

## Keynote Address

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# Division Management and Unification: Korea vs. Germany

## Han Sung-Joo

### 1. Preface

After 25 years, the German unification still evokes admiration and envy among the Koreans. Before Germany was unified, the relationships between East and West Germany and those between North and South Korea had shared both similarities and differences. Both countries were divided by the occupation of separate Allied powers in the wake of World War II. Both countries turned into fields of East–West confrontation while being incorporated into the postwar alliance systems. Nevertheless, neither country abandoned their hope for unification for several decades after the division. In neither case did the surrounding powers seem eager to have them unified. Germany’s neighboring countries feared that it might be reborn as a strong unified nation, whereas the countries around the Korean Peninsula were concerned about the possibly unstable aftermath of unification, and the possibility for a unified Korea to fall into some other nation’s sphere of influence.

At the same time, there have been several differences between the German and Korean divisions. Five such differences stand out. For one thing with the national division, while the Koreans were inflicted with what might be called “victim’s complex,” the Germans on the other part had what might be called a “guilt complex.” Koreans had the sense that they had done nothing wrong to deserve the tragedy of division but were simply the victim

of power politics and backdoor understanding between the powers, especially the United States and the Soviet Union. In contrast, the Germans recognized and accepted the fact that their national division was the result of what pre-World War II Germany had done; the invasion of neighboring countries, the persecution of some ethnic groups, particularly the Jews, and the precipitation of World War II.

Secondly, during the period of national division, while the DDR, East Germany, was under effective control and protection by the Soviet Union, it posed no serious military threat on West Germany itself. In contrast, North Korea was a constant security threat to South Korea, with which an all-out military invasion of the South had resulted in the Korean War, a smaller scale of military provocations, including commando attacks, military build-up, development of nuclear weapons and missiles of various kinds, and subversive activities.

Third, while the devoted and activist movements for unification came mainly from younger generations and from the politically leftist sectors in Korea, the relatively subdued and passive calls and desire for reunification tended to derive from the older generations and more from the conservative spectrum.

Fourth, whereas West Germany was an important member and active participant of multilateral regional and security organizations such as the European Community and NATO, South Korea’s main security link to the outside world was a bilateral alliance with the United States and it enjoyed no membership in region-

al organizations or communities. So when unification came to Germany, the East Germans were prepared to join not only their Western brethren, but also the European Community and NATO, thereby diluting the sense that East Germany was being taken over by West Germany.

Finally, after 45 years of the German division and 70 years of Korean division since 1945, there is a big difference in the nature of the relationship between East Germany and North Korea on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and China on the other hand, their respective benefactors and guardians. In 1990, the Soviet Union was a declining and disintegrating empire in need of economic help from the outside after overspending in arms build-up and competition with the West. The Soviet Union was also in the process of internal transition from autocracy and dictatorship to perestroika and glasnost. In 2015, China is a rising economic power still under an effective one party rule, challenging the domination of the United States and territorial status quo in East Asia, even though it has a strong interdependent relationship with the West, and has its own share of risks from rapid economic growth and self-aggrandizement. Nonetheless, East Germany was still under firm control of the Soviet Union and North Korea has been struggling for self-reliance and determination.

## **2. Status of North-South Korean relations**

Roughly speaking, since the end of the Korean War in 1953, inter-Korea relations have gone through seven different phases with various degrees of hostilities and engagements. The post-Armistice period of 1953-1960 can be characterized as one of internal recuperation from the war in both Koreas and estrangement between the two sides. It was a period of a military impasse with each armed forces aligned with the major supporting powers, namely the United States on the part of South Korea and the Soviet Union and China on the part of North Korea. It was also a period of diplomatic competition whereby in a starkly bipolarized world, both Koreas established and nurtured diplomatic ties with the countries belonging to one of the two main blocs (Western and Soviet bloc) at the exclusion of the other. The so-called nonaligned bloc provided a field of completion for both recognition and votes

at the United Nations on resolutions favoring one or the other of the two Koreas.

The second phase (1960-72) is one in which South Korea witnessed the emergence of a military government, and North Korea became increasingly belligerent toward South Korea with occasional military (although on a small-scale) provocations both to South Korea and its ally, the United States. A selected list of such provocations would include the 1968 raid attempt of the Presidential mansion by a North Korean armed commando group, the 1968 capture of the USS Pueblo, and the 1969 downing of an EC-121 reconnaissance plane. These provocative acts were committed at a time where the attention and energy of both South Korea and the United States were diverted to the war in Vietnam.

The third phase (1972-1984) could be characterized as a co-existence phase, where a series of dialogues got started as the two governments tried to use inter-Korea dialogue for the consolidation of power in their respective home fronts. The first dialogue of the series occurred as the Red Cross societies of the North and the South met from 1972 through 1973 and discussed possibilities for reunion of families separated by the war. The inter-Korea "Joint Declaration of July 4th, 1972" pledged first to resolve Korean issues by Koreans without the outside intervention of other powers, second to resolve disputes by peaceful means without resorting to military means, and third, work toward a grand unity of all the Korean people. Afterward, both sides set up the North-South Coordinating Committee to discuss reconciliation and unification. However, the dialogue was suspended in 1973 as the North refused to deal with the South.

The dialogue sputtered during the fourth phase (1984-1992), in large part because of the North Korean attempted assassination of the visiting South Korean president when the North Korean regime planted and exploded a bomb at the Aungmye Mausoleum in Rangoon, Burma in 1983. The North-South dialogue in the mid eighties began as Seoul accepted Pyongyang's proposal to provide relief goods for flood sufferings in the South. As a result of Red Cross talks, art performance troupes and some fifty families met with relatives living in the other part of the peninsula. The dialogue in the mid-eighties was the one that could not surpass a certain level because of

limitations pertaining to North Korea and distrust between the North and the South. The dialogue started mainly out of extra-dialogue motivations of the North, such as recovering international image that had been tarnished by the Rangoon bombing, enhancing the image of Kim Jong Il as successor to Kim Il Sung. Furthermore, faced with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the unification of Germany, North Korea felt obliged to reckon with South Korea which was broadening its diplomatic horizon starting with the hosting of the 1988 summer Olympics, and thus engage with South Korea in a serious bilateral dialogue. It resulted in such landmark agreements as Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation (1991), and Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula Agreement (1992).

But the apparent lunge toward reconciliation was superseded by another, at the fifth phase of estrangement (1993-1998) as the North Korean nuclear weapons program became a focal issue of contention. Additionally, the passing of the “great leader” Kim Il-Song in 1994 made it impossible for North Korea engage the South in any positive and active way. In the absence of the deceased father, his son and the designated successor, Kim Jong-Il needed time to consolidate his position at home and re-figure his policy and strategy toward the South.

The sixth phase (1999-2008), the phase of “Sunshine Policy,” was ushered in when Kim Dae-Jung, a long-time advocate of engaging the North became president in 1999. After the end of his five-years’ term, another “Sunshiner” President Roh Mu-Hyun succeeded Kim for the following five-year term until 2008. The ostensible purpose of Kim Dae-Jung’s Sunshine Policy toward the North was three-fold: One, to achieve peace by promoting cooperation, understanding and confidence. Two, to help North Korean people improve their economic conditions so that they can overcome hunger and dire poverty. Three, to induce North Korea to open itself to the outside world and enable the society to change so that ultimately both political and social conditions could improve. Improved relations between North and South Korea culminated in an inter-Korea summit meeting when President Kim Dae-Jung visited Pyongyang in June, 2000, and met his counterpart Kim Jong-Il. The result was large scale economic assistance to North Korea and an increased exchange of people,

goods and services between North and South Korea.

Despite the ten-year period of “Sunshine” relationship between North and South Korea, the North Korean military posture vis-à-vis South Korea did not become less aggressive or threatening. In fact, with the collapse of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework in 2002, North Korea openly stepped up its nuclear and missile programs with the effect of making the security situation in Korea more dangerous and threatening. In South Korea, criticism of the “Sunshine Policy” which presumably helped finance North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs mounted. Thus, when the conservative government of Lee Myong-Bak took office in 2009, the Sunshine policy was replaced by a more balanced policy which was less unconditional, one-sided and indulgent toward North Korea.

The seventh, and the current phase (2009- ) of North-South Korean relationship can be characterized by continuing advancement on several issues, such as: North Korean nuclear weapons program, a deteriorating economic condition of the North, the start of a third generational dynastic succession process, discontinuation of dialogue and the consequent decrease in exchange, trade and economic assistance between North and South Korea, and the perpetration of provocative acts on the South by North Korea. The phase is also witnessing China seeming to take a more “protective” attitude toward North Korea lest it should collapse on its own weight of poverty and intransigence, and the strengthening of U.S. commitment to security relationship with its allies, South Korea and Japan.

### **3. Possibility for duplication?**

Despite these differences between the divided Germany and Korea, however, South Koreans were hopeful after German unification that they could duplicate the German path to unification. Moreover, German unification provided North Korea with both incentives and perhaps means to prevent a similar process from taking place on Korean Peninsula.

In fact, at the time of German unification, North Korea had plenty to worry about: The Soviet empire was disintegrating; Both China and the Soviet Union officially

recognized the Republic of Korea and established diplomatic relations with it, while the United States and Japan did not reciprocate for North Korea; the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on a detente; China and the United States agreed on a rapprochement; and North Korea opposed the application of the German formula to Korea.

In that sense, German unification brought about retrogression rather than progress in the short term in the North-South Korean relationship, by stiffening the North Korean attitude. This is a very tragic irony for a divided country. That is to say, the stronger the aspiration of one side for unification is and the louder the clamor for unification is, the lesser becomes practical opportunities or possibilities to achieve it as the other side takes the aspiration for a desire to take over and therefore is threatening. While both North and South Korea clamor for unification, neither side would think of turning over power, or sharing it with the other side, in the name of unification. Under such circumstances, unification by either side would mean to absorb or subjugate, if not conquer, the other. Whereas North Korea's reference to unification meant to South Koreans a North Korean takeover of the South, the South Korean reference to unification sounded to the North to signify absorption of North Korea by the South, thus evoking the fear and resistance from Pyongyang.

What evokes North Korea's concern was not only German unification. As a result of transformations in socialist states since 1989 and the promotion of Nordpolitik by South Korea, most of them established diplomatic relations with Seoul. Pyongyang of course showed negative responses to the establishment of diplomatic ties by its allies with Seoul and recalled most of its international students from Eastern Europe and the USSR. North Korea, one of the most closed, if not the most closed, regimes in the world could not but be influenced by the transformation of socialism. As a means to prevent a regime change, North Korea chose to develop WMDs including nuclear weapons and missiles and to further insulate itself from outside influence.

Only during the 10-year period from 1998–2008 of South Korea's Sunshine Policy, North Korea chose to engage South Korea as the latter was eager to provide the former with extensive economic assistance. However, with the election of Lee Myungbak as President, and with the

return to power of the Grand National Party in 2008, South Korea's experiment with the Sunshine Policy had come to an end, and a policy of pragmatism and balance, which emphasized reciprocity, conditionality, and measured engagement with the North became an official policy of the South Korean government.

North Korea on its part was dissatisfied with the less generous and less indulgent South Korean government attitude following the more generous Sunshine Policy years. Since then, North Korea conducted three nuclear weapons tests and pursued what it named the byongjin policy, described as a parallel policy to become a nuclear weapons' state while simultaneously reviving its economy.

In the meantime, the Park Geun-hye government that succeeded Lee Myung-bak's government, pretty much continued the preceding government's "measured engagement policy" but with greater emphasis on cooperation with North Korea and search for "unification," which would supposedly bring a "bonanza" to Korea and its neighbors. The problem has been that the Park government had to overcome two hurdles to get positive results from its policy for promoting unification. One is the need to overcome North Korea's suspicion that Park's unification overtures are nothing less than a call for "unification by absorption," that is, by the German formula. The other is that it had to find a formula by which North Korea would suspend and then abandon its nuclear weapons program and refrain from conventional provocations.

#### **4. Persuading major powers**

Another important task for the Korean government is to persuade the four major powers, i.e., China, the United States, Russia and Japan, that have strong interests in how the situation on the Korean Peninsula develops, that Korean unification, when and if it comes, will actually be in accord with their respective interests rather than being against them. So, how will Korean unification affect their interests? One can think of both positive and negative perspectives of the major powers on Korean unification.

Let's first talk about the interest of the United States. There are some positive reasons why the United States will think Korean unification to be in its own interest as well.

Positive Reasons:

1. War in or over Korea less likely
2. North Korean threat (WMDs, missiles, etc.) and provocations removed
3. Emergence of a unified Korea as a powerful ally
4. Korea's increased dependence on the United States in the short term--need for economic and security support from the U.S.
5. Expansion of democracy, market economy

But there are some possible reasons why the U.S. could think Korean unification to be against its interest.

Negative reasons:

1. Weakening of rationale, necessity for the U.S.-Korea alliance
2. Korea' possible move closer into Chinese sphere of influence
3. Decrease in U.S. influence over Korea
4. Further deterioration of relations between Korea and Japan

Next, let's have a look at some opposing reasons Japan may have for Korean unification.

Positive reasons:

1. North Korean threat (nuclear weapons, missiles, etc.) removed
2. Expansion of "free world" (democracy, market economy)
3. Korean preoccupation on internal matters during unification process
4. Increased need for Japanese support and help

Negative reasons:

1. Emergence of a powerful neighbor
2. Removal of Japan's rationale for militarization (against North Korean threat)
3. Loss of opportunity for "divide and rule" between North and South Korea
4. Possibility for a unified Korea to move closer to China

Russia may also have contending reasons for welcoming or being reluctant for Korean unification.

Positive Reasons:

1. Increase in economic opportunities (gas, railroads, transportation, trade, investment, etc.)
2. Weakening of the U.S. alliance system
3. Assumption of a key role in the unification process

Negative Reasons:

1. Loss of opportunity to "fish in troubled waters" (between North and South Korea)
- Possibility for increased Chinese influence over Korea

## **5. China's interests and reasons for its stance**

Then finally, is Korean unification for or against Chinese interests?

Positive Reasons:

1. Reduced burden of North Korea
2. Absence of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles threat
3. Expanded economic relations and opportunities with a unified Korea
4. Removal of a rationale for U.S.-Korea alliance and U.S.-Japan-Korea coalition

Negative Reasons:

1. Loss of a buffer zone
2. Economic loss in the three Northeastern provinces
3. Possible influx of North Korean refugees
4. Possibility of continued presence of U.S. bases and troops in southern part of a unified Korea
5. Appearance of a competitor (unified Korea)

A key factor in Korean unification would be what China thinks would portend for its own interest. What kind of calculus is China making in actuality about unification of the Korean Peninsula, and what role is it expected to play? Although we often speak of "China's thinking," no unified consensus seems to exist among the experts in China's North Korea policy directly concerning unification. Their views seem to diverge into several ramifications:

First is that China has to render unconditional assis-

tance to its blood ally North Korea and safeguard its security. China wants to demonstrate its clout to other developing nations and keep Pyongyang within its sphere of influence by protecting the DPRK. Second is to maintain the present policy of shielding North Korea on the one hand and of recommending cooperative relations with Japan, South Korea, and the United States on the other. The PRC wants to make the Pyongyang regime undertake reforms and refrain from provocations with a view toward preventing military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula. Third is to exercise stronger pressure on North Korea, partake in international sanctions, and abandon the de-fense of Pyongyang if necessary.

Among these three alternatives, that is to say, (1) to assist North Korea unconditionally to preserve the regime and system, (2) to induce opening and change while helping it, and (3) to pressure and abandon it if necessary, the PRC government's current North Korea policy may be seen as the second, i.e. to encourage reforms, opening, and restraint from provocations while supporting the preservation of the DPRK and its regime survival.

China's North Korea policy, however, is detected to have begun moving, though little by little, toward the third alternative, a policy of mounting pressure on North Korea. This is deemed to have a close relationship with China's calculation of interests in Korean unification.

China thinks it would get the following short-term benefits should the Korean Peninsula be unified under the South Korean auspices:

First, if the peninsula is unified, China will be relieved from the burden of economic aid and military assistance for North Korea that has so far been greatly onerous.

Second, being relieved from hostilities and confrontations on the peninsula between North and South Korea, the PRC will become free from danger of military clashes and war it considers to be against its own interest. Such a perception is not unrelated to the fact that the DPRK has lately stepped up the development of nuclear weapons and missiles thereby increasing threats to China from possibilities for nuclear arms attacks and nuclear accidents in North Korea.

Third, when unification under South Korea's initiative is premised, China will not only further expand and vitalize its economic relations that are already vibrant

with the South but seize opportunities to secure its economic interests in the North Korean region in a stable manner.

In the longer term, Beijing may hope for the following benefits from Korean unification:

First, unification will contribute to the peace and stability not solely on the Korean Peninsula but also in Northeast Asia at large.

Second, an economic sphere and market of South and North Korea combined under a unified government will not merely offer greater economic opportunities for China but also contribute to regional integration as well.

Third, a unified Korea will obviate the justification (appropriateness) and necessity for external powers' (U.S.) military engagement and presence regardless of developments in Sino-American relations. At the same time, the rationale for a U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral alliance to contain and encircle China will be weakened.

Despite such positive short and long-term implications, China also expresses apprehensions over negative consequences and impacts from unification of the Korean Peninsula.

In the short term, China's concerns are as follows:

First, should the peninsula destabilize in the vortex of unification, innumerable refugees will flow from North Korea into China. While crossing the Yalu River and entering the border zones of China's two Northeast (Jilin and Heilungkiang) provinces, North Korean refugees will flow along the sea lanes to land on the Liaoning, Tianjin, Shandong coasts. The massive influx of refugees will not only impose a tremendous financial burden on China but constitute threats to regional security. The refugee problem will also be a thorny issue in relations with a unified Korea.

Second, unification of the Korean Peninsula will cause a direct negative impact on economic relations between China and North Korea. It will particularly give rise to enormous troubles for economic relations with China's three Northeast Provinces which account for 70 percent of China-North Korea trade.

Third, the livelihoods and properties of the Chinese, e.g. businesses, restaurants, shops, apartments, infrastructure such as roads and ports, and joint venture enterprises could suffer a loss from social unrest and disorder in the unification process.

In the medium to long-term, China has the following concerns over the consequences of unification:

First, China will lose the presence of North Korea which has served as a “buffer” to the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia.

Second, China’s economic foothold in North Korea may shrink and weaken as South Korea will replace it. Although China–North Korea trade (approximately \$6.5 billion in 2013) may not be termed as a big share of China’s annual external trade since it corresponds to an extremely miniscule portion (0.155% or 1/600) out of its total trade volume (\$4.2 trillion), Korean unification would deal a sizeable blow to Liaoning and Jilin Provinces, in which Dandong and Yanji would suffer most severely.

Third, there are uncertainties contained in such issues as alliance relationships (the ROK–U.S. alliance) and foreign troops’ presence in a unified Korea.

As seen above, I have compared and enumerated China’s positive as well as negative points of view on unification of the Korean Peninsula. Let me now further elaborate on the issues I mentioned last regarding Chinese views on the ROK–U.S. alliance and the U.S. forces stationed in Korea.

Originally, until the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, China had maintained a positive, or at least tolerant, position, considering not only the ROK–U.S. alliance but also the U.S.–Japan alliance as “necessary evils.” The reason was that the U.S.–Japan alliance not only had the effect of restraining Japan’s rearmament (and nuclear armament) but played a role as well in checking the military power of the Soviet Union, China’s rival. In particular, the fact that the ROK–U.S. alliance plays a role in deterring North Korea’s provocations on the Korean Peninsula constituted a reason for China to admit its usefulness.

As the Cold War ended and the Soviet threat largely died down, Beijing began to disparage the U.S. alliance system in Northeast Asia as a Cold War legacy while judging that the ROK–U.S. and U.S.–Japan alliances targeted China. China also has remained vigilant against the possibility for such current bilateral arrangements as ROK–U.S. and U.S.–Japan alliances, which serve the United States as their hub, to develop into a NATO-type multi-lateral alliance. We, therefore, can see that China has wariness over the prospect for a unified Korea to join such a multi-

lateral alliance system.

Showing sensitive responses as well to the U.S. provision of extended deterrence (“nuclear umbrella”) to Japan or South Korea, China retains an opposing position to it. China obviously thinks that the United States, by providing its nuclear deterrent to Japan and Korea, offsets or cuts in half China’s own nuclear deterrent.

From an objective perspective, however, neither the U.S. extended deterrence nor the ROK–U.S. alliance is always disadvantageous to China. I think this is true both at present and even after Korean unification. The nuclear deterrence and the ROK–U.S. alliance, along with the U.S.–Japan alliance, will have the effect of continuing to bind Japan as a nonnuclear state. There is no doubt that they will obviate the need for arms expansion by evoking a reunified Korea’s confidence in its security, and even arms reduction can further be expected as well. Furthermore, they will also enable the United States to play a peacemaker’s part in maintaining peace between its allies of Korea and Japan even after unification, to say nothing of the present. At the same time, Korea will be able to assume a useful role as a constructive mediator for cooperation between the United States and China by maintaining close relationships with both great powers.

As far as the U.S. forces in Korea are concerned, China may expect that the justification or necessity could either diminish or disappear for the U.S. troops to stay on the Korean Peninsula after unification. Concurrently, China would demand that the U.S. forces should never advance north of the present military demarcation line, even if the ROK–U.S. alliance is maintained and U.S. troops continue to be stationed after unification. This may be acceptable to the ROK and the United States, although it is foreseen in the U.S. position that a certain level of direct U.S. military role is indispensable in the process of dismantling North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction, especially its nuclear arsenal and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

When considering the long and short-term interests, as well as positive and negative reasons, for China to be in favor of or against Korean unification, it may be worthwhile to keep in mind China’s “Red Lines:”

First, South Korea and the United States must agree that the U.S. troops would not advance north of the Demi-

litarized Zone.

Second, the United States must not install a new military base north of the DMZ.

Third, as the ROK Army's activities in North Korea do not belong to the category of war, they are beyond the scope of the United States' wartime operational control, even before the OPCON is transferred. Such activities, therefore, must be regarded as the ROK Army's unilateral operation in the North. The ROK Army must avoid areas bordering China and retreat after disarming the North Korean army.

Fourth, South Korea and the United States must share with China the information including the "exclusive" information on North Korea.

Fifth, when securing North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biochemical arms and their delivery systems), the ROK-U.S. allies must allow international organizations such as the United Nations and IAEA to take charge of the procedures.

Sixth, a unified Korea must pledge to be a non-nuclear weapon state.

## 6. Conclusion

All the above interests of the major powers in Korean unification having been mentioned, it can be said just like the case of German unification that possibilities for unification of the Korean Peninsula would increase as the United States could actively support Korean unification, Japan's unfavorable reactions could be assuaged, and China could accept Korean unification as palatable.

It would prove nearly impossible to convince China or Japan without active cooperation and support from the United States. In promoting unification, it is essential for South Korea to consult and coordinate quietly but proactively with its four major neighboring powers.

German unification was not initially welcomed by some of its neighbors including France and Great Britain as they regarded it to be against their interest. They were ultimately persuaded, mainly by the United States, to change their stance. It turned out that German unification ultimately was in the interest not only of the larger European Community and the individual countries in it but

also of East European countries including the Soviet Union, later Russia. Unified Germany is the main source of energy and leadership in European integration, providing economic resources and serving as a bridge between the integrated Europe and the rest, including Russia.

In the case of Korea, regardless of why each country considers Korean unification to be for or against its own interest, there are several selling points for a unified Korea. For one, it will be a sure way to solve the problem of nuclear weapons proliferation on the Korean Peninsula and in Asia at large.

Secondly, a unified Korea will surely contribute to peace and stability of the region by removing a critical source of tension and conflict.

Third, a unified Korea would become an economic powerhouse that would contribute to expanding economic scale, vitality, and activities in the region. It can also accelerate regional integration, peace, and prosperity by becoming a major basis and source of political and economic cooperation.

That is why all the interested parties, not only Koreans, should support and be in favor of Korea unification. ■