

Reasons Behind the Strained Inter-Korean Relations and Ways to Improve Them

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Introduction

The Korean nation has lived on the Korean Peninsula for thousands of years as a homogeneous nation, sharing the same lineage. However, ever since the tragic national division forced on the Korean people in the wake of the occupation of south Korea by the U.S. troops, two different political systems based on different ideologies have existed on the Korean Peninsula for more than 60 years.

The historic North-South Joint Declaration issued on June 15, 2000, was a welcome change that placed inter-Korean relations on the track of reconciliation and cooperation towards national reunification. But the amicable progress in inter-Korean relations proved fleeting when the current south Korean regime persistently sought to pursue the policy of “reunification by absorption”; as a result, inter-Korean relations are now at their nadir. Reckless moves of the U.S. and south Korean authorities exacerbated the tension on the Korean Peninsula, leaving it on the verge of a war; the efforts to secure lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and reunify the country are now faced with serious challenges.

The international community expresses concern about the deterioration in inter-Korean relations and hopes that the improvement of inter-Korean relations will secure lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In view of these expectations of the international community, I decided to devote my work to the analysis of the causes behind the current deadlock in inter-Korean relations, while looking back upon the history of the epoch-making progresses in the relations between the two sides after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration. At the same time, I tried to enumerate the issues that need to be addressed for the improvement of inter-Korean relations.

Noteworthy Progress in Inter-Korean Relations after the Proclamation of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration

The historic inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in 2000 resulted in the proclamation of the Joint Declaration, which laid the groundwork for the independent reunification of Korea and national unity by relying on the strength of the Korean nation which is – the master of national reunification.

The Joint Declaration acknowledges that there are similarities between the north's reunification formula of a loose federation and the south's reunification formula of confederation. It was agreed by the two sides to move towards national reunification along the direction taken into account in the Joint Declaration; it was an important milestone in the efforts for national reunification. The Joint Declaration boosted the reunification movement together with inter-Korean relations under the ideal of "by our nation itself," in which led to epoch-making events in the post-division history.

To begin with, the reunification movement of the Korean people took a great step forward under the banner of "by our nation itself." For the first time after the division, dignitaries and organizations of all walks of life from both sides got together at Mt. Kumgang in June 2001, to hold a grand conference of national reunification on the occasion of the proclamation of the Joint Declaration. It set a pattern for the years to follow and events were held in Pyongyang and Seoul in celebration of the day.

Different kinds of meetings, seminars, and conferences were held in support of reunification by people of all strata from both sides – workers, peasants, youths and students, women, academics, press people, artists, athletes, religious practitioners, etc.

The reunification movement passed another important milestone in March 2005, when the political parties, social organizations and dignitaries from both sides got together to form the Joint Preparatory Committee of North, South and Overseas Koreans for Events for Implementation of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration as a nationwide body for reunification. It was a significant event that allowed the reunification movement to overcome the shortcomings of regional dispersion.

The Joint Declaration also opened up a new history of inter-Korean dialogue for reunification. The first inter-Korean ministerial meeting held in July 2000 was followed by different dialogues and contacts between governmental and civilian sectors of both sides. The two sides met on more than 100 different occasions for dialogue and negotiations, including the meeting of the prime ministers, some 20 rounds of ministerial meetings and scores of panel discussions for the promotion of economic cooperation. A wide range of issues were discussed in these meetings and agreements were reached in principle on many issues such as mutual respect, prevention of further tension, reconnection of trans-Korean railways and roads, prevention of flooding of the Rimjin river, tourist industry at Mt. Kumgang, reunion of separated families, dialogue between military authorities, etc. All these agreements were aimed at implementing the Joint Declaration.

Scores of inter-Korean military talks including two rounds of defense ministers' meetings that first started on September 25, 2000, on the island of Zeju and several rounds of general-level, inter-Korean military talks that first started on May 26, 2004, provided ample opportunities to discuss and reach agreements on military issues with a view to mitigating tension and securing lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The October 4 Declaration, adopted and published in 2007 was yet another milestone that opened up a bright prospect for enhancement and further expansion of inter-Korean relations.

At the inter-Korean Prime Ministers' meeting held in south Korea in November 2007, the two sides discussed and agreed on a number of issues such as the setting up of the "Special Area for Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea," establishment of the "Joint Committee for North-South Economic Cooperation," commencement of the second phase of the Kaesong Industrial Zone, the establishment of the Haeju Special Economic Zone, building of a port, joint usage of railways and roads, reconstruction of the Kaesong-Pyongyang highway and the Kaesong-Sinuiju railway, the establishment of areas for cooperation in shipbuilding in Anbyon and Nampo, etc.

At the same time the two sides agreed to commence tourist activities at Mt. Paektu, open a direct air route between Seoul and Mt. Paektu, inaugurate a reunion center for separated families at Mt. Kumgang, test the exchange of video messages between members of separated families and

the second round of inter-Korean prime ministers' meeting to be held in Pyongyang in the second half of 2008.

The defense ministers from the two sides met in Pyongyang in November 2007 to discuss issues concerning the establishment of the "North-South Joint Military Committee" and agreed on the third round of meetings to be held in Seoul in 2008.

The Joint Declaration promoted travel between north and south by people from many different backgrounds. For the first time after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration, a south Korean press delegation visited Pyongyang in August 2000. Two months later, delegates and dignitaries from 14 political parties and social organizations of south Korea visited Pyongyang on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea.

In September 2000, 63 long-term unconverted prisoners in south Korea returned to the DPRK. A direct flight route was opened between Pyongyang and Seoul via the West Sea, allowing delegations from both sides to visit each other. Notable successes were witnessed also in the field of sports and culture thanks to the Joint Declaration. Athletes and a party of supporters from the DPRK attended the 14th Asian Games in Pusan 2002 and the 22nd Universiad in Daegu in 2003. Athletes from both sides made joint appearances in opening and closing ceremonies of international sports events on at least eight different occasions. For seven years after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration, many athletes and sports delegations from both sides, representing sports like football, basketball, table tennis and taekwondo, visited each other. The two sides cooperated closely with each other in the field of culture as well; the forms of exchange and cooperation included exchange of artists and art performance, information sharing, protection of valuable cultural heritage, etc.

The DPRK's State Symphony Orchestra visited Seoul in August 2000 to give a series of performances, and the KBS Symphony Orchestra and MBC Art Troupe of south Korea visited Pyongyang for a joint performance and a joint concert by artists from north and south. There have been numerous other good examples of active inter-Korean cooperation in the field of culture. These included the Traditional Costume Show held in Pyongyang in June 2001, the joint presentation of North-South Taekwondo demonstration teams in Pyongyang and Seoul in September and October 2002, together

with Joint Exhibition in Pyongyang, Seoul and Mt. Kumgang by historians from both sides.

The Joint Declaration resulted in the reconnection of the railway and road systems, which in its turn promoted inter-Korean economic cooperation. The ground breaking ceremony for the reconnection of the railway systems on both the east coast (27.3 km) and west coast (25.5 km) of the Korean Peninsula was held in September 2002, amid great interest and expectation of the Korean people and the international community. Test operations of trains on these lines took place on May 17, 2007, and led to the commencement of freight traffic on December 11, 2007.

With the completion of the first phase of the development in Kaesong Industrial Zone, some 130 south Korean companies were involved in the inter-Korean economic cooperation. The tourist industry proved successful with more than two million south Korean tourists visiting the world-famous Mt. Kumgang resort on at least 3,550 occasions during the period of 2000 and 2008 until the tourist activities came to a halt.

For seven years after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration, arrangements were made for 15 rounds of the reunion of separated families, as well as six rounds of video meetings; some 18,000 people from 3,500 separated families had tearful family reunions. Inter-Korean trade in 2007 increased by 27 percent when compared with the previous year, reaching more than US\$1.7 billion.

The efforts of the government of the DPRK, aimed at improving inter-Korean relations, continued even when the tension mounted. The government of the DPRK sent a special envoy to Seoul in August 2009, to express its condolences over the death of the former south Korean president Kim Dae-jung in order to indicate its willingness to improve inter-Korean relations.

The requests by the president of the Hyundai group, who visited Pyongyang on August 16, 2009, were fully granted so that even south Korean citizens who were held in custody in the DPRK for breaking relevant laws have been released on humanitarian ground. The DPRK also proposed and arranged another round of reunion for separated families on the occasion of the traditional Korean holiday – the lunar harvest festival day.

When a south Korean tourist trespassed on an off-limit area and was shot to death, the DPRK expressed its regret at the incident and explained

what had happened, regardless of the detailed circumstances of the incident. The DPRK guaranteed the safety of tourists and prevention of future incidents in August, 2009.

On January 5 this year, the government, political parties and social organizations of the DPRK issued a joint statement and called for a comprehensive dialogue and negotiations between the two sides at all levels, with a view to mitigating the tension on the Korean Peninsula and improving inter-Korean relations. The DPRK's defense minister sent an open message to south Korea's defense minister and proposed the resumption of high-level inter-Korean military talks. However, the south Korean authorities turned a blind eye to our proposals and efforts aimed at improving inter-Korean relations and purposefully drove relations into a corner.

Reasons Behind the Strained Inter-Korean Relations

Inter-Korean relations developed amicably towards national reunification for almost eight years after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration as can be seen in the previous section. Then, why have inter-Korean relations become aggravated?

The blame lies with the idea of “unification by absorption” favored by the south Korean authorities. Soon after the incumbent south Korean authorities had come to power, they negated the Joint Declaration in which the two sides agreed on reunification formula. Their persistent advocacy of “unification by absorption” strained inter-Korean relations. To make matters worse, the south Korean authorities made “unification by absorption” an official government policy.

The slogan of “no nukes, opening and 3,000 dollars” is based on the idea of “unification by absorption” and was the first indication of its “policy towards north Korea” proposed by the current south Korean regime. The slogan was strongly criticized by people both at home and abroad, because it signaled a reckless anti-reunification policy. However, the south Korean authorities stubbornly talked about the need for “adherence to principles” and reintroduced the idea under the guise of “interdependence and common prosperity.”

The so-called “grand bargain” proposed by the south Korean authorities was yet another idea that drove inter-Korean relations into a corner. The “grand bargain” is otherwise known as a “package deal for the resolution of north Korea’s nuclear issue.” What the south Korean regime wanted to do was to trade north Korea’s nuclear weapons with the so-called large-scale “economic assistance,” which means the south Korea will offer “economic assistance” when the DPRK gives up its nuclear weapons. Lee Myung-bak proposed this “grand bargain” during his visit to the United States in September 2009. Since then, the south Korean authorities have tried to portray this proposal as a “new approach for the resolution of nuclear issue” and tried to solicit support for the proposal.

The so-called “grand bargain” is nothing but another name for the slogan of “no nukes, opening and 3,000 dollars.” Both ideas seek the same goal of “unification by absorption.” In his speech addressed to the UN

General Assembly, Lee threatened that the acceptance of his “proposal” by the DPRK was the “last chance for the continued existence of the regime.” Similar remarks were heard on many other occasions since then. It corroborates that the ultimate aim that the south Korean authorities seek to accomplish by clinging to the “no nuke, opening and, 3,000 dollars” slogan is to suffocate compatriots and achieve “unification by absorption.”

In his Commemoration Speech on August 15, 2010, Lee came up with his “3 phase unification” proposal – i.e. a proposal of unification going through three phases of “peaceful community,” “economic community,” and “national community.” It was a replica of “a single-nation community” proposal espoused by a former south Korean ruler. Lee also proposed a “unification tax.” This tax is based on the premise that there will be an “emergency in north Korea.” In essence, it is a tax for war and confrontation and yet another indication of his intention to prevail over the DPRK. The fact that the “unification tax” is for the sake of “3 phase unification proposal” clearly proves it.

What is particularly noteworthy in this regard is that the “national community” is based on the concept of “unification under liberal democracy.” This is the ultimate goal that the south Korean authorities seeks to obtain. It does not make sense for the south Korean authorities to beat the drum for “peaceful community” while staging war exercises almost on a daily basis, talk about “economic community” while checking the advance of inter-Korean cooperation, and call for “national community” while standing in the way of reunification.

The south Korean authorities are trying to give the world the impression that unification is imminent, saying “unification may come suddenly like a thief in the middle of a night.” What the south Korean authorities seek to do is to convince the world of the imminence of “unification by absorption” by south Korea in the wake of the so-called “contingency” in the DPRK. Furthermore, they want to justify their policy towards the DPRK and the “waiting strategy” by giving credence to “the collapse of the DPRK.” In pursuit of “unification by absorption,” the south Korean authorities provoked confrontation and brought the inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation to a grinding halt.

To expand and strengthen the inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation is an essential requirement and an urgent task for the improvement of

inter-Korean relations which, in turn, will lead to reunification and prosperity. However, the south Korean authorities deliberately broke the inter-Korean dialogue. Soon after coming to power, Lee Myung-bak talked about the need to change the inter-Korean negotiation stance that is led by the DPRK and to establish "new inter-Korean relations." On many occasions including the ministerial meeting dealing with diplomacy and security, Lee declared that "there will be no negotiation for negotiation..." and "I will not be dragged by the north without principle," etc. He went so far as to say that he would "teach the north a lesson even if it means that there would be no inter-Korean dialogue for the next five years." The south Korean authorities broke the inter-Korean dialogue by setting "abandonment of nuclear weapons" and "opening and reform" as preconditions for the development of inter-Korean relations.

The south Korean ruler declared that his "goal during the tenure in office is to make the north give up its nuclear weapons and reach out to the international community" and that "to wait for it to happen" was "his strategy towards the north." He talked about "uselessness of dialogue," saying that "there is no use talking to the north" and that "there is no need for the south to rush."

In the past, the inter-Korean joint events in celebration of the June 15 Joint Declaration were held on an annual basis. However, since 2008, not a single event has been held because of the south Korean authorities' view that regards the inter-Korean dialogue as "useless." The second round of the inter-Korean prime ministers' meeting due to be held in the second half of 2008 and some 20 other inter-Korean dialogues including a deputy prime minister-level session of the Joint Committee for inter-Korean Economic Cooperation were canceled as well.

The inter-Korean economic cooperation came to a halt because of the current south Korean authorities. They described the past ten years of inter-Korean cooperation as days when south Korea was simply dragged about by the north and received nothing in return. They went further by making public the so-called "4-point principle of inter-Korean economic cooperation." Its key content is to "advance in the resolution of nuclear issue, economic profitability, less financial burden, and consensus of citizens," claiming that "the inter-Korean economic cooperation backfired in the form of north's nuclear weapons and missile development." The south Korean authorities

not only reduced the size of the “Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund” but also barred south Korean businesses from working in the north under the pretext of “transparency” and many other preconditions.

The development of the Kaesong Industrial Zone also stalled. The south Korean authorities have openly mentioned that it would be difficult to continue the development of the zone unless the nuclear issues were resolved and even declared that “it’s OK to stop the work in the Kaesong Industrial Zone.”

Tourism at Mt. Kungang had long been considered as a “precious child of inter-Korean cooperation” by many. However, the south Korean authorities tried to vilify the tourism at Mt. Kungang by describing it as a drain on resources and unilaterally brought it to an end under the pretext of the unfortunate death of a south Korean tourist.

In the wake of the reckless moves of the south Korean authorities, the Red Cross Liaison Office at Panmunjom, which had been in operation for decades since the 1970s, had to be shut down. Also the inter-Korean hotline had to be cut off and humanitarian cooperation including the reunion of separated families had to be stopped.

Reconstruction and maintenance of an inter-Korean road system and railway system were important elements of the October 4 Declaration. The DPRK granted all the requests, including the field survey, made by the south Korean authorities for the successful implementation. However, the south Korean authorities barred the project under the pretext of “profitability.” To make matters worse, they even nullified the agreement by which the joint cheering party of supporters was to be sent to the Beijing Olympic Games via the inter-Korean railway system.

In setting up the “Special Area for Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea,” the DPRK granted all the requests made by south Korea. The DPRK opened an area of great military importance to south Korean companies and allowed them to conduct field a survey in the area of Haeju port – a sincere gesture on the part of the DPRK. However, the incumbent south Korean regime barred south Korean companies from conducting the field survey. As a result the Committee for the promotion of “Special Area for Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea” met only once.

In his speech concerning the incident involving a south Korean warship on May 24, the south Korean ruler made public the so-called May 24

measures – the content of which is to stop “inter-Korean cooperation and exchange,” which brought an end to the inter-Korean cooperation. The moves of the south Korean authorities aimed at “unification by absorption” and resulted in exacerbating tension on the Korean Peninsula. They openly talk about “contingency” and “pre-emptive strike.”

The south Korean military shifted its focus from “securing potentials to deter the north” to “pre-emptive strike on the north.” Accordingly, they worked out an “operation plan” to invade the north by relying solely on the strength of its army. The key focus of this plan is to launch a “surprise pre-emptive strike on north Korean nuclear facilities.”

Last year, the south Korean authorities worked out a plan labeled “emergency governance plan – rehabilitation” to cope with the so-called “contingency” in the north. The plan is to overthrow the DPRK government and take follow-up “administrative measures.” The south Korean authorities are also expanding and reforming its military to be able to engage in a “pre-emptive strike” and introducing modern weaponry from the U.S., including the F-15K fighter, early-warning aircraft, reconnaissance UAV, joint precision munitions to destroy underground facilities, etc.

On May 26, 2009 the south Korean authorities declared officially that south Korea would join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) on a full scale and subsequently took part in PSI activities and the setting up of the Missile Defense System, which further aggravated inter-Korean relations.

When a south Korean warship sank last year, the south Korean authorities considered it as a perfect opportunity to strain inter-Korean relations. They blamed the DPRK for the incident by making the “involvement of the north” *a fait accompli* and vowed to “retaliate.” The south Korean authorities used this incident to step up joint military exercises such as the “Key Resolve” and “Ulji Freedom Guardian,” and tried to bring greater military pressure to bear on the DPRK by conducting the so-called “joint firepower demonstration” with all kinds of war equipment and a large-scale joint amphibious war exercise in which the U.S. Marine Corps units in Okinawa were involved as well.

Invasion scenarios targeting the DPRK included the “OPLAN 5027,” “OPLAN 5029,” “OPLAN 5012,” etc., and were revised to better fit the idea of “pre-emptive strike.” All these scenarios are put into practice in joint military exercises such as the “Key Resolve,” “Fool Eagle” and “Ulji Freedom

Guardian". The focus of the "Key Resolve" and "Foal Eagle" joint military exercises conducted in March last year was on a pre-emptive strike on the DPRK's nuclear facilities, urban warfare in Pyongyang, a precision strike on commanding posts and "civil operation" by both the south Korean military and civil administration with the occupation of the DPRK's territory in mind.

Massive numbers of troops, more than 530,000 including some 30,000 U.S. troops, were involved in the "Ulji Freedom Guardian" military exercise in August this year. It was, in essence, a nuclear war exercise based on a newly revised war plan in which all kinds of modern war equipment including up-to-date means of nuclear strike were mobilized. In particular, the so-called "Special-Ops Unit," whose mission is to search and destroy the DPRK's nuclear weapons, were also present in the exercise.

The dangerous nature of the "unification by absorption," which the south Korean authorities seek to accomplish, lies in the fact that it denies the existence and the political system of the DPRK. The "unification by absorption" idea runs counter to formula of reunification by a loose federation because it does not allow different ideologies and political systems in the north and the south of Korea to co-exist. In short, the aim of the "unification by absorption" is to expand the ideology and the political system of south Korea into the realm of the DPRK and realize the ambition of "unification under liberal democracy." What's more, the fact that south Korean authorities talk about "unification tax" clearly shows their intention to accomplish the goal of "unification by absorption" with the "collapse of the DPRK's political system" in mind.

The "unification by absorption" is based on the premise that one party hurts the other party and sets up a "unified system"; it entails the risk of confrontation and war. The "unification by absorption" seeks confrontation between different political systems; "unification of systems," in turn, will inevitably lead to a war. This shows clearly that the blame for the current deadlock in inter-Korean relations lies with the south Korean authorities that advocate the idea of "unification by absorption."

The Essence of the Current Inter-Korean Confrontation and Ways to Improve Inter-Korean Relations

In order to improve inter-Korean relations, which are at their nadir, it is necessary to correctly understand the essence of the confrontation between the two sides. The international community is greatly concerned about north-south relations that have been pushed to the brink of war since the emergence of the present south Korean authorities, although relations had favorably developed since the beginning of the 21st century. Their strategy of “unification through absorption” is the main reason why north-south relations have made them deteriorate systematically in just over three years since the present south Korean authorities came to power. The situation has almost reached a point of explosion.

All “policies” toward the north of the present south Korean authorities have proceeded from the idea of “the unification of systems.” This means precisely “a method of achieving unification through absorption,” whereby one side swallows the other side, under the situation prevailing on the Korean Peninsula where two different ideologies and systems have existed in the north and the south for more than half a century.

The south Korean authorities adopted “unification of systems” as their policy, reneging on the north-south agreement of achieving reunification based on the federal formula. By opposing reunification based on the federal formula in favor of “unification through absorption” they turned the north-south relations into those of confrontation. Their “north policy” epitomized in the slogan of “no nukes, opening and 3,000 dollars,” which they launched in the early days of their rule revealed their attempt at “unification of systems” aimed to disable the nuclear deterrent of the DPRK, force DPRK into open and destroying it in the end. “Contingency” and a “wait-and-see strategy” touted by the south Korean authorities are, in essence, prompted by their ambition to see the system of the DPRK collapse.

After inventing the “unification tax,” which no previous regimes had ever thought of, the south Korean authorities have cried out to raise the funds necessary for the policy of “unification through absorption.” They

have been busy visiting not only neighboring countries but European countries to soliciting them to help them realize the policy of “unification through absorption.” This is, in a nutshell, a declaration of a war against the DPRK and falls only slightly short of an act of war. The south Korean authorities consider the DPRK an “enemy” to be wiped out, not as part of the driving force for reunification with whom they should pool efforts.

It is in the instinct of a human being to protect oneself. It is the position of the army and the people of the DPRK toward those forces set to do harm to their system. Herein lies the root cause of the deteriorated north-south relations. In other words, the present north-south confrontation is the confrontation of reunification modes. The federal formula proposed by the DPRK is a reunification model calling for co-existence and co-prosperity irrespective of ideology and system. “Unification through absorption” leads to war, while reunification by federal formula leads to peace.

Ways to Improve Inter-Korean Relations

The steadfast position of the government of the DPRK is to improve inter-Korean relations and advance towards a reunification through reconciliation and cooperation by implementing inter-Korean joint relations and to achieve peaceful reunification on the basis of the federal formula as agreed upon by the north and the south. Then, what should be done to improve inter-Korean relations?

To begin with, the south Korean authorities should abandon their ambition for “reunification by absorption.” What matters here is that they should move towards the goal of reunification based on the federal formula on the basis of recognition of and respect for the political system of the DPRK.

Inter-Korean relations can move towards the goal of national reunification through dialogue and cooperation only when the south Korean authorities recognize and respect the political system of the DPRK – a part of the driving force of reunification with whom they should cooperate. These relations can never be improved as long as the south Korean authorities, in pursuit of the goal of “unification by absorption,” negate the political system of the DPRK and consider the DPRK as an enemy. The south Korean authorities should therefore respect and implement the inter-Korean joint declarations on the basis of recognition of the existence and political system of the DPRK.

The Joint Declaration is a milestone of reunification by which the two sides agreed to move towards the goal of national reunification based on the federal formula. On the other hand, the October 4 Declaration is an action program for implementing the Joint Declaration. The idea of “unification by absorption” is nothing else than a policy of confrontation and runs counter to the idea of “by our nation itself” which runs through the Joint Declaration and will only result in mistrust and conflict. Hence, the attitude towards the inter-Korean joint declarations is the touchstone that makes it possible to find out who is for reunification and who is for division. Further, negation of these declarations will amount to a negation of reunification and inter-Korean relations.

If the south Korean authorities continue to cling to “unification by absorption” at a time when the entire Korean nation, both north and south,

aspires for national reunification, the tension on the Korean Peninsula will keep on mounting and eventually lead to a national catastrophe. The south Korean authorities should give up their ambition for “unification by absorption” and opt for federal formula of reunification as was agreed by the two sides in the Joint Declaration.

Another important issue is for the south Korean authorities to make moves for the improvement of inter-Korean relations through dialogue and cooperation. One of the important means to improve inter-Korean relations is to strengthen dialogue, cooperation, and exchange in many areas including economy, culture, humanitarianism, etc. Resolution of an issue through inter-Korean dialogue is a matter of priority in removing mistrust and improving relations.

It is clear that a conflict can never be resolved without dialogue. Expansion, development and diversification of inter-Korean relations are a noble work to achieve national reconciliation, unity, reunification and common prosperity. If the two sides revitalize economic cooperation and work together in the fields of culture and humanitarian affairs on the basis of the principle of common prosperity and complementing each other, both will benefit by sharing their resources and technology and help boost the economy and reconnect the ties as a nation.

The improvement in inter-Korean relations will be beneficial to both sides and will also promote national reunification. Inter-Korean economic cooperation will lay the foundation for a balanced development of the country’s economy and have a positive impact on the regional economy as well as the global economy. If inter-Korean relations develop towards the goal of reunification through reconciliation and cooperation, the tension on the Korean Peninsula – one of the most unstable regions of the world – will be eased, and will in its turn have a positive impact on lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Therefore, the south Korean authorities should give up the ambition for “unification by absorption” and respond, in a positive manner, to the DPRK’s efforts aimed at improving inter-Korean relations through dialogue and cooperation.

Last but not least, the U.S. and other countries concerned should refrain from standing in the way of the improvement of inter-Korean relations and support Korea’s national reunification on the basis of the federal formula. In the past, the U.S. and hostile forces that do not want to see a reunified

Korea always tried to throw a wet blanket over the improvement of inter-Korean relations. Soon after the proclamation of the Joint Declaration, the U.S. summoned south Korean authorities and scolded them for not getting an approval in advance. Later, the U.S. brought pressure to bear on the then south Korean government and forced it to “change the engagement policy” or to a policy to “control the pace of the development of inter-Korean relations,” saying that the then south Korean government’s view on the DPRK was “wrong.” The U.S. also tried to bar the inter-Korean economic cooperation, talking about the “transfer of materials of strategic significance” and “possibility of diverting the materials to military use.” Whenever there were signs of improvement in inter-Korean relations, the U.S. would resort to military exercises around the Korean Peninsula, exacerbating tensions.

To hamper inter-Korean cooperation and aggravate tension on the Korean Peninsula does not help the improvement of relations between the two sides and national reunification; neither does it help advance global peace and security. Therefore, all the countries concerned should not hamper the development of inter-Korean relations. Instead, they should do things that will benefit and boost inter-Korean relations and Korea’s peaceful reunification on the basis of the federal formula. At the same time, they should exercise influence on the south Korean authorities in order to make them give up the dangerous ambition for “unification by absorption” and improve inter-Korean relations.

Concluding Remarks

My point in this report is that the blame for the strained inter-Korean relations lies with the idea of “unification by absorption” espoused by the south Korean authorities and that they should give up the ambition for “unification by absorption.”

In the Western world, there is a widespread misconception that the Korean Peninsula can be denuclearized when the DPRK gives up its nuclear program and that inter-Korean relations can be improved when the DPRK stops “provoking.” Such views stem from misunderstanding as well as lack of understanding.

It is my hope that this report will help the international community to better understand the essence of inter-Korean relations and the right formula for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

It is also my hope that the international community will encourage the improvement of inter-Korean relations through reconciliation and cooperation and support Korea’s reunification on the basis of federal formula.

About the Author

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