the Korean reunification as well as political status of unified Korea. The international society recently begins to call the United States and China a “G-2” group⁵. Indeed, China's rapid rising to great power status calls for a new level of cooperative relations between the United States and China particularly on the Korean Peninsula despite of their mismatched interests and capabilities. Of course, the new situation demands Korean nation to work hard globally and wisely to win both the two superpowers' supports for Korean reunification.

The hopeful possibility is, however, that there is seen a slim light for possible shift in the Chinese thinking about Korea. With repeating North Korea's saber rattling tactics, China may come to realize that North Korea is really annoying China most of the time contrary to that it receives constant supply of Chinese material and political supports. Pyongyang used to not listen when Beijing tells it either to do or not to do something.

China has learned that when Beijing tells Pyongyang to take its advice on internationally sensitive matters, Pyongyang listens even less. When North Korea continues to be going its own way, China may logically reconsider it will be better to have a unified Korea that would do more together with China than the North alone. Chinese leaders may see that North Korea is a “psychological burden” for China in the long-run when

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski advocated in early 2009 the development of a G-2, comprising China and the United States that could address the international financial crisis, limit the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, tackle climate change, and help resolve on-going international conflicts.

Pyongyang continues to cause the international provocations. Although Beijing has long regarded the North as a strategic buffer against the extension of U.S. and allied forces up to its 1,416 km frontier with the North, China also fears that North Korea's nuclear threats could tip the region into destabilizing costly military rivalry.

Chinese government will be extremely cautious to abandon its usual reticence. But if the North continues to "play with fire works", China will not be able to stall international expectations by repeatedly saying that "North Korea does not listen" or that "we have no influence". More important, it could be a catastrophe possible to claim many Korean and Chinese lives if North Korea mishandles nuclear and missile balls across the border. A time may surely come for Beijing to think out about dumping a friend who continues to frustrating China's faithful backing-ups for decades. In other words, China may come to think it worth supporting a unified Korea which will at least maintain a cooperative neighborhood relationship.

To make matters better, China and the United States jointly seek to secure peace and stability in East Asia with U.S. President Barrack Obama's new foreign policy motto: "more cooperation on more issues more often." In time ahead, U.S. new administration is likely clamoring for greater role from China in stabilizing the East Asia, as Washington recognizes China's growing importance in world politics and economy. The new U.S.-Chinese bilateral keen cooperative partnership would surely pave a relatively easy road leading to Korean reunification when Pyongyang falls down soon.

Secondly, Moscow appears to abandon its adherence to ideological doctrine in place of economic pragmatism, although it does not yet clearly wash off its past ideological ties with Pyongyang. Moscow was an important support to the communist regime of the North⁶, but after Gorbachev era Russia is shifting away from being more obsessed with political and military ties than cooperation in the economic field with other countries. This

⁶ The Soviet Union was responsible with the United States for the division of Korea at the wake of the World War II and had provided more than \$2 billion in foreign aid and credits to North Korea up to 1984 and also provided an increasing quantity of oils, gas, weapons and other materials along with advanced military technologies up to 1989, a year of dramatic change in the external relations of the Soviet Union. From that time on, ideology gave way to pragmatism and internationally accepted standards of external deals.

suggests that Russia will not be much concerned with the future political status of a unified Korea as long as it can secure good relationship with united Korea so as to promote mutual economic benefits. Russia will be inclined to seek its benefits in an ever-widening environment for peace and stability beyond mere political siding issue in the East Asian region. Mikhail Gorbachev contributed greatly to such new realism in Moscow so that ideology gave way to pragmatism and internationally accepted standards of friendly economic relations. Russia will keep on this tract. Notably, Russia's Foreign Ministry swiftly criticized Pyongyang for its second nuke test of May 25, 2009, calling it "a serious blow to international efforts" to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, as already briefly mentioned earlier.

Although how far Russia would make distance with its old allies (North Korea and China) remains yet to be seen, it is increasingly hopeful for Russia likely to take a levelheaded judgment on two Koreas and to deal with Korea's reunification in a coordinated manner with other countries including the United States and Japan and China. Of course, Russia's attitude will still depend on the dynamics of political and economic relations of Russia with other countries in the region. In particular, the future direction of Russia-America, Russia-NATO, Russia-China as well as Russia-Japan relations (or tensions) will affect the Russian posture. Russia has yet a highly imperfect political and legal system with media suppression and rigged elections. As well, it will matter how Russia perceives on a unified Korea which would friendly cooperate with it in international theater. It is hopeful that Russia continues to move toward open democratic society so as to take one inch higher levelheaded position for the Korean reunification issue.

Thirdly, American interest in the Korean Peninsula is no less important at all. The United States lost more than 30,000 American young lives to save South Korea from falling into the hands of communists during the Korean War. After an armistice based on the division of Korea at the nearly same 38th parallel, the United States had poured huge economic and political aids and supports both to plant a democratic system and to keep its national security along with economic development in the South. Even with recently widespread anti-Americanism getting intense due to influence of growing nationalistic

elites over the inevitable passing of generations in South Korea, the existence of American troops is without question the main forces to back up Seoul's continuous economic development and democracy.

Of course, American perception rooted on pragmatism could shift its foreign policy in the direction of improving relationship with the North Korea any time soon if North Korea would change its paradigm of its heretofore brinkmanship diplomacy in favor of more cooperative gesture to the Obama administration in Washington. If so, the United States would be willing to establish a new diplomatic relationship with Pyongyang. If the two states improved their relations, the possibility of early reunification of two Koreas would of course cross "the river of no-return" for the time-being, if not forever. Then the strategy of Korean reunification must change from "sudden implosion or explosion model to gradual approach."

However, the incumbent North Korean leadership in 2009 is playing crazy enough to screw up such possibility for opening diplomatic relation with the U.S. by conducting missile launches as well as nuclear tests. Slandering Pyongyang's irrationality may be driving the Barack Obama administration to shy away from its proclaimed "idealism" that seeks to solve bilateral discords "through talks".⁷ If the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) adopted strong economic and maritime sanctions against the North⁸, Pyongyang would face a deteriorating economic situation which may eventually lead to ignite an uncontrollable implosion within its political territory. Of course, the North's economic hardship will

⁷ Barack Obama administration is reported in June, 2009 to become growing impatience with the North's fire works, and to aim for tough measure like re-designating North Korea as a country of terrorists' sponsorship.

⁸ It is still a question if both Russia and China would follow up with a new UNSC binding resolution. But Russia, once a key backer of North Korea, condemned the North's second nuke test. Moscow's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, who is also the Security Council president in 2009, said the 15-member body would begin work "quickly" on a new resolution. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu also said Beijing "resolutely opposed" the nuclear test, urging North Korea to return to negotiations under which it had agreed to dismantle its atomic program. This time, North Korea's reckless test makes Russia and China difficult to shy away from international move to impose new sanctions against the isolated communist nation. In the end, the U.N. Security Council's sanctions committee has come to slap a new set of sanctions on North Korea in accordance with Resolution 1874, which the council adopted on June 12 in response to the North's second nuclear test on May 25, 2009. But North Korea seems yet unfazed by both the move of UNSC resolution and the would-be effect-limited sanction though the North will be eventually put in a tighter corner. China continues to supply food and oil to North Korea despite of the North's provocative behavior.

depend much on whether China would continue or not to supply food and energy to North Korea through the back door.

To deter North Korean pursuit of nuclear weapons, the United States has so far thought if “talks” would be more effective than other options. “Past talk options” needed increasing help from China, but they ended up with the futility of the six-party talks which in return only contributed to helping the North earn both more time and more money to develop its nuclear weapons as well as the means to deliver them. Beijing would of course not want to see Pyongyang have the nukes and it encourages more talks, but talks alone will never induce the North to abandon nuclear projects.

By passing, it must be noted that on the Korean Peninsula China and the U.S fought against one another in 1950-53, which had both countries have their respective interests and love on the Peninsula. But China views its interests a lot differently than the U.S. sees. Today, Washington sees “no-nuclear peninsula” more important than the would-be political position of a unified Korea. On the contrary, if given the choice between a nuclear-owned North Korea and “no North Korea at all”, the current odds for Beijing to take the former are much higher. But there will be surely time for Beijing to reassess its policy toward the Korean Peninsula, when China views the unified Korea to be of more helpful for the economy and security of Chinese people in the region. If a unified Korea takes its position as a neutral state, Beijing does not need to worry about facing with U.S. troops either across the Yalu River or across the whole land-bridge peninsula.

The United States and its now allies – South Korea and Japan – have largely failed in reading Pyongyang’s ultimate intentions, and they mistakenly believed Pyongyang would change its course if they offered to provide economic and diplomatic aids. They simply could not read the very fact the North’s leadership has its own “dilemma” attributed to its half century-long misguided policy, which it realizes is “too late” or “too risky” internally to change now. For its own self-survival extension, the North’s leader groups need only to continue their brinkmanship tactics targeting not only for domestic purpose but also for outside purpose. The tactics aim to tame domestic discontents and instead to boost militant spirits among people while inducing external world to pay more concern and more aid

supply “if you want to sooth our provocations”. In addition, the ailing Kim Jong-il needs to clear a way through his military shore-up for his succession. To make his intended successor to become a true National Hero, the father needs to lay a groundwork to boost his designated successor (maybe the youngest son named Kim Jong-un ⁹) as a main architect to develop the nuclear industry.

Despite of this reality, so-called experts as well as policy makers in the United States and South Korea still tend to anticipate the North to return to talks after a “cooling-off period”. They must have already learned enough lessons about the North over the past several years. Nonetheless, it is not clear what they are still expecting to gain from “talks” with “our-own-way-regime in the North”.

When “carrots” are no longer effective (and unwelcome), it would be better to stop trying to feed the North’s closed mouths (which favor “tasty chosen beef” instead) with “carrots”, and instead it is better using sticks. The best policy option for the United States and its allies might be either to respond with a benign neglect to bellicose Pyongyang or to prepare “a critical preemptive strike” (even if it would likely result in a large casualties) against it. The more futile talks and time the U.S. and its allies waste, the worse return they would get back from the North. For last several years, such lack of rather effective options has driven the United States and South Korea (and Japan and Russia as well) to look to the “futile engagement talks” with Pyongyang with the meditation of China, which only helped Pyongyang from collapsing and instead helped it buy time to develop nuclear arsenals and missiles. But it is in the dark that the U.S. will be considering to take rather a tougher stance toward North Korea should negotiations with China and Russia fail to yield a new strategy to force Pyongyang to give up its nuclear program.

To make the Korean unification seemingly cross the border for infinite time to come, the UN General Secretary Mr. Ban Ki-moon addressed on July 29, 2009 in New York that he

⁹ The North’s saber-rattling in April-June, 2009, was believed to be part of its succession campaign. According to outside rumors, Kim Jong-il’s youngest son named Kim Jong-un, 26 year old in 2009, has the best chance of succeeding the authoritarian leader. He is known to have studied at the International School of Bern in Switzerland until 1998 under the pseudonym Park Chol, learning to speak English, German and French. Among his classmates largely consisting of children of foreign diplomats, he was known as timid, humble and introverted but an avid skier and a big fan of the NBA basketball star Michael Jordan.

would be willing to visit Pyongyang anytime in an effort to bridge a bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea amidst the prolonged deadlock of six party talks. He sounded to think that a bilateral relation improvement between Washington and Pyongyang is only an alternative to achieve peace in the region, but he must be overlooking the possibility that such a new move would cement the division of the nation while Pyongyang continues to grab all possible edges in its favor. The UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon is cautioned not to play a self-motivating missionary for the North whereas in fact he may have an eye to vie for the next South Korean Presidency.

There are three likely policy options available for the United States to consider regarding to North Korea as well as the whole peninsula issue. The first one is that the U.S. government would seek an extension of the October 2000 North Korea visit of the then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright if it still believes that a high ranking official visit to Pyongyang can get breakthroughs in negotiations with the North. This does not mean that Washington must ignore its past lessons about Pyongyang's unpredictability. The U.S. glimmering success may depend on its willingness to concede to the North as much economic, military and diplomatic demands as Pyongyang demands on the table.

The second is to seek a diplomatic relationship with Pyongyang as soon as possible without any prior requisites: American diplomacy may include the opening of cultural, educational and economic exchanges with the North. Some North Korea experts (i.e., Andrei Lankov) suggested that such new approach along with enhanced cooperative economic projects in the North will induce the North to change.¹⁰ But they (in particular, Andrei Lankov) must not overlook that the North leadership is very alert to such approach and that even if such approach were introduced very limitedly to help thaw ice in the North, the outcome would be slow only on long-term objectives.

Two Koreas' separate political systems would not come to converge to one another by themselves for an extended period, thus making Korean reunification be a tale of possibly long distance. Things are not such easy as a third party's irrelevant rhetoric can easily spell

¹⁰ Dan Blumenthal and Robert Kagan, *A New Path to Pyongyang*, The Washington Post and also reprinted in The Japan Times (May 30, 2009, p.16.).

out. Most telling, those so-called experts on North Korea do not understand why North Korea's leadership always tries to isolate its nation from the rest of world even further.

If American dramatic rapprochement toward the North begins someday, Japan and South Korea must realize that the traditional Washington's commitment to the defense of its Asian allies is no longer the same as before.

The third is an option that the United States may choose to carry out harder stance either with "all front sanctions" or "prudent measures" against on-going provocative North Korea. Although China signaled its displeasure with that prospect, such a strong policy position will lay a ground to induce the North's regime either to implode or to explode sooner or later. If such a big bang occurs in the North, the United States will be induced to take "contingency action" with South Korean military at the initial stage. But in order to avoid any possible direct military confrontation with China on the Korean Peninsula, the United States would make a concession with China to establish at least a color-free neutral state on the Peninsula unless a pro-American regime is permissible due to power game in the region.

American pragmatism would prefer achieving a realistic peace to non-promising conflict with Chinese military forces in Asian theater largely beyond Washington's reach. Of course, the U.S. may not hope to frustrate Japan in terms of U.S- Japanese security pact. The upcoming political shakeup in the Korean Peninsula would pave a way to getting the U.S., Japanese, and Chinese relationship improve on trilateral compromise. Being open-minded, rational and cooperative, policymakers of China, Japan and the United States could come dramatically to agree to help Korea reunified at any critical moments in future, if and only if China, Japan, and the United States become unequivocal ally one another. It is unofficially predicted that the three countries would initiate a trilateral cooperative organization to talk over extensive agendas on Northeast Asia including the Korean Peninsula issue. While China still needs the U.S. hands for its stable economic growth, the United States may also positively seek to solve the world's problems jointly with rising China while embracing Japan as well. In this case, the three countries will not want to include either South Korea or North Korea or both in their trilateral cooperative talks.

Lastly, Japan is most sensitive about any hostile events and military provocations evolving around the Korean Peninsula not only because of its geo-political and economic adjacency but also because of its national security and stability. As Japan relies on U.S. nuclear arms for its protection, Japan is currently more concerned about if U.S. will continue to provide an effective umbrella for Japan especially in regard to China and North Korea. North Korea's nuclear and missile tests are really serious enough to awaken Japanese leadership and people to alert to the dangers involved. While Japan calls on the Obama administration to "reaffirm U.S. commitment to security assurances" including "extended nuclear deterrence" to ally,¹¹ it seeks positively to reinforce its defense system after the North Korea's missile launch on April 5th, 2009. On the other hand, Japan would expect China to look to regional and global peace today as well as tomorrow, although Japan is concerned about long-term Beijing's seize of hegemony more seriously than North Korea's rude nuke threats. Japanese conservatives and Chinese communists do not forget their wartime sentiment toward one another. As history textbook reads, in early July 1937 the Japanese and Chinese armies clashed near the Marco Polo (Lugou) bridge southwest of Beijing. Toward the end of the month the Japanese army started a large scale attack from North China—territory just south of Manchukuo (Manchuria), the country Japan had established just few years earlier. In mid-August, 1937, Japan opened a war front in Shanghai, landing its forces into the city. In that year, the Japanese army rampaged into Nanjing (Nanking), the then Chinese capital, winding up with historically tragic Nanjing massacre.

Even if the two giants are still politically and militarily imprisoned by their memories of tragic history, they may have common interests toward the 21st century to play cooperatively and competitively for the prosperity of every country involved. New Japanese leadership may look to forming "a single economic zone" in closer consultation with its old enemies of both China and South Korea. It is a high time for the East Asian countries (Japan, China and South Korea or a unified Korea) to think of creating a common

¹¹ "Extended deterrence" refers to the idea that the U.S. would retaliate if its allies are attacked.

economic community through which they could tackle both security and economic issues and also seek to change “the law of jungle” where the stronger white-colored players have so far dominated.

The three Asian countries can create the largest single economic zone in the world if they agree to initiate their first step toward integrating into a common currency system. Such formation of a single economic community with a common Asian currency will set up its own barriers to costly war and mutual discord. In this case, South Korea will be included in the cooperative entity while the United States may be set aside. China- Japan –Korea trilateral harmony will also contribute to mitigating “political conflicts” across borders to be associated with the consequences of failing North Korea that implodes or explodes. Once the three countries could come to work together for common prosperity in peace and security, the Korean reunification would come rather easily without interrupting barriers in the blessings of even market economic system when the North implodes or explodes.

Some may yet argue that such single Asian community is yet unlikely in near future, mainly because of mutual antagonism and distrust deeply rooted in the beds of the three peoples’ mindsets. But the experience of old enemies in Europe (as well as the post-war U.S.-Japan relation) has been that friendly competition and cooperation does work good for the prosperity of everyone, and that prosperity and peace give a way to forgiving one another for the gone days. This is today’s important lesson for three Asian nations: China, Japan and South Korea which have rather rival political relations despite of many shared cultural traits. And everything is changing rapidly and dramatically in today’s world order. Recently, we have seen more signs of the shape that international relations in East Asia will take over the coming years. More importantly, Japanese leadership appears to understand the necessity of building a strategic, reciprocal relationship and discussing a number of urgent problems, most notably the ongoing global economic crisis and North Korea’s latest turn to intransigence. And the Sino-Japanese, South Korean-Japanese, and Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean trilateral summits are becoming so routine in their agendas to cooperate one another beyond the past history problem. Economic, environmental, and technology cooperation as well as cultural and educational exchanges are driving their

relationship going forward. This will tell the beginnings of perpetual peace and cooperation among the three East Asian countries, although there is still much work to do. It goes without saying that as Japan and China continue to narrow divide, Koreans could all hope that reunification is likely smoother when a big internal shake-up occurs on the peninsula.

Meanwhile, Japan will seek to develop a pivotal trilateral powwow with China and the United States to make sure of its shared interest and security in any future situation of contingency in Korea.¹² In order to secure all supports for national reunification, Koreans must do their best to enhance a nation-wide drive to post friendly relations with all neighboring nations around.

3. What Unification Formula: Option for Color-less State ?

The future path or direction facing a unified Korea will largely depend on its survival strategy to balance between flanking powers. The conflicting gravity of neighboring powers will influence the politics of the nation as well. For example, if China and Japan compete to build up respective hostile military strength, this would cause a stumbling block to the path of Korean reunification. The Sino-Japanese rivalry would enforce the necessity for a would-be unified Korea to keep a neutral and nonpartisan profile. Otherwise, Korea could freely produce its political stance in the world in accordance with its majority people's prudence. If neighboring countries were truly bystanders leaving the reunification to free choice of both North and South Koreans as they often reveal at least in their words, the reunification would be ideally an internal matter before Koreans. But just as word is one thing and behavior is another, so the reality is far away from idealism in terms of the political dynamics in the region. Indeed, it is really impossible to reliably predict the policy directions of neighboring nations when all pursues their own interest-first-policy in dynamic international environment.

¹² Such an idea of holding a trilateral framework among Japan, the United States and China was first floated by China to former U.S President George W. Bush. But it was shelved due to Washington's concern such forum might trigger a negative reaction from South Korea if the issues on North Korea were included in its principal agenda.

In this section, we will rather look into the feasibility of a “neutral Greater Korea” if the current *status quo* international relations remain unchanged when two Koreas come across a sudden moment for reunification. In other words, when the North implodes or explodes, what unification model (approach) will *ceteris paribus* work most likely effective?.

If we consider the issue from a pure perspective of pragmatic realism, “neutral Korea” is a feasible option which all stake-holding countries would accept, if not reluctantly, given the current international political environments around the Korean peninsula.¹³ Of course, neutrality does not necessarily reflect a majority of Korean wish and dream for their unified nation’s political stance (position) in the world. This “neutrality option” is offered as one of alternatives which could minimize any aggressive opposition from powers in the neighborhood to a critical chance for Korean reunification when the North implodes or explodes.

If a unified Korea sides with China, then the United States and Japan will not accept it unless a drastic improvement in existing military and political rivalry would soon occur among them. Likewise, if a future Korea stands with Japan and the United States, then China (and perhaps Russia as well) will think it hard to tolerate. Of course, if a great politician comparable to the former Soviet Union’s Mikhail S. Gorbachev rises in China to earthquake Chinese political landscape completely, the story may differ. Otherwise, the existing political and ideological wall dividing China and the others would not yet likely digest if a unified Korea were to side with any party or parties. One exceptional (but very weakly possible) case would be that two Koreas’ leaders get together humbly and

¹³ Neutralism means a condition for a state to stand aloof from surrounding powers while accepting the balance of power around the state. This condition can be secured through a legal or binding pact agreed by the powers of stakes on the particular state. Neutrality could be used as a protective political and military umbrella for the state from all concerned powers without fears that the balance of power in the region would be tipped against any of them. The 1968 Princeton study defined a neutralized state as follow: A neutralized state is one whose political independence and territorial integrity are guaranteed “permanently” by a collective agreement of great powers, subject to the conditions that the neutralized state will not take up arms against another state, except to defined itself, and will assume treaty obligations which may compromise its neutralized status..... Neutralization is a special international status designed to restrict the intrusion of specified state actions in a specified area. The status of neutralization is often referred to as “permanent neutrality to signify that it is valid in times of peace as well as war. (see Cyril E. Black, Richard A. Folk, Klaus Knorr, and Oran R. Young, *Neutralization and World Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1968, chapter xi.)

patriotically and dramatically agree to break down the wall between two Koreas and to unify the nation in a chosen political and ideological way. Perhaps in such special case, reunification is literally a matter of Koreans which no other nation can object. Such radical occasion may ask for initially nation wide martial law declaration until “new social order” for unified Korea is firmly established.

As long as two Koreas run parallel one another as today, however, such precocious presumption is not realistic ever. And as already discussed earlier, gradual unification scheme is also in fact nothing but a vision of protracted consensual permanent division of the nation under the pretext of “two states in one nation”, if not each vying to eventually absorb the other.

Some of insights into the reason for favoring to cement the division is provided by a look at the ideological and socioeconomic differences and gaps that would need astronomical costs to integrate into one. For a mere lapse of gradual time would not likely narrow these pecuniary and non-pecuniary cleavages between the two Koreas. Longer than two-decade’s engagement policy has proved sterile. Nor is national unification feasible by forces. So, to repeat again, the sure and short cut way for the Korean reunification must be sought rather first in pushing the North into a blind corner so that critical breakdown occurs soon in Pyongyang. And then South Korea must try to win full backings for smooth integration process from its neighboring nations when a big bang bursts out in North Korea. If any country (and anyone as well) insists that choking its economic lifeline to incumbent North Korea won’t help solve both the Korean strife and the North’s nuclear firework, its real intention as contrary to its rhetoric targets perhaps to maintain the Korean Peninsula divided longer, if not forever.

To induce neighboring powers not to oppose to Korea’s national integration, it must be addressed in a roundabout way through prior diplomacy that a unified Korea will keep its ‘neutrality stance’ in international conflicts.¹⁴ Of course, a multilateral arrangement must

¹⁴ ‘Neutral Korea’ is not official position of South Korean government, nor is it yet fully supported by majority of South Korean residents. It is just one of pilot options that would meet less determent from all walks of stake nations.

be subsequently negotiated to guarantee the neutrality among the nations when such a deal actually develops.

The idea of “neutral Korea” floats, first of all, in a hope not to trigger a negative reaction from neighboring powers to upcoming chance for Korean reunification.¹⁵ The proposal does not rule out, of course, that a unified Korea may take a form of ‘democracy as its political ideology’ as well as ‘a system of free market capitalism’. It implies that the united nation will not side with any particular party when conflicting view is a focus among concerned nations. Needless to say, a neutral stance as a sovereign nation must involve many disadvantages (as well as advantages) when the issues on hand are such prices that require in many fronts to sustain its independence and security. But if neutrality is the most resilient way for two Koreas to get united under complaisant concession among neighboring stakes, Koreans must positively look to grab such rare pragmatic opportunity.

Korean reunification will be achievable if firstly, incumbent North Korea and South Korea come to dramatically hold hands and hands together only with nationalistic unity getting rid of everything else related with ideological, political, partisan interests and division. But the reality does not show any possibility that this kind of candid rapprochement between the North’s communists and the South’s capitalists can be induced by any efforts for mutual cooperation and exchange as evidenced in the past two decade experiments. Strong wall planted in the mindsets of two Korean leaderships as well as majority of divided people is almost hard psychologically and politically to rip off through such humanly means and efforts as “serious talks”. As long as each half is still searching for a strategy of victory over the other, any seemingly mutual approach for talks to increase exchange and cooperation is fated to fail whenever a conflict of interest comes across one another. This says that the probability of Korea’s reunification by way of such seemingly nationalistic appeal is almost nil at least under the contemporary situation. A possibility

¹⁵ It is not sure yet if every country which has stake on the Korean Peninsula is willing to accommodate a unified Korea in form of neutrality, when a big bang occurs to bring down the North’s regime. We simply assume this system will face the least resistance to a reunification chance, assuming a bang to occur soon.

for Korea's reunification is only seen when either the North or the South falls down abruptly due to implosion or explosion and if the remnant side could take over.

The chance of internal implosion is, however, split in the ratios 70 to 30 between the North and the South. In other words, the odds of collapse in the North are assumed higher than in the South. For internal political instability coupled with people's wide spread discontents against their leadership (which is incapable of feeding its people) is growing faster in the North than in the South. The recent situation in the South is also increasingly vulnerable with passing of generations. For many social and ideological dissidents and their off-springs are increasingly outpouring their leftist (so-called progressive) sentiments which are matched by both anti-conservatism and anti-Americanism. But a probability of cataclysmic implosion is likely much higher in a country where people are being fed poorly under dictatorial monarchy than in a country where basic needs are met with increasing wealth despite of widening social and class friction.

Regardless of whichever side falls down first, the dramatic reunification will not be so easily achievable unless the four external powers involved (China, Japan, the United States, and Russia), all of which have a security interests in the divided peninsula, can agree on a framework for unifying Korea without threatening their own security and economic interests. Expressing differently, the neighbors would accept Korea's reunification if and only if its end-product, a reunified Korea, does not serve to disturb the balance of powers in the region. Otherwise, the vulnerable power will oppose reunification. That is why neutralization statecraft is suggested as a workable reunification formula, which must include procedures and outcomes fair to all parties involved. Indeed, neutrality proposal can be only alternative to win unisonant supports from four powers when a big cataclysmic bang occurs in the North. For under such a plan four powers could disengage themselves from the peninsula without fear that the balance of power in the region would be tipped against any of them. Thus, a neutralized Korea would attribute to neutralize their own conflicts and instead to enhance good economic relations beneficial among them in the region.

Lastly, it must make “three important points” among others distinctive here in relation with our proposal for neutralized Korean reunification. One point is that the big-bang reunification following a would-be implosion or explosion in the North is ‘endogenous’, which, though, demands Korean people to be alert and to prepare for. On the contrary, gradual unification approach (such as *sunshine policy*) based on mutual exchange and cooperation is largely a government gimmick apparently designed to prevent any implosion or explosion in the North while making the cocky South Koreans overflow with illusion of disguised peace. Given this latter case, however, the North’s side will never abandon its consistent position from which to achieve reunification on its own terms and the danger is always there for the North to resort to force, should favorable opportunity arise. Nor will the North agree with the South on the idea of giving up its communist monarch system in favor of open economic and democratic system.

Viewed in this light, the famine-stricken North is neither likely rebooted for economic revival nor prompted for political reform regardless of economic aids provided by the South or others. Nor will the South’s economic provision reduce the North’s brinkmanship tactics in order to move toward unity unless it is on its own terms. It is against this background that Korea’s reunification would be only possible when the North’s regime falls apart to stop holding on any longer.

Thus, the reunification demands, first of all, speeding up an erosion of the North’s power structure through international sanctions and economic hardships followed by big bang implosion. The collapse may involve with mounting cost of reunification, but the cost will not be beyond the economic resource potentials of the united Korea, nor will it exceed the benefit of reunification when viewed from the psychological boosting effects of one nation.

When a time comes to make the North implode or explode, Koreans must work to earn the support of the external powers that have security stakes in the peninsula. Though Koreans are primary responsible for securing reunification, they need to buy the support of the surrounding powers. The most possible bid price would be for the absorbing party of two Koreas to offer the four powers to come up with certain preconditions favorable to both

Korea's reunification and their security such as neutralization of the peninsula. The idea of a neutralized Korea would be bought by them only if a unified Korea would not constitute any cause of destabilizing the balance of power in the region, which requires a four-power agreement to respect the neutrality of the unified peninsula.

The second point is that our formula for Korea neutralization is not intended for "permanent neutrality" in such cases as adopted for Swiss in 1815 and for Austria in 1955. These two countries have been successful in preserving their unity and independence respectively, but in reality their permanent neutrality is no longer any binding concern of surrounding powers which are all in the same boat of European Community sharing common peace and security arrangement.

Neutrality could be used as a protective political and military umbrella for a unified Korea as well as securing agreements among four powers to support the reunification without tipping off the balance of power in the region. With the changing of generations with increasing mutual interactions over time, the international political environments and relations would be much improved and different from now in next three to five decades. Assuming such a scenario for changing world to come, the deal for Korean neutrality may not necessarily be "permanent"; rather it must be sufficient with conditional (temporal) neutral state for at most 50 years from the time of reunification. No body can predict how the world will evolve regionally and globally, of course, but the future international environment will surely become better and more peaceful with mutual cooperative endeavors and human common knowledge. At that time every country will be a cooperative trade partner one another sharing and exchanging what one has with others. Sound like a utopian world, but all nations do need to work toward such a dreamy world in their minds.

More importantly, it is time now for both China (with or without Russia) and the United States (with or without Japan), whether or not acting in their respective self-interest, to seriously begin a search for cooperative policy conducive to Korean reunification (as well as to their mutual benefits) in such a way that military confrontations could be avoided on the peninsula when an abrupt shake-up erupts soon in North Korea. Through such new collaboration, the two sides could promote their mutual cooperative benefits in political,

military, diplomatic, and economic and cultural fields, not to say of contributing to upgrade world peace and security.

The last point is related to the disposal problem for the stock of weapons filed up in two Koreas when they are united into a neutral state whose security will be supported by the power balances in the region. Most redundant arms and weapons must be destroyed, while sample collections may be placed on exhibition in a newly to-be-built military museum possibly located at somewhere in the current demilitarized zone area. The Demilitarized Zone can also serve as a wonderful ethological and ecological museum of nature which would attract many tourists after the reunification. Needless to say, many secretive hideout palaces used by the North's leadership could also provide tourists with points of interests in addition to existing natural and historical assets in the North after the reunification. Income (or saving) expected from restructuring two governments and military forces into one could cover a considerable portion of reunification costs, not to say of the tourism revenues.

3. Concluding Remarks

Amidst of reports that a total of about 6,959.5 million US dollar worth of cash and material aids were officially provided to the North by the South during 1998-2007, Pyongyang has been repeating its nuclear tests and missile launches.¹⁶ Despite of the North's buoyant military shore-ups, the current overall situation in the North is reportedly sliding down to drive many people to turn back from the leadership, if not in mass exodus. But none of this is new, and the dictatorial leadership in Pyongyang appears, nonetheless, to use its nuclear and missile tensions to prepare for its power transfer. Whether the transition of power from ailing Kim Jong-il to one of his known three sons will be successfully afloat is indeed a big question yet to be seen.

The events now occurring in Pyongyang do, however, foretell that the end of the regime is approaching. Whatever skillful tactics is adopted to retain its grip in the North, an eternal

¹⁶ Out of this, Kim Dae-jung administration supplied \$ 2,488.4 million and Roh Moo-hyun's administration provided \$ 4,471.1 million to North Korea.

truth says that “the sovereign power is not in the hands of men, but the decision is in the judgment of God”.

Time is appearing near for the North Korean system to implode. Under this possible situation, the reunification of Korea will likely have a great chance. As a reunified Korea will, however, have a great impact in the region, it cannot be easy if neighboring country or countries would fear that the unified Korea might come closer to any in such as tipping against any other of neighbor powers.

Against this background, a workable reunification formula is proposed here for “temporal neutrality” of the Korean peninsula till a peaceful international environment is firmly established in time. The word “temporal” is used here to differentiate it from “permanent neutrality” like Swiss and Austria. Though “temporal neutrality” is meant as time conditional status (say, for 50 years at most), it also signifies that it must be valid whether in times of peace or war, of course.

This kind of neutralization will contribute to stabilizing an international situation in a region from becoming disturbed by means of coercion. By allowing the emergence of a unified Korea in such a way that neither side could gain at the expense of the other, those competing powers can look forward to seeking more harmonious and mutually constructive cooperation in the region in place of heretofore expensive military hostilities one another.

As such, neutralization is likely to offer the common ground where it would make not only the Korea’s reunification achievable but also mutually beneficial to all concerned powers. Importantly, this idea of a neutralized Korea would yet be possible only if neighboring countries ultimately come to agree to endorse Korean reunification as their unselfish and ultimate goal. Otherwise, the idea would turn out to be just a fire burning on the head-top of most wishful Koreans inclusive of this author. Therefore, a concluding message is that Koreans must wake up to watch how the U.S., Japan, and China will drive their trilateral joint fronts on the future of Korea as well as how they would jointly or separately react when a big bang occurs in North Korea. And Koreans must endeavor to buy all possible favors to support reunification from all neighbors by offering a neutrality of a unified Korea.