

ON THE REUNIFICATION OF KOREA*

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In the last years not much has happened for the reunification process of Korea. And nevertheless there are reasons to stand by a prediction: by the year 2000 there will be some kind of reunification of that nation, so badly treated by history. In saying so it is then assumed that the forces pushing the Korean nation together are by-and-large greater than the forces pulling the two countries, as they are defined today, apart. And those forces are not only found in the obvious super-power interests in addition to the interests of Japan and China: Korea is the only country in the world having the four biggest powers in the world today as neighbors. The forces are also found inside the two Koreas as vested interests in the leaderships, differences in the two systems, and one factor that should not be underestimated: many people have gotten used to the situation and have become innovative in finding reasons why nothing will happen whereas the badly needed imagination for a process of unification is scarce.

And nevertheless the prediction stands because of one significant factor: the change of generations. It took Germany thirty years, 1945-1975, to produce a new generation that was able to look at the Nazi horrors and crimes with fresh eyes, launching Germany as a nation with at least to some extent a new identity. Correspondingly, it took Spain about forty years after the Civil War, 1936-1939 (and the death of Franco) to launch the country on a democratic path, unifying people who at an earlier age, in their own lives and in that of Spain, would have been bitterly opposed, to the point of killing each other. So maybe it takes forty years

also for the two Koreas to produce a new generation after the terrible war of 1950-1953, including the passing away also of the leader in the north? And that would bring us into the 1990s, leaving a sufficient number of years for a reasonable process to be completed by the year 2000.

In this process I do not think there is that much to learn from Germany, but very much to learn from Austria; after all, the two Germanys are not unified whereas Austria became a unity again, in 1955. Of course the differences are important. Germany was divided in order not to be united again, as punishment, as a revenge even, for the horrors of the war; and as a preventive measure to stifle a German state with its proven inclinations, three times in one century. Korea was divided not because it was an enemy but as a part of the Japanese empire, not taking into account the Korean peoples own heroic fight against Japanese imperialism headed by marxists and christians, by leaders who became president in North Korea and South Korea respectively. The division was a super-power convenience, and a clear expression of occidental racism: who are these Koreans, what kind of people are they, who do they think they are? So, whereas a consensus seems to be building both inside and outside Germany that the country will not be unified as a state whereas the unification of the nation, in the sense of people, goods and ideas crossing freely the borders is considered a birth right of the German nation. It should be as easy to cross from Bavaria into Thuringen as from Bavaria into Tirol -as the saying goes. Such sentiments do not surround the Korean peninsula; in that sense the

situation is more similar to Austria. And in the Austrian case it was the United States that held up unification, more than the Soviet Union--a point that might be of interest to take into account in the coming negotiations (that should be without preconditions).

So much for the process, what about the goal? A unitary state might be a long-term goal but hardly realistic given the differences of the two systems for the short-term. Much more realistic is the goal put forward by the north: the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo as put forward by North Korea (DCRK). The formulation preserves diversity within unity. It is interesting to compare this formulation of the goal with the corresponding list of twenty very small steps put forward by South Korea; in the first case a goal without much indication of the process; in the second case very small, highly concrete steps without much indication of the goal. Relatively typical of socialist-capitalist discourse, or in broader terms typical of change-oriented vs status quo-oriented! (The reader will find the corresponding documents in the appendix.)

Again Austria might be interesting as an example. There was once an Austro-Hungarian Empire, many Hungarians talk excellent German, some Austrians talk Hungarian. Today one country is socialist, one country is capitalist. The intercourse of people, goods and ideas across the frontier is considerable. It is not obvious that it is that problematic. If the two neighbors could obtain this level of interaction it would already be a great step forward. But does that not mean that strictly speaking a confederation is unnecessary? In a sense, yes, if it had not been

for the fact that Korea is one nation, Austria and Hungary are two: symbolic recognition of that circumstance has to be given.

How should a confederation of this type assert itself in the international system? No doubt, the basic point in the negotiations that would have to be with all the four powers mentioned would be an exchange of unification for neutrality, the latter implying withdrawal of all troops and at the same time creation of a credible defensive defense. For countries roughly of that type there are at least five models in Europe, all of them interesting for the case of Korea.

Thus, from Switzerland Korea can learn a lot about defensive defense and armed neutrality in general, and more particularly about the significance of a small, neutral country in a power field as a place where big powers in conflict can meet, have conferences, summit meetings and what not. A unified Korea should make this a major mission in world affairs, even creating out of Panmunjom a Korean Geneva. As an aside: the economic value of that industry is considerable.

From Austria a unified Korea can learn not only about the process of unification by studying intensely all the history of negotiations, but also about what it means concretely to be an active trade partner with powers on all sides. Austria displays a more active neutrality than Switzerland, hence there are different things to learn from Calvinist/Protestant and from Catholic approaches.

From Yugoslavia Korea can learn a lot, as also from Switzerland

about how to construct federations--there are positive and negative aspects. In addition the Yugoslavs offer another model of defensive defense also of considerable interest to a unified Korea, more based on paramilitary and nonmilitary resistance.

From Sweden a unified Korea could learn many of the same things as she can learn from Austria; active diplomacy from a basis of non-alignment, non-provocative defense, peace initiatives.

And from Finland a unified Korea can learn something about the importance of having good connections with the more closed societies in the world system, the socialist countries of various types. No doubt North Korea will retain many of her socialist features still for a long time to come, and also retain her contacts with the big countries bordering on that part of Korea.

Thus, not only does the process seem relatively feasible provided a minimum of political will is present; the goal is also attractive , not only for Korea but for the whole region and thereby for the world as a whole. What a process of this kind would mean is simply the defusion of a major source of conflict that once more could escalate into a terrible war, threatening not only to the Koreans as it certainly was, but to the whole region the whole world.

In the longer run, however, it may be argued that a confederation of the type mentioned is artificial. It may be argued that a unitary state would correspond better to the aspirations of the Korean people--whether that argument is empirically valid or not.

What seems to be the case is that it is difficult to conceive of a unitary state without a more unitary economic system . And here there are, of course, three possibilities: all of Korea capitalist, all of Korea socialist, or all of Korea social democrats. Meeting in the middle, in other words; where reason is, according to social democrats.

Of course, this is for Koreans to decide and to decide in a democratic manner. But one reflection might be of interest here: it is not obvious that a unitary system is more cohesive than a diverse system with a well-working symbiosis between the two parts. Moreover, it may also be that from a world economic point of view it might be better for the country to practice the current Chinese philosophy of "one country, two systems" than to continue with the conventional European tradition of unity and unitary systems which certainly have not stood the test of time. Interdependence is much stronger than convergence as a peace-building tie .

And it is only in that alternative setting that the second basic problem of the Korean nation--in addition to separation--can be solved: the problem of building democracy. As long as both leaderships see the other Korea as a threat the hard, repressive grip on the people, from left-and from right, will not be relaxed. Create a new, cooperative setting and a much more participatory setting might come about. In the interest of the Korean nation. And the world.

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Appendix A

TEN-POINT PROPOSAL FOR A DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF KORYO
(October 10, 1980)

Excerpts from Kim Il Sung, "Report to the Sixth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea on the Work of the Central Committee," Korea Today, 11, 290 (1980), 14-68.

Our Party considers that the most realistic and reasonable way to reunify the country independently, peacefully and on the principle of great national unity is to bring the north and south together into a confederal state, leaving the ideas and social systems existing in north and south as they are.... (p. 45).

It would be a good idea to call the confederal state the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo after a unified state that once existed in our country and is well known to the world, and by reflecting the common aspirations of north and south for democracy.

The DCRK should be a neutral country which does not participate in any political-military alliance or bloc.... (p. 46).

Our Party deems it appropriate that the DCRK should put forward and carry out the following policy:

First, the DCRK should adhere to independence in all state activities and follow an independent policy....(p. 46).

Second, the DCRK should effect democracy throughout the country and in all spheres of society and promote great national unity....(p. 46).

Third, the DCRK should bring about economic cooperation and exchange between north and south and ensure the development of an independent national economy....(p. 47).

Fourth, the DCRK should realize north-south exchange and cooperation in the spheres of science, culture and education and ensure uniform progress in the country's science and technology, national culture and arts, and national education....(p. 47).

Fifth, the DCRK should reopen the suspended transport and communications between north and south and ensure free utilization of the means of transport and communications in all parts of the country....(p. 48).

Sixth, the DCRK should ensure a stable livelihood for the entire people including the workers, peasants and other working masses and promote their welfare systematically....(p. 48).

Seventh, the DCRK should remove military confrontation between north and south and form a combined national army to defend the nation from invasion from outside....The confederal state should reduce the military strength to 100,000 to 150,000 respectively in order to end the military confrontation between north and south and bring fratricidal strife to an end for good. At the same time it is essential to abolish the Military Demarcation Line between north and south, dismantle all military installations in its vicinity, dissolve militia organizations in both parts and prohibit military training of civilians....(pp. 48-49).

Eighth, the DCRK should defend and protect the rights and interests of all Koreans overseas....(p. 49).

Ninth, the DCRK should handle properly the foreign relations established by the north and south prior to reunification, and should coordinate the foreign activities of the two regional governments in a unified way....(p. 49).

Tenth, the DCRK should, as a unified state representing the whole nation, develop friendly relations with all countries of the world and pursue a peaceful foreign policy....(p. 49).

Appendix B

PROPOSAL OF TWENTY PILOT PROJECTS TO FACILITATE
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND DEMOCRATIC REUNIFICATION
(February 1, 1982)

From "Proposal of Minister of National Unification for Practical Pilot Projects," South-North Dialogue in Korea, No. 028 (March 1982), 70-72.

- (1) The connecting and opening of a highway between Seoul and Pyongyang as a means of guaranteeing free passage between the South and the North.
- (2) The realization of postal exchanges and reunion of separated families, thereby easing their sufferings.
- (3) The designating and opening of the area north of Mt. Sorak and south of the Diamond Mountains as a joint tourist zone.
- (4) The joint management of homeland visits by overseas Korean residents and their free travel between the two sides by way of Panmunjom.
- (5) The opening of the harbors of Inchon and Chinnampo to facilitate free trade between the South and the North.
- (6) The allowing of free listening to each other's regular radio programs through the removal of tricky propaganda and jamming facilities for the promotion of mutual understanding between the South and the North.
- (7) The participation of North Korean delegations in the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympiad, and their entry into the South by way of Panmunjom.
- (8) The allowing of all foreigners wishing to visit the South and the North free access to the two areas by way of Panmunjom.
- (9) The creation of joint fishery zones for the convenience of fishermen of both the South and the North.
- (10) The conducting of mutual goodwill visits from various circles, such as politicians, businessmen, youths and students, workers, writers and artists, and sportsmen, to improve relations and foster trust between the South and the North.

- (11) The guaranteeing of free press coverage by the journalists of the two sides in each other's area to facilitate the correct reporting of the realities of the societies of the South and the North.
- (12) The undertaking of joint research on national history for the purpose of preserving and developing the national culture.
- (13) The exchange of goodwill matches in various fields of sports and participation in international games under single delegation between the South and the North.
- (14) The trading of products of daily necessity for the convenience of residents of both sides.
- (15) The joint development and utilization of natural resources between the South and the North to enhance the national economy.
- (16) The exchange of technicians and exhibitions of manufactured products to contribute to the industrial development of the South and the North.
- (17) The creation of sports facilities inside the Demilitarized Zone for goodwill matches between the South and the North.
- (18) The conducting of a joint academic survey to study the ecological system of the fauna and flora inside the Demilitarized Zone.
- (19) The complete removal of military facilities from within the Demilitarized Zone in order to alleviate military tension between the South and the North.
- (20) The discussion of measures to control arms between the South and the North, and the installing and operation of a direct telephone line between the officials responsible for the military affairs of the two sides.