"A People's Peace":

Inclusive Peacebuilding and the Role of Civil Society in Korea

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In this essay, Alec Forss assesses how the concept of inclusive peacebuilding applies to the Korean Peninsula, with a particular focus on the role of civil society in South Korea. In so doing, he outlines how a focus on inclusiveness has been increasingly codified in international resolutions and how broadening participation in the peace process remains highly relevant in the Korean context. He goes on to review the constellation of civil society actors in South Korea and their strategies, before assessing the Moon Jae-in government's efforts to foster inclusivity as well as the challenges faced.

Series on Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula

This essay is part of an ongoing series by ISDP's Korea Center to provide different perspectives on peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula. In so doing, it recognizes that peacebuilding is a long-term process and involves different dimensions, from the diplomatic and military to economic and societal.

Introduction

Elected in 2017, President Moon came to power in South Korea with a bold vision for the Korean Peninsula predicated on resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, establishing permanent peace, developing sustainable inter-Korean relations, and realizing a new economic community on the Korean Peninsula.[1]

Assessing progress towards these goals in a speech at Soongsil University on November 21, 2018, the then Minister of Unification of South Korea, Cho Myoung-gyon, stated that: "Although the government has strived to communicate with the people while working hard to develop inter-Korean relations and achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula, I think that our efforts may still fall far short of expectations." He went on to pledge that: "The government will work hard to duly hear the people and incorporate public inputs into policy on the path toward establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula and sustainable development in inter-Korean relations."[2]

The minister's remarks not only reflected the Moon Jae-in government's determination to foster public

support for and participation in its peacebuilding efforts, but also alluded to the deep political and societal divisions within South Korea regarding inter-Korean relations and policy towards North Korea.[3]

Despite admitting the government's shortcomings, the minister's pledge to "hear the people" and "incorporate public inputs into policy" chimed well with global policy discourse regarding peacebuilding, both at the United Nations and from lessons learned from peacebuilding processes around the world. The concepts of "inclusive peacebuilding," "national ownership," and "sustainable peace," among others, all stress the importance of inclusion – that is, including the voices and interests of all stakeholders – as a necessary precondition in political decision-making processes for embedding peace.[4]

Accordingly, this essay examines the concept of inclusive peacebuilding and how it relates to the Korean context. It considers South Korea's dynamic civil society landscape and the positioning and role of groups in regard to inter-Korean relations. The next section considers the Moon government's stated intentions and efforts to foster inclusivity and consensus regarding its North Korea policy, and the mechanisms for public inputs in decision-making. The final section seeks to provide a broad assessment of the challenges and opportunities of broadening participation in the peace process, with a particular focus on civil society.

Focus on Inclusiveness

The focus on inclusiveness in peacebuilding has been codified in several international resolutions as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions stresses the need for inclusive institutions and processes, including a multi-stakeholder approach that incorporates all actors from government to civil society.[5] UN Resolution 2282 (2016) also emphasizes that inclusivity is key to "advancing national peacebuilding processes."[6]

Other resolutions have advocated for the

participation of specific groups and their concerns, including women and youths. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security affirms "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building."[7] UN Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security upholds the positive contribution of youths in building peace in conflict and post-conflict situations.[8]

Inclusive peacebuilding encompasses different elements. In the formulation and execution of policy these include inter-sectoral coordination between government institutions as well as the establishment of participatory institutions and mechanisms to broaden participation to relevant non-governmental actors, for example academia, think tanks, civil society organizations, and business leaders, among others. In communicating policy, moreover, public information campaigns, educational curricula, and different dialogue frameworks may assume importance. Legitimacy and mandates for policies can be further strengthened through elections, ratification by parliaments, and referenda that provide public consent.[9]

Failure to be inclusive or forge a consensus on peacebuilding approaches runs multiple risks. Elite bargains may be fragile without securing popular legitimacy. The signing of a peace agreement does not necessarily translate into peace on the ground without local "buy in" from other actors. A narrow

focus or pursuit of a diplomatic peace agreement may fail to account for other issues important for establishing or embedding peace. Exclusive processes can also give rise to spoilers and miscommunication of objectives.[10]

> ❝ *Through advocacy or consultation, civil society groups may provide advice or critique government policy.*

The inclusion of civil society actors can be particularly important in peacebuilding processes. Involving a broad constellation of autonomous non-governmental groups and networks, ranging from human rights and other advocacy groups to conflict resolution organizations and faith groups, among many others, civil society may serve a number of functions.[11]

These include representing and articulating the views and interests of different sections of the population at the grassroots level. Through advocacy or consultation, civil society groups may provide advice or critique government policy. They may also perform an educational function by raising public awareness of important issues related to a peace process. They can be directly involved as actors in unofficial and semi-official diplomatic initiatives and help bridge ties between adversarial groups. Importantly they may champion a peace deal as well as hold the government accountable to its implementation. But while civil society groups can play a constructive role in peacebuilding, they can also inhibit and oppose efforts for peace.[12]

In sum, from Afghanistan, Liberia, and Somalia to Nepal, Colombia, and Northern Ireland, among many others, studies have underscored the central importance of inclusive peacebuilding, including encompassing civil society, both for conflict resolution and sustainable peace to prevent relapses into violence.[13]

The Korean Context

Divided into two separate entities in 1945 by the victors of the Second World War, a division reinforced by the devastating Korean War which killed and injured millions (1950-53), North and South Korea have in ensuing decades failed to find sustainable peace let alone achieved unification.[14] This in spite of periods of thawed relations and the signing of several "peace" agreements, notably the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration which committed the two Koreas to "boldly approach a new era of national reconciliation, peace and prosperity, and to improve and cultivate inter-Korean relations."[15]

Despite such expressed intentions, relations remain marred by political tensions, periodic military confrontation, and the enduring segregation of the Korean people. Accordingly, improving inter-Korean relations remains inextricably bound to a peacebuilding process towards not only political and military stability on the Peninsula, but also trust-building, reconciliation, and ultimately unification.

How inclusive peacebuilding pertains to the Korean context, however, is arguably relatively less applied, at least outside of Korea. The geopolitical and internationalized dimensions of the conflict, the hard border separating the two Koreas, and prevailing natural security interests have instead focused much attention on the narrow, elite-driven nature of nuclear and security-related negotiations – the flurry of summit diplomacy between leaders in 2018-19 being a case-in-point. This is further exacerbated by North Korea's political system with power and authority vested in the leader with limited room for other stakeholders amidst a near absence of civil society.

But while the issue of inclusiveness may arguably not have the same urgent degree of saliency as in other conflict and post-conflict scenarios, for the reasons above, it nevertheless remains especially relevant in both an inter-Korean and intra-South Korean context.

A process of normalization of relations and reconciliation between the Koreas, including the pursuit of cooperative projects, is not the exclusive

domain of government-to-government relations, but also includes the participation of a range of state actors and interests. For instance, senior military officials from both South and North Korea signed the Inter-Korean military agreement to reduce tensions as an annex to the Pyongyang Declaration in September 2018.[16] South Korea's National Assembly also plays an important role in scrutinizing government policy; disputes have arisen between the government and the conservative opposition over the domestic ratification of inter-Korean agreements.[17]

Non-state actors have also played an influential role. Before their suspension, South Korean companies, most notably Hyundai, have been instrumental in flagship inter-Korean projects in North Korea such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Mt. Kumgang tourism site.[18] Considered in more detail below, South Korea's active civil society landscape is also an important stakeholder in participating in as well as supporting (or indeed opposing) inter-Korean peace initiatives.

As a vibrant democracy, furthermore, the sustainability of the South Korean government's policies towards North Korea, unification, and approach to building peaceful relations is ultimately accountable to the electorate. Therefore, in fostering public support, the government is forced to consider how to formulate, coordinate, and communicate its policies. While the North Korean leadership also has domestic considerations to take into account, it appears to face fewer constraints in pursuing a particular policy course.

Role and Positions of Civil Society in South Korea

Up until the late 1980s, diplomatic contacts and negotiations between North and South Korea were largely secretive exchanges involving top officials and the intelligence services of each side.[19] South Korea's democratic transition, however, opened up new spaces for the involvement of civil society organizations, which pushed for political reform and took an active stance in relations with the North, the issue of unification, South Korea's security posture

with the end of the Cold War, and the humanitarian consequences of division, namely the painful issue of separated families.

> ## *South Korea's democratic transition opened up new spaces for the involvement of civil society organizations.*

Actors included the National Council of Churches in Korea, which lobbied for the withdrawal of American troops and the signing of a peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement. Student groups, meanwhile, advocated for inter-Korean student talks between Seoul National University and Kim Il Sung University. In 1989, Reverend Moon Ik Kwan, an advisor to a new umbrella constellation of groups called the National Alliance of Democratic Organizations, met with Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang.[20]

Concerned that North Korea was using such contacts to delegitimize the South Korean government, it responded by enforcing the 1948 National Security Law that bans contacts and exchanges with North Korea without permission from the government. (This law significantly shrank, and continues to constrain, both independent space for civil society engagement with the North, in addition to being used by South Korean governments to alternatively control pro- or anti-North Korean groups and their activities.[21])

Kim Dae-jung's election as president in 1997 represented a watershed moment in inter-Korean relations as he initiated the so-called sunshine policy that was carried on by his successor Roh Moo-hyun. Both Kim and Roh furthermore touted a participatory government which involved the promotion of civil society leaders to presidential office and government agencies, in particular of the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy. Whereas only 7 percent of Kim Young-sam's government before 1998 had been comprised of former activists, this increased to over

50 percent under Roh. Notwithstanding, criticism was also levelled at a co-option of civil society and its subordination to the political stance of the incumbent government.[22]

Two milestones were reached when Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun held historic summits – the first between leaders since the Korean War – with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in 2000 and 2007, respectively. But while the summits established the primacy of state-to-state diplomacy for promoting relations, the sunshine policy also sought to significantly expand the opportunities for social, cultural, and economic exchanges between the peoples of both Koreas, including family reunions. Such exchanges were predicated on one of the core principles of the sunshine policy which sought to restore a "lost" national identity and learn how to co-exist peacefully after decades of division.[23]

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However, not helped by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, which bedeviled rapprochement and increasingly turned attention towards a focus on U.S.-North Korea relations, attitudes in South Korea towards the North became increasingly polarized and politicized.[24]

Subsequently, under the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, which took a more conditional approach to engagement with North Korea, progressive civil society groups lost favor and influence. Furthermore, in 2010, following the Cheonan incident in which 46 South Korean sailors were killed, President Lee passed the so-called May 24 measures which restricted cooperation and exchanges with North Korea. These were expanded

in 2016 with the closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex after North Korea's fourth nuclear test.[25]

Civil Society and Public Opinion Today

South Korea today continues to display a dynamic and influential civil society with a high degree of mobilization on many different issues – as can be witnessed by the many rallies and demonstrations of different groups and political factions in South Korean cities.

While somewhat of an oversimplification, the constellation of groups "active" on North Korea-related issues can broadly be divided into liberals (or progressives) and conservatives. The former includes mass-membership organizations such as the People's Solidary for Participatory Democracy and the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice.[26] More conservative groups include an array of religious, military veteran organizations, as well as arguably some so-called "defector" groups of former North Korean nationals residing in the South.

Progressive groups largely support the agenda of liberal governments and are in favor of an engagement and trust-building approach with North Korea. Some also take a more critical stance of the U.S.-South Korea security alliance, viewing military deterrence and U.S. national security interests as obstacles to peaceful inter-Korean relations.[27]

Conservative groups meanwhile take a more wary view of the nature and actions of the North Korean regime including its human rights record. They instead emphasize the need to take a conditional stick-and-carrot approach whereby the provision of "rewards" and concessions – such as economic assistance – must be predicated on North Korea's behavior and willingness to demonstrate change including denuclearization.

It would be wrong, however, to view this dichotomy as being pro-peace and anti-peace per se. A more accurate distinction is that while the former emphasize the need to build peace, the latter – in the absence of North Korean change – see the necessity of preserving peace through deterrence and

maintaining a strong U.S.-ROK alliance.

But while civil society groups may be aligned or affiliated with the stance of the incumbent government, this does not mean that such groups do not take an entirely uncritical view of aspects of government policy and agenda-setting in inter-Korean relations.[28]

Coalitions of groups have also mobilized around specific issues such as the National People's Action to Stop the Deployment of THAAD in South Korea, referring to the U.S. anti-missile system.[29] Others still have sought to form international coalitions such as Korea Peace Now, a global movement of women mobilizing to end the Korean War and focused on the rights of women and the humanitarian consequences of sanctions.[30] Another, the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, is focused on raising awareness of human rights violations in North Korea.[31]

Civil society groups seek to exert influence on public opinion and policymaking in different ways. This includes direct action through organizing public demonstrations and rallies on the streets. Other strategies include advocacy through issuing statements, publications, and open letters, educational initiatives, participating in dialogues, mobilizing networks, advising special governmental committees, and engaging in international fora. Others still seek to disseminate information (typically anti-North Korean government) by various means to the North Korean population. Many have formed umbrella groupings to amplify their voice and influence.

Before the first inter-Korean summit in April 2018, a coalition of domestic and international human rights groups sent a letter to President Moon, urging him to include humanitarian aid, family reunions, and human rights on his agenda with Kim Jong Un.[32] In March 2019, a coalition of 55 South Korean civil society organizations – some of which have consultative status within the UN Economic and Social Council – penned an open letter to the UN Security Council urging continued peace efforts

amid a stall in negotiations after the failure of the Hanoi Summit.[33] In another initiative, the Kaesong Industrial Complex and Kumgang Tourism Pan-national Campaign has sought to urge the National Assembly not to block measures leading to the resumption of these inter-Korean projects.[34]

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The existence of a vibrant civil society plays an important role in raising public awareness, advocacy, and lobbying of government. However, as the next sections explore, challenges remain in developing a more fully independent, non-partisan function for civil society; establishing effective institutional mechanisms to mediate dialogue between government and society; as well as sanctions and legal obstacles which constrain space for civil society actors, especially in inter-Korean exchanges.

North Korea Policy: "Made by the People"?

The Moon government, following the imprisonment of former President Park Geun-hye, has responded to popular demand for greater transparency and accountability in policymaking. Its government innovation strategy includes greater access to public data, breaking down silos between government ministries, and ensuring citizen participation.[35] The government's North Korea policy has also to some extent fallen under this strategy. In so doing, a key stated principle is that of pursuing an "open policy" in which policy "will be completed through public participation and interaction to ensure that the

policy can be fully understood by – and made by – the people."[36]

A further consideration driving this approach is the government's concerns over the sustainability and longevity of its policy given the deep polarization in South Korean politics and society. As Chung-in Moon, a chief ideologue of the sunshine policy and senior advisor to President Moon, has argued, "forging a national consensus is the most crucial first step toward a successful engagement policy [with North Korea]."[37]

> ❝ *Seven decades of division have witnessed a weakening of ethnic and cultural bonds with the North.*

To make it harder for any next South Korean government to overturn its policy, and so help to build more sustainable inter-Korean relations, the Moon government has therefore sought to push ahead with what it calls a National Unification Agreement – to bridge differences and codify national consensus on issues of unification and the government's North Korea policy.[38]

Moreover, forging such a consensus is not only seen as necessary to bridge the ideological divide, but also the generational: seven decades of division have witnessed a weakening of ethnic and cultural bonds with the North, especially among the younger generation of South Koreans who fear the social and economic consequences of a unification they are increasingly less interested in.[39] As President Moon himself has stated, "[t]he North and South represent a community of life in which coexistence is a must … This is peace for the lives of the common people, beyond political and diplomatic peace."

The Moon government has therefore sought through different ways to broaden national ownership and instill popular public support and enthusiasm

of its Korean Peninsula policy and its objectives. These efforts are considered below, including communication and education, institutionalizing participation in decision-making, and role of civil society in inter-Korean exchanges.

Communication and Education

Before the first Panmunjom inter-Korean summit in April 2018, the Inter-Korean Summit Preparation Committee under the Blue House was tasked with arrangements for the summit. This included creating a website (both in Korean and English) www.koreansummit.kr, which contained news, videos, photos, and information on the history and milestones of inter-Korean relations as well as the Moon government's policy towards North Korea. There was even a participatory function where ordinary citizens and other well-wishers could leave messages of hope and reconciliation. The subsequent summit was also partially televised live. K-Pop events have also been held in support of peace messaging objectives. However, such initiatives have been criticized as government "propaganda" by some conservative groups.

Relevant governmental websites have also provided details of the principles and strategies guiding the Moon administration's policy towards North Korea. The Ministry of Unification publishes annual white papers on issues and policies pertaining to inter-Korean relations and Korean unification. Also available online, in 2018 10,000 hard copies of the white paper were distributed to the National Assembly, educational institutions, libraries, and civic organizations.[40]

Unification education in schools is another important plank of government-society communication. In the past, despite teaching about Koreans' common ethnic heritage, the curriculum contained an anti-communist agenda which emphasized reunification by de facto absorption of the North. This has changed since both Koreas have by and large consented to the principle of a longer-term unification process and format of "one nation, two systems."[41] Under the Moon government, unification education has been broadened to also include peace education,

thus seeking to promote values of non-violence, compassion, and inculcating a deeper knowledge and understanding of the causes and maintenance of conflict and division.[42] This reflects a key concern for some civil society groups who point at the "militarization" of South Korean society and mindsets.[43] However, again, such education is not immune to politicization, while concerns exist over a lack of clear methodology, objectives, and capacity in teaching "peace."[44]

At a civil-civil level, a novel initiative partially supported by the Ministry of Unification has been the trialing of "Social Dialogue for Peace and Unification Building" to try and bridge the societal divide on attitudes towards North Korea. This has brought together civil society activists and ordinary citizens from both sides of the ideological spectrum to share perspectives. Such dialogues may potentially represent an important channel to start a constructive conversation and find greater consensus within South Korean society.[45] However, they too may be vulnerable to a counterproductive politicization, especially if there is a perception that their purpose is to convert opinion towards the government's agenda.

Institutionalizing Participation

A key consideration of inclusive peacebuilding involves incorporating different stakeholders in decision-making. As stated by the government, it seeks to "institutionalize participation of – and interaction with – the National Assembly, local government bodies, civil organizations, and experts to draw a national consensus and agreement on unification issues and our North Korea policy."[46]

However, such institutionalization, especially in incorporating civil society, has been rather weak. The reality is that policymaking and interactions with North Korea remain largely confined to powerful subcommittees under the Blue House, the intelligence service, as well as key government ministries, notably the foreign and unification ministries.

Unlike on other socio-economic issues which link

civil society with government through standing committees, there exists no permanent committee on peacebuilding or inter-Korean relations. Aside from direct advocacy, civil society voices have largely been limited to ad hoc roundtables arranged by the Presidential Office as well as governmental think tanks, which, furthermore, have tended to invite those organizations broadly aligned with government policy.[47]

> ## "A key consideration of inclusive peacebuilding involves incorporating different stakeholders in decision-making.

Human rights groups in particular have expressed disappointment that a human rights dialogue has not been promoted on the agenda of inter-Korean relations. Criticism has also been leveled at the withdrawal of government funding and support for some groups.[48] Furthermore, even those civil society groups broadly aligned with the incumbent government have advocated for greater participation of civil society and expressed frustration at the slow pace of implementing inter-Korean projects such as reopening the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Mt. Kumgang tourism resort, which they see as instrumental for trust-building between the two Koreas.[49]

On paper, arguably the most prominent public participatory body is the National Unification Advisory Council (NUAC), which serves as a bidirectional mechanism to communicate government policy and to input grassroots voices into policymaking via its members. It has over 15,000 members in South Korea and 3,000 among the Korean diaspora abroad. The President of the Council is concurrently the South Korean president. At the launch of the 19th NUAC, President Moon asserted that "it brings together people of different ideologies, regions, generations, and social backgrounds." Among its activities, it seeks to gather public opinion and channel recommendations to the chairperson. It

claims for instance to have improved inter-Korean relations in 2018 by making recommendations to suspend U.S.-ROK military exercises and by inviting high-ranking North Korean representatives to the opening and closing of the Pyeongchang Olympics.[50]

Its critics argue, however, that it largely functions to disseminate the government's message;[51] the South Korean president further has the power to appoint council members. Perhaps responding to such criticism, attempts have been made to make it more inclusive by increasing the participation of women and youths to serve as advisors, who are elected through a public contest system. Furthermore, NUAC's Secretariat have admitted the need to strengthen the procedure for evaluating whether recommendations are reflected in government policies.[52]

> ❝ *Not only has North Korea done little to create a conducive environment for a deepening or broadening of exchanges, but the lack of independent space for civil society in North Korea also represents an obvious challenge.*

Inter-Korean Exchanges

Broadening civilian participation has been codified in inter-Korean agreements signed in 2018. The Panmunjom Declaration calls for "multifaceted cooperation, exchanges, and visits and contacts of people from all levels of society in order to give further momentum to the atmosphere of national reconciliation and unity."[53] This has involved organizing family reunions as well as cultural, art, and sporting exchanges.

In 2018, before the freeze in relations, out of a total of 36 inter-Korean meetings, 19 concerned politics

(mainly preparation for summits), four military matters, four economic issues, two humanitarian assistance, while seven were related to socio-cultural exchanges. This shows that while political and security issues remain predominant items of concern in inter-Korean relations, people-to-people diplomacy has also been given a prominent role. Furthermore, for the second inter-Korean Summit, held in September 2018, representatives from civil society, sport, and culture were selected alongside different South Korean ministries and business leaders to visit Pyongyang and meet their North Korean counterparts.[54]

However, not only has North Korea done little to create a conducive environment for a deepening or broadening of exchanges,[55] but the lack of independent space for civil society in North Korea also represents an obvious challenge. Despite the existence of such organizations as the Korean National Peace Committee and the Democratic Women's Union, their degree of autonomy from the government is highly restricted.

Furthermore, there is also the risk that exchanges can perform more of a ceremonial and symbolic role in service of both government's agendas. Their contribution can also be difficult to quantify where civilian exchanges are mobilized to fulfill intangible goals such as "reconnecting the blood-lines of the nation." Which groups or sub-groups participate are also an issue whereby women's and youth groups have been relatively underrepresented.[56]

How such exchanges are organized is also an important consideration. A case-in-point was the controversy caused by the creation of a joint North-South female ice hockey team at the Pyeongchang Olympics when South Korean players had to make way for North Korean participants; it did not help that the team lost every match they played.[57] The subsequent fall-out demonstrated the need for greater consultation with and "buy-in" from relevant sporting bodies rather than a decision implemented in a seemingly arbitrary and top-down manner.

Importantly, civilian exchanges face legal obstacles in the form of the Inter-Korean Exchange

Cooperation Act, which hinders non-government sanctioned exchanges with North Korea and controls the allocation of funding for activities based on criteria such as whether they violate sanctions, have the potential to harm national security, and/or undermine inter-Korean relations. Any encounters and exchange of materials and financial transactions need to be approved by the Minister of Unification who can place restrictions or conditions.[58] A recent case-in-point is the government's attempts to crack down on groups involved in sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the DMZ.[59]

Some civil society groups have called for revision of the Act through legislative petitions to the National Assembly in order to allow more autonomy in private exchanges in economic, academic, and cultural fields. Recognizing the need to some extent devolve policy, the Moon administration has sought to introduce a bill to ease regulations regarding inter-Korean exchange and cooperation.[60]

This includes granting greater authority to local governments to act as legal agents of exchange with North Korean entities, such as in providing humanitarian aid and directly applying for funding from the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund to carry out other projects. (This reflects the fact that such local and regional government actors often have their own specific interests, especially those bordering North Korea, such as in transboundary water management.[61]) While concerns exist that this could squeeze out space for non-governmental actors, the bill also seeks to relax restrictions on South Korean citizens pursuing independent contacts with the North (as long as these are not perceived as potentially undermining inter-Korean relations).

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

The South Korean government cannot make and execute policy on and engagement with North Korea in a "black box." South Korean civil society is a noisy and powerful force in domestic politics that will seek to make its voice heard. The Moon government has therefore expended considerable efforts to foster greater inclusivity as key to the sustainability of its engagement-oriented approach with North Korea.

> ## North Korea's destruction of the symbolic inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office in June 2020 marked a further low in relations as exchanges all but ceased.

The government initially enjoyed high public approval ratings for its North Korea policy, which was attributable to its efforts to openly communicate its strategy and objectives, broaden participation, and the results yielded in terms of a diminution of tensions.[62] However, as negotiations deadlocked and the focus of attention turned to U.S.-DPRK negotiations and the nuclear issue, this squeezed out space for South Korea and led to decreasing support for the government's policy, which was seen to be increasingly ineffective. North Korea's destruction of the symbolic inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office in June 2020 marked a further low in relations as exchanges all but ceased.[63]

In terms of the inter-Korean dimension, despite efforts to expand civilian participation, there are a number of challenges. As noted, the virtual absence of civil society in North Korea and centralized nature of the regime thwarts the development of an independent space for North-South civilian exchanges outside of highly controlled interactions which depend on prior negotiation and agreement between the central governments of both Koreas. These can only be as effective as the North Korean regime allows them to be and inhibit a broader based engagement outside of high-level talks. Further constraining factors include the international sanctions regime which can limit or even prohibit civilian exchanges if providing resources or materials. South Korea's national laws, military tensions, and the vicissitudes of U.S.-North Korea, inter-Korean, and consideration for U.S.-South Korea relations can also curtail or even shut down any space for non-governmental initiatives.

As peace researcher Pamela Aall has asserted, "NGOs cannot provide a substitute for concerted international action on the part of the major states [to a conflict]."[64] Accordingly, it can be argued that until there is a substantial improvement in diplomatic relations and attenuation of the negative security environment, and pending a degree of opening up of North Korea politically, the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations will largely be subordinate to government-to-government interactions and priorities.

> *It is necessary to reiterate that peacebuilding is not an event but rather a long-term process.*

Regarding the intra-South Korean dimension, civil society would appear to exercise relatively limited influence on the core issues of denuclearization, peace regime, and the normalization of diplomatic relations, which have been subject to elite-driven negotiations and interests with associated diplomatic and military sensitivities. This is exacerbated, however, by the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for participation and their deep politicization among different interest groups. Furthermore, it would appear that despite the rhetoric of listening to differences of opinion, criticism can arguably be levelled at the Moon administration's concept of national ownership as "acquiescing to the strategies and priorities of the national government" – a common critique of government-led inclusive peacebuilding approaches.[65]

Despite such critiques and obstacles – some of which are beyond the government's control and which also has to balance many different factors in policymaking – there is still much saliency for inclusive peacebuilding and the role of civil society in the Korean context.

As the literature on inclusivity in peacebuilding processes points out, narrowly struck "elite bargains" can be fragile, viewed as exclusionary, and incur opposition if they do not find popular domestic support. Government-society communication

of agendas and objectives is therefore crucial. Furthermore, particularly on the issue of unification, which would directly affect the everyday lives and futures of all Korean citizens, fostering inclusivity and national consensus will be a crucial task requiring careful consultation; and one which would potentially find legitimacy through a public referendum.

Fostering more institutionalized arrangements – whether through a bipartisan civic forum or creation of a permanent standing committee – for vertically channeling civil society opinion and interests could provide a more mature platform for government-civil society interactions than exists at present. Such a platform would face the difficult task of bridging the currently politicized divide and so seek to be accommodative and sensitive to (necessary) differences of opinion. In so doing, this could potentially give a broader sense of ownership to any South Korean-led process. Inclusive arrangements that foster the bottom-up percolation of ideas and policy proposals could also hold the potential to broaden the inter-Korean agenda beyond the diplomatic and military to other important domains such as gender equality, climate change, and the environment, which arguably the younger generation increasingly identify with.

Related to above point is the need to create a broader "peace constituency" in South Korea in support of peacebuilding efforts amidst an apathy of younger generation in unification and deep skepticism of conservatives to rapprochement with North Korea. This points to a need for more society-society initiatives such as expanding social dialogues, which may prove a way of starting a constructive conversation at the grassroots level and thus augment the official peace process. These furthermore should seek not only to include those already active in such debates but reach out to a broader public whilst, again, being sensitive to alternative perspectives and proposals.

Finally, looking farther ahead, it is also necessary to reiterate that peacebuilding is not an event but rather a long-term process. Even should elite-led negotiations lead to a diplomatic or political peace, in other words a negotiated settlement, the sustainable implementation of agreements as well as achieving social accommodation, integration, and reconciliation

will necessitate multi-stakeholder coordination as well as both deeper and broader civil society and people-to-people engagement – the challenges of integrating North Korean nationals into South Korean society being a case-in-point of the magnitude of the task ahead.[66] ■

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The ISDP Korea Center seeks to promote informed understanding and constructive dialogue on issues of peace, security, and sustainable development on the Korean Peninsula. It also serves as a hub to advance knowledge, exchange, and cooperation between Korea and the Nordic region.

Endnotes

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