

# The Building of a National Community: The Key to Reunification

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The Korean Peninsula has been divided at the 38th parallel for the past half-century following the end of the Second World War. The Korean people in the North and the South as well as those overseas aspire for the reunification of the two Koreas. However, there is a great deal of disagreement among the Korean people about the process by which the reunification should be executed and the types of regime that the reunification would bring about.

For the past fifty years a variety of unification issues have been debated and policies have been enunciated. But none of these policies, however lofty they may have been, have ever been fully implemented. Only the dialogues between the government leaders of North and South Korea in the early 1970s and 1990s produced the July 4, 1972 Joint Communique and the Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between the South and the North in December 1991. These agreements were reached after a series of dialogues and negotiations, but have not been implemented. Thus the conflict between the North and the South has persisted.

There are three possible scenarios which can bring about the

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reunification of the two Koreas. One is the possible invasion of the South by the North, as John Deutch, the U.S. CIA director, stated before the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee on December 11, 1996. However, North Korea is not likely to launch another Korean War unless it wanted the self-destruction of its own regime. The Pyongyang leaders know that the U.S. would repel any attack from the North and cause a massive destruction of economy and society as well as the loss of millions of human lives in the North. The experience of the Korean War taught them the lessons of being destroyed and occupied by the armed forces of South Korea and the United Nations.

The second possibility is that the North will collapse internally or implode because of the incredible economic problems the North faces. Some of the specialists on North Korea believe that the North is not likely to collapse within three to five years and moreover, the allies of North Korea like China and Russia would not let the Pyongyang regime collapse since it would not serve the interests of their countries. Even the ROK government doesn't want to see the North collapse because of the problems of feeding and sheltering millions of refugees fleeing from the North and of solving the difficulties of providing economic assistance to the

North. Thus, reunification by the absorption of the North is not an option.

The third possibility is that North Korea will pursue a peaceful resolution of conflicts and reunification with South Korea. It is in the interests of South Korea as well as of the United States to resolve peacefully the conflict situation in the Korean Peninsula since war would cost millions of human lives and bring about the devastation of both the North and South Korean economies and societies. Therefore, the interests of South Korea would be best served if North Korea opened its dialogue with the South as well as with the United States and implemented the Basic Agreement of 1991. It is also in the interest of the international community if the Pyongyang leadership carried out Chinese-style reforms and an open door policy.

To avoid another Korean War and the collapse of the North Korean regime, South Korea and the United States should agree on the conflict resolution strategy by which they should help the Pyongyang regime to take certain steps to reform its economy and society by opening its doors to the outside world for trade and cultural exchange with other countries.

Because of the impact of the Cold War on Korea, the conflict between the North and South intensified during the half-century

of division which led to violence and war. Therefore, the primary objective of conflict resolution in the post-Cold War era should be directed toward the building of a national community by which the reunification of two Koreas could be achieved. To build a national community the South Korean government should develop a policy of inclusiveness so that the Korean people in the North and South as well as those overseas may participate in it by arousing their national consciousness for the sake of the peaceful reunification of Korea.

The Korean people have shared a common language, common culture, and common historical experience for many centuries. The national community should be created on the basis of the national experience regardless of their political ideology or system. The process of nation building therefore should start from the building of mutual confidence among the people and then negotiating cultural, economic and societal cooperation. Thus the political and ideological barriers could be broken down by arousing the national consciousness and by appealing to the unity of the Korean people on the basis of common interests for coexistence, cooperation and reunification. Thus the building of a national community is in essence the reunification of the Korean people and the creation of a unified nation-state. ■■■