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THE UNIFICATION POLICY OF NORTH KOREA

1. The Basis of the North Korean Unification Policy

Considering intra-Korean relations and national unification as steps toward the completion of a socialist revolution, North Korea has steadfastly pursued the communization of the entire Korean peninsula by trying to stage a communist revolution in the South. Toward this end, North Korea has put forth the “three revolutionary forces” and deployed various unification front tactics. Pursuant to its revolutionary scheme, Pyongyang has varied its tactics to accommodate the changing environments. Accordingly, it has responded to Seoul’s calls for intra-Korean dialogue from time to time.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern bloc along with the deterioration of the North Korean economy in the later half of the 1980’s forced the North Koreans to make a partial change in their policy toward the South. Nevertheless, no fundamental change has been observed yet. In this chapter, the basis and strategies of the North Korean unification policy are presented. In particular, the presentation centers around the confederation method Pyongyang has consistently proposed for decades.

North Korea's View of the South

After Korea regained independence from Japan in 1945, the North proclaimed that “the South is a complete colony and a military base of the United States, and the socio-economic structure of its society still displays semi-feudal characteristics with no substantial changes from those under the Japanese rule.”

Recently, however, the North no longer defines the South as a “semi-feudal society,” but instead, as a “semi-capitalist society where the independence of a broad range of the working mass is restricted by a particular class through an abnormal and vicious capitalistic means of exploitation.”

It also denounces the ROK government as “a puppet regime that is nothing more than a cover for the American colonial rule and a colonial, subordinative reactionary government that represents the interests of landowners, comprador capitalists, and reactionary bureaucrats.”

Such a view of South Korea has led North Korea to the conclusion that the only legitimate government on the Korean peninsula is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Therefore, the North believe that the South is a subject that should be integrated into their system.

North Korea's View of Unification

Pyongyang claims that the national division has been caused by the United States, which has forcefully occupied the South and placed it under colonial rule. Accordingly, the North does not view the unification as a process of integrating the divided national society, but rather as the completion of a “national liberation and peo-

ple's democratic revolution which has not been fully achieved due to American imperialism" or, in short, a "Korean revolution."

The North Korean communists believe that once national inconsistencies are resolved through "national liberation" and class contradictions are resolved through the "people's democratic revolution," a people's government will finally be established in the South. When such an event takes place, they believe, unification will be possible through cooperation between the people's governments in the South and the North. This will then mark the completion of the "Korean revolution." The North Koreans still hold such a belief.

In other words, the North Korean approach to unification and intra-Korean relations is based on a revolutionary attitude that considers the process as a progressive step toward its immediate goal—that is, a socialist revolution. Its position is reaffirmed in the preamble of the constitution of the [North] Korean Workers Party, which states that "the immediate goal of the [North] Korean Workers Party is to achieve a perfect victory in the northern half of the republic in order to complete the national liberalization and fulfill the tasks of people's democracy in the entire Korea, and the ultimate goal of the party is to spread the Juche ideology throughout the Korean peninsula and build a communist society on it."

North Korea's Principles of Unification

In presenting its position on national unification, North Korea has put forth different sets of principles over time. Despite the changes, however, Pyongyang has consistently insisted upon the idea of "self-reliance" as the basic principle in its unification formula throughout time. With the emphasis on the idea of "self-reliance,"

the North has tried to justify its demand for the withdrawal of American troops from the South and to complete the communist revolution on the peninsula.

At the birth of the North Korean regime, Pyongyang set forth the Basic Principles for National Unification which called for “self-reliance, democratic principles, and peaceful means.”

Later, it announced a series of changes in those principles in order to “adjust them rationally according to the changes in domestic and international environments and to the demands of the progress of revolution”: the Three Principles of Independence, Peaceful Unification, and Great National Unity of 1972, the Five Point Program for Unification of 1973, the Five Principles for Unification of 1990, and the Ten Point Program for the Great Unity of the Korean People for Unification of 1993.

All these principles and programs, however, have been presented as strategic and tactical means to achieve “national unification through a communist revolution in the South.”

2. North Korea’s Strategies for Unification

Revolution for National Liberation and People’s Democracy

The preamble of the [North] Korean Workers Party defines the nature of the revolution that must be carried out in the South as a “revolution for national liberation and people’s democracy.” As a step prior to a “Korean revolution,” its immediate aim is not to establish a socialist or communist regime, but to create a people’s democ-

matic or pro-communist government in the South that would carry out such a task.

“National liberation” here refers to regaining the independence of South Korea from the colonial rule of American imperialism. “People’s democracy,” on the other hand, is defined as a transitional stage in which the oppressed laboring masses in South Korean society including the proletariat and the peasants are freed from subordination by the ruling class—including landowners, capitalists, and reactionary bureaucrats—and carry out a social reformation through the formation of a communist coalition government to move toward socialism.

Based on such strategies, North Korea’s unification formula thus calls for the following steps in achieving national unification: the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea → overthrow of the anti-communist government → establishment of a pro-communist people’s democratic regime → unification under communism through cooperation with North Korea. In short, Pyongyang’s position can be summed up in this phrase, “First, revolution in the South; then, unification under communism.”

Strengthening of the Three Revolutionary Forces

The North Korean regime has spent a long time developing what it considers as the three crucial factors in completing the communist revolution in the South: the emergence of North Korea as a powerful, impregnable revolutionary base of support, the development of a sufficiently strong revolutionary force in South Korea, and the full and undivided support from international revolutionary forces. Internally, North Korea’s efforts to strengthen those

three revolutionary forces were designed to increase the possibility of a communist revolution in the South based on the democratic revolutionary base strategy.

In order to increase the revolutionary capability of its society, the North Korean regime has stressed three measures, including the reinforcement of political indoctrination of North Korean people based on the system of “*Juche*” ideology, strengthening of its economic capability to back up political and military strength, and fortification of military capability as a means to guarantee victory in revolution.

At the same time, Pyongyang has attempted to maximize the confrontation of conflicting elements within South Korean society while expanding the underground pro-communist organization. It also tried to create a Unified Front for Unification, which has taken after the its predecessor, the Democratic National United Front, with a focus on “completing the task of national liberation.” The unification front thus created is to push South Korean society into chaos and debilitate the strength of anti-revolutionary forces that guard liberal democracy against subversive forces, thereby reinforcing the strength of the revolutionary group in South Korean society and increasing the chance for revolution from within. In addition, North Korea has increased diplomatic efforts to create an international environment favorable to its struggle to communize the Korean peninsula.

Peaceful Means and Military Force

North Korea has employed both peaceful means and military force in its pursuit of national unification. On one hand, Pyong-yang

has attempted to first complete the people's democratic revolution within South Korea, and then, absorb the new revolutionary government into the North Korean regime, or when the present government is replaced by a coalition or pro-communist regime, to achieve unification through cooperation with the new regime. In short, the peaceful means Pyongyang claims to pursue is nothing more than an indirect attempt to achieve national unification by dividing up South Korean society. The "main link" in such a tactic is the unification formula that involves a proposal for an intra-Korean confederation.

Pyongyang, at the same time, has never ceased to desire to achieve national unification through the use of force. Its consistent demand for the withdrawal of American troops from the South is also intended to create a favorable environment for an invasion of the South. On the surface, the North has continuously published propaganda that it is peace-loving and rational and pursues unification through negotiation. In reality, however, the Pyongyang regime places much more weight on its military build-up in preparation for an armed invasion. The basic strategic tools in North Korea's revolutionary policy constantly used in complement with the means for peace are: the principle of "First, revolution in the South; then, unification via communist cooperation," strengthening of the three revolutionary forces, and the theory of revolution for national liberation and people's democracy.

The United Front

Formation of a united front is one of the basic tactics communists deploy during the process of revolution. When their own capabili-

ties are strong enough to defeat the primary enemy, communists have no need for a united front. When, however, their own capabilities are not strong enough, the communists try to build a temporary coalition with all the parties that currently oppose the primary enemy. Then, after defeating the primary enemy with their help, the communists would eliminate all the others except those who support them.

Having incorporated this tactic in its plan for a revolution in South Korea, the Pyongyang regime has stressed that “revolutionary organizations in the South must try their best to create an Anti-US, National Salvation Unification Front with the participation of all patriotic parties and social institutions and groups and individuals from every social class and field under the banner of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism.”

In June 1949, North Korea in fact established a unification front under the name of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland. Recently, there have been several similar organizations very active within South Korea and abroad, including the Pan-Korean Alliance for Reunification .

3. Changes in the Confederation Formula

Ever since it first proposed a unification formula based on a Korean confederation in the 1960's, the North has remained steadfast to this particular format of unification despite of the numerous minor adjustments it has made in the formula in order to accomodate changes in the environment. North Korea's strategic interests in this formula are to communize the entire Korean peninsula by

accomplishing the withdrawal of American troops from the South and overthrowing the South Korean government.

1 — Changes in North Korea's Formula Over Time

The 1960's: An Introduction of Confederation

North Korea's Kim Il-sung first proposed a 'confederation' as a means of unification in his speech during the ceremony marking the 15th anniversary of national liberation on August 14, 1960. The North Korean leader said that "if South Korea is not yet prepared to accept a free all-Korea general election, ... as a provisional measure, [North Korea] proposes a confederation system between the two Koreas."

North Korea's proposition, however, contained several noticeable peculiarities. First, it admitted that a free all-Korea general election is the most rational and feasible means to peaceful unification. Second, it recognized the existence of two distinctive political systems on the Korean peninsula and admitted that the confederation would be only a provisional arrangement. Third, a characteristic of a union of nations was embedded in it since it suggested the establishment of a Supreme National Congress composed of representatives from each government as an apparatus for discussion and coordination.

The 1970's: Confederal Republic of Koryo

On June 23, 1973, North Korea published the Five Point Program for Unification which included (i) clearance of military confrontation, (ii) cooperation and exchanges in various areas, (iii) convocation of a Great National Congress, (iv) formation of a confederation,

and (v) entry into the United Nations under a single name.

In comparison with the version Pyongyang put forward in the 1960's, this new proposal replaced the Supreme National Congress composed of government representatives with the Great National Congress which was closer in its format to an assembly of the general public. This was apparently intended not to recognize the legitimacy and authority of the South Korean government. At the same time, by proposing the name the "Confederal Republic of Koryo," the North was probably trying to increase the value of the symbolism and the effectiveness of the propaganda its new proposition would have. Koryŏ was the name of an ancient Korean kingdom that lasted from A.D. 918 to A.D. 1392. Its capital was located in the North Korean region now known as Kaesŏng.

The 1980's: Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo

At the Sixth Congress of the [North] Korean Workers Party convened on October 10, 1980, North Korea expanded its existing unification formula and came up with the Formula for Creating a Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. The ideas of the new formula might be summed up as follows: first, preconditions for a self-reliant peaceful unification should include (i) replacement of the incumbent South Korean regime, (ii) abolishment of the anti-communist and national security laws, (iii) legalization all political parties and social organizations, and (iv) release of democratic activists and patriots (i.e. pro-communist activists); second, in relation to formation of confederation, a Supreme National Confederal Assembly would be established with an equal number of representatives from both governments, along with a few representing Koreans living

abroad, as its members, and a Confederal Standing Commission would be created to supervise local governments of the South and the North; third, after the confederation is completed, policies that should be implemented by the unified confederal Korea would be the Ten-point Political Program for a Unified State, which include: (i) pursuit of grand national unity, (ii) intra-Korean economic cooperation and exchanges, and (iii) creation of a Combined National Army.

The 1990's: A Reinterpretation of the Confederation Formula

In his New Year's message in January 1991, Kim Il-sung disclosed a tactical change from his previous position on the confederation formula. "Under the circumstances where two different systems exist in the North and the South, unification of fatherland should be achieved on the principle that neither side takes over the other or is taken over by the other and in the form of a confederation with one people, one nation, two systems, and two governments.... The task to combine the two systems into one should be resolved gradually thereafter and left in the hands of future generations, but the establishment of a single unified nation that transcends the differences in ideology and system must not be put off any longer."

In the light of North Korea's steadfastness to the existing Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo, Kim's statement reflected a significant change in North Korea's attitude on unification. First of all, he made a distinction between unification by the integration of systems and unification by a confederation. He argued that the former presupposed the taking over of one side by the other, which

could not be acceptable and should thus be strongly opposed. Reflected in his argument was North Korea's serious worry about the possibility of being taken over by South Korea, just like East Germany had been absorbed in the process of the German unification which was predominantly achieved on West German initiatives.

Moreover, the confederation under one people, one nation, two systems, and two governments was an incomplete formula because it did not present a blueprint for the unified Korea. This insinuates that North Korea has now begun to consider the confederation as an interim arrangement, rather than as an ultimate end in itself.

2 — Contradictions in the North Korean Proposition

As was noted above, North Korea's confederation formula has undergone numerous changes since it was first introduced in August 1960. Nonetheless, in general, the North Korean formula includes the following contradictions or inconsistencies:

First, North Korea presents two preconditions for the confederation up front: the withdrawal of American troops from the South and overthrow of the anti-communist regime. It is a scheme based on the doctrine of "revolutionization of South Korea."

Second, although North Korea insists on forming a confederation "while the North and the South recognize and accept the ideology and system existing in each other's society as they are," the creation of a confederation with two distinctively different systems is impossible in reality.

Third, North Korea is ambiguous on whether it is proposing a federation or a confederation. Though the proposed arrangement is

formally called a “confederation,” its described structure is closer to that of a “federation.”

Fourth, despite its proposition of a confederation, North Korea arbitrarily compels the South to accept the name, format, and foreign policy of the unified nation as proposed by it.

Fifth, Pyongyang’s promulgation of the Ten-point Political Program for a Unified Korea as a plan to be implemented *after* unification under a confederation renders the implementation of those measures meaningless in the process of unification when they are rather needed to prepare a favorable environment for the process of unification.

In short, the underlying strategic interest of North Korea in its proposal of a confederation is to achieve communization of the South by building a pro-communist coalition once the attendant preconditions are met. In other words, the confederation is nothing more than a superficial formality and North Korea’s underlying intent is the communization of the Korean peninsula. This idea is rooted in the doctrine of revolutionization of the South. Therefore, unless the North abandons its revolutionary strategy, no sincere and substantial change can be expected in its confederation formula.