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by Chung-in Moon *

ABSTRACT

Despite the global trend toward dismantling Cold War structure since the late 1980s, North and South Korea have been trapped in a vicious cycle of mutual distrust, negation, and protracted military confrontation. However, the first inter-Korean summit talk that was held in Pyongyang in June 2000, and the adoption of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration have brought about revolutionary changes in inter-Korean relations, and has give a new hope for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. Although the historic summit was instrumental for reviving and expanding economic, social, and cultural exchanges between the two nations, it failed to produce concrete measures to resolve security problems surrounding the Korean peninsula. In order to ensure stability, both Koreas should more actively engage in negotiations on inter-Korean tension reduction, confidence-building measures, and arms control. At the same time, issues of weapons of mass destruction and missiles should be resolved. There must also be new discourses on the status of American forces in South Korea in particular and the ROK-US alliance in general. Otherwise, American forces in South Korea could become another major barrier to peace-making and peace- building in Korea. In view of this, transforming the armistice treaty into a viable inter-Korean peace treaty and forging a peaceful reunification of Korea could take a much longer time than expected. Until such goals are realized, the Korean peninsula is likely to face the perennial question of insecurity.

THE KOREAN SUMMIT AND ITS AFTERMATH

The June Korean summit and subsequent developments signify revolutionary changes in inter-Korean relations. Viewed from the protracted, vicious cycle of mutual distrust, negation, and military confrontation that has governed the Korean peninsula for the past fifty years - recent changes reflect a truly profound breakthrough. The summit was the most dramatic testimonial to the transformation of inter-Korean relations from mutual negation to mutual recognition and acceptance. It also revived the official channels of communication between the two Koreas that were broken for the past seven years. The substantial expansion of inter-Korean social, cultural, and economic exchanges, including the reunion of separated families, is another token of positive developments.

More importantly, the summit was instrumental for forging new trust between president Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong-il through lengthy negotiations that could serve as the most critical deterrent to the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula. On the occasion of the summit, North Korea has become much more transparent and accountable in its power structure and decision-making process by exposing members of the inner ruling circle and their behavioral pattern to outside observers. Exposure of chairman Kim Jong-il to the outside world was particularly illuminating. The most critical aspect is the emerging signs of genuine change in North Korea for opening its nation and initiating reform. Apart from the increasing frequency of diplomatic normalization with Western countries, North Korea has also shown its willingness to undergo major structural changes. Chairman Kim Jong-il's visit to Shanghai this January epitomizes the essence of such changing attitude.

However, the summit talk and the adoption of the June 15 Joint Declaration do not necessarily imply the end of the Korea question, but merely the beginning of a long and precarious journey toward peaceful co-existence and Korean reunification. Despite remarkable progress in inter-Korean relations, an array of new and tough agenda for future inter-Korean negotiations await. Some of important agenda items can be summarized in the following:

* Military issues: tension reduction, military confidence-building, arms control and reduction, and replacement of the armistice treaty by a new inter-Korean peace treaty;
* Weapons of mass destruction and missile issues including implementation of the joint declaration of de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula;
* Terms of economic exchanges and cooperation including extensive institutional changes in the direction of opening and reform;
* Return of kidnapped South Koreans, including fishermen, and prisoners of the Korean War, who are still detained in the North, as a reciprocal measure to the return of unconverted North Korean spies and pro-North Korean sympathizers;
* Increased frequency and expanded size and scope of reunions for separated families, including identification of missing families and exchanges of letters.

CBMs, ARMS CONTROL, AND INTER-KOREAN PEACE TREATY

Resolution of these items are not likely to be easy or smooth, not only because of their backlash effects on vital interests of the North Korean regime and state, but also because of inherent differences between the two Koreas in setting their priority. For example, South Korea has always wanted to include tension reduction and military confidence-building measures in their agenda of inter-ministerial talks, but the North has avoided these issues. Although the second ministerial talk was able to produce a joint statement urging tension reduction and activation of inter-Korean military talks, the North has been rather reluctant to discuss these issues. The situation will be even more complicated if North and South Korea begin deliberating on arms control, limitation, and reduction. It is not easy to realign and reduce the combined forces of nearly 1.8 million soldiers and related weapons systems, since such moves can severely undercut institutional interests of the military in both North and South Korea.(1) Moreover, even though Chairman Kim recognizes American forces in the South as a fait accompli, actual inter-Korean arms control negotiations are bound to affect their status.

Transforming the armistice treaty into an inter-Korean peace treaty system will pose more complex and daunting challenges. South Korea is not a legal party to the armistice treaty since it refused to sign it in 1953. Only North Korea, the United States, and China are de jure parties to the treaty, with the United States representing the United Nations Command.(2) Thus, dismantling the armistice treaty involves complex legal processes which would be difficult for North and South Korea to resolve through the principle of self-determination. As President Kim Dae-jung suggested in his meeting with Jiang Zemin at the United Nations in September last year, the transformation of the inter-Korean peace treaty should be resolved in a forum other than bilateral negotiations. The Four Party Talks could be a more desirable venue in this regard where inter-Korean peace treaty can be guaranteed by China and the United States. However, such efforts can contradict North Korea's intention to sign a bilateral peace treaty directly with the United States ahead of the dismantling of the armistice treaty.(3) Hence, inter-Korean peace-building is a much more complicated task than commonly thought, and it would be difficult to envisage peace and security on the Korean peninsula without undergoing the process of tension reduction, confidence-building measures, and arms control and reduction.

SUSTAINING CONTRADICTION OF PEACE AND SECURITY: MILITARY PLANNING AND THE FUTURE ROLE OF USFK

Despite the summit and improved inter-Korean relations, as conservative observers have criticized, both Koreas have not shown any fundamental changes in their threat perception, force structure, deployment patterns, and military planning since the summit. Although there are some signs of tension reduction evidenced through the ban on propaganda warfare along the DMZ, the first inter-Korean defense ministerial talk, and the partial removal of mines in the DMZ for the reconstruction of the Seoul-Shinuiju railway system, both Koreas still consider each other principal enemies, and strategic and tactical doctrines have not been changed. North Korea still maintains its offensive deployment along the DMZ, and is known to have engaged in massive military maneuvers since the June summit, heightening security concerns of South Korea and the United States. South Korea has not undertaken any significant changes either. Defense budgets have remained by and large intact, and the planned acquisition of FX, SAM-X, AWACS, and Aegis is being implemented without delay. It is ironic to observe contradictory postures of North and South Korea in their military planning. Both emphasize and anticipate peaceful co-existence through the summit, but they are not willing to compromise their security posture, symbolizing a classical security dilemma in the transition from war to peace.

One of the most significant outcomes of the summit is the North Korea's tacit recognition of American forces in the South. Departing from its rigid stance that emphasizes the unconditional withdrawal of American forces from the South, Chairman Kim is known to have concurred with the president Kim's view of utilities of American forces in the South. President Kim justified the continuing presence of American forces on three accounts: a credible deterrent to war on the Korean peninsula, a balancer to stabilize regional strategic instability, and ultimately peace-maker or peace-insurer even after Korean unification. Chairman Kim recognized the instrumental value of American forces by quipping that: "American forces can prevent you from invading the North."(4) Thus, the North is not likely to raise the status change of American forces as the precondition for improved inter-Korean relations any more. However, the advent of the Bush administration could complicate the status of American forces and U.S.-ROK alliance ties in three important ways. First, as part of the senior Bush's East Asian Strategic Initiative formulated in 1992, the new Bush administration might consider reducing the size of its ground forces in South Korea. Improved inter-Korean relations could further facilitate it. Second, the issue of an increased defense burden sharing, which was on halt in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, could resurface, straining Washington-Seoul relations. Finally, as Secretary of State Colin Powell recently suggested, the American request of the reduction of North Korea's conventional forces could produce unintended consequences for inter-Korean arms control as well as the status of American forces in the South by undercutting the existing division of labor between the U.S. and the ROK in dealing with the North.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND MISSILES

Inter-Korean negotiations are not likely to adopt agenda involving weapons of mass destruction and missiles. The United States will continue to remain the principal actor for dialogue and negotiation with the North over these issues, while retaining the close trilateral policy coordination with Japan and South Korea. However, South Korea will be placed in a difficult position if the North again plays the both nuclear and missile cards in its game of brinkmanship diplomacy. In order to avoid such a contingency, South Korea is also obliged to engage in negotiations with the North over the issue of nuclear and missiles. Given Chairman Kim's responses during the summit talk, however, it mightl be quite difficult for the South to persuade the North to comply with both the joint declaration on de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). However, North Korea has shown some positive signs in resolving the missile issue. Departing from its adherence to missile sovereignty, the North has been willing to negotiate over the moratorium of development, test launching, and exports of missiles provided that the United States support DPRK's satellite launches as well as agree with cash compensation for the moratorium. Although the idea of cash compensation was strongly opposed, the Clinton administration showed its interests in supporting the launching of North Korea's satellites using American facilities. However, the advent of the Bush administration could impede such process. Even the Perry process itself can be jeopardized, portending a turbulent future ahead.

Meanwhile, South Korea reached the final agreement with the United States on its independent missile program. As a result, the South is now able to develop missiles with the maximum range of 300 km. Although its missile program will be fundamentally constrained by the United States and the MTCR, South Korea will now have chance to accumulate new technology for its more independent missile program. However, its future is not certain. If inter-Korean relations improve, it will be difficult to justify resource allocation for the missile program.

One major concern related to the weapons of mass destruction and missile is the Bush administration's plan to engage in the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) in East Asia. The new development associated with TMD is likely to destabilize the region. China and North Korea will oppose it since it aims at containing them. The American TMD venture could undermine previous efforts to persuade the North to suspend its missile program through the Perry process. It can also cause a new policy discord between South Korea and the United States. President Kim Dae-jung made it very clear that South Korea would not be interested in participating in the TMD for several reasons: technical uncertainty of its effectiveness, high financial burden, the China factor, and the North Korean factor. The divergent views in the pursuit of the TMD might become another source of tension between the U.S. and South Korea.

PROSPECTS AND TIMELINE FOR KOREAN UNIFICATION

It is too early to tell any concrete timelines for Korean unification not only because of its low feasibility, but also because of the lack of clear consensus on the mode of unification. However, the June Korean summit has brought about a major turning point in paving the way to Korean unification. The second item of the June 15 Joint-Declaration touches on a more sensitive issue, namely, modes of Korean unification. It states that "Acknowledging that there is a common element in the South's proposal for a confederation and the North's proposal for a loose form of federation as the formulae for achievement of unification, the South and the North agreed to promote reunification in that direction." This item was most hotly debated.

It is known that chairman Kim took the initiative on the issue of national unification. He urged president Kim to adopt the Koryo Confederal Democratic Republic as a gift to the Korean nation. As a matter of fact, North Korea has persistently adhered to the Koryo confederal model since late Kim Il-sung proposed the confederal mode of Korean unification on October 10, 1980 on the occasion of the sixth plenary session of the Korean Workers' Party.(5) The North Korean proposal of confederation is much closer to federation than to confederation in the strict sense. It is predicated on the notion of 'one nation, one unified state, two local governments, and two systems' where diplomatic sovereignty and rights over military command and control are assumed to belong to one central government, while other functions are delegated to the jurisdiction of two local governments. In his 1991 new year message, Kim Il-sung proposed a loose form of confederation by stating that "in order to achieve a national consensus on the Koryo Confederal Democratic Republic more easily, we are willing to discuss a loose form of confederation with the South which would temporarily bestow greater power and autonomy to local governments and gradually enhance functions of the central government over time in the future."(6) For all the slight amendment of the original version, the North Korean government and officials have consistently insisted that the confederal model is the only to national unification.(7)

President Kim Dae-jung counter-argued that it is virtually impossible to make a transition from the state of national division and conflict to a completed stage of (con-)federation at once. Merging diplomatic sovereignty and integrating military command and control are not easy tasks. President Kim cited the Yemeni example where hasty military integration within the framework of federation derailed the entire process of unification. According to him, the stage of federation (yonbang) cannot be reached without going through the stage of confederation (union of states, yonhap). His version of confederation is predicated on 'one nation, two states, two governments, and two systems', which is similar to union of states as in the case of the European Union or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). But there have been two types of confederation scheme available in the South. One is the union of republics (gonghwakuk yonhap) which president Kim suggested as the first stage of his three stages' approach to national unification, and the other is the union of North and South (nambuk yonhap) which former president Roh Tae-woo proposed as the interim stage of his commonwealth model of Korean unification. (8) Kim's union of republics presupposes reasonable political confidence-building, free market system, and pluralist political system as preconditions for confederation. Once confederation is established, it becomes easier to reach the stage of federation and ultimately a unified state. Meanwhile, Roh's commonwealth model posits reconciliation, exchanges, and cooperation as the first stage through which the North-South union and ultimately a one unified nation-state can evolve. While the Kim's model includes federation as an interim stage, the Roh's model skips the stage of federation and assumes a direct transition from the interim stage of North-South union into a unified state.

Interestingly, president Kim proposed the Roh's interim stage (i.e., North-South union) as an alternative to the North Korea's federation scheme. The interim stage comprises four distinct elements: (1) peaceful management of national division and military conflict through tension reduction, confidence-building measures, arms control and reduction, and inter-Korean peace treaty; (2) promotion of exchanges and cooperation to foster national unification; (3) institutional realignments to promote inter-Korean social integration through which hostile institutions are removed, friendly institutions re-enforced, and framework for reunification is formulated; (4) institutionalization of confederation or union of North and South Korea by formalizing summit meetings, ministerial meetings, parliamentary meetings, and ultimately an umbrella consultative body between the two. The North Korean leader was receptive of the proposal. Both leaders have indeed agreed on at least two points: one is that Korean reunification can be achieved through incremental and functionalist approaches, and the other is that the last stage of confederation (South Korean proposal), namely formalization of the summit, ministerial, and parliamentary meetings, converges with the loose form of federation (North Korean proposal). The convergence of discourses on unification formulae, which used to compete in a parallel mode, can be seen as one of the most significant achievements in the summit talk. Judged on the above discussion, de jure unification, be it confederation, federation, or a single unified state, is still far away, but peaceful co-existence and de facto unification appear to be near.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The June Korean summit made a significant contribution to creating an internal and external milieu conducive to peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. However, beneath the new rapprochement lie a myriad of security problematiques. And it is not easy to resolve these issues given their complex linkages with domestic and international politics. It is now the time to address these issues one by one. Any inter-Korean improvements without settling and resolving security issues are nothing but a perilous detour. There should be no longer delay in bringing security agenda on negotiation table. Along with this, leadership in both Koreas should not only avoid the politicization of inter-Korean issues for domestic political purposes, but also overcome domestic division and opposition. Improved inter-Korean relations cannot be envisaged without pacifying domestic forces and forging a viable national consensus. The international community should also give its blessing and lend unprecedented support for tension reduction and peace-building on the Korean peninsula. By abandoning the structure of balance of power determinism, the four major powers can also play a constructive role in facilitating peaceful co-existence and reunification. But it should be remembered that reunification cannot be achieved without first achieving peace. Once peace is realized, the door to reunification will open. Keeping this in mind, both Koreas should make every effort to turn spectres of war into rays of peace and to transform division into reunification with patience, prudence, and inter-subjective understanding.

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(1) Chung-in Moon, Arms Control on the Korean Peninsula , (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1996), ch. 6.

(2) Sung-ho Je, "Building a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula," Kukga Jonryak (National Strategy), 2:1(1996), pp. 77-78 (in Korean).

(3) Chung-in Moon, "The Kim Dae-jung Government and Peace-building on the Korean Peninsula," Kukga Jonryak (National Strategy), 5:2(1999), pp.139-170.(in Korean).

(4) The Joongang Ilbo, June 20, 2000.

(5) Yonhap News Agency, Bukhan 50nyon (Seoul: Yonhap News Agency, 1995), pp.483-487.

(6) Bukhanyonguso, Bukhanshinnyonsa Bunsok 1945-1995 (Seoul: Bukhanyonguso, 1996), pp.220-228.

(7) Literal transition of yonbang is federation. But North Koreans have translated yonbang as confederation, creating a confusion between yonbang and yonhap (confederation or union of states). In a sense, the joint declaration clarified the conceptual confusion.

(8) On Kim's proposal, see Kim Dae-jung, Three Stages' Approach to Unification (Seoul: The Kim Dae-jung Foundation), in Korean. On Roh's proposal, see National Unification Board, Theoretical Foundation and Policy Directions of the Commonwealth Model of Unification (Seoul: National Unification Board, 1990), in Korean.

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