Why Have Attempts to Settle Inter-Korean Conflict Failed? :

Lessons for Peace Building in the Korean Peninsula

Hong, Yong-Pyo
(Hanyang University)

CONTENTS

I . Introduction	1. The Armistice Agreement in 1953
II . Origins of Ideological and Military Conflict	2. The July 4th Joint Communiqué in 1972
1. The Division and the Formation of Conflict Structure	3. The Basic Agreement in 1992
2. The Korean War and the Intensification of Mutual Conflict	4. The June 15th Joint Declaration in 2000
III . The Trials and Errors in Conflict Settlement	IV . Conclusion

· **Keyword:** ideological incompatibility, security incompatibility, the Armistice Agreement, the Basic Agreement, the Joint Communiqué, Korean summit

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the reasons why the conflict between North and South Korea has been unsolved, focusing on the incompatibility of ideological identity, and the incompatibility of core interests, especially interests in terms of military security.

First, this study examines historical causes of ideological and military confrontation between North and South Korea. Second, four cases in which Seoul and Pyongyang tried to settle the conflict between them will be studied. They are: (1) the armistice agreement of July 1953, (2) the Joint Communiqué of July 1972, (3) the conclusion of the Basic Agreement in December 1991, and (4) the Joint Declaration of June 2000. In each case, this paper analyzes how two Koreas dealt the problem of ideological and interest incompatibility, and what the limitation in such efforts were. Finally, based on the case analysis, this paper will discuss plausible way to settle inter-Korea conflict and build peace system in the Korean peninsula.

I. Introduction

The conflict between North and South Korea originated from the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union in international scene, and the power struggle between left and right wing forces in domestic arena after the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. This conflict in the Korean peninsula institutionalized with the establishment of two separate governments—i.e. the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—in 1948, and deepened by the Korean War in 1950. Furthermore, the mutual conflict and distrust between the two Koreas had been reproduced on a progressive scale after the war because of the bitter confrontation between them for decades. As a result, the conflict structure still exists in the Korean peninsula.

There have been several attempts to settle the conflict, and to build peace system between the two Koreas. They were: the Armistice Agreement in 1953, the July 4th Joint Communiqué in 1973, the North-South Basic Agreement in 1992, and the June 15th Joint Declaration in 2000.¹⁾ Although they could promote peace in the Korean peninsula to some extent, they virtually failed to settle inter-Korean conflict. Why were they unsuccessful?

Without settling the conflict structure, it will be difficult to build peace system in the Korean peninsula, and ultimately achieve unification. Few works on the subject, however, have analyzed the causes of the failure in past efforts to resolve conflict in Korea. If any, they did not analyze the above mentioned four attempts altogether with a framework, rather they usually deal with one of the four cases respectively.²⁾ As an effort to overcome such a limit, this study will examine past four cases with the framework of conflict resolution theory, and draw lessons for peace building in the Korean peninsula.

In general, a situation of conflict is defined as “any situation in which two or more

1) The October 4 Declaration in 2007 between North and South Korea leaders may be regarded as another important agreement to settle inter-Korean conflict. But this paper will not deal with it mainly because it is yet to be implemented.

2) Many works have dealt with the subject especially since inter-Korean summit in 2000. For example, see articles in Chung-in Moon, et al. eds., *Ending the Cold War in Korea: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001); Jong-Chun Baek & Young Jae Kim, eds., *Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: KAIS, 2001); Yoon Bae Kim & Young Jae Kim, eds., *Peace Building on the Korean Peninsula and the New World Order* (Seoul: Oruem, 2005). Moon (2001) included papers which paid attention to historical aspects of the Korean conflict, but they only deal with the Korea War without examining conflict settling attempts between the war and the 2000 summit.

social entities or parties (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals.”³⁾ In particular, international conflict is usually caused by the ‘incompatibility of interest’ and the ‘incompatibility of ideological identity.’ Consequently, when interest complementarity between parties involved increases, and when threats to one party’s ideological identity decrease, the possibility of conflict resolution become high. On the contrary when the parties involved do not have willingness to accept the difference of ideological identity, and when one party’s interest sacrifices the other’s interest, mutual conflict deepens.⁴⁾

In this vein, this paper will try to analyze the reasons why the conflict between North and South Korea has been unsolved, focusing on the incompatibility of ideological identity, and the incompatibility of core interests (especially interests in terms of military security). First, this study will examine origins of ideological and military confrontation between North and South Korea. Second, the cases in which Seoul and Pyongyang tried to settle the conflict between them will be studied, and the limits of such attempts will be analyzed. Finally, this paper will discuss how to settle inter-Korea conflict and build peace system on the Korean peninsula.

II. Origins of Ideological and Military Conflict

1. The Division and the Formation of Conflict Structure

The Korean peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel immediately after the unconditional surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945. The United States and the Soviet Union occupied the southern and northern parts respectively. It was supposed to be a temporary division to facilitate the disarming of Japanese troops. In the early stage of the occupation, the US and the Soviet Union attempted, however ostensible, to establish a unified government in Korea. But such attempts proved to be futile as the rivalry between the two superpowers became acute, combined with the competition between the Communist forces and the right-wing conservative forces within Korean political arena.

In northern part of the peninsular, Kim Il Sung, who became the top leader with the support from Moscow, regarded the Soviet Union as “liberator of the nation.”⁵⁾ On the

3) C. R. Michell, *The Structure of International Conflict*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), p.17.

4) Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990), pp.5–17; Haktae Sun, “Nambukan galdeunghagyeul makanijum [Mechanism of Conflict Resolution between North and South Korea]” *Hankuk jongchihakhoebo* [Korean Political Science Review], Vol. 32, No. 2 (1998).

contrary, North Korea identified the US as an “imperialist,” and South Korea as its “puppet.” In addition, Kim Il Sung tried to build a Communist system helped by the Soviet Union. As early as February 1946, the Soviets and the northern Communists organized, as a central governing body, the North Korean Provisional People’s Committee with Kim Il Sung as its chairman, and eliminated Cho Man-sik, a highly respected nationalist leader. The North Korean Workers Party was established in August, and the first local elections to choose the representatives for People’s Committees were held in November. In February 1947, the North Korean Supreme People’s Assembly was inaugurated as the highest legislative body.⁶⁾ North Korean effort to establish a Communist system fortified with the rupture of the US-USSR Joint Commission in August 1947, which was to prepare for the establishment of a provisional Korean government and for the trusteeship.

As Kim Il Sung regarded South Korea as “the puppet of American imperialists,” President Syngman Rhee identified the North as “the puppet of Soviet Communists.” After the liberation, Rhee was expected to be a figure who could unite the Korean people and establish an independent and unified government. But he disclosed strong anti-Communism from the early stage. In 1946, Rhee’s antagonism towards the Communists developed into a call for the establishment of a separate government in the South. After the Joint Commission had adjourned without any results, Rhee publicly argued that, because there was no hope for unification through the Joint Commission, a separate southern government had to be created in order to appeal to world opinion for the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from north of the 38th parallel.⁷⁾

The international environment was developing favorably for Rhee by early 1947. In March, President Truman of the US announced the Truman Doctrine which emphasized the necessity of American support for “free peoples.” It was followed by the Marshall Plan in June, and George Kennan’s “containment” policy in July.⁸⁾ With the final rupture of the second US-USSR Joint Commission in August, the US made a decision to move

5) Il Sung Kim, *Selected Works of Kim Il Sung, Vol. I* (Pyongyang: Chosun nodongdang chulpansa, 1963), p.53.

6) Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part I: The Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp.320–80; Dae-sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.59–95.

7) For detail’s of Rhee’s anti-Communism, see Yong-Pyo Hong, “The Evolution of Syngman Rhee’s Anti-Communist Policy and the Cold War in the Korean Peninsula,” A Paper Presented in the International Conference by the Korean War Studies Association, Beijing, October 2002.

8) For a detailed analysis of the containment policy, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

ahead with the creation of a separate government in South Korea which was friendly to the US. For that purpose, the US government submitted the Korean question to the United Nations.

On May 1948, general elections were finally held in South Korea under the supervision of the UN Temporary Commission on Korea while the leftist boycotted the elections. Subsequently, the newly created National Assembly, which was predominantly anti-Communist in character, elected Rhee as the first President of the new government. On August 15, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was formally established. In the North, where the Communists had consolidated their power with Soviet support, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was officially proclaimed on 9 September 1948, electing Kim Il Sung as its Premier.

With the creation of two separate governments which claimed different ideologies and political systems, a major precondition for military conflict was firmly in place. Although both leaders in North and South Korea superficially supported 'peaceful unification,' they knew that a political solution of the Korean division had already proved impossible in the post-Liberation period.

Immediately after the establishment of the DPRK, it declared itself to be "the only lawfully elected people's government" in Korea and designated Seoul, the capital of South Korea, as its capital. Pyongyang, the major city of North Korea, was designated as its "revolutionary" capital.⁹⁾ Furthermore, Kim Il Sung, expressing his "utmost hostility and hatred" against the US and South Korea, declared "territorial integration (Kutowanjong) to be its major goal. Kim asserted that the "territorial integration" should be accomplished by repelling "American imperialists" from Korea and arousing South Korean revolution.¹⁰⁾

In fact, Kim Il Sung thought that peaceful unification was "impossible under current situation," and he was "always" planning to attack the South by military means. In addition, the North Korean leader, worrying about a possible invasion from South Korea, believed that unless military action was taken at once, the unification of the country would be delayed, during which time the southern regime would build up strong armed forces and overthrow the North. Thus, Kim tried to obtain Soviet support for military unification.¹¹⁾

9) Quoted in Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policies of South and North Korea: A Comparative Study* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1986), p.73.

10) For details on North Korea's "territorial integration," see Myung-Lim Park, *Hankuk jonjangui balbalkwa kiwon [The Korean War: The Outbreak and Its Origins, Vol. I]* (Seoul: Nanam, 1996), pp.83-91.

11) Such an attitude of Kim Il Sung is well portrayed in "Russian Documents on the Korean

After the division, like Kim Il Sung, President Syngman Rhee, who took the power in the South, claimed that the ROK was the only lawful government in Korea. He also considered unification by military means. For example, as early as February 1949, President Rhee straightforwardly expressed his intention to use force to unify the country. Rhee believed that the UN's recognition of South Korea made it "legal to cover all Korea."¹²⁾ In addition, the fear of the Communist threat inside and outside the South seemed to force Rhee to contemplate a kind of pre-emptive war. For example, President Rhee perceived the revolts in Yosu and Suncheon in October 1948 as the result of a "conspiracy" of the Communists to "overthrow" the ROK government by provoking a "civil war." He also believed that the communization of China was "bound to have unfavorable effects upon Korea." Thus, he argued that, before Korea became "another China," the Communists in Korea had to be removed.¹³⁾ For that purpose, Rhee asked the US to provide military aid.

As discussed above, both Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee feared a surprise attack by the other, and thus became more eager to make a pre-emptive strike. In other words, while consolidating political systems under different ideologies, North and South Korea were involved in a zero-sum game where one's loss of security interests resulted in the other's gain.

2. The Korean War and the Intensification of Mutual Conflict

On June 25, 1950, North Korea finally initiated all-out war against South Korea. The three years of bloody war only resulted in another division of the peninsula along the demarcation line, further intensifying the incompatibility of ideological identity and security interest between two Koreas.

For North Korea, as its goal of unification under Communist ideology had been thwarted by the involvement of the US, its hostility against the US and its "puppet" South Korea deepened further. As early as July 1950, Kim Il Sung said that without US involvement, the war had already ended and the "revolutionary task" of unification was achieved.¹⁴⁾ More importantly, the Korean War also turned the hostile image of the US

War," Summarized by ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994.

12) US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Vol. VII: The Far East and Australasia, Pt. 2* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), pp.956-58, February 8, 1949 (hereafter cited as *FRUS* with volume number).

13) Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960: A Personal Narrative* (Seoul: Panmun Book, 1978), p.220.

14) Il Sung Kim (1963), pp.17-31.

and South Korea into reality for the general people in North Korea. Before the war, the anti-American and anti-South Korean sentiment was abstract one which was just infused by political leaders. Owing to the war damage caused by American and South Korean forces, however, the North Korean populace, for themselves, became to feel antagonism against the US and the ROK during the War.

The political structure of North Korea was also severely damaged during the war. A tremendous number of loyal Communist party members were killed during the war. In addition, a lot of local leaders were expelled from the Korean Worker's Party because they proved to be "impure elements, cowards, or spies" particularly during the stage when the U.N. forces marched into North Korea.¹⁵⁾ Thus, Kim Il Sung tried to rebuild the Party, especially to strengthen "the ideological unity of the Party." For this purpose, a training program to re-educate party officials at all levels was intensified after the war. This political indoctrination program was an effort to rehabilitate Communist ideology in order to increase "the hold of Communism upon every member of the North Korean populace."¹⁶⁾

In addition, the experience of the formidable power of the US forces increased North Korean perception of threat to its security. During the Korean War Some 635,000 tons of bombs and 32,557 tons of napalm were dropped in the northern part of Korea by the U.S. Air Force, which was larger than the amount of bombs (503,000 tons) used against Japan during the Second World War. This enormous bombardment was reported to destroy about two-thirds to three-fourths of the prewar industrial transportation and urban residential facilities in North Korea. As early as September 1952, the US had already estimated the morale of the North Korean people who were short of food, clothing and housing as "bordering on panic."¹⁷⁾ Such an experience intensified the perception of threat from the US and South Korea, which in turn strengthened anti-Americanism and anti-South Korean sentiment in North Korea.

In South Korea, just like its counterpart in the North, the antagonism against the Communist increased with the devastating war. President Rhee, as his perception that

15) Byung Chul Koh, "The Korean War as a Learning Experience for North Korea," *Korea & World Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fall 1979), pp.370-371.

16) For a detailed analysis on North Korea's postwar policies, see Yong-Pyo Hong, "North Korea in the 1950s: The Post Korea War Policies and Their Implications," *Korean Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (2004).

17) Cited in Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.208. According to a North Korean report, some 600,000 private dwellings, 8,700 factories, 5,000 schools, and 1,000 hospitals or clinics had been destroyed as a result of the war. Scalapino and Lee (1972), p.413.

the Communists would attack soon turned out to be true, strengthened his anti-Communist policy. In terms of domestic politics, the war led to the liquidation of a large number of leftists, and therefore South Korean politics became to be led by anti-Communist conservative forces.¹⁸⁾ Moreover, after the Communist invasion of the South, anti-Communism became the main basis of the ideological legitimization of the ROK government. North Korea's provocation of the hostilities and the atrocities committed during the war deepened anti-Communist sentiment among the South Koreans.¹⁹⁾ This deepened anti-Communism was effectively used by South Korean leaders in consolidating their own power, which in turn further increased anti-Communism among general public. As symbolized by the disputes on the National Security Law (or Anti-Communism Law), political leaders, especially those from military, tended to identify their political opponents as enemy of the nation, and to punish them in the name of national security.

In terms of security interests, Seoul's perception of threat from Pyongyang dramatically enlarged because of the facts that North Korea had indeed provoked the war, and that the North had driven the South to the southern end of the peninsula. South Korean antagonism against China and the Soviet Union was also increased due to their military assistance to the North. Such perception of insecurity made President Syngman Rhee oppose to a cease-fire without repelling the Communists from Korea. In a similar context, President Rhee concentrated his efforts on obtaining a mutual security pact with the US as a way to protect Communists threats.²⁰⁾

In sum, the experience of the war fortified ideological identity in North and South Korea respectively, deepening antagonism against the other's ideology. Moreover the continued military confrontation along the military demarcation line, led both the rulers and the ruled in North and South Korea to place a high priority on security against each other's threats.

18) Jang Jip Choi, "Political Cleavages in South Korea," in Hagen Koo, ed., *State and Society in Contemporary Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.22.

19) The following description may help understanding of the depth of anti-Communist feeling in South Korea caused by the war: "The Korean War brought calamities to virtually everybody. Since Korea has an extended family system, almost everyone in Korea lost blood relatives. Others lost their property and still others were separated from their families. Many South Koreans held North Korea directly responsible for these calamities." Sang-Seek Park, "Legacy of the Korean War." *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 1991), p.305.

20) For a detailed analysis on President Rhee's posture, see Yong-Pyo Hong, *State Security and Regime Security: President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity dilemma in South Korea* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

III. The Trials and Errors in Conflict Settlement

The incompatibility of ideological identity and security interests between North and South Korea originated in the process of their division and intensified during the war between them. Then, how have they attempted to solve the problem, and what have been limits in that attempt? To answer to these questions, this section will analyze four cases: (1) the armistice agreement of July 1953, (2) the Joint Communiqué of July 1972, (3) the conclusion of the Basic Agreement in December 1991, (4) the Joint Declaration of June 2000.²¹⁾

1. The Armistice Agreement in 1953

After the three years of devastating war, the Armistice Agreement was concluded on July 27, 1953.²²⁾ But this formula was just to cease hostilities without ending the war formally and establishing a peace system on the Korean peninsula. According to Item 60 of the Armistice Agreement, a political conference should be held to discuss the peaceful settlement of the Korean question. In April 1954, the political conference among countries concerned was held in Geneva. In fact, both the UN and Communist sides had have pessimistic views on the possibility of political settlement of the Korean question because of severe distrust and antagonism against each other, and participated in the conference only to put blame on the other for the failure of the unification.²³⁾

During the conference, North and South Korea proposed their own unification formulas. North Korea suggested the formation of the 'All-Korean Commission,' which

21) The armistice agreement was not signed by the South Korean government, unlike other three cases. But it can be said that South Korea has been a de facto party concerned in implementing the agreement.

22) For a full text of the agreement, see Research Center for Peace and Unification, *Korean Unification: Source Materials with an Introduction* (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1976), pp.154-171.

23) For example, the Americans had already recognized that the chances for achieving the peaceful unification of Korea at the conference were not great, but they believed that the conference might still be successful as "good propaganda." The main objective of the US at the proposed conference was to obtain a "strong moral and political position" by presenting proposals commending themselves as "fair, reasonable, and workable" to the world. If the proposals were not accepted by the Communists, then the US could blame them for the failure to achieve a peaceful settlement. *FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol. XVI: The Geneva Conference*, pp.119-24, April 20, 1954, and pp.131-39, April 24, 1954; For details on the postures of the UN and Communists sides, see Henry W. Brands, Jr., "The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, Syngman Rhee and the 'Other' Geneva Conference of 1954," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 61 (February 1987).

would draft an electoral law for general elections, on the principle of north-south equality. What North Korea intended in this proposal was to secure a veto power over the unification process, thus ensuring that unification would come on North Korean terms only.²⁴⁾ South Korea also wanted unification under its own authority. The original position of Seoul in the conference was that since the ROK had been established by free elections under UN supervision, elections should be held only in North Korea. As UN allies expressed negative opinions on such a suggestion, South Korea changed its position in consultation with the US. Now Seoul proposed to hold elections in both North and South Korea. But it had conditions: the elections should be held in accordance with the constitutional process of the ROK; and in proportion to the population of North and South Korea. Such a suggestion virtually meant that the legality of the ROK should be maintained, and that North Korea should be incorporated into it.²⁵⁾ Given this situation, the conference was ruptured without producing any results to solve the Korean problem.

The main purpose of the Armistice Agreement was to cease fire and to block a renewal of military hostilities while shifting the responsibility of solving political and ideological issues to another formula (that is, the political conference discussed above). The Armistice Agreement has been successful to the extent that there has been no war in Korea thus far. The Agreement, however, has been failed in controlling military build up in two Koreas, which in turn caused the instability of the armistice system. The Item 13 of the Armistice Agreement regulated arms control between the two sides. It stipulated that "in order to insure the stability of the armistice so as to facilitate the attainment of a peaceful settlement," the two sides should "cease the introduction into Korea of reinforcing military personnel and reinforcing combat aircraft, armored vehicles, weapons and ammunition." But both the UN and the Communists did not observe this regulation from the beginning. At last, in 1957, the US government authorized the UN Command to take unilateral action to suspend the effect of the Item 13, criticizing that Communist violations of the provision considerably increased the military capabilities of the northern Communists.²⁶⁾ As a result, the arms race between North and South Korea became unable to be controlled, fortifying the incompatibility of security interests.

24) For this point, see Hakjoon Kim (1986), p.172.

25) *Ibid.*, p.174.

26) *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. XVIII, Pt. 2: Korea*, pp.85-87, May 10, 1955; p.148, August 12, 1955; pp.468-69, July 19, 1957.

2. The July 4th Joint Communiqué in 1972

International developments towards détente in the late 1960s and early 1970s had a profound impact in the Korean peninsula. In particular, influenced by Sino-American rapprochement, the two Koreas began dialogue from 1971. It led to the Joint North-South Communiqué of July 4, 1972, which was the first agreement on unification matter between North and South Korea.²⁷⁾ In this Communiqué, above all, the two Koreas agreed on three principles for unification: (1) unification should be achieved through independent Korean efforts without foreign interference; (2) unification should be accomplished not through military means against each other, but through peaceful means; and (3) as a homogeneous people, a grand national unity should first be sought, transcending differences in ideologies and systems. In addition, the document pledged to ease tensions and foster an atmosphere of mutual trust between the two. North and South Korea also agreed to install a direct ‘hotline’ to prevent sudden military accidents, and to establish the North-South Coordinating Committee which would serve as the primary governmental channel for unification dialogue.²⁸⁾

This agreement was meaningful in the context that it opened the era of ‘confrontation with dialogue.’ It also contributed to easing ideological and military compatibility to the extent that North and South Korea agreed to disregard ideological difference for national unity, and not to use military force for reducing tension and peaceful unification. Unfortunately, however, such contribution was largely symbolic one without real improvement in inter-Korean relations. Both Seoul and Pyongyang, maintaining mutual distrust and antagonism, did not have real intention to solve the ideological and military incompatibility at that time: they just wanted to adjust themselves into the changing international environment.

First of all, neither North nor South Korea was prepared to cooperate with the other at the expense of one’s own interest. In North Korea, even the three principles of unification, agreed in the July 4th Join Communiqué, were interpreted in its own terms. North Koreans regarded the independence principle as the withdrawal of the US troops; the peace principle as the cessation of the modernization of South Korean military; and the national unity principle as the guarantee of free political activity for all political

27) For a full text of the Communiqué, see Research Center for Peace and Unification, *Korean Unification: Source Materials with an Introduction* (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1976), pp.318–319.

28) For a detailed analysis of the July 4th Join Communiqué, see Jinwook Choi & Sun-Song Park, *The Making of a Unified Korea: Policies, Positions and Proposals* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 1997), pp.59–69; Hakjoon Kim (1986), pp.298–311.

parties (including Communists) and the abolition of the National Security Law.²⁹⁾ Furthermore, North Korea still maintained its goal of unification by revolution, emphasizing that unification would be achieved “only on the condition that a South Korean revolution is achieved under the flag of the DPRK.” Pyongyang also continued to threaten Seoul with provocative behaviors.³⁰⁾

South Korea’s attitude toward North Korea also remained unchanged. For example, the day after the July 4th Joint Communiqué was announced, ROK Prime Minister made it clear that the agreement did not signify coexistence with North Korea.³¹⁾ In addition, South Koreans saw détente as giving Pyongyang strategic advantages over Seoul. While South Korean relations with the US were marked by disengagement and ambivalence, North Korea enjoyed a reaffirmation of alliance obligations from China. Given such perception, the South Korean government tried to increase self-reliant military capabilities including the development of nuclear weapons.³²⁾

Furthermore, both North and South Korea tried to consolidate their own ideological base. In South Korea, President Park Jung Hee adopted so-called ‘Yushin (Revitalization) Constitution’ in October 1972, emphasizing the need of “Korean style democracy.” This constitution sought to transform the political system into a vehicle for “personalized, Caesaristic rule,” by giving extraordinary power to the president, such as the right to dissolve the National Assembly, the extra-constitutional power to enact special measures, and the right to nominate one third of the National Assemblymen.³³⁾ North Korea also revised its constitution in December 1972 to give more power to Kim Il Sung as President and to emphasize the importance of Juche ideology. The new constitution declared that: the DPRK is “an independent socialist state,” and “guided in its activity by the Juche ideology” of the Korean Workers’ Party. It also created a new office, President, which was empowered to be the head-of-state. According to the constitution, all important political power was to be concentrated on President.³⁴⁾

29) Choi & Park (1997), p.65.

30) Among many, in August 1974, North Korean elements in Japan organized an assassination attempt on South Korean President, by which First Lady was killed. In November, North Korean infiltration tunnels were found within the DMZ, which indicated that the North had prepared to attack the South regardless of the agreement of July 4.

31) Cited in Choi & Park (1997), p.66.

32) For ROK response to détente, see Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The US-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 109–115; Joo-Hong Nam, *America’s Commitment to South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 4.

33) Choi (1993), p.27; Soong Hoon Kil and Chung-in Moon, eds., *Understanding Korean Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p.49.

34) See Chin-wee Chung, “The Evolution of a Constitutional Structure in North Korea,” Robert

In sum, the July 4th Joint Communiqué in 1972 failed in settling ideological and security conflict between the two Koreas because they still had mutual distrust and they did not have willingness to improve their relations. This agreement, however, had value in the context that it provided a base on which North and South Korea could develop relationships between them.

3. The Basic Agreement in 1992

Influenced by the end of the Cold War, North and South Korea began high-level meetings from September 1990. As a result, the ‘Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchange & Cooperation between the South and the North (so-called Basic Agreement)’ was concluded in December 1991, and came into effect in February 1992.³⁵⁾ The Basic Agreement had meaningful contents in terms of settling inter-Korean conflict.

First, the Agreement gave credits to previous formulas to solve the conflict: its Preamble declared that it reaffirms the three principles of unification set forth in the July 4th South-North Joint Communiqué; and Article 5 stipulated that the two sides shall abide by the present Military Armistice Agreement of July 27, 1953 until a state of peace has been realized.

Second, by agreeing to recognize and respect each other’s political system (Article 1), not to interfere in each other’s internal affairs (Article 2), and not to slander or vilify each other, North and South Korea laid a foundation to accept difference in ideological identity.

Third, Seoul and Pyongyang, in the Preamble of the Agreement, declared that they would try to remove the state of military confrontation, to avoid armed aggression and hostilities, and to reduce tension in order to achieve national reconciliation and ensure peace. They also agreed not to attempt any actions of sabotage or overthrow against each other (Article 4). In addition, Article 9 and 10 stipulated non-use of force and the abandonment of armed invasion against each other. A South-North Joint Military Commission was to be set up in order to implement and guarantee non-aggression.

Many expected that the Korean peninsula could enter into a stage of reconciliation and cooperation with the new framework for peace. Immediately after the agreement,

A. Scalapino and Jun-Yop Kim, eds., *North Korean Today: Strategic and Domestic Issues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp.19–42.

35) For a full text of the agreement, see Ministry of Unification, *Unification White Paper 1992* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 1992), pp.463–87.

North–South dialogue became indeed very active. These talks included high–level meetings, nuclear dialogue, sports talks, and Red Cross meetings, which contributed to some extent to building confidence with each other. However, the relationships between the two Koreas were soon aggravated particularly because of the suspicion over North Korean nuclear development.

In fact, the major reason of North Korea's acceptance of the agreement was to overcome its security crisis. With the collapse of the Cold War structure, North Korea saw the formation of the 'new world order' led by the US which had been the 'archenemy' of North Korea. Pyongyang's diplomatic isolation had increased dramatically as a result of Seoul's successful Nordpolitik. In addition, due to the ever–widening gap of national power between the two Koreas in favor of the South, the North had apprehension for a German–style reunification, i.e., absorption by the South. In his New Year's speech, Kim Il Sung directly stated that unification should be achieved in the principle of "not eating or not to being eaten."³⁶⁾ Given the circumstance, it appeared that Kim Il–sung tried to reduce perceived threat from South Korea by concluding the Basic Agreement.³⁷⁾

For North Korea, however, probably the utmost task to resolve its security crisis was to deal with the US. During the Cold War era, the DPRK could balance US power by relying on either the Soviet Union or China. But now, with the demise of major supporters, North Korea had to cope with American threat for itself. Thus, Pyongyang sought to negotiate directly with Washington, aiming at obtaining US security assurance, and ultimately at improving relations between the two. Thus, by effectively using its 'nuclear card,' North Korea concentrated its effort on making a peace agreement with the US, refraining from having dialogue with South Korea.

In short, the Basic agreement facilitated conflict management between North and South Korea to the extent that it reduced the threats to each other's ideological identity and security interests. A specialist on the Korean issue observed that the agreement, if implemented, would have meant a "nearly complete cessation of the conflict" on the peninsula and a "reversal of decades of policy" on both sides.³⁸⁾ But owing to Pyongyang's perception of insecurity, especially vis–à–vis Washington, the Basic Agreement could not be implemented fully.

36) *Rodong shinmun*, January 1, 1991.

37) In a similar context, it is argued that Pyongyang intended to maintain its political system through the Basic Agreement by means of requiring mutual respect of each other's political system. See Choi and Park (1997), p.98. Kim Il Sung praised the agreement as "the first epochal event" since the start of inter–Korean diplomacy in 1972. Cited in Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, Mass.: Addison–Wesley, 1997), p.261.

38) *Ibid.*, p.262.

4. The June 15th Joint Declaration in 2000

From 1998, probably encouraged by South Korea's so-called Sunshine policy,³⁹⁾ the Pyongyang government gradually resumed its dialogue with Seoul. Eventually, the two Koreas held the summit between President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il, and issued the Joint Declaration on June 15, 2000. It included five points: (1) North and South Korea agreed to pursue national unification based on the principle of independence; (2) The two Koreas recognized the commonality between the confederation proposed by the South and the federation at the lower level proposed by the North, and they agreed to promote unification in that direction; (3) North and South Korea agreed to make efforts to reunite family members separation by the Korean War, and for the South to repatriate "unconverted" North Korean spies who had finished their respective jail terms; (4) North and South Korea agreed to promote the "balanced development of the national economy" through economic cooperation, and to stimulate exchanges in civil, cultural, health, environment, and all other areas; (5) The two Koreas agreed to hold a dialogue between relevant authorities to implement the above agreements expeditiously.⁴⁰⁾

The Joint Declaration did not directly deal with ideological issue. But Item 2 regarding the commonality in unification formulas had an important meaning in terms of ideological compatibility. Both the confederation proposed originally by President Rho Tae-woo in 1989, and the federation at the lower level by Kim Il Sung in 1991 are viewed as temporal and intermediate steps toward full unification, in which the differences in ideologies and systems are accepted in the principle of "one nation, two systems, and two governments."⁴¹⁾ Accordingly, Item 2 of the Declaration in fact means that North and South Korea agreed on the coexistence with each other, recognizing different ideological identities.

The June 15th Joint Declaration, however, had limitation as far as the compatibility of security interests concerned: it did not directly mention the way to release military tensions and to settle peaceful relationships between the two Koreas. Some observers argued that the Declaration dealt with the issue not explicitly but "implicitly."⁴²⁾ But the

39) This policy made it clear, as one of its principle, that South Korea does not have any intention to undermine or absorb North Korea. For details of the policy, see Ministry of Unification, *Policy Towards North Korea for Peace, Reconciliation, and Cooperation* (Seoul: The Ministry of Unification, 1999).

40) For a full text, see Ministry of Unification, *Unification White Paper 2001* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2001), pp.42-43.

41) See Choi and Park (1997), pp.99-105.

implicit manner itself limited the talks on military affairs in implementing the Declaration. Although various types of dialogue between North and South Korea were held after the summit, military issues were not dealt frequently. For example, during the period from July 2000 to October 2002, through ministerial level talks, North and South Korea could conclude only two agreements in military issues, while concluding 27 agreements on economic issues and 17 on social/cultural issues. It is notable that North Koreans used to avoid South Korean pressure for military dialogue by emphasizing “the spirit of the June 15th Joint Declaration” which did not have direct linkage with military agenda. In fact, Pyongyang still wanted to talk not with Seoul but with Washington as far as military issue concerned despite of inter-Korean summit.

In sum, the Joint Declaration was successful in reaffirming the recognition of ideological difference between them. It failed, however, in settling military conflict between them partly because of the limitation of the Declaration itself, and partly because of continuing North Korea’s attitude, an attitude that preferred to negotiate with the US to solve the military conflict in the Korean peninsula.

IV. Conclusion

With the division of the Korean peninsula, North and South Korea adopted different political systems and ideologies. Each claimed jurisdiction over the entire country as the only legitimate government while identifying the other as a “puppet” of foreign powers. Each also regarded the other’s ideology as something to be removed. Therefore, the two Koreas could not but conflict with each other for ideological identity and security interests from the beginning of the division. This conflict further deepened with the bloody war between the two.

Given situation, however, North and South Korea made some attempts to settle mutual conflict. But all of them had limitations in solving the issue of the incompatibility of either ideological identity or military interests. Two attempts during the Cold War period, the Armistice Agreement in 1953 and the Joint Communiqué in 1972, had contributed to laying foundations from which the two Koreas develop conflict management methods. At that time, however, the mutual distrust and antagonism were too deep to respect each other’s ideological identity and to adjust security interests.

42) For example, see B. C. Koh, “The Sunshine Policy, the Inter-Korean Summit, and Dismantling the Cold War Structure,” Chung-in Moon, et al. eds., *Ending the Cold War in Korea: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), p.357.

Influenced by the end of the Cold War structure, the two Koreas could agree on more workable solutions to settle ideological and military conflict, including the Basic Agreement in 1992 and the Joint Declaration in 2000. Under these formulas, the two sides gradually accepted the difference of ideological identity. In terms of military interests, however, Seoul and Pyongyang could not make meaningful improvement because of the latter: the North put its focus on obtaining security guarantee from Washington, perceiving serious security threat from the US. A number of lessons can be drawn from the above observation.

First, although the ideological conflict has not been fully settled, it can be said that the relationships between North and South Korea have improved to the extent to respect each other's ideology thanks to the Basic Agreement and the June 15 Joint Declaration. Accordingly it is important to maintain current level of mutual confidence and to increase it gradually. For this, it is necessary for two sides to strictly abide by the agreement not to interfere in each other's internal affairs and to slander each other. This is thought to be a basic but significant step toward conflict settlement.

Second, facing security crisis after the end of the Cold War, North Korea has taken the maintenance of its security interest vis-à-vis the US as the utmost goal. Thus, in dealing with the security issue, the emphasis should be put on how to reduce North Korean perception of insecurity. In fact, North-South relationships have been influenced by the North's perception of threat from the US. For example, Pyongyang participated in the summit and following various dialogue with Seoul when it had perceived that the threat from the US had been reduced.⁴³⁾ But as the Bush administration took a hard line posture, arguing that the policies of the Clinton administration were appeasing in orientation in early 2001, North Korea took a negative attitude toward North-South relations. In addition, North Korea has been eager to obtain a concrete security commitment from the US through the nuclear negotiations with the Bush government. In this regard, US security assurance to North Korea will be helpful to settle the security conflict in the Korean peninsula. Although South Korea's room for maneuver is very narrow as far as the nuclear game concerned, it is necessary for Seoul to take steps to manage the issue because without settling the nuclear issue

43) In September 1999, so-called the Perry report recommended to President Clinton a step by step improvement, leading ultimately to the normalization of relations with the North. In November, the US government eased its economic sanctions toward North Korea in return for the latter's delay of the missile testing. This development was followed by the Joint Communiqué of October 2000, which declared that "neither government would have hostile intent towards the other and confirmed the commitment of both governments to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free from past enmity."

peace system cannot be built in the Korean peninsula. For this purpose, South Korea is needed to maintain effective policy cooperation and coordination with the US.

Third, the military talks between North and South Korea should be developed. As far as North Korea is concerned, the US is more important in reducing its security crisis as discussed above. But the conflict of security interest in the Korean peninsula can not be concluded without lessening military confrontation between the two Koreas for themselves. After the summit of June 2000, through various social and economic exchange and cooperation, the distrust between the two decreased. As a result, it is true that tension in the Korean peninsula has been reduced to some extent. This kind of indirect method, however, has limitations in settling security conflict as can be seen in nuclear crisis raised by North Korea. Therefore, the South Korean government needs to take stronger stance to force the North Korean government to participate in military dialogue to directly decrease military tension and build peace system in the Korean peninsula.

Fourth, the Basic Agreement framework should be utilized more actively. Unfortunately, since the Kim Dae Jung government, South Korea has rarely given credit to the agreement. But it is thought that the Basic Agreement included most items needed to settle ideological and security conflict. Accordingly, it would be more plausible to utilize the agreement than to make a new formula in order to build peace system in the Korean peninsula.

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