
The Summit and Agreement on Unification Formula

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The North-South Korean summit ended with success. The summit provided the South and its people with a chance to clearly and directly observe the Northern society and its leader, Kim Jong-il, who had been veiled to the outside world. The South seems to be in a state of shock due to the new images of North Korea and Kim Jong-il, implying that the cold-war oriented view of the North, which had dominated our society during the past, is now being challenged fundamentally.

The summit was historic in that it set up a milestone for Korean unification. It was also unconventional in the sense that the agreement between the two summits went beyond everyone's expectation by including not only comprehensive goals on unification, reconciliation, cooperation, reduction of tension, and continuous dialogue, but also practical measures to achieve them. In particular, the agreement on the principle of an independent resolution of unification and on the commonality of the two sides' unification formula was significant enough to characterize the summit as a "unification conference."

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The Summit as a Unification Conference

The summit, against most experts' expectations, has turned out to be a unification conference. Analyzing the background and nature of the summit, most experts argued that it was basically a means of overcoming the North's economic crisis. It was anticipated, therefore, that the summit would proceed in the form of the North responding positively to the South's sunshine policy, the principle of reconciliation and cooperation, and more specifically, the idea of "inter-Korean economic community" suggested by President Kim Dae-jung in the recent Berlin declaration. While the South's experts were speculating in this way, the North might have been preparing carefully the agenda and final products of the summit meeting.

North Korea has been fortifying its unification movement and its political education on the mass. For example, it has been trying to garner international support for the so-called "Three Charters for National Unification," which was formally put forward in the North's joint editorial of 1997. In the last year, it also performed a ground-breaking ceremony for the Three Charter Monument. Before the summit, the North's mass media has been making extensive reports on the Three Charters, and the principle of national great unity and independence. This was the essential part of "fundamental matters" that the North raised at the working-level negotiations.

It was fully expected before the summit, therefore, that it would include both the South's agenda of "reconciliation and cooperation" in economic and humanitarian matters, and the North's "unification" agenda characterized by national unity and independence. What nobody could expect was the agreement on the principle of an independent solution of unification and the commonality between the two unification formulas: the South's confederal system and the North's loose federal system. This agreement is what really makes the summit a unification meeting in its genuine sense, and it will serve as a momentum for further discussion on such important matters as the unification formula, reconcil-

iation and cooperation, and the establishment of peace system.

The North's Independence and the South's Independence

The first clause in the joint statement concerns the principle of "independence," which was first proclaimed by the July 4th Joint Communiqué between the two Koreas in 1972. The North has interpreted the meaning of independence as "expelling foreign influences," thus arguing that the unification should be viewed basically as an internal matter and be resolved on the basis of national great unity. In contrast, the South's independence means "the resolution of the unification matter by the concerned parties themselves" to the extent that it does not damage the South-U.S.-Japan tripartite alliance system and the South's relations with the four majoring powers.

The major reasons why these two contrasting principles of independence could be agreed at the summit seemed to be the North's will to settle the unification matter with the U.S., as well as the North's realistic judgment on the unlikelihood of the tripartite alliance system being destroyed at once. Recognizing the reality in which the Korean problem is inevitably intertwined with international matters, the North might be willing to resolve the Korean problem in cooperation with the neighboring countries. In fact, Kim Il-sung already pointed out in his new year's address of 1992 that the Korean problem could not be resolved without cooperation from the neighboring countries.

In any event, the agreement on the principle of independence was quite an accomplishment in that it closed the gap between the two Koreas' views by declaring the unification matter as a national matter and recognizing its international nature at the same time. There still remains a source of dispute, however. Despite the agreement on the basic principle of independence, there was only discussion, but no specific agreement, on related matters such as the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces stationed in the South, the nuclear and missile problem, the reduction of tension, and the establishment of a peace system.

Therefore, the future task is how to apply the principle of independence elastically in the upcoming bilateral negotiations to be held between the North and the U.S., between the North and Japan, and finally between the North and the South. For this purpose, it seems necessary to reinterpret the meaning of independence as preventing unwarranted interventions by the neighboring powers under the principle of "resolution of the Korean matter by Koreans themselves." We should recognize that the unification matter cannot be resolved realistically without some involvement by the four neighboring powers, and take a more practical position by utilizing their involvement to our advantages.

The principle of independence will shortly raise the question of U.S. armed forces stationed in the South. We should admit that realistically this issue cannot be settled at once and concentrate our efforts on negotiating the possibility of gradual withdrawal of the forces or the conversion of their role into a regional balancer. Furthermore, we might consider a tripartite conference in which the South, the North, and the U.S. all participate in order to settle the status and role of the U.S. forces. In the current situation where each of the North and the South views the issue basically as a bilateral issue that concerns the U.S. and itself, the tripartite conference might be a comprehensive framework that could satisfy the two Koreas by conferring both the rationale and real benefits of "independence" on them. Moreover, the conference could also provide the three parties with a chance to discuss the possibility of converting the current armistice agreement into a peace treaty.

A Confederal System and a Loose Federal System

Another epoch-making achievement of the summit was the agreement on unification formula. The agreement, which nobody had dreamed of, was what made the summit truly a unification meeting. Until the summit, the South and the North had been in a state of sheer conflict and confrontation regarding the question of unification formula.

The South's unification formula was embodied as "confederal

system" by the Roh Tae-woo government. In contrast, the Kim Dae-jung government's unification policy was not a unification policy in strict sense, as it focused not so much on "de facto unification" as on "peaceful coexistence" and "dismantle of the cold war system." In other words, the policy stuck to the short term goal of establishing a peace system on the Korean peninsula.

In contrast, the North's unification formula had quite a long history. It evolved from "transitional federal system" in the 60s, to the proposal of "Federal Republic of Korea" in the 70s, and then further specified as the proposal of "Democratic Federal Republic of Korea" at the 6th meeting of the Korea Labor Party in 1980. The proposal of Democratic Federal Republic of Korea aimed at a completed form of unified nation, proposing to establish a federal government on the basis of mutual recognition of the two different political systems. The problem was its preconditions. The proposal suggested that the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces stationed in the South, the abolishment of the South's National Security Act, and the democratization of the South's political system should precede.

It was during Pastor Moon Ik-whan's visit to Pyongyang in 1989 that the North's unification formula began to show changes. At his meeting with Kim Il-sung, Pastor Moon suggested that there should be another step in the North's proposed federal system, and more specifically that the local governments of the North and the South be given the power over diplomacy and defense temporarily for a fixed period. Pastor Moon's suggestion was partly accepted, and was expressed in the joint statement by Moon Ik-whan and Heo Dam, which said "the federal system may be established either at once or gradually." The gradual formula here is nothing but a loose form of federal system, where the power over diplomacy and defense remains for a fixed period at the hands of the local governments.

A loose federal system, although it takes the form of one state with one sovereign power, is very similar to a strong confederal system in which the external sovereignty resides in the respective local governments of the South and the North. It was this similarity that enabled the two leaders to agree upon the commonality

between their respective unification formulas. In addition, President Kim Dae-jung might have seen the possibility that a loose federal system could be the first step in moving from a confederal system to a federal system. The agreement could be also viewed as a realistic choice by the two sides in that the North compromised the stricter form of federal system put forward in 1980 while the South compromised its formula of a confederal system.

Now that the two sides have found, at the summit, some common grounds in their two respective unification formulas, they are to start a long journey into the road to unification. It is likely that the two sides will be engaged in working level negotiations in order to specify the unification formula more clearly. Since the basic direction is agreed upon, the concrete form, power, and operating system for a new confederal (or federal) system will be discussed in more details.

Concluding Remarks

As declared in the joint statement, the Korean problem will be discussed and resolved mainly by official level dialogues between the two sides. In addition, various private organizations are expected to participate in the process. If the past were to be characterized as an era of "lacking discussion on unification", the future could easily turn into an era of "excessive discussion" on the matter.

In relation to the issue of unification formula, we are likely to see greater participation from various unification movement organizations outside the formal political process that have either been supportive of a federal system or found it inevitable to accept a newly agreed-upon mixture of confederal and federal systems. There will also be some repulsion and resistance by those conservative forces who disapprove of the agreement on unification formula. What we need, then, is the minimum national consensus on this matter, which can be formed only through open discussion and convergence of opinions.

What is the most important of all is to sustain the atmosphere for unification by faithfully executing the contents of the joint state-

ment one by one. For that purpose, it is important to act first upon those matters that are easy to put in practice. Beginning with red cross meetings for the reunion of separated family members, we should strive to realize cooperation in various areas including economic, social, cultural, and sports. We should also make diplomatic efforts to secure international support. For the time being, we can expect to see intensive diplomatic games starring the two Koreas and the four neighboring powers. How to make the international relations move in direction favorable to unification could be the key to a successful fulfillment of the joint statement.

Together with all these efforts for various cooperation and international diplomacy, we should not forget to work for the conversion of our perception of North Korea. As the atmosphere for the conversion is presented to us by the summit, it is the task for both the government and the people to make this atmosphere of unification, reconciliation, and cooperation "irreversible."

The process of Korean unification and peace-making has just moved its first step. More tough obstacles may be in the way. It is time to put everyone's power and wisdom together. ■■■