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## CURRENT PROSPECTS OF KOREAN REUNIFICATION AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE INTERSTATE RELATIONS

**ABSTRACT:** Forecasts predicting the reunification of the Korean Peninsula were common throughout the 1990s. Since then, enthusiasm for such predictions has dampened, and though the fundamental assumption of reunification remains, predictions of when and how this will happen have been more restrained. Reunification leaves two unresolved yet interdependent issues: reunification itself, which is the urgent challenge; and the strategic issues that emerge from reunification, which have the potential to fundamentally transform strategic relations in the region of Northeast Asia. Within this context, this paper examines the prospects of Korean reunification against the background of the interstate relations. Initially, it will establish the framework from which such scenarios will emerge: the historical background of the division, the extreme differences between the two states, the role played by the North Korean nuclear threats and the impact of the September 11, 2001 on the interstate relations, and finally general situation and relations in the East Asian region. Then, three possible scenarios of the unification will be developed: through peaceful integration, through the fall of North Korea or through a war. Summing up, even the death of Kim Jong Il will not bring change in the domestic and foreign policy of North Korea which is going to continue an aggressive approach toward the South. In the short-term reunification is definitely not in the interest of the current ROK administration, and the South has no intention of encouraging it. None of the considered scenarios envisions early reunification, and it seems that for the future, the status quo on the Korean Peninsula will remain.

**KEY WORDS:** Korean reunification, inter-Korean relations, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), North Korea

Artificial borders that divide any country always lead towards serious problems that a separated society has to face. The example of Germany after the end of the Second World War helps explain why the

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Korean division attracts the world's attention to such a great extent. The Korean Peninsula has an extremely strategic position in East Asia, and that is why any changes in its mapping would affect the whole region. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with Kim Jong Un, who is governing North Korea according to former Chairman Kim Jong Il's "army-centered policy," poses a threat to the world with its vague statements about its nuclear potential. The Republic of Korea (ROK) is no longer trying to negotiate a solution, and president Lee Myung-bak has no intention of changing his non-aligned approach to the foreign policy towards the northern state. The North stopped propaganda broadcasts against the South. The United States of America, which is allied with the South, plays an important role in these relations since the terrorist attacks on American mainland. The USA has declared North Korea to be of one of the three countries constituting an "axis of evil."

There are three possible scenarios for the unification of the Korean Peninsula: through peaceful integration, through the fall of North Korea or through a war. In order to fully analyse the subject, it is essential to consider some research questions:

1. How was Korea divided into two countries that are hostile towards each other?
2. Are the inner socio-economic situations in both Koreas contrasting?
3. Do North Korea's nuclear threats play a significant role in the negotiations?
4. What was the impact of the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 on the inter-Korean relations?
5. What is the influence of Korea's neighbours, the major regional players-Japan, China and Russia on the prospective process of unification?

### **The Historical Background of the Division**

Since 1910 the Korean Peninsula had been under Japanese control. After the Japanese defeat in 1945, the USA and the USSR agreed to divide the country into two zones along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel (at a latitude of 38 degrees north), so that they were able to jointly organise the Japanese surrender and withdrawal the Americans in the south and Russia in the north (which was bordered by the USSR). From the American point of view, this division was seen as a temporary one. Moreover, the United Nations insisted on free elections for the whole country. The Americans considered it to be the best solution, due to the fact that the southern zone contained two-thirds of the population, and they believed in the

possibility of outvoting the communist north. Unfortunately, unification never arrived (Jinwook, *Korean Unification and the Neighboring Powers* 63).

The artificial border became a battlefield of Cold War rivalry, and agreement could not be reached. The elections supervised by the UN were only held in the south, and the independent Republic of Korea was set up with Syngman Rhee as the president and its capital at Seoul (August 1948). The next month, the north controlled by the USSR, created the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the communist government of Kim Il Sung, with its capital at Pyongyang. In 1949, Russian and American troops were withdrawn, which triggered an extremely dangerous situation, because obviously most Koreans bitterly resented the artificial division forced on their country by outsiders. To make the matters worse, both governments claimed the right to rule over whole country.

In June 1950, North Korean troops invaded South Korea, beginning the Korean War. The United Nations forces, mostly American, hastened to help the south, while the Chinese helped the north. After much advancing and retreating, the war ended in 1953 with South Korea still non-communist (Lowe 144-7). Since then, the United States of America has remained the Republic of Korea's closest ally, and analogically the North Korea has had Chinese and Russian support. The division still remains Scenarios of reunification are discussed below (Fuqua 120-32).

### **Extreme Differences Between the Two States**

There is a yawning gap between the North and the South parts of the Korean Peninsula. It is estimated that the South's economy is 30 times larger than the northern one. The statistics show that two percent of ROK's Gross Domestic Product is allocated to national defence, which is equal to twice the national defence paid by DPRK, although it spends around 25 percent of its GDP for its military programmes (Ku-Hyun 23).

The Republic of Korea is governed by Lee Myung-bak, and is perceived as a powerful country in its region. For instance, the amount of current ROK trade through Asian Sea Lines Of Communications (SLOCs) reaches over 40 percent of its total trade, and about two-thirds of its energy supplies flow through the South China Sea.

In 2001, ROK was confronted with some grave problems such as economic downturn, increase of unemployment rates and some political and financial scandals, which undermined the president's popularity. Like many democratic countries, South Korea has to deal with problems like political disputes in the National Assembly. In the elections held in 2001, six political parties gained seats in the National Assembly.

While considering South Korea's position, it is necessary to mention the Sunshine Policy which provided greater political contact between the two Koreas and, most importantly alliance with the USA. As opposed to the conservative Lee government, the Kim Dae Jung administration had emphasised the "friendship" with the Americans which resulted in the trilateral co-ordination mechanism among ROK, the USA and Japan (which is known as the Trilateral Co-ordination and Oversight Group-TCOG). What is more, South Korea in order to support the Sunshine Policy, has focused on the support of countries like Russia, China (Jinwook, *US-China Relations and Korean Unification* 182). This approval had been formalised in 2001 when several countries declared their cooperation with ROK's policy towards North Korea. The Bush administration in the US praised ROK at the South Korean-US Summit in March 2001 as well as on other occasions. Bush stressed that he would continue his own policy toward DPRK, calling for a dialogue between Northern and Southern states on the Korean Peninsula ("The Korean Peninsula" 151).

South Korea is paying a lot of attention to relations with superpowers like Russia and China for two reasons. Firstly, this is due to close connections that the states established with North Korea, historically and geographically (Chung-in Moon 34) Secondly, China and Russia have been willing to improve their relations with DPRK in recent years. This attitude meets the approval of South Korea, since it may help to mitigate the alienation of North Korea on the international arena. Mostly due to its geographical situation, ROK cherishes the hope that the North will open up. Closed borders between the Korean states are an obstacle for southern trade. One of the most significant companies, Hyundai Motor Company, is known all around the world, and constitutes the basis of the Korean development, as well as Samsung which became South Korea's number one company (Lee B. 44).

In North Korea, it is still a common practice among Pyongyang's administration to use slogans such as: "building of a powerful nation," "the army-cantered policy," or "army-first policy." Some of the phrases constitute acts of propaganda like that used in the USSR. For instance: "discard outmoded thought [and] follow the new" ("The Korean Peninsula" 154-7).

North Korea is perceived by the world as a state closed to international relations, where the army rules consistent with communist policy. Some politicians are making attempts to change world public opinion. Kim Jong Il after issuing a call 'to follow the new', took his second trip to China. That trip gave hope to South Korea and Japan and many other countries that the North was going to push through some radical reforms. However, the former North Korean leader made no

effort to attract further positive attention. Currently, the country is in an awful economic situation and suffers from food shortages, unemployment and a very low general level of development. Aware of that situation, DPRK's government created the Economic and Trade Zone established in Rason City, in order to introduce new technologies. Yet, nothing has changed. In reaction to society's demands and problems, Kim Jong Il used the army first, then the Worker's Party of Korea made some steps towards controlling enterprises and farms, aiming to increase their effectiveness, by introducing some new technologies. In fact, most of these products were used for the military.

North Korea suffers from food shortages. According to Jung Ku-Hyun, it is estimated that the number of people who have died due to starvation over the last ten years reached about 2 million (Ku-Hyun 23). The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates the amount of shortages at around 1 million tons each year. This is a dangerously weak point in DPRK system, because this shortfall is covered by the international aid, including South Korea, Japan or the USA. Another aspect of the critical food shortage is the process of fleeing of civilians to South Korea. The number of people that succeeded in escaping from the North, due to food shortage significantly increased during 2001. In June, there was an incident that took place in the UN organisation office in Beijing. A family entered the office asking for asylum and safe passage to the Republic of Korea. This case did not cause any serious crisis (Bluth 67).

Yet another aspect is North Korea's attitude towards the world's superpowers. North Korean official statements refer to possible attack by the United States and its allies, Japan and South Korea, who, in the opinion of many Northern officials, are just waiting for a proper opportunity to get rid of the socialist system. This is one of the official reasons, why North Korea is paying attention to its military power.

However, some steps towards negotiating with the United States to bring peace to the country have been taken. In October 2000, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok, first vice chairman of the National Defence Commission, visited each other's capitals to join in the discussion ("The Korean Peninsula" 156). Madeleine Albright spent a dozen hours exchanging ideas with Kim Jong Il (Thomas 16). North Korea wanted president Bill Clinton to visit Pyongyang, however this never happened due to the lack of agreement on the nuclear weapons conference.

After there was a change in the American government, a new administration came to the White House and the hostility between USA and DPRK grew even further (*A White Paper on South-North Dialogue in Korea* 11-15). This was caused mainly by the statement uttered by the

newly elected President, George Bush, during his talks to Kim Dae Jung in March, when distrust of Chairman Kim Jong Il was clearly expressed. The American president has been reported to call Kim Jong Il a “pygmy” and to compare the DPRK’s leader to “a spoiled child at a dinner table.” There are many factors that contribute to the hostility. One of the sources is the presence of US troops in South Korea; another is the nuclear potential of North Korea. Not surprisingly, North Korea maintains “friendly” relations with China and Russia, but what is a very promising sign, in recent years it has also established some diplomatic contacts with member states of the European Union as well as with Canada.

### **The Role Played by the North Korean Nuclear Threats**

North Korea wants to be perceived as a military state. It aspires to build-up its military power under slogans such as: “the building of a powerful nation.” The vast, forward deployed conventional force of DPRK causes instability on the Korean Peninsula and in the whole Asia-Pacific region.

In late 1991, North Korea signed the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation and the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, but early in 1993 the North Korean government withdrew from the treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapon. Although later on, it announced the unilateral suspension of its withdrawal from the treaty, its nuclear development continued and is still carried out. The history of threats is quite long and complicated, but the analysis of the present situation is vital to find out whether the unification could be possible in the future. The world has changed since the terrorist attacks in the United States. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 prodded the international community under the US leadership to find those who were responsible for the attacks, as well as to prevent possible future threats. In January 2002, North Korea found herself on a list of countries that might proliferate and export nuclear weapons.

The DPRK strongly denied possessing such a weapon. In mid-October 2002, the US government presented their evidence and reported that North Korea acknowledged having possessed a secret nuclear weapons programme. The Communist State’s admission places it in violation of a 1994 agreement signed with the administration of former US President Bill Clinton, under which Pyongyang agreed to freeze its nuclear programme (Scobel 201). In recent months there has been a thaw in Pyongyang’s dealings with the outside world.

In October, Mr Bush sent Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly to North Korea to initiate security talks. The response of North Korea was cautious since the state reportedly confessed to the nuclear programme after being confronted with the American documentary “evidence” on the issue by Mr Kelly during the visit.

At first, the North Koreans tried to deny the evidence, but eventually they declared the 1994 Clinton-era framework for containing its plutonium-fuelled nuclear program “nullified” (Hirsh M., T. Lipper, M. Isikoff. 24). Washington considers North Korea’s long-range ballistic missile programme as the most serious threat (Calabresi 30-1). Pyongyang is the major exporter of sensitive ballistic missile technology to states like Iran, Libya, Syria and Egypt. The BBC News Website estimates North Korea to have: A military budget of around \$1.3 bn; an army of one million, eight hundred combat aircraft, as well as five hundred missiles of conventional medium range and longer range missiles in development. It is assumed that North Korea also came into possession of weapons of mass destruction: chemical, some biological capacity, and is developing nuclear weapons. North Korea is projected to have ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States by 2015, and may have the plutonium to build one or two nuclear weapons.

North Korean military power is enormous, and many times, it has been used to force South Korea to agree to the conditions of further cooperation. It is believed that about two-thirds of North Korean military strength is placed along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which is a two kilometre wide piece of land extending to north from the truce line. It is necessary to add, that the southern capital is situated about 40 kilometres from the DMZ, which means that it is located within the missiles’ range. This places South Korea in a very difficult and uncomfortable position in the talks.

North Korean nuclear weapons constitute an extremely important factor shaping the international relations with South Korea as well as with the United States. The atmosphere between the two states is filled with mutual distrust that was built over the recent years. The North as well as the South need to change their attitude, build up confidence by contact and talks in order to enable mutual understanding. Only under those conditions could any joint agreements be reached (Dong-won 82).

The first steps towards reconciliation were made in September 2002 when amid ceremonies on both sides of the border, North and South Korea began clearing mines along the Demilitarised Zone between the two nations. The work will allow road and rail links severed during the Korean War to be reconnected. That reconnection would not only join the North and the South, but would also link the whole Korean Peninsula to

the rest of the world, thanks to connection with the rails of the Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR) as well as Trans-China Railway (TCR). These projects were accepted by both sides, and would enable the Korean states to rebuild its strategic logistic position (Dong-won 82)

### **The Role of the September 11 2001 Terrorist Attacks on the Inter-Korean Relations**

September 11, 2001 was a day that has changed the world. On that day the international community witnessed the horrifying terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States. The US changed its attitude towards North Korea, and what is more it reformed defence planning from a "capability-based" model that pays attention to how an adversary might fight (*Quadrennial Defence Review Report* 143). The world population condemned the attacks, but the response of certain countries accentuated the diversity present in contemporary world. The behaviour of the South and North Korea was different from each other.

Japan and South Korea, the allies of the United States of America, strongly condemned the attacks. They even proposed support for the American response. Moreover, the South Korean government paid a lot of attention to public opinion at home as well as to the relations with Arab and Middle Eastern countries. It also took measures to respond to all kinds of terrorism on a domestic (Hakjoon) level. However, society's awareness of a direct threat of terrorism was rather low. South Koreans asked for cooperation and dialogue on this matter together with North Korea. The DPRK did not respond positively on the issue. A week after the attacks, President Kim Dae Jung, stated that South Korea perceives the situation as an act of war; furthermore he sent a message to Bush that his country is ready to provide all-out support for the United States actions towards retaliation. The scope of support was announced in details on September, 24. First of all they were to dispatch medical support teams to function as "mobile surgeries." What is more, they promised to provide some necessary means of transport. Besides that, the expedition of liaison officers to facilitate smooth cooperation was guaranteed. South Korea assured of its active participation in the global coalition against terrorism. The state agreed to share any information concerning terrorism with the USA ("The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia" 31-3).

The ROK government was trying to provide aid equal in range to the support promised by other countries. Due to the fact that some states,



like Japan, did not make this type of offer, the dispatch of combat troops was not promised. The ROK National Assembly carried out a comprehensive study which analysed the international response, domestic public opinion and US relations with Middle Eastern and Arab countries.

Although a positive diplomatic reaction was presented, among the South Korean society and some people in the government, serious talks about the wide-range and the power of the US response to the attacks were pointed out. President Kim Dae Jung stated that, "at the start, I had the impression that the United States was being overly excited in carrying out a wide ranging military campaign" ("The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia" 32). Later, the President was more approving: "the United States has shown considerable self-restraint, and is carrying out measures that are sensible" ("The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia" 33). He added that the US campaign was: "a war against terrorism to maintain peace and security for mankind" ("The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia" 33). On 9 October the Republic of Korea, signed the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

After the attacks, the South Korean armed forces and the police were placed on high alert. Some special training was undertaken, including the Army NBC Defence Command, which specialise in dealing with nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) warfare. Since South Korea is an ally of the United States, they examined the likelihood of a terrorist attack on ROK, as well as the possibility of an attack from North Korea. North Korea was conscious of being a target for global condemnation, thus the chance for using the international pandemonium to launch the military action against the South was relatively low.

The first of the Five-Point Instruction proposed by Kim Dae Jung and accepted by ROK's government on October 7, 2001, imposed maintaining the peaceful relations on the inter-Korean cooperation, in the case of war against terrorism. As far as inter-Korean dialogue is concerned, it is necessary to emphasize the South Korean will to produce a joint declaration on the terrorism aspects. President Kim Dae Jung expressed such opinion just before the fifth inter-Korean ministerial talks that were held in mid-October.

However, the oppositional Grand National Party proposed that North Korea apologise for the acts of terror committed in the past, provided that the two countries would publish a declaration. In the past, North Korea was not keen on the idea of some joined declaration as well (Burdelski 114). It has highlighted terrorism as a topic to be discussed bilaterally between the US and itself, but not between the two Koreas.

The North Korean reaction to the attacks was very cautious. It took some necessary measures to ensure that they would not have a negative impact on the US-DPRK's relations, but its interpretation was that when the roots of that attack are considered "the blame lay on the United States". For the United States the attacks were a chance to put a diplomatic pressure on North Korea in terms of the chemical and biological weapons such as anthrax as it is believed to possess (Barry, *"The Axis of Evil"* 29).

The attacks on Afghanistan prodded North Korean forces to go on an alert. It seems like the military action in Afghanistan frightened North Korea. This is especially evident in the statement of the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was full of restraint. It commented the just launched action as follows: "the action of the United States should not be a source of a vicious circle of terrorism and retaliation that may plunge the world into the holocaust of war" (*"The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia"* 34-6).

North Korean actions were contradictory. The day after the attacks, the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented his country as the one which is "opposed to all forms of terrorism and whatever support to it." This statement underlined that North Korean had signed the Joint-North Korea Statement on International Terrorism of October 2000.

In November, the same Ministry announced the North Korean will to sign the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, as well as the motivation to accede to the International Convention Against Taking Hostages. Notwithstanding these statements, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), citing the *Washington Post* several days after the attacks, suggested that arrogant foreign policy such as forcing through the missile defence plan might be the cause of the US isolation in the international community and Bush's unilateral foreign policy that prioritizes benefits for the United States alone could have been the cause of the recent events.

All in all, there have been a few more statement exchanges, which finally led to a direct appeal to North Korea made by Bush at a news conference in November: "I made it very clear to North Korea that in order for us to have relations with them, we want to know: Are they developing weapons of mass destruction? And they ought to stop proliferating" (*"The Terrorist Attacks in the United States and Security in East Asia"* 36). That chain of events and official statements, finally led President Bush to state on January 29, 2002 that North Korea is regarded as a one of the countries that are the base of an "axis of evil" together with Iran and Iraq. This was discussed widely among newspapers all

around the world, as a very controversial opinion. It was much more than denying North Korean policy that sacrifice its citizens' lives for the building of military power (Tkacik 1). In October, North Korea admitted having weapon of mass destruction.

### **General Situation and Relations in the East Asian Region**

An important aspect of Asian and Pacific relations is the multilateral character of correspondence among the countries. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one of many organizations that aims at improving international cooperation. The most significant cooperation is the one among ASEAN plus three countries, which are: Japan, People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. There are some opinions that this is an attempt to create an alternative economic structure less dependent on Washington ("Region Azji i Pacyfiku-Qua de nef?" 371).

The institutional base for the political order in the region is the system of military agreements signed by the United States with Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, Thailand, Philippines, as well as with Taiwan (on the ground of the unilateral Taiwan's Relation's Act 1979, which gives some basic peace guarantees for the People's Republic of China) (Weiss 123).

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Plus Three summit was held in Shanghai in October 19-21, 2001. This summit was extremely significant mainly due to two reasons. The first one is related to the place of the meeting. Shanghai is becoming a business-financial centre, and is the best evidence of the People's Republic of China development and trade conversion. The summit was to be a very important and meaningful meeting, which was revealed by the enormous amount of journalists' accreditation to it (about 3000).

However, the summit did not manage to pass without disruption. An "unpleasant" situation was caused by the People's Republic of China, which did not invite the representatives of Taiwan even though it was agreed in 1992 that Taiwan and Hong Kong were to participate in APEC not as sovereign countries but as economic subjects. The second reason for the summit's significance is connected with agreement over political declaration that condemns terrorism in all forms. The role of the United States as a leader in counter-terrorism action had been accepted, nevertheless the military action in Afghanistan did not gain any support ("Obszar WNP: koniec Eurazji?" 225).

As far as the institutional side is concerned, the dialogue of so called the "10 + 3" group played a meaningful role. The roots of this group can be found in the financial crisis in that region, because it revealed how weak the cooperation had been. The countries were not able to prevent the crisis from happening and were not ready to deal with it. (Boisseau Du Rocher 34).

The first meeting of the group was held in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, in 1997. A few characteristics of working of that group can be listed. First of all, countries in that region of the world are very sensitive about their sovereignty and they agreed that no law solving can be carried out; additionally the system of voting based on majority was introduced and adopted. The second feature is based on the economic issues, which encouraged ten ASEAN countries to cooperate with the three most powerful states in Asia-Pacific region, which are at the same time their biggest trade partners. Finally, the ASEAN countries proposed that sort of joint talks, because they were aiming to achieve by this increased access to the three countries' domestic markets. In addition, the talks between ASEAN and China about creating the free trade area began (Boisseau Du Rocher 36); this was firstly announced on November 4, 2001 at the summit in Brunei. When more detailed talks took place, it was known that within the next ten years this free trade area will cover about 1,7 billion people and during the first step towards this kind of "unification," up to July 1, 2004, the reduction of duty for some goods is to be performed (*Peace and Prosperity* 240). This shows that the transformation of the People's Republic of China from a very cheap producing base country to an extremely receptive market for goods produced in the region is an on-going process.

China-North Korean relations were tightened up, but without prospects of changes in their situation. In 2001, visits were made by two leaders, Kim Jong Il, the general secretary of the Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee and chairman of the National Refuse Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It was a surprise visit, at the beginning of the New Year, during which Kim Jong Il toured places such as Shanghai General Motors Corporation. This might have been related to Kim Jong Il's New Year's Address, in which he claimed that North Korea has to adopt a new way of thinking to boost its economy (Wolf and Akramov 33). Nevertheless, it does not mean that DPRK is preparing to open like China did previously.

In September, Jiang Zemin revisited North Korea, who while talking to Kim Jong Il was prodding him to accept the path of development. He underlined that China's attitude towards the stability on the Korean peninsula was as follows: "maintaining and promoting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula is extremely important." These visits

constituted the reconfirmation of the traditional "friendship" between the two countries ("China" 188-9).

The dialogue between China and South Korea was important (Xiaoming 134-6). Li Peng, the chairman of the standing committee of the National People's Congress, visited the Republic of Korea. The visit of Prime Minister Lee Han Dong to China took place as well. The talks touched upon political and economic issues. China's main objective was to strengthen economic ties with South Korea. In October 2001, the twenty-first century Korea-China Leaders Society headed by Kang Young Hun, who used to be the prime minister of the ROK, visited China, and had a meeting with Li Peng. Li Peng stated that the Chinese government sincerely supports and welcomes the restoration of dialogue and cooperation between the ROK and DPRK, and hopes for reconciliation through dialogue and the eventual voluntary reunification of the two Koreas (Jwa, Sung-Hee, Chung-in Moon 92). However, China is also aware of some obstacles to the possible unification, the most serious problems were listed: political, economic and psychological barriers between the North and South, that cannot be overcome overnight (Xuehan 32).

This statement shows that China really cares about the situation on the Korea Peninsula. This is connected with its economic objectives; peaceful development in both Koreas is essential for the Chinese economy. As long as South Korea had stuck to its Sunshine policy towards the North, stability on the peninsula has been prominently easier to maintain as opposed to the current government leadership politics on foreign issues and international relations (Kim I. J., H. P. Lee 64).

In October 2001, Jiang Zemin met with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung at the summit meeting of APEC. Afterwards, the Chinese leader highlighted his support for maintaining good North-South relations and mentioned that during his talks to Kim Jong Il, he prodded him to pay a visit to Seoul. At the press conference following the summit, Jiang expressed his support for the North Korean participation in APEC. China's attitude towards both Koreas differs in that these countries are completely different from each other, but in both cases, the People's Republic of China is using diplomacy to ease the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and encourage peaceful dialogue ("China" 189-90).

Russia is the second superpower in the region. Its basic objectives towards the Korean Peninsula is very close to the policy promoted by China. Russia wants peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas and is doing her best to prevent any destabilization. As such, Russia supports the status quo. Russia's attitude towards the North Korea regime is to help it to survive, as though it may help to stabilize the tensions on the

peninsula, which might be helpful in restoring Russia's influence in the region (some within the Russian defense industry hope to resume exports to North Korea). In April 2001, the Minister of the People's Armed Forces, Kim Il Chol visited Russia, and the trip resulted in signing a pact of military cooperation as well as assistance in military technology. That subject was also an incentive for Kim Il Jung's visit to Russia from late July to mid-August. On August 4, Chairman Kim and President Putin signed a joint declaration at the Russia-North Korea summit in Moscow. According to it, Russia claimed that North Korea constructed its missile plan in a peaceful character, and it was highlighted that it would not be a threat to any nation that respects North Korea's sovereignty. One of the leading summit's subjects was arms supplies. Putin visited South Korea in February 2001 and new economic deals were made ("Russia" 248). Countries that play a significant role in the Korean Peninsula neighborhood, support unification, although there are different roots of that attitude.

## Conclusions

The reunification of the Korean Peninsula seems to be barely possible due basic changes in South Korean foreign policy. Despite the historic handshake of the leaders, Kim Dae Jung, and Kim Jong Il in 2000, there is still room for improvement in inter-Korean relations. Senior journalists from South Korea visited the North to establish communication. Decades after politics drove hundreds of families apart, a tearful reunion of many relatives took place. One hundred North Koreans met their family members in the South in a highly-charged, emotional reunion. Reopening the border liaison offices at the "truce village" of Panmunjom, in the no-man's-land between the heavily fortified borders of the two countries, was also regarded as a sign of goodwill. South Korea granted amnesty to more than 3,500 prisoners. On October 4, 2007, Roh Moo-Hyun and Kim Jong Il signed an eight-point agreement on issues of lasting peace, high-level talks, economic cooperation, highway and air travel and renewal of train services.

Despite the events that undermined inter-Korean relations such as in June 2002 when North and South Korean naval vessels waged a gun battle in the Yellow Sea, which was the worst skirmish for three years, (thirty North Korean and four South Korean sailors were killed) or in 2010, when North shelled island of Yeonpyeong and killed four South Koreans, reunification is still possible.

While considering the topic of 'whether the total opening of the inter-Korean borders is possible within next few years and if so

under what conditions', it is possible to come up with scenarios for reunification which are as follows:

1. The first one is through a peaceful integration. This can be perceived as the most optimistic scenario, but in fact, it would be extremely difficult to perform. That kind of inter-Korean development would involve steps like: an initial acceptance of the status quo by the two Koreas and by four major powers which are the United States, China, Russia and Japan. This can be described as a two plus two model. What is more, a mutual recognition of that model would be indispensable. The next step would involve a formal peace treaty. A period of peaceful coexisting before these steps would be taken, is necessary as well. The integration itself, would entail levelling of each countries policy, which are completely different. Cooperation on economic level with limited political and social integration is required before the next step could be reached (Choi, *Perspectives on Korean Unification and Economic Integration* 245). In such case, the most troublesome part would follow, not only for the governments' officials but especially for the two societies: structural change evolving along the lines of a "one country, two systems, two governments" approach evident in previous Republic of Korea proposals for unification. Only after these steps are completed could a peaceful integration could happen. An important factor is the protracted time period of peaceful coexistence, because a recognition of status quo or formal treaty without few years of good cooperation is hardly possible. Despite the fact that North Korea in August 2002, have introduced market reforms in the first move away from its planned economy, for instance the currency was devalued, food ration coupons were scrapped, and workers' wages were boosted to pay for goods sold at new rates, it is rather unlikely that this country would abandon its communist ideology.

"North Korea goes to market-maybe" this is the title of the article published on the BBC News website. A senior South Korean official has said the North had begun what he called "sweeping reforms," aimed at turning round its collapsed centrally planned economy. Reports from Seoul say that the rationing system is being phased out in a partial move towards a free market. It remains notoriously hard to gauge what is happening in North Korea, with even foreign aid workers based in Pyongyang being denied access to large parts of the country. However, it does now seem clear that significant economic changes are under way. David Morton, who represents the World Food Programme in Pyongyang, reported that the introduction of a limited free market had already had an effect. On July 1, 2001 the state of DPRK introduced a new price system (Lee J.-Ch. 358). In one sense, these moves towards a free market are a formal recognition of the reality that has existed for

some time. The state had lost control of the food distribution system, partly due to the farmers who were withholding produce to sell on the black market.

BBC News website presents Hazel Smith, a Korea analyst at the United States Institute for Peace, who claims that the state would rather tolerate and regulate the market than lose control altogether. Together with the rise in prices, wages and living allowances are going up too. Smith also warned of possible trouble ahead. South Korea is observing the process of reform in its impoverished northern neighbour keenly. There is a good deal of cynicism in Seoul about whether the reforms are a genuine attempt to move to a free market, or simply a short-term measure to wrest back control from the black marketers. If the North Korean Government asks for economic assistance, then the international community will be willing to provide it. In the case North Korea is not willing to accept the offer, there will be very limited room to maneuver. Otherwise, this may cause some problems in the future. A degree of political liberalisation would be necessary if North Korea wanted substantial support from South Korea and the rest of the international community. Moving on from tolerating, then legalising the markets to a system where there are economic incentives and the individual gets rewarded is a problem for the government. The next step would be political freedom for individuals. North Koreans would look at-but probably not follow-the reforms introduced in China. It is impossible for the North Korean Government or anyone else to predict exactly where the reforms will end up. Nevertheless, the changes are a sign that the authorities in Pyongyang are adopting some more pragmatic approach as they seek to turn round an economy that has produced misery and starvation for the bulk of the population. The government is genuinely committed to its huge experiment, including sweeping price reforms designed to emulate Beijing's capitalist experimentation in the early 1980s (Wehrfritz and Tahayama 27).

These economic reforms are being introduced as a result of the dramatic situation of economy and citizens' standard of living, rather than because of North Korean will to open up. Annually, 6 to 8 million of North Korean citizens are being supplied in food by the UN (Hirsh, "Kim is the Key Danger" 19). In order to analyse the strength and durability of these performances, it is necessary to wait a year or more, because in the past there were some attempts of the North Korean government that gave hope for coming out from isolation, but it always came back to its previous ideology.

The unification through peaceful integration could be realised, only under some external and impartial control. The United States hopes to be



an honest broker, who could regulate the processes between the two Koreas, especially as they see themselves as an advisor in managing the confidence-building measures or monitoring mutual force reductions that might emerge from a peace treaty.

2. The second scenario of unification through default assumes a state failure in North Korea and an abrupt unification of absorption. This view was particularly popular during the late 1980s and early 1990, with the end of Cold War and widening of a yawning gap between the North and South economic development. The general steps in the collapse scenario begin from some kind of triggering event. This could be a mass disorder that derives largely from the initial steps by the DPRK towards initiating reforms and abandoning them in due course. Such reforms could very easily create a spiral of expectations among society by giving it a force to pursue the government to follow the already initiated path of changes. On the other hand, a trigger might come from the elite, also by waking up the hope for major economic changes. If the trigger occurs, then an international intervention might be obligatory for restoring the order. There are some doubts about the character of the intervention. Should it be a result of the ROK-US alliance—a joint military action of the two? Do the South Koreans need to obtain the US or international consent to act on their own in the North? Or perhaps, the action should be undertaken by the multinational force under the UN supervision?

The next aspect is connected with the socio-economic integration problems, which are believed to be the most acute under this scenario. First of all, it is due to the lack of clarity in comparison to the effects of unification through a war. The issues could be nearly the same, but who would owe the right to seize the power and govern the administration? The questions are then: who will gain the authority and under what conditions? How should the intervention be performed so as not to usurp the sovereignty of the Northerners? Unpopular policies telling how to govern and administer the territory problems connected with currency conversion, enfranchisement or border control, all of them might face strong opposition by indigenous populations in a way that might not occur in a post-war military reality.

In that scenario, the role played by the United States is worth mentioning since the Americans see themselves as the ones who could play a constructive role both in a short and long term perspective. In a short term outlook, it might act as a major support for the intervention. While in the long time perspective, the US could behave as a coordinator among China, Japan and Russia, and other regional states facing the possible negative regional effects of the DPRK collapse. On the other hand, the Americans have to be aware that although at the beginning

their help would be welcomed by the Koreans, later on, after gaining the knowledge how to manage with new situation, some negative sentiments are likely to occur towards the US presence on the peninsula.

3. The last option, is often referred to as the "worst" end of spectrum. Unification in that context would be an effect of war. This could be, hypothetically, a repeat of the North invasion of the South, as happened in 1950. Such similar action is rather not possible, because the US-ROK alliance is very strong and this would be a suicidal action undertaken by the North. The US-ROK cooperation acts as a deterrent for invasion, but when it comes to such an unpredictable leader as Kim Jong Il, it is impossible to anticipate his actions. In the past, wars occurred more often through miscalculation or accident during a period of high tension than through cold, rational calculation, which makes that scenario still very plausible. The more likely trigger would be if a possible new status quo for the Korean Peninsula brought so many losses to DPRK that by military action, a desperate attempt to change the status quo was made by the Northern state.

In the case of war, its outcome may include characteristics such as: many civilian casualties among Koreans and Americans, as well as large-scale industrial devastation in Seoul and in other major cities. As it was proved that North Korea has a weapon of mass destruction, possible chemical damage to the environment in the South has to be taken into consideration. Massive destruction in Japan might be possible due to DPRK missiles attacks, in order to forestall US and Japanese joint action. Eventually, the effect would be the post-war occupation and administration of former DPRK. The scenario based on war, would cause some acute problems between the US and ROK with China. The full extent of the Chinese reaction to such a war is not known. A significant issue would be China's probable attempt to create a buffer zone, which would prevent refugee flows. These refugees would be settled down on Korean territory. The question is, how the US and ROK states should react to the military presence on during the conflict. The role of the United States in that scenario, in comparison to the two other possible unification outcomes, would involve the largest US military presence on the North territory. It is very likely that the US would play a crucial role in the North occupation. In the long term, the American role would be similar to the one in the unification through default scenario.

The reunification reached by any of the presented scenarios and the process of rebuilding will involve countless adjustments to form the new society's economic, political, and other key social institutions. Southern values are likely to dominate due to their demonstrated success in the global economy, and due to simple demographics: two-thirds of the

unified population, probably 75 million people, would be South Koreans. While forming societies people usually create five major institutions to establish order and transmit their values to next generation: family, religion, education, economy and government.

It is difficult to estimate and describe a society that may not appear soon, however some basic characteristics can be predicted. For instance, family, which can be found in every society, constitutes a foundation, because it instils basic values and behaviour for average citizen, in reunified Korea would probably maintain its strong unit. The discrepancies between the Southern and Northern families are visible, even tools that are used in everyday life differ a lot. In the South Internet, democracy and market economic are universally accepted, but for the Northern society it might be difficult to adapt. Unified Korea is likely to be pluralistic in terms of religion, although in DPRK Confucianism has been blended with socialist values, which in fact created the cult of Kim Il Sung, (also called Kimilsungism). While in the ROK Christianity gained a lot of popularity, the government would probably outlaw Kimilsungism religious practices and would encourage some Christian missionaries and others promoting commonly accepted religions.

As far as education is concerned, unified Korea is likely to implement South Korea's relatively liberal educational system to produce individuals who can improve the country's ability to succeed in the global economy and overcome the stress of unification. The North Korea's system is seen by the Korea Worker's Party (KWP) as a tool to control political conciseness of the society. Unified Korea would need to develop new understandings of itself as an independent nation-state, without resorting dysfunctional nationalism. The unified Korea would undoubtedly seek implementing economic principles of the free market and trying to become part of a vast Eurasian market connecting Pusan, Paris, Moscow and Beijing. Some urgent measures would have to be taken to neutralise the socialist economic concepts. Another problem which a unified Korea would have to face is the massive North Korean migration to the prosperous south, which economically could be disastrous. The last public institution is the government, which most likely would be democratic. The perception of the government's role in the society is completely different in the North and in the South. The Southern Koreans will require an increasingly transparent government accountable to voters and oriented to help them to achieve their socio-economic objectives. The government role and the responsibilities of the Northern Koreans as free citizens might be confusing for them. Such confusion, if improperly managed, could be a source of serious instability.

All in all, if unification occurs and leads two separate countries to enter into the alliance on all levels. The possibility that there will be

a total opening of inter-Korean borders is highly unlikely in the next few years. Nowadays, the international relations, especially after the attacks of September 11, 2001, are rotating every day and what is more the Asia-Pacific region faces instability.

Throughout the 1990s, enthusiasm for Korean reunification predictions has faded due to the resilience of the North regime. Although the underlying assumption of reunification remains, forecasts of when and how this will occur have been more restrained. Even the death of Kim Jong Il will not bring changed to domestic and foreign policy as North Korea is going to continue adopt an aggressive approach toward the South. In summary, in the short-term reunification is definitely not in the interest of the current ROK administration, and the South has no intention of encouraging it. None of the considered scenarios envisions early reunification, and it seems that for the future, the status quo on the Korean Peninsula will remain.

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