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## Sunshine Policy is the Best Policy Available Realistically

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Recent developments on the Korean peninsula have not been so bright. North-South official talks on food and fertilizer aid held last April ended without any significant agreements. North Korea's military threat toward the South has not waned, as evidenced by the recent submarine accident.

In the meantime, the process of consolidating Kim Jong-il's power seems to be moving smoothly inside North Korea. Having already occupied the position of Party Secretary, Kim Jong-il is also expected to assume the role of Head of State in the near future, and his control over the military seems to be as tight as ever. Diplomatically, North Korea's international posture is being strengthened, as it maintains good relations with China and expands its relations with Russia while continuously pursuing an improvement in the relations with the United States. Due to the worsening of its economic difficulties and the food shortage, however, the country seems to be in need of external aid.

Viewed in this way, North Korea is getting more and more stabilized in political and military terms, despite its enormous difficulties in economic terms. Therefore, the possibility of the country going through a serious regime change such as a collapse in the near future seems to be slim. As a result, the North is also highly unlikely to soften its policy direction and strategy toward the South.

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All these external factors greatly limit South Korea's ability to change its North Korea policy. In other words, a hasty change in its policy might lead to a very serious conflict and confrontation between the two Koreas. In particular, an excessive hard-line policy putting pressure on the North will disappoint a majority of South Korean citizens longing for peace. An excessively soft policy will prevent the government from effectively responding to the North's threat and instability.

Under the present circumstance, we need to develop several situational arguments. First of all, given the difficulty of altering the status quo on the Korean peninsula, we need a path-breaking measure that would reduce the military tension and contribute to a peaceful co-existence between the two Koreas. Second, we need to improve inter-Korean relations by inducing the North to change its rigid strategy toward the South. Third, the South needs to maintain and strengthen its security posture as long as the present military tension on the peninsula remains unchanged. In sum, South Korea is in need of a rational policy alternative that would induce the North's change, while at the same time pursues the military logic of self-defense.

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## **Policy Choice: Sunshine Policy**

What kind of policy alternative can be chosen, then? Don't we need a policy that allows for a dualistic approach, economically aiding the North on the one hand, and politically and militarily checking the North on the other hand?

The new Kim Dae-jung government has chosen a sunshine policy. The sunshine policy is basically a conciliatory policy, named after an old fable regarding how sunshine can outperform wind in taking off a traveler's clothes. Following the sunshine's strategy of taking off clothes through warming, the policy aims to induce the North to change its previous hard-line posture and pursue reform and opening on its own through a flexible and conciliatory approach toward the North. In this sense, the sunshine policy may

be evaluated as a conciliatory policy that is based on the strength to overcome the North's challenge and to pursue cooperation with the North even unilaterally.

*Fifth, the sunshine policy is possible only when the South's security capability is more than enough to deter the North's military threat. One can never rule out the possibility that the South's unconditional concessions might lead the North to make a misjudgment and initiate a military attack on the South. Therefore, we must have sufficient defense capability to pursue such flexible policies as the sunshine policy.*

Several preconditions must be satisfied, however, for the sunshine policy to make sense. First is the presumption that the North's political system will not collapse in a short term. Of course, we do not know exactly how long the system will exist, but the government declared that it would not encourage the North's collapse on purpose. Therefore, we will patiently wait for the time when unification becomes a feasible goal, but at the same time we want to shorten the waiting by inducing the North to change its posture as soon as possible. The sunshine policy is suited for this goal.

Second, the policy accepts the idea of a step-by-step unification, where inter-Korean unification and integration can be realized only after achieving stability and peace on the peninsula. This idea, of course, is grounded on the fact that much time is needed for integrating the two societies that have become so differentiated as a result of a long period of division.

Third, the sunshine policy acknowledges the North Korean regime as a de facto political entity in the northern part of Korean peninsula. This is clearly a change from the old position, which was to consider the North Korean regime as an illegal political group. Now the South Korean government is taking a more realistic position by accepting the North as a partner for dialogue.

Fourth, the current state of confrontation between the two Koreas must be altered. In order to achieve peace and prosperity on the peninsula, it is necessary not only that the South alter its old position toward the North, but also that the North give up the intention of revolutionizing the South for a communist system. The sunshine policy, in this respect, is based on the need to break up the status quo on the peninsula.

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As can be seen in these preconditions, the sunshine policy's objectives can be summarized as twofold. One is to encourage North Korea's changes, and the other is to secure peace on the peninsula. Here, the North's changes ultimately mean its transformation into a democratic system and its acceptance of a market economy. The sunshine policy simply presumes that such changes are more likely to come about by taking a conciliatory policy than by putting pressure on the North. Meanwhile, the securing of peace, as a step required before reunification, refers to reducing the military tension and preventing warfare through inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation.

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## Sunshine Policy's Basic Directions and Merits

In implementing the sunshine policy, the new government has set several basic directions. The government should maintain consistency in its North Korea policy, pursue national security and cooperation simultaneously, and emphasize mutual benefits for both sides. As to the international cooperation, the government should insist on the principle of "the Korean problem being solved by Koreans" while securing neighboring countries' support. As to the domestic society, the government should make every effort to create a firm basis for policy consensus among the people. In particular, the government should emphasize the aspect of national security on the firm belief that North Korea's changes are unlikely unless we have strong security capabilities.

In pursuing the sunshine policy, the government is employing

*Considering these merits, the sunshine policy is neither impatient nor hard-line. It encourages, but does not force changes on the part of North Korea, thus minimizing the resentment. Moreover, it is a soft, conciliatory policy firmly based on strength, and must be differentiated from a naive conciliatory policy solely based on concessions. It is a non-competitive policy in that the policy promotes cooperation with, and assistance to, the North for its stability and recovery.*

various methods and measures. They include efforts to revive the "North-South Korean Basic Agreement," apply the principle of separating politics from the economy, maintain light-water reactor assistance, expand social and cultural exchanges for the recovery of national identity, and realize the reunion of separated family members.

Given the rigid situation on the peninsula, the sunshine policy has several merits. First, the policy deals with North Korea's security threat by pursuing security and cooperation simultaneously. This complements the old policy which put a heavy emphasis on security often at the expense of dialogue and cooperation.

Second, the sunshine policy attempts to bring about North Korea's opening and reform by promoting cooperation and reconciliation with the North. Such an attempt is quite different from a unilateral aid policy that might cause the North's resentment and resistance. In other words, the sunshine policy pursues cooperation and exchanges on the basis of North-South Korean partnership, and thus increases the possibility for the North's voluntary joining in the efforts.

Third, the sunshine policy is based on strength. It is an aggressive policy response that can reduce the tension on the peninsula by effectively dealing with North Korea's military threat. It must be differentiated from a naive conciliatory policy that supplies the North with carrots only, thus possibly endangering national security.

Fourth, the sunshine policy takes a step-by-step approach in that it focuses not so much on the long-term goal of Korean reunification as on the short-term goal of stability on the peninsula. In particular, it must be noted that the sunshine policy can lay a firm ground for continuing North-South Korean cooperation by taking flexible policy measures such as the separation of politics from economy.

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is a soft, conciliatory policy firmly based on strength, and must be differentiated from a naive conciliatory policy solely based on concessions. It is a non-competitive policy in that the policy promotes cooperation with, and assistance to, the North for its stability and recovery. While one may criticize it as an anti-reunification, or reunification-delaying policy, it might be the most rational policy for achieving peace on the peninsula and melting down the North's rigidity.

The sunshine policy can be characterized as a passive reunification policy, in that it focuses more on the immediate goal of North Korea's changes and peaceful co-existence than on the ultimate goal of Korean reunification. Or it may be better termed as an incomplete reunification policy, or a limited North Korea policy, that aims primarily at stability on the peninsula. In this sense, the sunshine policy is certainly not the most ideal policy for reunification, but it may be the most rational and the best policy available given the political reality Korean peninsula is facing today. ■

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