

Korea's New Leaders and Prospects for Reconciliation

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Abstract: The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) since 1972 have attempted reconciliation but without durable success. The DPRK's building of a nuclear arsenal erased progress achieved between 1989-1992, and 1998-2008. Assessed here is whether Korea's new leaders since 2012 might be able to resume progress toward reconciliation.

Key Words: Korean Unification, Korean reconciliation, ROK, South Korea, DPRK, North Korea, Korean nuclear issue, engagement, containment, Park Geun Hye, Kim Jong Un.

Introduction:

South-North Korean rivalry since their conception as separate nations in 1948 has motivated their globally recognized accomplishments. They recovered from Japanese colonization (1910-1945) and rebuilt after DPRK leader Kim Il Sung's failed attempt at forceful unification during the Korean War (1950-53). The ROK separately has won the world's respect with rapid industrialization, participation in the world market and international organizations, and democratization. The DPRK has moved in a different direction. Despite strident economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Pyongyang has built a formidable military backed by a technologically advanced military-industrial complex that has developed a nuclear weapons capability. Yet neither Korea has successfully addressed national division. Until at least durable reconciliation is accomplished, both Koreas' accomplishments could evaporate in a second Korean War.

New Leaders, New Hope

New leadership in both Koreas since 2012 brings new hope that reconciliation might resume. DPRK Supreme Commander Kim Jong Un inherited his father Kim Jong Il's authority in December 2011. His southern counterpart ROK President Park Geun-hye, daughter of former ROK president and dictator Park Chung-hee, won election in December 2012 on a platform that included resumption of South-North Korea reconciliation. Kim claimed a similar goal but seemed during his first two years in power preoccupied with consolidating his position and broadcasting to the world confidence in his military's might.

Prospects for jointly pursuing reconciliation seemed bleak, particularly after Pyongyang engaged in a period of "March Madness" in the late spring-early summer of 2013. Immediately after Park's inauguration on February 25, 2013 the DPRK initiated an escalating spiral of insults

aimed at Park and provocative threats aimed at the ROK.¹ The UN Security Council's (UNSC) imposition of sanctions on the DPRK in February 2013 because of its January launching of a satellite and third nuclear test prompted the outbursts. Park's nominations for key posts in her new administration were also verbally assaulted.² By March's end the Korean Peninsula was on the edge of war. Pyongyang's purpose remains unclear. Its leaders, particularly the generals, may have sought to test Park's commitment to reconciliation as had been done soon after ROK President Kim Dae-jung assumed office in 1999. Whatever the motives, Park responded with calm resolve. She had won election by a narrow 2% margin while walking a fine line between firmness toward the DPRK as she held out the promise of dialogue and economic cooperation. She waved the big stick of the "US-ROK alliance," cautioning that she would retaliate forcefully to any armed North Korean attack, yet consistently urged reconciliation.

US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Beijing and Seoul in early April to confirm US reassurances that it would back the Park Administration.³ Park also called on Beijing and Moscow to restrain their North Korean ally, but Pyongyang persisted to the point of shutting down the joint South-North Kaesong Industrial Project (KIZ) despite Park's offers to engage Pyongyang about its concerns.⁴ Park's handling of the crisis won her broad international and domestic respect and support. For the DPRK, Kim Jong Un's efforts had only garnered intensified distrust.

The belief that prospects for reconciliation's resumption had been smashed proved premature. After Pyongyang abruptly halted its outrageous provocations, the two Koreas reopened KIZ. Occasionally the verbal dueling heated up. The north flew unmanned drones south into the ROK. On one occasion there was a dangerous exchange of artillery fire on the North Limit Line (NLL) that extends west from the ROK's coast into the Yellow Sea just south of the DPRK's southwest coast. But both sides restrained themselves and avoided escalation. Ever since, the two Koreas have sought common ground. By February 2014, bilateral dialogue resumed with a series of meetings. Park's "Dresden Declaration" followed on March 28 but Pyongyang promptly dismissed the proposal for separated family reunions, humanitarian aid and social exchanges as being a "psychopath's daydream."⁵

Nevertheless, on May 23, the DPRK announced that it would accept Seoul's invitation and send athletes to the 2014 Incheon Asian Games. Then quietly on July 7, 2014, Kim Jong Un's government issued a specific formula for the resumption of reconciliation.⁶ The statement

¹ C. Kenneth Quinones, "March Madness" – the Korean Peninsula's Annual War of Words," *Journal of Political Criticism*. Volume 12 (May 2013).

² *Chosun Ilbo*, "Seoul Vows 'Stern' Response to N.Korean Provocation," March 7, 2013.

KCNA, "Kim Kwan Jin's Stay in Office Denounced by DPRK Secretariat," March 27, 2013.

³ "Remarks of Secretary of State John Kerry with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea Yun Byung-se After Their Meeting," April 2, 2013, pp.1 and 4.

⁴ PARK Geun-hye and Barack Obama, "Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance Between the ROK and the US. May 7, 2013." www.korea.net.

PARK Geun-hye, "Remarks by President Park Geun-hye at a Joint Press Conference Following a Summit with U.S. President Barack Obama." www.korea.net. May 8, 2013.

⁵ "President Park's Dresden Declaration," and "NDC Statement," *Vantage Point* (Vol. 37, No. 5) May 2014. pp. 8-12.

⁶ "DPRK Government Statement Calls for Ending Confrontation and Improving North-South Ties," *KCNA*, July 7, 2014.

commemorated Kim Il Sung's last reunification proposal prior to his 1994 death. The unexpected announcement listed four steps Seoul must take before reconciliation might resume:

1. End "reckless hostility and confrontation: Pyongyang defines this as ending "north-targeted war exercises" and jointly implementing the June 15, 2000 South-North Declaration of Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong Il, and the October 4, 2008 declaration issued by ROK President Noh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong Il
2. Reject dependence on outsiders to settle Korea related issues: This is a reference to the July 4, 1972 first joint South-North Declaration in which both sides pledged not to rely on other nations to resolve their differences.
3. Seek reasonable reunification proposals that guarantee common prosperity: This is defined as the promotion of co-existence and co-prosperity as set forth in the June 2000 declaration, and
4. Create an atmosphere favorable to improving relations: This appears to be a call for Seoul to drop its demands for Pyongyang to apologize for past misdeeds, to distance it from UN sanctions imposed because of nuclear and ballistic missile tests, and instead engage in a broad range of exchanges and economic cooperation.

The July 7 proposal is Kim Jong Un's definition of common ground for resuming the reconciliation process. It accents bilateral cooperation as concretely defined in previous bilateral accords. Actually the two sides previously accomplished all these points. Even the reference to ending war exercises can be linked to Seoul's 1992 decision to discontinue its then largest military exercise with the US, "Team Spirit." Pyongyang's reference to historical agreements (1992 Basic Agreements, 2000 Pyongyang Joint Statement and 2008 Roh Moo-hyun-Kim Jong Il Joint Statement) suggests that future joint effort can repeat past success.

History's Legacy

The lack of enduring progress toward reconciliation says little about the two Korea's past effort and success. Since their first dialogue in 1971-72, they have held 618 negotiation sessions, two summits (2000 between ROK President Kim Dae-jung and DPRK leader Kim Jong Il, and 2008 ROK president Roh Moo-hyun and DPRK leader Kim Jong Il), and 10 prime minister level meetings. They have signed 230 agreements, including the 1992 "Basic Agreements" that promised negotiation of a peace treaty, economic cooperation, social and educational exchanges and mutual respect, and in December 1991 issued the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The KIZ Project is a result of the 2000 summit.⁷ Plus they have conducted 19 family reunion sessions since 2000 that involved 25,000 people. Success was achieved when there was:

- convergence of goals
- separation between political and security issues,
- significant alteration in the geo-political situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula, and
- non-interference by foreign nations.

⁷ Kim Ki-woong, ROK Assistant Minister of Unification Policy, "South Korean Government's Initiative for Peaceful Unification of Korean Peninsula," *Vantage Point* (Vol. 37, No. 7) July 2014. P.26.

Inter-Korean dialogue proved impossible until 1971-72 primarily because Kim Il Sung's foremost goal was to achieve national unification by subverting the ROK government. He had no interest in dialogue or reconciliation. The ROK until 1971 was preoccupied with countering the North's offensive by pursuing economic prosperity and rallying international respect. Seoul had little to gain from dialogue, but in 1971 the status quo surrounding the Korean Peninsula changed abruptly. Seoul's foremost ally the US and Pyongyang's defender China shifted from confrontation to diplomatic and economic engagement. Also the US was withdrawing from South Vietnam. Korea's two leaders reacted by engaging in their first ever dialogue and on July 4, 1972 issued their first joint statement in which they pledged to pursue reconciliation and unification without foreign interference. In other words, reconciliation was to be a bilateral process. No sooner had their fears of abandonment by their primary supporters waned than South-North dialogue ceased. Also political turmoil in the south possibly convinced the north to sustain its campaigns of subversion and terrorism against the south. Seoul meanwhile became preoccupied with restoring domestic order.

A second round of sustained South-North dialogue began in 1989. Again the two Korea's long term goals coincided. The ROK had achieved impressive prosperity and rallied broad international respect with its successful hosting of the 1988 Seoul Olympiad. The DPRK's reliance on terrorism had garnered it nothing but condemnation. This combined with Seoul's successful forging of diplomatic and commercial ties with most of Pyongyang's allies, particularly the USSR and China, isolated the DPRK. When ROK president Noh Dae-woo offered as part of the *Nord politik* policy to resume dialogue, DPRK leader Kim Il Sung agreed. The bilateral "Basic Agreements" and denuclearization pledge followed. The discovery of North Korea's plutonium production program abruptly reversed the progress. The US willingness to negotiate with North Korea, however, defused the crisis and continued the process of engagement, except that Washington, not Seoul, assumed leadership. The freezing of Pyongyang's nuclear activities and reduction of tension benefitted South-North relations, but mutual distrust persisted.

A third opportunity to pursue reconciliation materialized between 1998 and 2000. North Korea found itself in a desperate struggle for regime survival. After the USSR collapsed in 1990 its successor Russia no longer promised unqualified military and economic support. Virtually all of Pyongyang's former allies had established diplomatic and commercial ties to Seoul. Pervasive food shortages caused severe malnourishment, even starvation, which threatened domestic political stability. North Korea's economy collapsed. Desperate, Pyongyang turned to its enemies Seoul, Washington and Tokyo for help. Seoul's response was so-called "Sunshine Diplomacy," i.e. political and economic engagement. Again Pyongyang's policy priorities coincided with Seoul's quest for reconciliation. Unprecedented progress followed until Pyongyang's first nuclear test. South Korean voters by 2008 rejected engagement in favor of confrontation and isolation of North Korea by electing Lee Myung-bak president. Both sides, as they had done in 1992, promptly reverted to confrontation. South Koreans nevertheless clung to the hope of unification as discovered by a Hyundai Research Institute poll conducted in 2013. Nearly 80% of voters age 40 and older believed unification remains necessary to promote the nation's prosperity and peace while 75% of voters in their 30s held a similar view. Only younger voters in their 20s believed unification was unnecessary.⁸

⁸ Lee Yong-hwa, "South Koreans' Increasing Awareness of the Need for Unification," VIP Report, No. 538, November 18, 2013, Hyundai Research Institute.

Korea's New Leaders and Reconciliation

Park Geun-hye and Kim Jong Un share their predecessors' daunting task of avoiding a second Korean War while striving to forge national reconciliation. As reviewed above, history suggests success depends on several factors including the matching of each side's priorities, but the past does not automatically repeat itself. Each leader's individual abilities and extent of domestic political support are equally important. Park seized the initiative prior to her election and campaigned on a platform that accented reconciliation on a *quid pro quo* basis. Her northern counterpart's initial response was hostility and personal insult, but the two sides eventually postured publicly seeking common ground. By mid-2014, they appear to have found reasons to pursue cooperation.

For South Korea reconciliation with North Korea is the best way to safeguard and promote its prosperity. Conflict and the threat of war discourage foreign investment while war would destroy Seoul's impressive economic gains. Looking to the future, unity would better enable Korea to deal with China's rising economic prowess and address South Korea's problems of an aging and shrinking population. North Korea continues to regain its political and economic composure following the devastating events of the 1990s. Despite extensive international economic sanctions, according to the Bank of (South) Korea, North Korea's real GDP increased 1.1% in 2013, the third consecutive year of growth. Its international trade amounted to US 7.8 billion, a 7.8% increase over 2012, according to South Korea's Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA).⁹ Pyongyang's priorities appear to have shifted from regime survival to achieving prosperity, a goal Kim Jong Un shares with his father.

Kim Jong Un must also deal with the relatively hostile international environment surrounding his small kingdom. Beijing, Moscow, Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have imposed economic sanctions on the DPRK to halt Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. These sanctions are a formidable impediment to Kim's pursuit of prosperity. Leaders of the world's superpowers (China, Russia, and the USA) have visited Seoul for summit meetings with President Park but none have met Kim. Their preference for doing business with South Korea is obvious, and they have made clear their preference for the resumption of South-North Korea reconciliation. After all, peace on the Korean Peninsula best coincides with their shared priorities of sustaining peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

These facts suggest that South and North Korean policy priorities once again are coinciding, thus improving prospects for bilateral social and economic cooperation. North Korea's nuclear ambitions remain an impediment, but twice in 1994 and 2000 both sides managed to achieve cooperation by demonstrating flexibility and exchanging concessions to restart reconciliation.

Personal Factors

Park and Kim share the burden of limited experience as political leaders. Park benefits from years of political wheeling and dealing as a politician, but faces for the first time the challenges of actually ruling a politically complex democracy. Kim came to power with no

⁹ "North Korean Foreign Trade Volume Posts Record High of USD 7.3 Billion in 2013," and "Real GDP of DPRK Grows in 2013, ..." IFES Briefs No. 14-05-26 and No. 14-07-03, Institute for Far Eastern Studies, *Kyungnam* University, Seoul, ROK.

political experience but has the advantage of ruling as an absolute monarch and dictator. Yet he lacks legitimacy which compels dependence on his closest advisers, particularly Pyongyang's political generals.

Park Geun-hye is a paradox. The daughter of assassinated ROK President and dictator Park Chung-hee, she is South Korea's first woman president who acquired political power and legitimacy through a democratic election. She seeks reconciliation with North Korea despite her mother's assassination by a pro-Pyongyang ethnic Korean resident of Japan. Her family's tragic history appears to have forged within her a resolve to sustain her nation's democracy while pursuing reunification. Her gender, limited experience and goals confront her with multiple challenges. Traditionally, Korea's Confucian heritage anointed men the politically preferred gender. When late in the 19th Century the wife of King Kojong allegedly involved herself in court politics, Korean champions of "enlightenment" accused her of impeding Korea's modernization and for this Japanese advocates of Korea's independence from China assassinated her. Park Geun-hye does not have to contend with such a dangerous situation, but early in her administration she had to convince her male advisers and critics of her ability to lead the nation. Her gender and five year office term limit the time available to achieve this. Otherwise her authority will fade quickly.

Kim Jong Un at first glance seems to have several advantages over Park, but actually has two major disadvantages: a lack of legitimacy and experience. Park's authority is firmly rooted in her democratic election while Kim's legitimacy is tied to a single fact – his father Kim Jong Il ruled North Korea. This profoundly limits his authority. North Korea's third monarch Kim Jong Un lacks any record of protecting the nation from "imperialists." Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung enhanced his legitimacy by claiming to have won the nation's independence fighting the Japanese "imperialists" and to have saved it from the American "imperialists." Albeit exaggerated, North Koreans have little choice but to accept this version of history.

North Korea's second ruler Kim Jong Il lacked legitimacy other than being Kim Il Sung's son. Again history was distorted to embellish his legitimacy by falsely claiming that he had been born in a log cabin in his father's guerilla camp at the base of Mount Paektu. Actually Kim Jong Il was born and raised in Russia. For several years Kim Jong Il was groomed to rule but protected from criticism behind the codeword "party center." In the 1980s he reportedly assumed oversight of domestic policy yet, despite years of preparation, still had to confront his lack of legitimacy. After he became "Supreme Command" in 1994, he struck a deal with North Korea's generals to buttress his legitimacy by proclaiming "Military First Politics" (*Seonggun jeongji*). Whatever the generals deemed necessary to defend the nation they received, including: nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles etc.

Kim Jong Un's handicaps are more formidable. He inherited his position with limited life experience, no record of military service and after brief preparation to govern. His study at an international high school in Switzerland surely aroused doubts about his comprehension of North Korea's *Juche* ideology and allegiance to North Korean style socialism. Although none outside Pyongyang's inner political circle can say for certain, Kim Jong Un may be a monarch, but he is hardly a dictator. Like his father, his lack of legitimacy compels him to depend extensively on advice from Pyongyang's political generals which restricts his policy options. He must maintain his father's "Military First" promise as evident in the young Kim's position regarding a negotiated end to North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals. As stated on numerous occasions by spokesmen for the Foreign Ministry and Korean People's Army Supreme Command, the DPRK will not consider dismantling these arsenals until the United States ends its

“hostile policy” toward the DPRK and ends its nuclear umbrella over Northeast Asia. Kim Jong Un appears to be a “managed monarch,” one surrounded by older and more experienced advisers intent on perpetuating their priorities, making him more a follower than an initiator. Some South Korean pundits guessed that Kim Jong Un would initiate economic reform and political liberalization because of his education outside North Korea. He has done neither after reigning two years.

Reconciliation and “Trustpolitik”

Park’s 2012 presidential campaign platform included restarting reconciliation using “trustpolitik.”¹⁰ Her predecessors Chun Doo-hwan (1980-87) and Noh Dae-woo (1988-93) had successfully used “*nord politik*.” Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun continued the process but Park’s immediate predecessor Lee Myung-bak reverted to confrontation. Park must proceed cautiously to avoid appearing “soft” on the North. Her “trustpolitik” links parallel approaches, as she explained in 2011, “First, North Korea must keep its agreements made with South Korea and the international community to establish a minimum level of trust, and second, there must be assured consequences for actions that breach the peace.” As examples of prior success, she cited US-China reconciliation in the 1970s and the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. Recalling her predecessors’ efforts, she called for a new policy of alignment that involves aligning South Korea’s security and cooperation with the North’s, and inter-Korean dialogue with parallel international efforts, i.e. the Six Party Talks process which aims to end Pyongyang’s nuclear program. This “alignment policy” requires Seoul’s prompt and forceful response if North Korea again attacks the South as it did twice in 2010. But if North Korea moves toward “genuine reconciliation,” Seoul should do likewise.

South Koreans’ Divergent Views on Reconciliation

But first Park must contend with political realities in Seoul and Pyongyang. She faces a situation radically different from her predecessors. Events of the previous two decades have erased South Koreans’ expectations of quick reconciliation followed by unification. Also gone is the expectation that cultural and educational exchanges plus economic cooperation could transform North Korea into a compatible member of the international community. Prior to democratization in 1988, the primary theme of political debate in South Korea was whether to preserve its authoritarian government or democratize. Some feared that democracy might weaken the nation’s national defense posture vis-à-vis North Korea while slowing progress toward prosperity. Advocates of democracy, South Korea’s self proclaimed progressives, won this debate.

Since 1989, the foremost issue facing South Koreans remains whether to induce North Korea toward reconciliation or to confront it. Progressives prefer the tactics of engagement in the hope of gradually transforming North Korea. They emphasize that the United States had

¹⁰ PARK Geun-hye, “A New Kind of Korea – Building Trust Between Seoul and Pyongyang,” *Foreign Affairs*. Sept./Oct. 2011; and, “A Plan for Peace in North Asia – Cooperation Among Korea, China and Japan Needs a Correct Understanding of History,” *Wall Street Journal*. November 12, 2012.

shifted to the engagement of North Korea after 1989 to end its nuclear program and to promote its transformation. They also point out that the US engagement of China since 1972 was changed China from a belligerent threat into a responsible member of the international community. Conservatives however champion confrontation which accents diplomatic and economic isolation of North Korea, particularly strident economic sanctions backed by formidable military might, in the hope of collapsing the authoritarian regime. They also emphasize concern about Pyongyang's persistent pursuit of nuclear weapons and record of broken promises in this regard. They argue that engagement's tactic of South-North economic cooperation funds, at least partially, North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. For "progressives" the goal is a "soft landing" which facilitates North Korea's gradual acceptance of international norms. "Conservatives" favor a "hard landing" that means not just regime change but collapse as a prelude to unification. President Park's approach to North Korea attempts to straddle these polarities.

Pyongyang's Interpretation of Reconciliation

The two Koreas share the long term goal of national unification, but their national priorities and definitions of reconciliation diverge significantly. North Korea's authoritarian political system spares its leadership from dealing with public opinion. As the monarch and dictator, North Korea's leaders have monopolized the prerogative of determining national goals and the methods to achieve them. Until the late 1980s, the foremost goal was national unification, whether achieved using armed force or not. But in the 1980s South Korea shifted the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula to its favor. Seoul by 1988, in part because of hosting the Seoul Olympiad, achieved military and economic supremacy. Soon after Pyongyang's chief champion, the USSR collapsed and China established diplomatic relations with South Korea. Famine and economic collapse followed. The Pyongyang regime seemed on the verge of demise, particularly after founder Kim Il Sung's death in 1994.

Pyongyang was compelled to redefine its national priorities. Regime survival replaced unification as the foremost priority. Kim Il Sung's son and heir Kim Jong Il, after a faltering start, declared the rather surprising goal of achieving a "strong and prosperous nation" by 2012. To do this, he pronounced in 1998 his "Military First" (*songgun jeongji*) policy which promised the Korean People's Army (KPA) whatever it needed to preserve the regime. Hindsight suggests that North Korea may have adopted a conciliatory posture toward reconciliation between 1989 and 1992, and 1998 and 2002 more as a means to sustain the regime than to achieve reconciliation. Nevertheless, tensions on the Korean Peninsula subsided and Pyongyang facilitated substantial social exchange and economic cooperation, yet continued to pursue its nuclear ambitions.

Then and now, South and North Korea appear to be talking past one another. South Koreans view reconciliation either as a way to set the stage for peaceful co-existence or as a prelude to the North's collapse and unification. But for Pyongyang, reconciliation is a means to ensure regime survival by achieving political and economic parity with Seoul. As for unification it has become a distant goal. Thus Kim Jong Un rejects Park's persistent calls to discard its nuclear ambitions as a prelude to resuming reconciliation and economic cooperation. For Kim, nuclear deterrence is the cornerstone of his defense policy. Also Kim's political legitimacy is linked to pursuing his father's priorities, i.e. regime survival as defined by his grandfather's *juche* ideology. This reality poses a formidable impediment to Park's "trustpolitik."

Pyongyang's Priorities

Pyongyang's provocative behavior between February and April, 2013, and the subsequent confrontation with Seoul over KIZ in April and May could have had the secondary purpose of buttressing Kim Jong Un's stature as leader by demonstrating his cool headed and decisive leadership in the face of the perceived "imperialist" threat posed by additional UNSC sanctions. His policy statements and official activities since coming to power suggest his priorities are to maintain a formidable military and to address consolidate his power.¹¹ Reconciliation was a secondary, longer term concern. In his January 1, 2013 New Year's Address, Kim listed his priorities as "consolidating our political and military might" by:

- "building of an economic giant," particularly with
- "larger numbers of sophisticated military hardware,"
- enhance "party organizations' ... militant function and role," to achieve
- "reunification," which he calls the "greatest national task."

Until mid-2014, Kim concentrated on rallying the confidence of the army (KPA) and Korean Workers Party (KWP). Early 2013 was devoted to reinforcing his legitimacy by acting out before North Korean media a "command performance" as he instructed the KPA to deter an imagined possible US and ROK attack during their annual joint military exercises Key Resolve and Foal Eagle. On March 2 he visited the Joint Security Area (JSA) near Panmunjom and was lauded for his courage.¹² KCNA reported on March 20 that he had directed drone and rocket attack drills. Next he oversaw work "in different fields of the KPA," according to KCNA, which included the making of musical instruments, children's overcoats and chorus practices. But the next day he was guiding an army amphibious landing drill. He ended March by ratifying a plan to "mercilessly strike the U.S. mainland" if the "U.S. imperialists" make a "reckless provocation with a huge strategic forces."¹³ By April 15, the "crisis" had passed and, according to KCNA, he was enjoying sports competition, a concert and paying respect to his grandfather and father at Kumsusan Palace. Kim's efforts to rally the KWP's allegiance included a January 28 speech to the 4th Meeting of KWP Secretaries of Cells. Next he addressed on economic issues at the National Meeting of Light Industrial Workers on March 18. On March 31, he reportedly "guided" a Plenary Meeting of the KWP Central Committee.¹⁴

Meanwhile he authorized the issuance of numerous policy directives. The National Defense Commission (NDC), generally recognized as the most potent policy body, defined the issues for other agencies to comment about. It declared that the DPRK nuclear capability is no

¹¹ KIM Jong Un, "New Year Address Make by Kim Jong Un." January 1, 2013. www.kcna.co.jp.

¹² KCNA, "U.S. and S. Korean Regime Warned Against Staging War Maneuvers against DPRK," March 2, 2013,

¹³ KCNA, "Kim Jong Un Convenes Operation Meeting, Finally Examines and Ratifies Plan for Firepower Strike." March 29, 2013.

¹⁴ KCNA, "Kim Jong Un Delivers Address at the 4th Conference of KWP Cell Secretaries," KCNA, January 30, 2013, and "Kim Jong Un Makes Opening Address at 4th Meeting of Secretaries of WPK Cells, KCNA, January 28, 2013, KCNA, "Kim Jong Un Makes Speech at National Meeting of Light Industrial Workers," March 18, 2013, KCNA, Report on Plenary Meeting of the KWP Central Committee," March 31, 2013.

longer a topic for negotiation, directed the closing of the North-South Kaesong Industrial Zone (KIZ) and blamed Park for Korea's woes. The KPA's Supreme Command pointedly criticized the US-ROK joint military exercises and declared the Korean War Armistice to have become "null and void."¹⁵ It also accused the US and South Korea of threatening "pre-emptive nuclear strikes," and disrespecting North Korea's sovereignty and its leader. Consequently, the KPA leadership declared, the DPRK was compelled to build a nuclear arsenal. The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) blamed the South for problems regarding the KIZ, and criticized Park and her administration, US-ROK military exercises and UN sanctions. The Foreign Ministry spokesman criticized the UNSC sanctions imposed because of Pyongyang's early 2013 satellite launch and nuclear test, also declared the Korea War Armistice null and void, and repeatedly reiterated that the DPRK's nuclear deterrent capability is no longer open to negotiation.¹⁶ The Foreign Ministry warned repeatedly that the DPRK "will exercise the right to a preemptive nuclear attack" if threatened, the Armistice Agreement would become totally nullified once "U.S. nuclear war rehearsal gets into full swing," and ruled out negotiations with the U.S. "unless it rolls back its hostile policy" The statements' uniform belligerence suggests the intent to warn Pyongyang's adversaries not to expect Kim to be conciliatory. Together they manifest resolve to pursue Kim's predecessors' priorities, regime survival above all.

Kim Jong Un's theatrics may have impressed his generals and party cadre, but not North Korea's primary supporters China and Russia nor his adversaries. The DPRK's friends publicly urged Pyongyang to restrain itself. Clearly Kim was unconcerned about reconciliation early in his reign since his provocative words and deeds erased most of reconciliation's progress, position further implied by his simplistic formula that resuming reconciliation required pursuing it in "an independent manner" by implementing the "north-south joint declarations" of 1972, etc.

But while Kim's demeanor became a source of international concern, Park was rallying domestic and international support with calm formation of an effective administration, meetings with world leaders and reiteration of her intent to pursue reconciliation. Unlike Kim, who has ruled twice as long as Park, Park's self confidence has steadily increased as she successfully broadened her domestic base of political support and rallied international respect. This positions her to seize the initiative regarding reconciliation as became evident in July 2014 when Pyongyang accepted Seoul's invitation to the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon and Kim finally enunciated a specific formula regarding reconciliation (see page 3).

Korea-Japan Relations

¹⁵ KCNA: "Spokesman for Supreme Command of KPA Clarifies Measure to be Taken by It," KCNA, March 5, 2013, p. 2. "Armed Forces Ministry Blast S. Korean Warmongers," March 13, 2013. "Kim Jong Un Guides Drone Attack, Self-propelled Flak Rocket Drills," March 20, 2013. "Kim Jong Un Convenes Operation Meeting Finally Examines and Ratifies Plan for Firepower Strike," March 29, 2013.

¹⁶KCNA, "DPRK FM Refutes UNSC's 'Resolution' Pulling up DPRK over its Satellite Launch," January 23, 2013, KCNA, "Kim Jong Un Guides Consultative Meeting of Officials in Fields of State Security and Foreign Affairs, January 26, 2013, KCNA, "DPRK FM Spokesman Urges US to Choose Between Two Options," February 12, 2013. KCNA, "Second Korean War is Unavoidable: DPRK FM Spokesman," March 7, 2013.

Before Park can turn to pursuing reconciliation it is imperative that she further reinforce domestic confidence in her presidential skills. Her handling of Tokyo is accomplishing this. All Koreans disdain imperial Japan's perceived abuse of Korea and some Japanese politicians' rationalization of it. For Park, improving relations with Japan is not a priority. But it remains Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's priority, prompting him to make repeated overtures to her. Park has responded with polite, tough mindedness while she awaits confirmation through Abe's words and deeds that he has foregone rationalization of imperial Japan's misconduct.

Abe early in his administration sought to improve relations by sending in January 2013 special envoy Nukaga Fukushima to meet President-elect Park in Seoul. They agreed to "make a mutual effort to build trust" regarding divisive issues. Abe next dispatched Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro to Park's inauguration but their meeting yielded no positive results. On March 10 Abe called Park to congratulate her and urged "candid exchanges of opinions," and reportedly said he looked forward to meeting her in Seoul at the forthcoming China-Korea-Japan summit and invited her to Tokyo. Park was non-committal.¹⁷ Then the deputy prime minister and about 80 members of Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) visited Yasukuni Shrine, long an irritant in Japan's relations with its neighbors. China and South Korea promptly protested because World War II Class A Japanese war criminals are enshrined there. Park cancelled her foreign minister's visit to Tokyo and concurred with China's refusal to attend a previously scheduled May 25-26 trilateral China, ROK and Japan summit.¹⁸

Again Abe attempted to calm his neighbors by rejecting reports that he and his administration would not honor the 1995 "Murayama Statement" in which then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi of the Socialist Party officially apologized for imperial Japan's "invasion" of China and Korea. Abe in 2006 during his first term had expressed doubts about the accuracy of the apology's terminology, outraging Beijing and Seoul. But in early May 2013 Abe's chief cabinet secretary Suga Yoshihide formally confirmed that the Abe administration would not revise the apology and recognized that imperial Japan's military had coerced Asian women to become "sex slaves."¹⁹ Relations nevertheless remained icy. The ROK and Japanese foreign ministers finally met at the ASEAN Regional Forum on July 1 but ROK Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se reportedly told his Japanese counterpart Kishida Fumio that, "Unless they are handled carefully, historical issues can end up hurting the spirit of an individual nation." Kishida reportedly said, "Japan and South Korea are important neighbors that share basic values and interests and are precious partners." Yun countered, "(President) Park believes that close efforts by South Korea and Japan are important for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region."²⁰

Park's response to Abe has reassured most South Koreans about her patriotism which is vital for sustaining broad popular support given her father's education in imperial Japan and service in the imperial Japanese army. Also, many South Koreans today are displeased with the

¹⁷ VOA News, "Japan, Korea Move to Ease Tensions," January 5, 2013. *Chosun Ilbo*, March 15, 2013, and "Park, Abe Call for Better Bilateral Ties," March 7, 2013.

¹⁸ *Chosun Ilbo*, "Foreign Minister Cancels Japan Trip," and "Japan's Drift to the Far Right Hurts Stability in Northeast Asia," April 23, 2013. *Chosun Ilbo*, "Park has No Plan for Summit with Abe, July 2, 2013.

¹⁹ International Herald Tribune, May 9, 2013. P.1.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, "Japan Fails to Thaw Icy Ties with South Korea, No Summit in Sight," July 2, 2013.

treaties her father negotiated with Japan to normalize relations in 1965. Again she has had to walk a tight rope between displeasing South Koreans and the Japanese. She appears to have done this successfully by not quickly giving Abe what he seeks while firmly but politely insisting that Japan must do more to convince South Koreans that Japan's past expressions of regret about imperial Japan's misdeeds are sincere. As of September 2014, Abe was still waiting for a summit with Park.

Kim Jong Un, less concerned than Park with public opinion, responded positively in July 2014 to Abe's requests to reopen the investigation of the status of the Japanese abducted by North Korean agents some 30 years ago and the several thousand Japanese citizens who migrated to North Korea with their spouses between 1959 and 1982. Pyongyang has promised to report its findings by the end of September 2014. Whether the results will placate the Japanese people remains to be seen. If they deem Pyongyang's report unsatisfactory, and there is some reason to believe this could happen, Japan-DPRK relations will remain icy. In any event, the Japanese public and political leaders' preference to work with South Korea benefits Park because this makes Tokyo prone to support her reconciliation policy.

Park Launches "Trustpolitik"

Park Geun Hye's most formidable task is the resumption of South-North reconciliation. Despite numerous provocations in 2013, Park kept open the door to dialogue with Pyongyang.²¹ Her campaign resembles Kim Dae-jung's in that her first step has been to rally international support for her strategy while maintaining a resolute military deterrence posture. Kim Dae-jung was the first post-Cold War East Asian leader to rally the support of all the super powers with visits to Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow. Ultimately Pyongyang felt compelled to work with him. Just as Pyongyang sought to provoke Park in the spring of 2013, Pyongyang tested Kim's commitment to reconciliation with hostile rhetoric and armed attacks on South Korean naval vessels in the Yellow Sea. Kim responded in kind but always followed quickly with offers to engage in dialogue and negotiation.

²¹ KCNA: "DPRK Warns Future of Kaesong Industrial Zone (KIZ) Depends on S. Korea's Attitude," March 30, 2013; "Important Steps Declared as Regards Kaesong Industrial Zone," April 8, 2013; "CPRK Spokesman Slams S. Korean Group for Vociferating about Kaesong Industrial Zone," April 4, 2013; "DPRK's Principled Stand on Inter-Korean Dialogue Remains Unchanged: CPRK Spokesman," April 18, 2013. Reuters, "Update 3 – South Korea Seeks Talks with North to Reopen Industrial Zone," April 25, 2013. KCNA, "NDC Policy Department Threatens to Take Final, Decisive Step (KIZ)," April 26, 2013; Reuters, "South Korea to Pull All Workers from Industrial Zone in North," April 26, 2013. KCNA, "S. Korea Denounced for Making Public Decision to Do Away with KIZ," April 27, 2013; "Fate of KIZ Depends on S. Korean Authorities: (NDC) Spokesman," May 5, 2013; "CPRK Special Statement Proposes Talks Between Authorities of North, South," June 6, 2013; "North and South Held Working-level Contact," June 10, 2013. *Xinhua*, "Commentary: An Encouraging Sign on Korean Peninsula After Months of Tensions," June 10, 2013. *Xinhua*, "High-level Inter-Korean Talks Called Off: Officials," June 11, 2013. KCNA, "CPRK Slams S. Korea for Making North-South Talks Abortive," June 13, 2013. *Xinhua*, "DPRK Urges S. Korea to hold Joint Events, Start Dialogue on KIZ," June 23, 2013.

Park in May 2013 launched her campaign to rally international support with a successful visit to Washington, DC where President Barack Obama praised her, voiced full support for her “*trustpolitik*” and a negotiated end to North Korea’s nuclear program. She also addressed a joint session of the US Congress, an honor only extended to a few East Asian leaders and never one from Japan.²² She repeated her successful international diplomacy with a June 27-30, 2013 visit to Beijing. Again, China’s highest leaders welcomed her and avowed support for her “*trustpolitik*” strategy and goal of dismantling North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.²³ Altogether, Park and Xi have met five times including Xi’s July 2014 visit to Seoul. Russian President Vladimir Putin also warmly received Park at the August, 2013 G-20 meeting in St. Petersburg and followed with a 2014 visit to Seoul.

Park’s successful summits have confirmed international support for her strategy and the shared goal of a nuclear free Korean Peninsula. Beijing’s comfort with Seoul is reflected in DPRK-China bilateral trade. This declined more than 7% to \$1.3 billion in January-March, 2013, with Chinese imports from North Korea rising 2.5% to \$590 million but exports declining 13.8% to \$720 million – excluding fuel, food or other Chinese aid (China provided the DPRK 523,041 MT of crude oil in 2012). Their annual trade is worth some \$6 billion, a fraction of China-ROK trade which was valued at \$230 billion in 2012.²⁴ Park has also had summits with the leaders of France, the United Kingdom and Belgium, and with leaders in the Middle East and South Asia.

China has demonstrated publicly its displeasure with North Korea. For the first time it stated that it would enforce the UN Security Council sanctions imposed on North Korea after its third nuclear test.²⁵ Only Kim Jong Un’s special envoy Marshal Choe Ryong-hae has met Chinese ruler Xi Jinping. China then summoned DPRK chief negotiator to the Six Party Talks Kim Gye Kwan to Beijing, possibly to admonish Pyongyang for its February 2013 nuclear test and reluctance to return to the Six Party talks.²⁶ Kim meanwhile awaits invitations to summits with China and Russia.

²² Mark Landler and David Sanger, “Obama and Park Make a Display of Unity,” *International Herald Tribune*. May 9, 2013. p. 4. PARK Geun-hye, “Address by President Park Geun-hye to the Joint Session of the US Congress,” www.korea.net. May 9, 2013. John Park, “Madame Park Goes to Washington,” *National Bureau of Asian Research Policy Q & A*. May 6, 2013.

²³ YOON Sojung, “Presidential Trip to reshape Future Vision of Seoul-Beijing Ties,” www.korea.net. June 26, 2013. Wi Tack-whan and Yoon Sojung, “President Park Holds 1st Korea-China Summit in Beijing.” www.korea.net. June 27, 2013. *Xinhua*: “Korean Peninsula Situation to be Discussed during ROK President’s China visit: Spokeswoman.” June 26, 2013. “Chinese, ROK Presidents Hold Talks, Pledge All-round Cooperation.” June 27, 2013. “Chinese Leaders Meet ROK President, Calling for Stronger Ties,” June 29, 2013. “Chinese FM Urges Early Resumption of Nuke Talks on Korean Peninsula.” June 27, 2013.

²⁴ Reuters, “China Steps Up Customs Checks, but North Korea Trade Robust,” April 30, 2013.

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Bank and Official Linked to North Korean Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs,” 2013. *Xinhua*, “U.S. Slaps Fresh Sanctions on DPRK Bank, Individuals,” 2013, and “China Promises to Honor UN Resolution on DPRK,” April 17, 2013. Reuters, “China Steps Up Customs Checks, but North Korea Trade Robust,” April 30, 2013.

²⁶ KCNA, “Kim Jong Un’s Special Envoy Leaves for China,” May 22, 2013. *Xinhua*, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Meets Choe Ryong Hae,” May 24, 2013. “President Xi Reaffirms

Park's "*trustpolitik*" avoids mention of coercive tactics such as UN sanctions. Instead she accents positive *quid pro quo* steps that reflect and match North Korea's conduct, an approach Pyongyang has favored since its nuclear negotiations with the United States in the early 1990s. Park emphasizes multilateral negotiations at the US, China and Russia favored Six Party Talks. She also talks of including rather than excluding Pyongyang in multilateral economic projects such as reconnecting Korea's rail network to the Trans-Siberian and Trans-China railroads, and working with China and Russia to promote regional trade while facilitating the flow of Russian oil and gas Northeast Asia via yet to be built pipe lines.

The first indication that Pyongyang might eventually respond positively to Park's "*trustpolitik*" strategy came early in July 2013 after Park's repeated offers to convene discussions on KIZ. This project is the cornerstone of reconciliation and is a central element of the first 2000 South-North summit between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong Il. Resumption of the KIZ's operation was agreed to on September 11 with normal operation restored on September 16, 2013.²⁷ Located 70 kilometers north of Seoul and 160 kilometers south of Pyongyang near the DPRK city of Kaesong (headquarters for the KPA's forces deployed along the De-militarized Zone or DMZ), the 6,500 acre area began operation in 2004 and has steadily grown in size and production. As of early 2013 it housed the office and factory buildings of 123 South Korean small and medium size firms which employ 53,448 North Korean workers. The total monthly cost per worker is US \$129 of which \$80 is for basic wage plus overtime pay, meals, transportation, insurance and other benefits. This is significantly below the average costs per worker in the Shandong and Hanoi special development zones. In 2012 KIZ produced \$469.5 million worth of goods and accounted for 99.5% of South-North Korea trade the same year. Since the products are labeled "Made in North Korea," they cannot be exported to Japan and face very high duties if exported to the US. Obviously KIZ benefits both Koreas in several ways.²⁸ South Korea's small and medium business sector faced huge losses if the zone had remained closed. For Park, reopening KIZ was politically significant for her stature in the eyes of South Korea's business community and the pursuit of reconciliation. North Korea also restored the South-North military hotline which had been disconnected in March 2013

Pyongyang's attitude toward Park again turned nasty in October 2013. On October 4, 2013, the NDC accused her of having "malignantly slandered the dignity and social system in the DPRK, ..." Apparently what sparked this and similar subsequent outbursts was Park's repeated urging that the DPRK give up its nuclear ambitions. The NDC demanded that "Park and her group should not try to lead the DPRK to change and force it to dismantle nuclear weapons." It concluded that the DPRK's nuclear weapons are, "a powerful deterrence to deter the nuclear war disaster to be inflicted by the U.S. ..." ²⁹ The DPRK repeated similar allegations on October 14, 2013.³⁰ Pyongyang continued to verbally assault Park well into November, demanding that

Denuclearization on Korean Peninsula," May 24, 2013. KCNA, "DPRK-China Strategic Dialogue in Diplomatic Field Held," June 19, 2013.

²⁷ Yonhap News Agency, "North Korea Newsletter No. 279 (Sept. 12, 2013), Korea Agree to Reopen Joint Industrial Complex in Kaesong on Sept. 16." <http://English.yonhapnews.co.kr>.

²⁸ Yang Moon-soo, "Kaesong Industrial Complex as Key to Peace on Korean Peninsula," *Korea Focus* (September 2013) www.koreafocus.or.kr.

²⁹ KCNA, "NDC Policy Department Slams Park Geun Hye's Coarse Invectives against DPRK," October 4, 2013.

³⁰ KCNA, "DPRK Spokesman Urges Park Geun Hye to Have Right Options." October 14, 2013.

“they (ROK administration) should not dare utter words about the nukes of the DPRK ...” and proclaiming that, “Park should know that genuine confidence can be built only when she respects all the north-south joint declarations and agreements ...,” a reference to the June 2000 Kim Dae-jung declaration and the October 2007 Roh Moo-hyun-Kim Jong Il agreement.³¹

The sordid Jang Song Thaek (Jang Seong-taek) case then distracted Pyongyang’s leadership. One concern was that this once powerful and rich in-law of Kim Jong Il had been involved South Korean agents. At least three times since 1996 South Korea’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) had successfully used money and other enticements to gain access to ranking DPRK officials, including top ranked KWP official Hwang Chang-yop. If the NIS had had any involvement with Jang, this would have seriously undermined prospects for reconciliation. Fortunately rumors of involvement apparently have proven to be false

After the political atmosphere had stabilized in Pyongyang in early 2014, Kim Jong Un refocused on other priorities including reconciliation. When Park offered to convene meetings of divided families, Kim seriously considered doing so but the meetings have yet to take place. Nevertheless, the two parties continue to seek common ground with Kim responding positively to participating in the Incheon Asian Games in October 2014. In the past both sides have found similar venues beneficial for discussing the resumption of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Park Geun-hye’s persistent pursuit of “*trustpolitik*” strategy, supported by broadened domestic and international support, could eventually restart reconciliation. Domestic support for her approach is evident in a September 12, 2013 survey by the widely read TNS Korea *Monthly Omnibus Poll*, a survey of 1,000 South Korean adults by Professor Chung Jinwoo in Seoul, Korea.³² In this poll, 64% of respondents believed Park would improve relations with North Korea during her term, regardless of political party affiliation and whether they approve or disapprove of her as president. Another 30% believed the relationship will remain unchanged and only 4% believe it would not improve. Formidable impediments remain before sustained reconciliation can resume. Obviously the nuclear issue is foremost. Park insists that Kim Jong Un must discard his nuclear ambitions before reconciliation can proceed. Kim adamantly insists that his nuclear program is not open for negotiation and remains vital for deterring the perceived threat of a US “pre-emptive” nuclear attack. Park’s efforts at a minimum have reduced tensions on the Korean Peninsula compared to the situation prior to her inauguration. She also appears, with the help of Moscow and Beijing, to have convinced Kim to at least temporarily shelve his provocative rhetoric and actions, and instead to at least consider joining Park in pursuing reconciliation.

If Kim eventually deems reconciliation a top priority, he must first rally and sustain his advisers’ support. Now that the December 2013 trial and execution of Jang Seong-taek is history, Kim’s advisers can be less concerned about consolidating his authority. Kim can rally support for reconciliation by asserting that it would better enable him to achieve his foremost goals of building a prosperous and strong nation. But the lack of support among his advisers could quickly undermine any steps toward reconciliation. The international community’s

³¹ KCNA, “DPRK NDC Policy Department Warns Park Geun Hye and Her Group Against Their Sophism,” November 15, 2013.

³²“TNS Perspectives,” Issue 6 (Sept. 12, 2013). www.Jinwoo.chung@tnsglobal.com.

preference for reconciliation, particularly in Beijing and Moscow, could further reinforce Pyongyang's commitment to reconciliation. Internationally Kim knows that he lags far behind Park in terms of international respect. His participation in reconciliation could reverse this.

Clearly Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and Seoul's precondition that it be discarded are the foremost impediments to reconciliation's resumption. Given the two sides' adamancy it would seem impossible to dismantle these impediments. However, this was previously accomplished by recasting the nuclear issue as one to be resolved by the international community, i.e. the Six Party Talks. Certainly the United States, China and Russia, despite their shared resolve to see Pyongyang discard its nuclear weapons program, prefer that South-North reconciliation resume, the sooner the better since this would reduce tensions on the peninsula. Reconciliation could also reduce Pyongyang's paranoia toward the US and convince it to again negotiate the future of its nuclear weapons program. But before this were to happen, Pyongyang most likely would demand the end of UN sanctions, a matter the international community and not the two Koreas would have to address.

Thus it is up to Park Geun Hye and Kim Jong Un to forge a compromise. For Park this is more problematic because she must convince the South Korean public that deferring resolution of the nuclear issue is in the national interest since it would allow reconciliation to restart. This is certain to be a daunting task, but the stronger her domestic support, the better the prospects for success. Ultimately, Park alone cannot resume and sustain progress toward reconciliation. This will require substantial domestic political support and her North Korean counterpart's cooperation. Yet Park has clearly "put the ball in Kim Jong Un's court."

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