

Between Principle and Pragmatism: What Went Wrong with the Lee Myung-bak Government's North Korean Policy?*

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The progressive decade of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun government showed a remarkable improvement in inter-Korean relations through two summit meetings and expanded exchanges and cooperation. However, as the Lee Myung-bak (MB)'s conservative government stepped into power in February 2008, the overall landscape was radically altered. Whereas exchanges and cooperation between two Koreas have been virtually suspended, military tension has been heightened as evidenced by the sinking of Cheonan naval vessel and shelling of Yeonpyong island. Blame should be placed on Pyongyang first, but the Lee Myung-bak government equally responsible for such development. Its emphasis on impractical principles and lack of pragmatism, a wishful thinking on the coming collapse of North Korean regime, and universal value that overlooks North Korea's peculiarities has brought a major setback to the inter-Korean relations. Given time constraint, it might not be easy for the MB government to reverse the trend. Yet, a more practical and forthcoming engagement is needed for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

Keywords: *Lee Myung-bak Government, Inter-Korean Relations, Denuclearization of North Korea, Pragmatism, May 24 Measures, Principled Engagement*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Korean conflict is one of the most protracted and complex issues in contemporary international politics owing to its volatile history of conflict and confrontation since the devastating Korean War in 1950-1953. The 1953 armistice agreement notwithstanding, the two Koreas continued to engage in a series of sharp military confrontations, with a brief period of inter-Korean dialogue following the July 4 South-North Joint Statement ('June 4 Joint Statement') in 1972. Unfortunately, the peninsula once again fell victim to global geopolitics, as the inauguration of the Reagan administration in 1980 and the return of Cold-War tensions throughout Northeast Asia eventually strained inter-Korean relations.

However, with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the dissolution of the Eastern European bloc, and German unification, the close of the Cold War era created a new atmosphere, culminating in the adoption of the 1992 Basic Agreement on Non-aggression, Reconciliation, Exchanges and Co-operation between South and North Korea ('Basic Agreement'). Again, the progress did not last. The first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, the sudden death of the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung, and the controversy surrounding the dispatch of a South Korean condolence delegation to his funeral ceremony brought inter-

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Korean relations to a dramatic halt. Only during the progressive decade of the Kim Dae-jung (DJ) and Roh Moo-hyun (Roh) governments from 1998 to 2007 did inter-Korean relations significantly improve, due to the compounded efforts of the Sunshine Policy and the Peace and Prosperity Policy, respectively. Whereas the first Korean summit in June 2000 produced the June 15th Joint Declaration, the second Korean summit in October 2007 resulted in the adoption of the October 4 Joint Summit Declaration (Lim 2008; Moon 2007).

Since the Lee Myung-bak (MB)'s conservative government stepped into power in February 2008, however, the pendulum of inter-Korean relations has once again swung to disarray amidst a radically altered landscape. Highly critical of its progressive predecessors, the MB administration adopted an 'Anything But Roh Moo-hyun' ('*ABR*') posture as the basis for its initial North Korea policy, the 'Vision 3000: Denuclearization and Openness' initiative ("De-nuke, Open 3,000"). However, four years into the MB government, inter-Korean relations have hit rock-bottom, perhaps its worst point in decades, and the administration's ever evolving North Korea policies have failed to generate any progress. After a series of incidents, including missile and nuclear tests as well as fatal military clashes, military tensions on the peninsula have risen to near crisis levels. At the same time, animosity from Pyongyang has become increasingly vitriolic and confrontational. In the 2009 New Year joint editorial of the Nodong Shinmun, the North described the MB government as "the fanatic regime that is obsessed with hostile confrontation with the North," and labeled Seoul's 'Sangsaeng Gongyoung' (Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity) policy as a policy of "aggravating inter-Korean confrontation by impure clowns" (Nodong Shinmun, January 1, 2009). The North even compared the appointment of Hyun In-taek as the Minister of Unification to an "act of crime" (JoongAng Il-bo, February 12, 2009). With ten years of progress from the reconciliation, exchange and cooperation efforts of the DJ and Roh governments now a mere memory, inter-Korean relations stand at a dangerous precipice. Against this backdrop, the paper aims at examining the MB government's policy on North Korea, assessing its performance, elucidating causes of the stalled inter-Korean relations, and offering new perspectives on emerging from the status quo.

2. THE LEE MYUNG-BAK GOVERNMENT AND THE EVOLVING FOUNDATIONS OF ITS NORTH KOREA POLICY

Upon his inauguration, President Lee was confident that he could open a new horizon of inter-Korean relations through a mix of principle and pragmatism. However, prior to the application of principle and pragmatism, the MB administration's North Korea policy was first and foremost a reaction to the policies of the two previous governments. MB himself as well as those around him strongly believed that both DJ's Sunshine Policy and Roh's Peace and Prosperity Policy were catastrophic failures. He made correcting those mistakes his top priority and as such, the administration's policy toward North Korea began with the comprehensive negation of the engagement and reconciliation policies of his two predecessors. '*ABR*' (Anything But Roh Moo-hyun) was, in particular, at its core.¹ In contrast to the promises of the progressive approaches, the MB administration believed both policies not only failed to change the North through 'reform and opening,' but also resulted

¹ The author was the first person who used the expression of "Anything But Roh Moo-hyun (*ABR*)" in his interview with Yonhap News Agency, 21 December, 2008.

in strengthening the North's nuclear weapons capability and reinforcing its 'military-first policy.' The administration also contended that the engagement policy spoiled North Korea by giving unilaterally (*peojugie*) without a corresponding reciprocity principle. With the North acting like a principle and the South an agent, the MB government was convinced such a passive and humiliating attitude encouraged Pyongyang to act more unruly. Also important was its opinion that for all the unilateral giving, the engagement policy did not make any contribution to improving human rights in North Korea. Moreover, the previous governments' preoccupation with improving inter-Korean relations (*minjokgongjo*) seriously impaired 'international cooperation' (*gukjegongjo*), especially the ROK-US alliance. For these reasons, the MB government did not endorse both the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Joint Summit Declaration signed by its predecessors.

Notable is the fact that the foundation of the MB government's North Korea policy was not only reactive from the outset, but also continued to evolve based in no small part on the administration's reaction to North Korean provocations. Over the last four years of the administration, the foundation of its North Korea policy has evolved through four components: 'De-nuke, Open 3,000' and the 'Grand Bargain' initiative, the 'Sangsaeng Gongyoung' (Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity) policy, the 'May 24 Measure,' and the three-stage approach to unification and the unification tax.

2.1. 'De-nuke, Open 3,000' and the 'Grand Bargain' Initiative

Since the days of his presidential campaign, MB couched the core of his North Korea policy within the context of denuclearization. He firmly believed that improving inter-Korean relations would be inconceivable without first resolving the North Korean nuclear problem and critiqued efforts such as the Six-Party Talks for failing to alter North Korea's behavior. Thus, he formulated the 'De-nuke, Open 3000' initiative,² which pledges to assist North Korea in achieving a \$3,000 per capita income within 10 years in exchange for denuclearization. More specifically, the initiative states that if Pyongyang voluntarily denuclearizes, Seoul will help the North adopt an export-oriented economy, induce the future investment of US\$40 billion through international cooperation funds, and achieve a US\$3,000 per capita income within 10 years (Ministry of Unification 2008). Furthermore, the South Korean government would come up with a comprehensive assistance package to the North in various sectors such as the economy, education, finance, infrastructure, and welfare. In substance, the initiative is similar to the 'CVID' (Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Dismantlement of nuclear weapons) proposal of the first Bush administration, which set North Korea's denuclearization as a precondition for the normalization of U.S.-North Korean relations. North Korea flatly rejected the 'De-nuke, Open 3000' initiative because it did not view South Korea as its counterpart in the nuclear issue. For the North, the U.S. was and remains the only party with which it will negotiate for a nuclear deal. Moreover, Pyongyang did not consider US\$3,000 a viable incentive when weighed against what it saw as its national and regime security.

The MB government's nuclear framework for its North Korea policy took a more assertive tone in response to the North's second underground nuclear testing in May 2009.

² The official title of the initiative is "Vision 3000: Denuclearization and Openness." But I avoided using the official title because Vision 3000 seems misleading. "De-nuke, Open 3000" is the literal translation of the policy title '*Bihaek Gaebang 3000*' in Korean.

During his visit to the U.S. in June 2009, President Lee sought strong assurances from the U.S. government. President Obama responded by reassuring extended deterrence as well as the provision of the American nuclear umbrella to South Korea. President Lee also suggested a concerted effort among the five members of the Six-Party Talks for sanctions on North Korea. Then, on the occasion of his visit to the United Nations in September 2009, he proposed the ‘Grand Bargain’ strategy in a speech to the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. Thereafter, he continued to emphasize the significance and necessity of the ‘Grand Bargain’ approach at various international forums, including the China-Japan-South Korea summit in Beijing on October 10, the East Asian summit in Thailand on October 25, and the Singapore APEC summit in November 2009.

The ‘Grand Bargain’ proposal consists of four major elements. First, it calls for close policy coordination among the five member nations of the Six-Party Talks in dealing with North Korea. In the past, lack of such coordination was often responsible for stalled Six-Party Talks. Whereas the U.S. was only concerned with denuclearizing North Korea, the ROK was preoccupied with improving inter-Korean relations. Alternatively, Japan was focused on resolving the abduction issue, while China, as the chair country, was trying to steer the Six-Party Talks process itself and sought stability in North Korea. Thus, the ‘Grand Bargain’ proposal was designed to tackle the coordination dilemma with the understanding that denuclearization of North Korea would never be accomplished as long as each member pursued individual national interests. Secondly, the proposal reiterates that the South will make every effort to assure regime security in North Korea and facilitate its economic reconstruction on the condition that the North chooses verifiable denuclearization.

Third, the proposal asserts that the existing approach of the Six-Party Talk has failed in redressing North Korea’s bad behavior because it consisted of only rewards with no punishment mechanism. Hence, the proposal stresses the combination of dialogue and pressure as well as reward and punishment. While maintaining channels of dialogue with the North, the proposal encourages the international community to continue enforcement of UN Security Council Resolution 1874 until verifiable denuclearization is realized. Finally, the ‘Grand Bargain’ proposal advocates a package deal rather than a step-by-step approach. Judged on past experiences, the DPRK has adopted ‘salami tactics’ that reap benefits at each stage, while renegeing in fulfilling required obligations. In order to prevent this, the proposal suggests a one-shot deal in which North Korea’s denuclearization is tied to appropriate compensation as a single package (Korea Institute for National Unification 2009).

As with the first iteration, the North rejected the ‘Grand Bargain’ proposal, accusing it of being “a simple copy of the ‘De-nuke, Open 3000’ initiative” and arguing that “it is nothing but a fanciful dream to mention the abandonment of our nuclear program without removing the hostile anti-North Korean policy by the United States” (Korean Central News Agency, September 30, 2009).

2.2. ‘Sangsaeng Gongyoung’ (Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity) Policy

With severe criticism of the ‘De-nuke, Open 3,000’ coming from the North and the liberal/progressive camp in the South,³ President Lee responded by stating that “while the priority should still be placed on denuclearization, we will explore new ways for *mutual*

³ The liberal/progressive camp in the South criticized that the MB government has only a policy on the North Korean nuclear issue, but not a North Korean policy *per se*.

benefits and common prosperity that can enhance the mutual gains of both Koreas,” at the opening speech of the National Assembly in July 2008 (Cheong Wa Dae Homepage at <http://www.president.go.kr>, last accessed 20 November 2011). The ‘Sangsaeng Gongyoung’ policy has since become another official North Korean policy foundation of the MB government, emphasizing co-existence and co-prosperity as the future vision for inter-Korean relations (Ministry of Unification 2009). It highlighted that improvement of inter-Korean relations should lead to changes in North Korean behavior. It identifies a broader set of goals that includes the realization of an advanced Korean Peninsula, happiness for the entire Korean people, and peaceful reunification through the establishment of peace and economic community. While adhering firmly to the principles of pragmatism, productivity, and denuclearization of the North, it attempted to adopt a more flexible policy management approach by harmonizing national consensus, international cooperation, and inter-Korean relations.

Additionally, the MB government set up as medium-term priority projects the cultivation of an inter-Korean dialogue culture that assures mutual respect at meetings, reduction of military tensions and confidence-building between the two Koreas for the establishment of a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula, inter-Korean economic cooperation for reciprocity and co-prosperity, revitalization of social and cultural exchanges, and a solution for North Korea’s humanitarian problems. Also announced were four guidelines as conditions of the proposed economic cooperation including progress on the North Korean nuclear issue, sound feasibility, fiscal capacity, and national consensus. Regarding exchanges and humanitarian issues, the policy called for regularizing the reunions of separated families, settling the issues of South Korean prisoners from the Korean War and abductees by the North, improving human right conditions in North Korea as mandated by universal standards, and promoting unconditional humanitarian assistance.

Lastly, the policy contains concrete plans for the implementation of the ‘De-nuke, Open 3,000’ policy in terms of three stages: a complete shutdown of all the nuclear facilities in North Korea, fulfillment of North Korea’s denuclearization, and provision of benefits proportionate to its denuclearization. This is clearly expressed by Unification Minister Hyun In-taek’s inaugural speech in early 2009. Hyun proclaimed that “I will implement President Lee’s philosophy of national governance in our policy on North Korea and unification. And denuclearization of North Korea will continue to serve as a precondition for the comprehensive development of inter-Korean relations” (Ministry of Unification 2009). His statement can be interpreted as the adherence to the existing North Korea policy, while leaving open room for dialogue and cooperation (Yonhap News Agency, February 12, 2009). Therefore, notwithstanding the rosy shift in tone represented by the ‘*Sangsaeng Gongyoung*’ policy, Hyun’s speech chilled inter-Korean relations by reminding North Korea that such a vision remained hostage to progress in North Korea’s denuclearization.

2.3. Sinking of the Cheonan and the ‘May 24 Measure’

Following the sinking of the Cheonan warship on March 26, 2010, the MB government’s North Korea policy pivoted again towards a hard-line stance. On May 24, four days after the official announcement of findings by a joint investigation group that held a North Korean torpedo attack responsible for the sinking, President Lee announced three countermeasures in a speech to the nation. The first element of what became known as the ‘May 24 Measure’ was the adoption of a so-called ‘proactive deterrence’ military posture that resembles the

‘preemption doctrine’ of the George W. Bush administration. The MB government made it clear that the detection of any intention or indication of a North Korean military attack would be answered with a preemptive attack. By that point, the ROK Joint Chief of Staff had already changed the rules of combat engagement in the West Sea to allow preemptive strikes in response to provocative North Korean actions.

Second, the MB government undertook a series of hard-line policies against the North. It tried to squeeze the North Korean economy by suspending all economic exchanges and cooperative projects, with the exception of the Gaesung Industrial Complex (GIC). Additional pressure was placed on the North Korean leadership by blocking any cash flow into the North and even banning all humanitarian assistance including food aid.

Internationalizing North Korea’s rogue behavior and seeking a coordinated sanction regime, one independent of the nuclear policy framework, constituted the third component. The administration’s intention was either to force North Korea to comply with international norms and principles or to foster its collapse through close international cooperation and coordination. Seoul mobilized support from its allies and friends such as the U.S., Japan, EU and Australia, while concurrently seeking multilateral sanctions against North Korea through the UN Security Council. Although South Korea failed to win a UNSC sanction resolution against North Korea, allies such as the U.S. and Japan began to voluntarily implement unilateral sanctions on North Korea in the wake of the Cheonan sinking. The ‘May 24 Measure’ dominated other North Korean policy agendas, virtually paralyzing inter-Korean relations and severely escalating military tension on the Korean peninsula.

2.4. Three-Stage Unification Scheme and Unification Tax

Despite the high state of military hostilities on the peninsula, in his National Independence Day speech on August 15, 2010, President Lee made two interesting proposals, one on the three-stage approach to unification, and the other unification tax. The first of his three-stage unification is the formation of peace community that can assure peace and security on the Korean peninsula. He again emphasized the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as a precondition. The second stage is the formation of economic community through the promotion of comprehensive exchanges and cooperation and the integration of North-South Korean economies that would require an epochal development of North Korean economy. The third stage is the realization of ‘national community (*minjok gondongche*)’ that not only demolishes institutional barriers between the two Koreas, but also guarantees the dignity, liberty, and basic rights of the Korean people. Since the MB government did not present specific contents of this unification proposal afterwards, it is difficult to figure out what progress has been made through the proposal. A spokesman for the Ministry of Unification referred it to the extension of *hanminjok gondongche tongilbangan* (Commonwealth Unification model) of the Roh Tai-woo government that is composed of three stages, namely trust-building and peaceful-coexistence, North-South Korean union of states involving the institutionalization of summit, ministerial, and parliamentary talks, and ultimately the formation of a unified democratic republic (Roh 2011: 286-287). However, no concrete picture that can support the link with the Roh Tai-woo’s proposal has been given. Thus, it can be said that the National Independence Day’s proposal is by and large rhetorical.

More controversial was the idea of unification tax. President Lee stated in his speech that “Unification will eventually come. I think that time has arrived for us to deliberate on realistic measures such as unification tax to prepare for the day of unification. I propose a

public debate on this issue.” Arising in the middle of the Cheonan fiasco, the unification scheme and tax proposal was seen as an ironic gesture because the administration had been emphasizing contingency and collapse in the North and combat preparedness to deal with a military confrontation. It may have been better appreciated if the proposal had been made at the time of improved inter-Korean relations. But it was known that the unification tax was originated from a report of the Presidential Committee for Future Planning on costs of unification. It assumed two possible scenarios. First, in the case that North Korea goes through the sequence of contingency, collapse, and unification by absorption, unification costs are estimated to be US\$2.14 trillion dollars (2,550 trillion Korean won) over approximately 30 years. Second, however, if the North undergoes reform and opening amidst peaceful co-existence and unification through mutual consensus is achieved, the cost of unification would be much smaller, around US\$305 billion (350 trillion Korean won), or one seventh the cost of an absorptive unification (Lee and Kim 2010).

Assuming that unification will come through the first scenario, President Lee proposed to introduce unification tax in order cover enormous costs of unification. The MB government recently revealed a plan to reserve 50 trillion Korean won for the coming decade in preparation for North Korea’s sudden collapse. The plan aims at drawing 3 trillion won from the North-South Cooperation Fund and 5 trillion won from ‘unification tax’ respectively every year (Yong-su Lee 2011). Ryu Woo-ik, new unification minister, has also suggested the idea of raising fund from civil society. What seems interesting is that the MB government prefers higher costs of unification through absorption to much lower costs of unification through mutual consensus.⁴ No wonder why Jopyongtong (Committee on Peaceful Unification of Fatherland), a propaganda wing of the Korea Workers’ Party, condemned the plan as “a proclamation for a full-scale showdown” and “an impure and foolish proposal with North Korea’s contingency in mind” (Korean Central News Agency, August 16, 2010). And public debate on the proposal is continuing South Korea, but public support does not seem to be high.

An overview of the MB government’s North Korea policy reveals that it has been by and large reactive, retaliatory, and even unrealistic, as apparent in the unification tax proposal. Moreover, several of the various policy foundations are predicated on vastly different assumptions (regime security versus collapse) and at times contradictory objectives

⁴ Not factoring into the plan’s assumptions is the case of unification after the outbreak of a major war. In this scenario, the cost would dramatically increase due to war-related expenses and the costs of post-war reconstruction, for which the total estimate is more than 8,000 trillion Korean won. When the incalculable loss of lives is taken into account, this cost would be astronomical (Moon 2010). Yet another scenario is possible, in which North Korea’s dependence on China deepens as the MB government continues to isolate and contain its economy through sanctions. If this trend continues, North Korea could be placed under the economic trusteeship of China. Paradoxically, the South’s burden of financing unification may well be reduced in this scenario owing to China’s contribution. However, this case could further delay the process of unification, raise South Korea’s entry costs in the North, and catalyze greater complications with respect to regional power considerations. Under any scenario, the share of unification taxes as a ratio of total unification costs might be mitigated by financial resources for unification drawn from other sources. Such sources might include private-sector investments, a reparation fund from Japan, bilateral support from the U.S., Japan and China, and loans and grants from various multilateral lending institutions such as the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank.

(denuclearization versus co-existence and co-prosperity versus regime collapse). Such reactionary and disjointed policy foundations are arguably neither principled nor pragmatic in their construction. To what extent then has the administration's policy been successful?

3. INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS ON THE COLLISION COURSE: ASSESSING THE MB GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE

Although the events on the Korean peninsula over the last four years could not have been predicted, the MB administration's ability to rise to the challenge in its North Korea policy shows a rather dismal performance record. The most important aspect of inter-Korean relations concerns tension reduction and the promotion of peaceful co-existence between the two Koreas. But military tensions have spiraled to new heights and crises of peace have become routine throughout the administration's term. Moreover, the feeling of insecurity has become widespread as the state of inter-Korean relations has deteriorated along virtually every dimension of interaction between the two nations (Korea Peninsula Peace Forum 2011).

3.1. Heightened Military Tensions

The first crisis of peace began with the shooting death of a South Korean female tourist at the Mt. Kumgang tourist resort by a North Korean soldier in July 2008. The MB government demanded a joint investigation of the incident, an apology, and an official pledge to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, but the North fell short of complying with these demands. Instead, it tried to resolve the issue through Hyundai Asan, a South Korean firm in charge of the Mt. Kumgang project. Seoul in turn banned further South Korean tourist visits to Mt. Kumgang, and the project came to the complete halt. Pyongyang's response was hostile. On January 17, 2009, the DPRK military spokesperson proclaimed a full confrontation against the South. Shortly after on January 30, Joppyongtong unilaterally declared that "all agreements concerning the resolution of political and military confrontation on the Korean Peninsula are invalidated," and that "NLL (Northern Limit Line) related provisions of the Basic Agreement and the appendix will be discarded" (Korean Central News Agency, January 17, 2009).

Subsequently, North Korea test launch its Taepodong-2 missile on April 5 and undertook its second underground nuclear testing on May 25, 2009. The MB government mobilized international sanctions against the North, including the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1874, and the tit-for-tat continued. Amid increasing tensions, a naval clash between two Koreas took place on November 10, 2009 near Daechong Island in the West Sea. The naval clash ended in only two minutes, but it was enough to put the Korean peninsula at a flash point. The situation worsened, when on March 26, 2010, the PCC-772 Cheonan, a South Korean navy corvette, was sunk at night in the vicinity of Baekryong Island: 40 sailors were killed and 6 sailors were missing. The ROK government announced on May 20 that the cause of the sinking was a torpedo attack by a North Korean submarine. Ignoring the North's denial, President Lee announced the 'May 24 Measures' which raised the South's military posture and suspended all forms of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, with the exception of the Gaesung Industrial Complex. The entire peninsula was placed in 'a hair-trigger' situation.

As the G-20 Seoul Summit was nearing in November 2010, the MB government took a softened stance on the North in fear of untimely provocation. Right after the summit, however, South Korea resumed military exercises in the West Sea. On November 23, South Korean marines stationed in Yeonpyong Island prepared for a shelling exercise directed at the southwestern part of the NLL, which is deemed a part of South Korean territorial waters, despite North Korean warnings. The ROK military ignored them and undertook the exercise. Initially, the North did not respond to the relatively short-range shelling exercises, such as the 155 mm Howitzers and Vulcans, ground-to-air artillery pieces. But North Korean artillery started to strike back on the grounds of self-defense when South Korean marines began shelling exercises with its K-9 self-propelled artillery, with a firing range beyond 40km. The North Korean shelling killed four South Koreans, two marines and two civilians, and caused additional damage to civilian areas. The shock of the Yeonpyong shelling was enormous, not only because there were civilian casualties, but also because it was the first shelling into ROK territory by the North since the 1953 armistice agreement (Delury and Moon 2011). The ROK government failed to retaliate. Following the Yeonpyong shelling, however, the MB government planned a major joint naval exercise with the United States. The exercise invited fierce opposition from China, which was fearful of deployment of an American aircraft carrier in the West Sea. Despite China's protest, the naval exercise was carried out, aggravating China-ROK relations.

In retrospect, a more proactive handling of the Mt. Kumgang incident could have prevented a worsening of the situation. Additionally, both the Cheonan and Yeonpyong incidents could have been avoided had the MB government honored the establishment of the Special Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea, as agreed to in the October 4 Joint Summit declaration. Yet, the MB government rejected it on the ground that such a zone could invalidate the NLL in favor of North Korea. Critically, although the administration had been championing a strong security posture, its performance in handling North Korea's military provocations was damaging to its domestic credibility. South Korean citizens' sense of insecurity has further deteriorated, and the increased inter-Korean military tension, coupled with entanglement of the big powers, has bred anxiety over the advent of a new Cold War structure in the region, with a potential confrontation between a ROK-U.S. axis and a China-DPRK axis. According to the annual Hyundai Research Institute (HRI) peace index of which score ranges from warlike situation (20 and below), heightened tension (20-40), co-existence of cooperation and confrontation (40-60), friendly cooperation (60-80), and peace and co-prosperity (80 and above), the MB government never scored more than 40 for the last four years. It is starkly contrasted with the Roh Moo-hyun government that scored more than 70 in 2007 (Hyundai Research Institute 2011: 66).

3.2. Worsening Nuclear Spiral

Deeply concerning on another front is the worsening condition of the North Korean nuclear quagmire. The MB government made resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem a cornerstone of its North Korea policy through its 'De-Nuke, Open 3,000' initiative and later in its 'Grand Bargain' proposal. But the end result of these efforts has been quite the opposite. Following the adoption of the UN Security Council's presidential statement regarding the missile test-launching on April 5, 2009, North Korea responded with a tough stance. It declared its withdrawal from the Six-Party talks, expelled inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, and formally announced the recommencement of

reprocessing of spent fuel rods. Then, on April 29, North Korea announced that it would conduct a second nuclear test, test launch an intercontinental ballistic missile, and build a light-water reactor by securing lowly-enriched uranium unless the UN Security Council issued an apology. As promised, North Korea carried out a second nuclear test on May 25.

In October 2010, Dr. Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, following a visit to the Yongbyon nuclear site, revealed the existence of a uranium enrichment facility, albeit a low uranium enrichment program for peaceful use. Although it would take more time and effort to transform it into a high uranium enrichment program and to produce uranium-based nuclear bombs, the revelation was shocking. While the MB government blocked the Six-Party Talks process, North Korea has been strengthening its nuclear weapons capability, ridiculing the sanction regime strongly advocated by South Korea and the United States (Segal 2011). North Korea now appears determined to act on its own accord, following its own timetable. Looking forward, the failure of the administration's denuclearization based-policies and the assumptions of regime collapse underscoring its more recent policy proposals bode poorly for the future of the nuclear dilemma.

The North Korean nuclear issue also became a source of discord between China and South Korea. Whereas China, being the chair country, has hoped to settle the North Korean nuclear problem through Six Party talks negotiation, the MB government has sought to denuclearize North Korea under its own initiatives such as 'De-nuke, Open 3,000' and a grand bargaining. The South Korean proposals were predicated on the ineffectiveness of the existing six party talks framework. Unlike the Roh Moo-hyun government that steered the six party talks in close cooperation with China, the MB government was skeptical of the September 19 joint statement and February 13 Agreement from the beginning, and showed a rather passive and even non-cooperative attitude. It discomforted China that strenuously labored for the birth and operation of the six party talks. The Chinese government has long believed that the nuclear issue is to be resolved primarily between North Korea and the U.S. within the framework of the six party talks. Thus, it could not accept Seoul's initiative. It was not plausible because South Korea does not have any tangible practical leverages. Nor was desirable because it can undercut China's leadership position in the six party talks process.

3.3. Halted Exchanges and Cooperation

Confidence-building exchanges and economic cooperation between the two Koreas fell victim to the worsening military tension. The scope of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation throughout the progressive decade was phenomenal (Ministry of Unification 2011), and such actions definitely contributed to inducing opening and reform in North Korea. Of these, the Mt. Kumgang tourist project and the Gaesung Industrial Complex (GIC) are noteworthy because the two were more than just economic cooperation projects. They made profound contributions to reducing military tensions and expanding a new space for peace. The Gosung area where Mt. Kumgang is located is one of North Korea's major naval bases. The fact that the North allowed South Korean tourists' access to this area implies that the zone of peace had been extended to that very North Korean naval base. The same can be said of the GIC. Gaesung is the most important strategic front post for the North. Staunch military opposition notwithstanding, Chairman Kim Jong-il approved the construction of the GIC for the sake of economic cooperation. Even now, the GIC has been working smoothly. Nevertheless, the Mt. Kumgang project has been completely suspended since July 2008, with

Hyundai-Asan on the verge of bankruptcy.

However, the May 24 Measure froze all forms of exchanges and cooperation projects, general trading, off-shore production and processing, and non-commercial transactions with the sole exception of the GIC. Many South Korean firms which established off-shore production facilities in North Korea went bankrupt. Humanitarian assistance, including food aid, has also been completely stopped. Only assistance for vulnerable groups in North Korea is still permitted. The following figures provide an indication of how dramatically non-military interaction between the two Koreas have fallen during the MB administration. In 2010, the number of South Korean tourists visiting North Korea was zero, compared to 350,000 in 2007 and 300,000 in 2008. The number of reunions of separated families decreased from 3,782 in 2007 to zero in 2008, 888 in 2009, 886 in 2010, and zero in 2011. No high-level official meetings have been held since the visit of a North Korean condolence delegation to the funeral ceremony of former President Kim Dae-jung in 2009, and the two secret contacts between the North and South in 2009 and in 2011 are known to have ended in failure.

3.4. Collateral Damage: Improving China- DPRK Relations, Worsening China-ROK Relations

The MB government's hard-line policy has also produced the unintended outcome of North Korea's growing dependence on China (Jong-seok Lee 2011: 8-11). As South Korea blocked economic exchange and cooperation with the North, Pyongyang has actively sought economic assistance from China. In 2000, China's share of North Korea's total trade was 24.8 percent, but rose to 88.1 percent in 2010 (Kim 2011). In addition, President Hu Jintao has been promoting the economic development of China's northeast region by initiating the Changjitu (Changchun, Jilin, Tumen) project. North Korea's Rajin and Sunbong ports are seen as vital to the project's success because they can serve as a maritime logistics hub for the project. Thus, China has been actively seeking economic cooperation with North Korea through massive investments in order to have access to the Rajin-Sunbong area. China has also launched a joint development project with North Korea for the Hwanggumpung Island in the Yalu River. Along with these specific projects, rich mineral resources and the availability of low-cost and high-quality manpower in North Korea have become very attractive to China. Likewise, North Korea has been incredibly receptive to the immense economic opportunity China sees in the North. As its only remaining economic lifeline, Pyongyang has become desperate in promoting economic ties with China. However, DPRK-PRC cooperation has not been confined only to the economic field. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of their alliance, the two nations are stressing the importance of strategic cooperation.

Meanwhile, deteriorating inter-Korean relations negatively affected China-South Korea relations. The sinking of Cheonan and shelling of the Yeonpyong island led to a series of ROK- US joint naval exercise in the West Sea. Beijing strongly opposed such naval exercises by claiming that they can heighten tension in the region. But Seoul and Washington D.C. made a rejoinder that they are lawful and legitimate military efforts among allies within the boundary of South Korea's territorial water in order to show determination of effective deterrence against North Korea only. Nevertheless, Beijing expressed great concerns because they can pose a threat to China's national security in terms of the type of forces involved (i.e., U.S. carrier battle group) and of geographic proximity. In fact, the Chinese government

responded in kind by undertaking a similar naval exercise. In addition, China called the shelling of Yeonpyong Island by North Korea as ‘cross-fire’ and appealed for the restraint of both Koreas rather than condemning it. This diplomatic behavior was unacceptable from the Seoul’s standpoint. The South Korean government, mass media, and even ordinary citizens strongly denounced the Beijing’s ‘pro-North Korean’ attitude.

Divergent views on the future of North Korea also worsened China and South Korea relations. China’s interest lies in ensuring stability on the Korean peninsula and preventing the sudden collapse of North Korea, whilst the MB government has anchored its North Korea policy in a wishful thinking based on the contingency and collapse of North Korea and an eventual unification by absorption as in the case of Germany. China has prudently expressed its concerns over ROK-US joint efforts to deal with a contingency in North Korea through the concept plan 5029 that is predicated on military intervention of ROK-U.S. combined forces to control weapons of mass destruction as well as to stabilize situation in the North. Likewise, the North Korean problem has become a source of worsening relations between China and South Korea (Moon 2011c).

3.5. A Failure to Communicate

Just as exchanges and cooperation are critical to establishing mutual trust and confidence, one of the most telling examples of deteriorating inter-Korean relations is the scandalous incident of secret contacts between Seoul and Pyongyang. On June 1, 2011, a spokesman of the DPRK National Defense Commission (NDC) announced that it officially rejected the ROK government’s offer to hold chain summit talks, which had been made through a series of secret talks beginning May 9. He even revealed that the South had begged to hold the summit. The MB government, while admitting to the existence of the secret contacts, vehemently denied the NDC’s allegations, stating that “begging for the summit talks is an outright fabrication,” and criticized the North for its ruthless behavior unprecedented in the history of North-South dialogues.

The revelation shocked the South Korea people because the MB government has been persistently emphasizing the principle of ‘open and transparent contact.’ The secret contact efforts should not be condemned for their aim of attempting to reopen inter-Korean dialogue and arrange a summit meeting. Rather criticism should be directed to its mode of conduct (Moon 2011b). For the North, inter-Korean summit in which Chairman Kim Jong-il is involved is almost sacred with paramount importance. Thus, if the MB government wanted to hold such a meeting, it should have sent some positive signals to the North in tandem with secret contacts, such as the resumption of food aid and exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas. At the same time, it should have refrained from inciting the North through provocative psychological warfare against North Korea. Instead, the MB government exhibited a confusingly ambivalent posture. While proposing a summit talk through secret contacts, it continued its hostile position against the North. Most damaging was the ROK military’s use of pictures of the three Kims (Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un) as shooting practice targets, which instantly angered the North Korean military. On May 30, the day before the revelation, a spokesman of the NDC sent a stern warning to the South that “we will not engage in dialogue with the South any more” and that “we will deal a decisive physical blow against sites of psychological warfare at any time” (Yonhap News Agency, 1 June 2011). The MB government also demonstrated procedural flaws that undermined its efforts. In late April, North Korea sent a message from Kim Jong-il to President Lee through

Jimmy Carter, who had just visited the North. However, the ROK government refused to arrange Carter's meeting with President Lee, while demanding that the North speak directly to the South if they have anything to offer. It was tantamount to slamming its door in the North's face. As such, the rejection of the proposal for summit talks and the revelation of secret contacts might have been precipitated partly by Seoul's rude and inconsistent behavior.

Judged on the above, the performance of the MB government's North Korea policy has been abysmal in virtually every regard. As the specter of crisis of peace haunts South Koreans, hope for improved inter-Korean relations has evaporated. What went wrong?

4. WHAT WENT WRONG? - POLICY FAILURES AND THE MISMATCH OF PRINCIPLE AND PRAGMATISM

Certainly, North Korea deserves the lion's share of blame for the ongoing military tension and strained inter-Korean relations. Its brinkmanship diplomacy, inveterate intimidations, and belligerent behavior all contributed to worsening relations. Nevertheless, the MB government is also liable for the current debacle. Its wishful thinking on the collapse of North Korea, the primacy of rigid principle over pragmatism, an unnecessarily robust hard-line security stance, failure to recognize North Korean identity, erratic and inconsistent projection of policy, and its flawed decision-making structure have all played a role in its poor policy performance on North Korea.

4.1. Wishful Thinking on North Korea's Collapse

One key factor attributable for the poor policy performance is the premise of a forthcoming contingency and eventual collapse of North Korea, a major underpinning of the MB government's policy. Upon the confirmation of Kim Jong-il's health problems in August 2008, the contingency and collapse theory became all the more attractive. It was widely believed among those who worked for President Lee that because the Kim Jong-il regime would soon collapse, there was no hurry for engagement with the North. The logic of benign neglect first factored in, but the MB government soon placed a greater emphasis on preparing for the advent of a contingency situation and the sudden collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime rather than improving the inter-Korean relationship (Chung 2009). This stance is reminiscent of both the Kim Young-sam government's North Korea policy as well as the first Bush administration's hard-line policy on the North (Hankyoreh, December 3, 2008). In fact, South Korea and the U.S. have been working on transforming the 'Concept Plan 5029 (CONPLAN)' into an operational plan predicated on military intervention into the North for the control of weapons of mass destruction and stability operations in response to massive social and political unrest amidst contingency (e.g., death of Kim Jong-il) and regime collapse in North Korea (Moon 2011c).

To date, that premise has proven faulty. Kim Jong-il still appears in full control of political power after having recovered from his stroke and the succession process to his son Kim Jong-un appears moving smoothly. North Korean citizens may not be happy with his succession, but they are powerless. North Korea does not have any civil society from which organized civil opposition could emerge. Meanwhile, Kim Jong-un is currently being patronized and protected by three layers of powerful supporting forces. The first layer of patronage is his family, which is composed of his father Kim Jong-il, his aunt Kim Kyoung-

hee, and his uncle Chang Sung-taik. The Korea Workers' Party, which was institutionally strengthened after the party representatives meeting on September 28, 2010, now offers him the second layer of protection and support. Finally, the military lends undisputed support and protection to him. Once the official designation of Kim Jong-un as the successor is completed, the uncertainty associated with succession will be considerably reduced. Of course, the passing or incapacitation of Chairman Kim Jong-il within one or two years could complicate the succession process. Nonetheless, this would not lead to regime collapse, needless to say the collapse of the sovereign state, due to the vested interests and unity among Kim family members, party officials, and the military.

Such developments have critically undermined the MB government's North Korea policy basis of 'wishful thinking' on the sequence of contingency, regime collapse, and absorptive unification. Despite the need for a policy recalibration based on alternative scenarios, the evidence is not likely to prompt a change in policy because President Lee and his advisors still appear to believe in the imminent end of the North Korean regime.

4.2. The Primacy of Rigid Principle over Pragmatism

In his inauguration speech, President Lee stressed that "inter-Korean relations should be developed in a more productive way. I will steer inter-Korean relations not by the ideological yardstick, but by pragmatic thinking." However, the current government policy on North Korea has been dictated by self-imposed rigid principles and an ideology void of pragmatism. The most notable principle has been to correct North Korea of rude and counterproductive habits such as brinkmanship behavior and lack of reciprocity. But this attitude appears to be little more than a pretext to place sanctions against North Korea given that the product of this principle is a clearly unacceptable offer. For example, it seems quite inconceivable that Pyongyang would accept Seoul's "De-nuke, Open 3,000" proposal because the North would never give up its nuclear weapons for a per capita income of US\$3,000 in ten years. There is no equivalence in such an exchange. More importantly, 'openness and reform' must be a matter of the North's self-determination, not a matter that the South can enforce. Indeed, North Korea deems the South's unilateralism as a significant threat to its regime.⁵ Moreover, North Korea also thinks that it can achieve such a goal by itself if and when the nuclear issue is resolved.

Ideological rigidity is another barrier, especially in forging national consensus in South Korea. The MB government's preference of 'unification by absorption' stems from its ideological stance toward liberal democracy and market economy (*Hankyoreh*, November 17, 2008). It has implicitly regarded the North as the axis of evil and has indirectly been supporting anti-North Korean groups, mostly defectors from the North, in sending out propaganda fliers to the North. Its supporters have categorized South Korean society into two polarized groups: conservative patriots and pro-North Korea left-wingers. They have not only denounced opposition parties, notably, the Democratic Party and the Democratic Labor Party, and civil progressive groups as either pro-North Korea groups or followers of North Korea, but also accused them of agitating South-South conflicts. In reality, what the liberal progressive groups advocate is not to support or protect North Korean regime, but to honor

⁵ According to Nodong Shinmun, "the more obsessed South Korea becomes with Vision 3000, the worse inter-Korean relations will become, making political and military conflict unavoidable." *Nodong Shinmun*, Feb. 2, 2009.

the Chapter One of the Basic Agreement that stipulates the principles of mutual recognition and respect of regime difference, non-interference with domestic affairs, and suspension of mutual slander, sabotage and subversion, so that the North and the South can cultivate mutual trust (Lim 2011). Furthermore, they argued that although they favor the North to adopt market economy and liberal democracy, its choice is up to the people of the North. The ruling conservative coalition could not tolerate such stance, deepening ideological polarization. And as long as the MB government adheres to such ideological rigidity, Pyongyang is unlikely to warm to Seoul.

Pragmatism is all about problem-solving. Yet, it can hardly be detected in the administration's conduct regarding North Korea. Let's take an example of the Six-Party Talks. As noted before, North Korea's nuclear armament has been strengthened through a second nuclear test and the operation of a uranium enrichment program. Realizing the urgency of the situation, China and the U.S. were willing to resume the talks. But the MB government opposed doing so, arguing that the North must 'first apologize for the Cheonan sinking and the Yeonpyong shelling, and then we will talk,' and further delaying the Six-Party Talks process. The ROK government eventually changed its position upon diplomatic pressure from Beijing and Washington, D.C. and proposed a three stage approach to the nuclear problem in the sequence of inter-Korean talks, US-DPRK talks, and resumption of the Six-Party Talks. Despite the shift in stance, the Six-Party Talks have not resumed. Likewise, a lack of pragmatism and a myopic devotion to principled preconditions have continued to undermine progress for both inter-Korean relations and the Six-Party Talks process.

4.3. Fallacy of Hard-line Security Stance

The MB government's hard-line security stance has also factored in complicating inter-Korean relations. Its official security policy line can be summed up in the dictum of "if you want peace, prepare for war." Since the days of the transition team in early 2008, the MB government has taken this posture of willing to risk the war to discipline the North, rather than preventing or at least minimizing military conflicts. For this, President Lee called on ROK armed forces to be afraid of war and to be prepared to finish a war within a day of its outbreak. The combination of this hard-line stance and the contingency and collapse assumption may account for the rapid shift in policy from denuclearization and co-prosperity to the aggressive forward posture of the 'May 24 Measure.' To a certain extent, the North recognizes this attitude as a type of 'preliminary declaration of war.' It is within this context that inter-Korean relations have fallen into a game of chicken.

Three possible factors account for the MB administration's over-emphasis on security. First, President Lee and his staff might have taken peace during the progressive decade for granted. They did not fully appreciate the significance of the peace dividend secured by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Second, they believed that appeasement policy during the progressive decade significantly weakened South Korea's security posture. It was widely shared among conservative forces that the prevailing false sense of peace made South Koreans, especially youths, insensitive to national security. Finally, over-confidence in the alliance with the U.S. might have made President Lee and his military staff unafraid of war with the North. For them, ROK armed forces' capability, when combined with American forces, is sufficient to defeat North Korea (Yonhap News Agency, February 16, 2009). However, this attitude is ironic given the inability of the MB government to effectively cope

with North Korea's military provocations, as illustrated in the sinking of the Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyong Island. It is no wonder that young people in South Korea slam the MB government for being incapable of either loving (i.e., engagement with the North) or fighting (i.e., combat capability).

In view of the above, the fallacy of MB government's is two-fold. First, over-emphasis on security has entailed negative boomerang effects, making South Korea's security more vulnerable. Rhetoric of hard-line security posture not only blocked chance for military confidence building with the North by heightening the latter's suspicion as well as sense of security crisis, but also resulted in actual military clashes such as naval conflicts in the West Sea. Second, despite its conventional military build-up and the formidable might of American alliance, the MB government could not resolve Seoul's security dilemma. On the contrary, security concerns of South Korean citizens get aggravated, rather than ameliorated, producing immense fatigue effects among them.

4.4. Negation of North Korea's Identity and Failed Trust-building

The single most salient cause for the deterioration of inter-Korean relations emanates from a lack of trust-building. Trust-building is only possible when each party recognizes the other's identity. In this regard, mutual respect of the Basic Agreement, which includes provisions on recognition and respect of each other's system, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, suspension of mutual slander and vilification, and a ban on any actions to sabotage or overthrow each other, is essential for trust building. At the same, the North regards the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Summit Declaration, both of which were signed by Chairman Kim Jong-il, as the most important documents guiding the nature and direction of inter-Korean relations. Although President Lee recognizes the Basic Agreement as legitimate and pledges to implement it, he has never endorsed the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Joint Summit Declaration (Ministry of Unification at <http://www.unikorea.go.kr>, last accessed 20 February 2011). In actuality, it can be argued that he does not even honor the Basic Agreement. The North perceives the MB government's call for the improvement of human rights as interference with its domestic affairs, violating the non-interference principle of the Basic Agreement.⁶ The MB government has also been championing national unification based on 'market economy and liberal democracy,' which can be not unreasonably be construed to imply unification by absorption. To the North, this position is tantamount to violating the principle of mutual respect of regime differences embodied in the Basic Agreement.

The MB government has also shown several conflicting and even contradictory gestures toward North Korea. While emphasizing dialogue, mutual benefits and common prosperity, it has left the North with an impression that Seoul is seeking unification by absorption. Thus, the North has reason to doubt the sincerity of the South as much as the MB government is skeptical about the North. A milder example is seen in a past proposal by President Lee exchange liaison offices in Seoul and Pyongyang during his visit to Washington, D.C. in 2008. But no follow-up measures were taken, leaving the North with only empty words (Pressian, December 5, 2008). More damaging are instances when the MB government calls for dialogue, all while encouraging propaganda warfare against the North. For instance, some

⁶ Departing from previously abstention position, South Korea has become a co-sponsor of the UN Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK. See *Segye Ilbo*, Nov 23, 2008.

South Korean military troops at the frontline used pictures of the Kim family as shooting practice targets under the slogan, ‘Dig up Kim Il-sung’s corpse and behead it, and hack Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un to pieces.’ This incident happened at the time the South government was trying to push forward an inter-Korean summit through secret contacts. It would be extremely difficult for the North to trust the sincerity and authenticity of the words and actions of the MB government under this circumstance (Chang 2011). In fact, such behavior by South Korea infuriated the North and precipitated discernable frustration from the North, evidenced by the frequency of real-name criticisms of President Lee, which rose from 5 times in April, 2011 to 64 times in May, and 166 times in June respectively (Hyun-jung Lee 2011).

4.5. Erratic and Inconsistent Policy Projection

The absence of trust described from the examples above is symptomatic of a systemic inconsistency in the MB administration’s policy projection. A good and sound policy-making requires consistency and coherence. But it is hard to find such traits in President Lee’s decision-making and consequently, across the comprehensive scope of his North Korea policy foundations. While he underscores pragmatism, dialogue and cooperation with the North on the one hand, he gives an impression favoring military confrontation and absorptive reunification based on regime collapse on the other. For example, President Lee, at a roundtable dialogue with citizens on January 30, 2009, once claimed, “who truly cares for North Korea? The North should realize that South Korea is the only country that cares about North Korea with affection.” Yet, depending upon the situation, his tone has radically changed. Upon the shelling of Yeonpyong, he raised stern criticisms against the North by stating: “only harsh chastisement can prevent further provocations, neither patience nor tolerance can achieve this.”; ‘incalculable punishment (November 23)’; and ‘rigorous counterattack is required’ (December 23). More recently, Lee hinted at the likelihood of absorptive unification arising from a sudden collapse of North Korea’s regime by rephrasing a biblical verse that “unification will come like a thief.”

It is understandable for President Lee to alter his remarks in light of changing circumstances, but the degree of fluctuation seems extreme. The simultaneous blending of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘confrontation’ often confuses not only the North, but also people in the South. This might be a result of his efforts to satisfy two conflicting audiences, the North Korean counterpart and conservative forces in the South. However rational each independent decision may be, the administration has effectively put in place a conflicting set of coexisting policy visions with an erratic projection of priorities. While early preconditions focused on denuclearization, later incidents forced apologies and symbolic gestures to the fore. By seeking international sanctions under the ‘May 24 Measure’ the administration undermined the efficacy of the punishment card in its ‘Grand Bargain’ initiative for the nuclear issue. Due to the apparent incompatibility of many of its reactionary policies, it is difficult to imagine the development of sustained momentum in any particular dimension.

4.6. Deficient Decision-making Structure, Intelligence Failure and Domestic Politics

The administration’s penchant for inconsistency may be attributable to another flaw in the MB government, namely the absence of a control structure in its national security management. A coherent and flexible policy is by and large a function of effective

coordination among competing agencies that is enabled by responsible leadership and a clearly defined division of labor. In other words, a control center and a functioning coordination mechanism are essential for the crafting of sound foreign policy. For example, Lim Dong-won played the control center role on North Korean policy during the Kim Dae-jung government, while Lee Jong-seok performed in the same role during the Roh Moo-hyun government. They were empowered by the president to coordinate policy, but they could not dictate policy arbitrarily since they were constrained by the National Security Council. Such an institutional arrangement for control and coordination enabled relatively coherent, consistent, and flexible policy-making. But the MB government has neither a central control tower nor effective institutional checks and balances in its foreign policy apparatus. The National Security Council was dissolved and the Ministerial Meeting of Foreign and National Security Affairs, which used to be held every Thursday afternoon, became dysfunctional. Even now, no effective coordination mechanism exists. Furthermore, no one seems to be in charge of foreign and national security policy other than President Lee himself. As he became overstretched, it has been known that Kim Tae-hyo, secretary to the president for strategy, has been dictating policy-making. However, he is too junior to steer policy coordination between moderate and conservative cabinet members.

Compounding the structural deficiencies is the role of intelligence failure and premature judgment in the administration's policy missteps. The thesis of North Korea's early collapse is a case in point. The MB government's North Korea policy has been based on the sequence of contingency, collapse, stability operations through military intervention, and unification by absorption. This position was primarily derived from a combination of intelligence reports from intelligence agencies, conservative mass media, and North Korean defectors, all of which supported the government thesis. Judged on current developments in North Korea, such intelligence turns out to be flawed. Instead of admitting their error, however, the MB government continues to base its North Korean policy on that assumption. Another intelligence failure can be found in its underestimation of the China factor, in that North Korea has been able to survive international economic sanctions with the help of China. The problem was that President Lee was not receiving any alternative views that challenged the dominant perspective. A lack of plural intelligence analysis led to distorted information on North Korea. Also to blame is biased intelligence collection and analysis. The MB government has been guilty of collecting and analyzing intelligence on North Korea to help justify its contingency and collapse thesis. The intelligence was not subject to objective analysis, but was abused and misused for psychological warfare purposes.

One critical explanation for the insularity of viewpoints has been the MB government's exclusion of experts on North Korea and China. Key officials of the administration believe that the clientelistic attitude of said experts was a root cause of past policy failures on North Korea and China. But this seems quite a misleading claim. On the contrary, the absence of area experts on China and North Korea precluded a more comprehensive understanding of the issues which could have averted dismal policy performance. On a related note, the MB government also has inherent limits in collecting relevant information on North Korea. As the number of official contacts have decreased apace, it has become difficult to publicly collect information through official contacts. In addition, the administration has completely shut out officials who used to work for previous governments. Thus, relevant intelligence could not be accumulated or properly utilized. Excessive dependence on internet media, run by North Korean defectors primarily interested in psychological warfare against the North, has further intensified the intelligence distortion (Delury and Moon 2011). It is difficult to

expect effective policy-making on North Korea under these conditions.

Finally, domestic politics matter. The MB government underwent a major political crisis in May 2008, less than three months after his inauguration. Millions of South Koreans poured into the streets with candles to protest MB's decision to liberalize beef imports from the United States. He overcame the crisis by making a humiliating apology to them. But he learned an important lesson from the crisis: "reward the friendly, co-opt the neutral, and punish the hostile." Instead of pursuing a catchall policy that appeased everyone, President Lee decided to stick to his conservative policy platform in order to consolidate political support from conservative forces. At this point, he began to strengthen his hard-line policy on North Korea. Domestic political considerations became all the more evident in that the massive candlelight vigil was seen as organized by pro-North Korean sympathizers, ultimately affecting profoundly the direction of MB's North Korea policy.

5. CONCLUSION

All things considered, there is little to no 'pragmatism' in the MB government's North Korea policy, only an emphasis on 'impractical and rigid principles.' Unilateral dogmatism, rather than pragmatism, has characterized the nature of its North Korea policy management. In addition, several other factors undercut the administration's policy performance: 'wishful thinking' that the North would change its behavior under pressure or collapse; 'rigidity of principles' such that neither negotiations nor even humanitarian aid were allowed without North Korean concessions, especially on denuclearization; 'narcissistic behavior' that promotes self-serving motives such as making unacceptable offers to the North; 'skewed moral claims' that overlook the peculiarities of the Korean Peninsula reminiscent of a narrow emphasis on universal human rights without regard to the larger trade-offs between human rights and peace/confidence-building; and 'primacy of authorities' that fails to support informal and non-governmental interactions with the North. Ultimately, the excessive adherence to impractical principles void of any real pragmatism has brought disaster upon inter-Korean relations.

With only one year remaining in the MB government's term, is it still possible to turn around the ship? Can it produce a breakthrough on par with another inter-Korean summit? Unfortunately, a dramatic reversal is extremely difficult under current circumstances. Channels for inter-Korean contact and dialogue seem completely blocked after the breakdown in the secret contacts of May. Even if such channels did exist, an inter-Korean summit would not be possible, as admitted to by Unification Minister Rhyu Woo-ik admitted (Joongang Il-bo, December 6, 2011). Pyongyang cannot accept Seoul's preconditions for a summit talk, which include an apology and pledge of non-recurrence for the Cheonan and Yeonpyong incidents as well as progress in denuclearization. Seoul is also not in a position to accommodate Pyongyang's likely demands, namely compliance with the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Joint Summit Declaration. Moreover, North Korea may not venture into a political deal that can be easily invalidated after MB's term ends (Moon 2011 d). Taking into account the forthcoming general election in April and presidential election in December 2012, respectively, it is almost impossible to expect the MB government to make progress in inter-Korean relations. Current stalled relations, with relatively high military tension, are likely to sustain until the end of his term.

Lessons to be learned from the MB government are obvious. Pragmatism should prevail

over dogmatism. Rigid principles and partisan ideology should be avoided since they can jeopardize peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Also, rather than approaching the problem as a package deal or make any and all actions contingent on demanding preconditions, it is better to do the easy things first and the difficult things later. Why shouldn't the MB government normalize the Mt. Kungang tourist project, resume humanitarian assistance, and reactivate economic and social exchanges and cooperation independent from apologies or denuclearization? Furthermore, national interests, not partisan political ones, should guide the nature and direction of policy on North Korea. Thus, politicization of inter-Korean relations needs to be discouraged. Lastly, as in all diplomacy, inter-Korean relations require the true participation of both parties. Trust-building and progress cannot be made without recognizing the identity of North Korea and respecting its right to survival. In this sense, it is imperative that the South Korean government puts itself in the North's position, and vice versa.

President Lee once said, "North Korean policy must be dealt with from the perspective of the future of the Korean nation, rather than being dictated by partisan political interests." He is right. Neither a specific government nor specific political forces should monopolize the policy on North Korea and unification. Although its remaining time is short, the MB government should take bold and pragmatic steps to make a breakthrough to the stalled inter-Korean relations.

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