

## Inter-Korean Relations without the U.S.-ROK Alliance

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

After long period of confrontation during the Cold War, the two Korea tried to thaw the bilateral relations since the early 1990s. The 1992 Basic Agreement produced comprehensive lists of reconciliation measures that are yet to be completed. South Korea's sunshine engagement since 1998 led to major breakthrough in inter-Korean relations including two summit meetings in 2000 and 2007, Kaesung Industrial Park, Mt. Kumkang Business, family reunion, and various socio-cultural exchanges. Yet, as North Korea developed nuclear program as a result of alleged U.S. hostile policy, the inter-Korean relations were largely constrained by security dilemma. Accordingly one might argue that the dissolution of the U.S.-ROK alliance would remove the major obstacle in reconciliation effort between the two Koreas. It will facilitate Pyongyang's decision to give up nuclear program with no direct U.S. military threat on the peninsula. Seoul could accelerate its sunshine engagement once the nuclear issue has been settled.

However, the sudden end of the US-ROK alliance may in fact cause more tension and instability in inter-Korean relations. As long as North Korea continues its nuclear program, South Korea's economic engagement will remain largely limited as increasing numbers of South Koreans are skeptical of sunshine impacts on North Korea's aggressive military policy. Social exchanges will also remain largely one sided and limited as the fearful North Korean regime tries to keep its society from different political and social values of South Korean society. On the other hand, South Koreans will become more

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critical of North Korea's rigid political system based on totalitarian personal cult of Kim Jong-Il regime and its human right violations. Most of all, North Korea's nuclear issue may well continue to be a source of military security tension on the peninsula as Pyongyang sees unchanging nature of U.S. hostile policy even after the military withdrawal from the South. Indeed, without nuclear umbrella, Seoul may decide to pursue its own nuclear program to counter nuclear Pyongyang, which will disrupt regional military balance with nuclear domino.

Recent polls show that despite the ideal of inter-Korean reconciliation, the reality of Northeast Asian geopolitics is well understood by South Korean public. After years of engagement with North Korea, more Koreans now support keeping better relations with the U.S. than five years ago. As South Koreans has become more realistic on inter-Korean reconciliation after years of sunshine engagement, the U.S-ROK alliance will remain a crucial component of peninsula as well as regional security.

## **1. Introduction**

What will happen should the U.S.-ROK alliance cease to exist? This paper assumes a circumstance wherein the current U.S.-ROK alliance suddenly comes to an end for some reasons, and it supposes the following situations. First, there will be no U.S. military presence or whatsoever on the Korean peninsula. Second, the mutual defense commitment will be gone including U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea.<sup>1</sup> Third, the two countries will still remain friendly with continuing FTA, social and cultural exchanges albeit the absence of military alliance. Fourth, South Korea's relations with China, Japan and Russia will remain similar to today, which means that abrogating alliance with the U.S. does not really mean new alliance partnership with China. Fifth, discussions on inter-Korean relations will start from current situation. North Korea's nuclear development has not been resolved, political and economic reconciliation remains limited --- there is no fundamental change in military balance between the two Koreas. In sum, all geo-political situations in and around the Korean peninsula remain the same except for the absence of U.S.-ROK military alliance. This paper will only focus on the future of the North-South relations in this hypothetical situation.

## **2. Evolution of Inter-Korean Relations**

### **During the Cold War**

Since the Korean War of 1950, inter-Korean relations remained largely frozen

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<sup>1</sup> The Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and ROK was signed in 1953.

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throughout the Cold War era. The two Koreas exchanged hostility toward each other with strong military build up. The demilitarized zone (DMZ) dividing the two Koreas became one of the most heavily armed borders in the world. Bulk of almost two million military forces from both sides confronted one another face-to-face across the DMZ. The two militaries remained on a high alert ready to go to full scale war in any minute. There were numerous small scale military skirmishes between the two in the border areas of land and sea. In 1968, North Korea sent commandos to Seoul to assassinate President Park Chung Hee. Same year in the sea, a U.S. navy ship, *Pueblo*, was forcefully abducted by the North Korean navy. In the summer at *Panmunjum*, North Korean soldiers attacked and killed two U.S. soldiers who were cutting a tree nearby. Both sides were one more provocation away from a second Korean War, which miraculously did not occur.

Yet, there was a rare moment of breakthrough as well in inter-Korean relations. Amidst rapprochement between Washington and Beijing and the fear of abandonment from respective ally, the two Koreas decided to ease the tension between them in the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> South Korean special envoy *Lee Hu-rak*, then the chief of KCIA, made secret visit to Pyongyang in 1972 and agreed to a first ever Joint Communiqué between the two governments since the Korean War. The July 4<sup>th</sup> South-North Joint Communiqué declared independence, peace, and national unity as the three basic principles for future unification.<sup>3</sup> However, the spirit of reconciliation did not last long and the two sides largely remained hostile through the 1980s.

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<sup>2</sup> After the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, the US 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division withdrew from South Korea in 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Envoy from North Korea also made a secrete visit to Seoul after Mr. Lee's visit to Pyongyang in May. "The July 4th South-North Joint Communiqué" (July 4th 1972)

## **1992 Basic Agreement**

Major breakthrough in inter-Korean relations came in the early 1990s with the end of the Cold Wars. For the first time since the 1972 Joint Communiqué, the two governments held several rounds of ministerial meetings in a shuttle diplomacy between Seoul and Pyongyang. In December 1991, they announced Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North Korea. The agreement, consist of four chapters and twenty five articles, addresses most comprehensive measures for peaceful cooperation between the two Koreas in politics, military, economics and future unification. In Chapter One, the two agreed to promote political reconciliation with formal recognition and respect to one another, non-interference in the internal affairs, no slandering, no efforts of insurrection against one another, establishment of a Liaison Office and a South-North Political Committee. In particular, Chapter One suggests a replacing the present armistice system with a peace treaty.

Chapter Two touches upon military aspects of inter-Korean reconciliation. It includes non-use of force and peaceful dialogue for resolution of disputes, recognition of current border, and establishment of Joint Military Commission for confidence building measures such as notification of military move and exercises, peaceful use of DMZ, exchanges of personnel and information and establishment of military hotline. It also mentions phased arms reductions which include the elimination of WMDs and verifications.

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Chapter Three discusses measures for economic and social exchanges. For economic development, the two promised to engage in economic exchanges and cooperation including the joint development of resources, the trade of goods as intra-Korean commerce and joint ventures. They almost promised to reconnect the railway and roads and shall open sea and air routes. As for social cooperation, broad exchanges in science, technology, education, literature and the arts, health, sports, environment, journalism and media were agreed. The social exchanges also included freedom of intra-Korean travel and contact among people, and exchanges of mail and telecommunication with guarantee of confidentiality. Finally, the two Koreas agreed to cooperate in humanitarian issues such as reunion of separated families.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, the 1992 Basic Agreement dealt with all the elements of inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation. The goals and ways for true reconciliation were set. The success of inter-Korean reconciliations was to be measured by how the two sides implement the articles of the Basic Agreement. Yet the two Koreas did not follow up those agreements as they confronted over North Korea's nuclear development program with the revelation of Pyongyang's secret nuclear program in 1993.

### **Sunshine Engagement Since 1998**

In a drastic departure of traditional North Korea policy, President Kim Dae-Jung launched a comprehensive engagement policy, later called sunshine policy, towards North Korea as soon as

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<sup>4</sup> Chung, Won-shik (Prime Minister, ROK) and Yon, Hyong-muk (Premier of the Administration Council, DPRK), "Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North Korea" (Signed on December 13, 1991, Effective February 19, 1992)

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he came to office in 1998.<sup>5</sup> Kim believed that patient and unconditioned engagement by the South would reinforce those in the North who also want peace, thus result in positive gains for more cooperation. For this, he adopted three principles: no tolerance of armed provocation by North Korea, no unification by absorption of the North by the South, and sincere efforts for reconciliation and cooperation. Especially Kim made it clear that South Korea does not want the collapse of the North. Under Kim's sunshine doctrine, South Korea encouraged private business ventures with North Korea, various aids through both government and private channels, and human exchange including family reunions. The two governments also held several rounds of ministerial meetings in a shuttle diplomacy between Seoul and Pyongyang. Kim's determination and patience finally paid off in 2000 when the two governments held a historic summit in Pyongyang. Despite the newly developing second nuclear crisis since 2002, the next Roh Moo-Hyun administration continued the engagement policy with the North.

### **3. Prospects of Inter-Korean Relations**

With its comprehensive list of reconciliation process in politics, security, economic, and socio-cultural fields, the 1992 Basic Agreements provide useful references for measuring the success of inter-Korean relations. Over the past decade, the two Koreas made some progress in their bilateral relations, especially when Seoul made aggressive reconciliation efforts during the Kim Dae-Jung and the Roh Moo-Hyun administrations. Indeed, South Korea's engagement efforts continued despite North Korea's nuclear development. It reflected increasing confidence and strategic interests of Seoul in managing the inter-Korean relations in a peaceful and stable manner. Yet,

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<sup>5</sup> The term sunshine policy came from one of Aesop's ancient Greek fables in which the sun and the north wind try to remove a traveler's coat.

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most articles of cooperation list in the Basic Agreement are yet to be fulfilled. For this, North Korea criticizes the U.S.-ROK alliance as the major obstacle for national independence and inter-Korean cooperation. Will the dissolution of U.S.-ROK alliance facilitate the inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation? In other words, what is the prospect of realizing the ideal of the 1992 Basic Agreements if the alliance is gone?

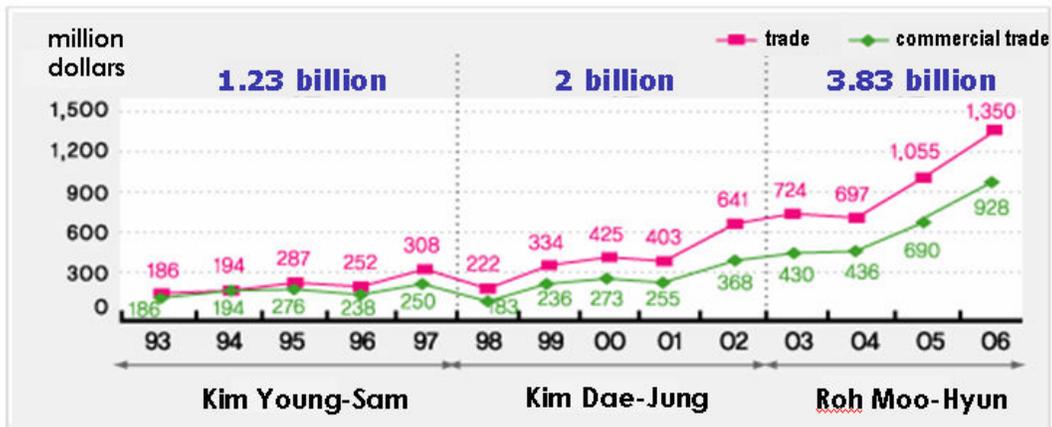
### **Economic Cooperation**

South Korea's sunshine engagement focused on economic exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas from the beginning. South Korea hoped that economic aid and exchange would build mutual interest and trust that can translate into political and military trust in the long run. It also believed that the economic aid, such as fixing and upgrading North Korea's outdated infrastructure as well as supply of food and fertilizer to the North was a long-term investment for future unification. Indeed, the inter-Korean trade has increased substantially over the decade as shown below. South Korea has become the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest economic partner of North Korea with over U.S. \$ 1.35 billion trade in 2006.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Office of the President, ROK, "4 Years of Participatory Government under Roh and Strategy for Advanced Korea" *in Korean* March 5, 2007 ([http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/policy\\_and\\_issue/4years\\_appraisal/archive\\_view.php?meta\\_id=4years\\_appraisal&id=f518afb9a30e9de7fc56fb74&category=252](http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/policy_and_issue/4years_appraisal/archive_view.php?meta_id=4years_appraisal&id=f518afb9a30e9de7fc56fb74&category=252) accessed on August 19, 2007)

ROK-DPRK Trade Amount Status



(Source: Office of the President, ROK)

Dissolution of the U.S.-ROK alliance may not have much impact on the inter-Korean economic relations. Economic exchange and cooperation may continue to increase and develop regardless of other development. Indeed, South Korea's sunshine engagements were often criticized by hawks in Washington who saw it as rewarding North Korea's bad behavior of nuclear defiance. After North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006, Washington and Seoul expressed their differences over whether South Korea should continue Kaesung Industrial Park and Mt. Keumgang Project amidst UN economic sanctions on North Korea. Even though South Korea voted for the UN sanctions, it did not want to stop the two projects which have become important cash crops for North Korean regime. The South Korean government insisted that the two projects must continue despite the nuclear test and came at odds with Washington.

The absence of alliance with the U.S. would make Seoul free to go ahead with its deepening

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economic engagement with North Korea despite the nuclear standoff. Indeed, it was argued that South Korea's patient engagement contributed the peaceful management and solution of the crisis in the aftermath of North Korea's nuclear test. The Roh government argued that hard-line response to nuclear crisis, such as canceling Kaesung and Mt. Keumgang projects, would have caused more tension and crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Instead Seoul's continuing engagement efforts paved the way to the February nuclear agreement at the six party talks in 2007.<sup>7</sup> Roh made it clear that increasing interdependency between the North and the South is the best means to guarantee peace. And the best way to do it is to build North-South economic community through expanding economic cooperation.<sup>8</sup> The South Korean government emphasized that deepening economic cooperation would facilitate North Korea's decision to give up its nuclear program.<sup>9</sup> Later the Grand National Party (GNP), major opposition party to the South Korean government, announced a new North Korea policy guideline that supports economic cooperation and aid even before North Korea's nuclear dismantlement. Previously the party insisted that economic assistance should be based on reciprocity from North Korea on the nuclear issue.

However, recent survey shows that the South Korean public support for economic engagement appears to be less enthusiastic. According to the figure below the number of people who supports continuing or increasing economic assistance to the North has decreased compared to five years

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<sup>7</sup> Blue House Briefing, "October Nuclear Test Crisis in Retrospect," (Office of the President, July 10, 2007. *in Korean*

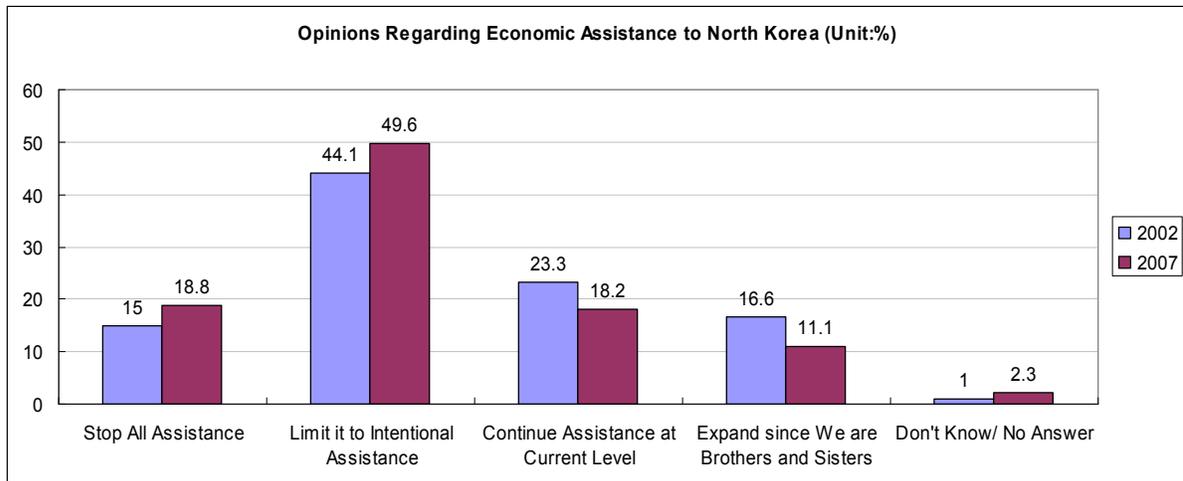
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accessed on August 26, 2007)

<sup>8</sup> Roh, MooHyun, "Building Economic Community is most important for Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *in Korean* (Blue House Briefing, Office of the President, August 14, 2007, [http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive\\_view.php?meta\\_id=inter\\_korean\\_summit&id=d12ac8da b7940bdb22b06be3](http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=inter_korean_summit&id=d12ac8da b7940bdb22b06be3) accessed on August 19, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> Office of NSC Advisor, "Virtuous Cycle of Economic Cooperation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *in Korean* (Blue House Briefing, Office of the President, August 10, 2007, [http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive\\_view.php?meta\\_id=peacekorea&category=286&id=923 b0885976f9a39d8ac8b8d](http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=peacekorea&category=286&id=923 b0885976f9a39d8ac8b8d) accessed on August 27, 2007)

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ago. And more people want to stop or limit economic assistance in 2007.<sup>10</sup>



(Source: Hankuk ilbo)

Two factors may explain the public skepticism on economic engagement. One has to do with a more immediate issue of North Korea's nuclear development. South Koreans became seriously concerned with North Korea's nuclear threat since the nuclear test in October 2006. The other has to do with more general sunshine fatigue. After almost a decade of engagement efforts, the South Korean public became more skeptical of the sunshine effect. Despite increased contacts and rhetoric of national cooperation, there seemed to be no fundamental change in the North Korean regime with continuing emphasis on exclusive Juche ideology, military first policy, and personal cult of Kim Jong-il.

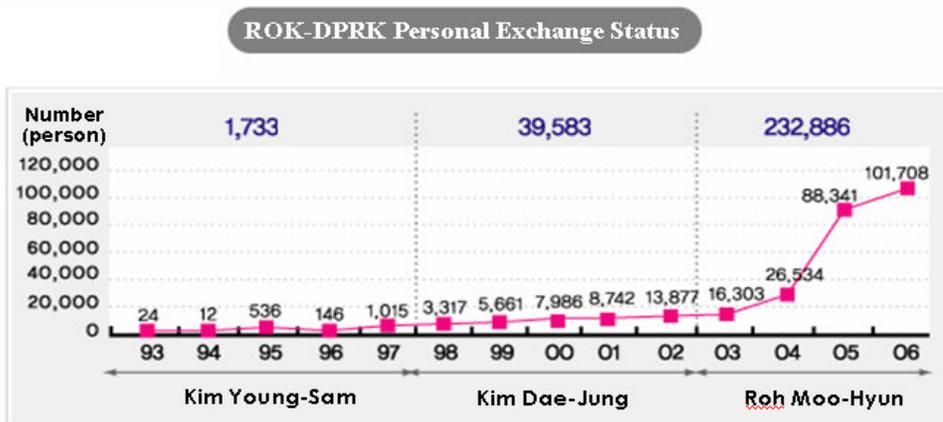
### **Social Exchange**

Since South Korea started sunshine engagement, human exchanges between the two Koreas

<sup>10</sup> *Hankuk ilbo*, June 8 2007

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showed remarkable increase. The South Korean government gave a green light for business and private citizens to pursue their own contacts with the North. Numerous NGOs, churches and charities were allowed to offer food and other aid, and businessmen were no longer asked to seek specific approval for a visit to Pyongyang to negotiate investment and trade agreement. As shown in the figure below, almost forty thousands people exchange were made during the Kim Dae-Jung administration, more than 20 times increase compared to 1,733 in previous administration. The figure increased substantially again under Roh's government with over a hundred thousand people exchange in 2006 alone.<sup>11</sup> Inter-Korean social exchanges showed certain progress in its contents as well. People from various fields including science and technology, academia, literature and arts, medicine and hospital, sports, media and journalism, and religion had numerous exchanges.



(Source: Office of the President, ROK)

However, the remarkable increase in human exchange reveals an uneven nature of inter-Korean cooperation. First, most of the visits between the two Koreas were made by South Koreans.

<sup>11</sup> Office of the President, “4 Years of Participatory Government under Roh”

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Meanwhile only a handful of selected North Koreans visited South Korea. In 2006, 870 North Koreans visited the South while over 100,000 South Korean, most of which were tourists, visited the North.<sup>12</sup> Second, the North Korean government never allowed free contacts between its private citizens and the South Korean counterparts. Tens of thousands Korean tourists spent one to three days in a very restricted area of Mt. Keumgang run by the Hyundai Asan Cooperation and were greeted by few dozens of highly trained North Korean guides. In Kaesung Industrial Zone, all the North Korean workers are handpicked and strictly controlled by the North Korean government. All the social and cultural meetings by North Korean citizens with South Koreans are closely watched and reported back to the government. As for family reunion, the North has been very cautious in allowing it. While tens of thousands South Korean families want to see their separated members in the North, Pyongyang so far allowed only 2,700 people to meet their family members since 2000. And except the first two years, rarely have any North Korean family members visited the South. The impacts of social exchange were superficial and short-lived in many cases.<sup>13</sup>

It is unlikely that the North Korean government would be more open and flexible in allowing its citizens to have free contacts with South Koreans in near future. Even after U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea, North Korea's isolationist tendency would not change right away unless it undergoes serious political and economic reform. The totalitarian nature of its regime makes the tight government control of its society a key to the regime security. What Kim Jong-il fears most is the infiltration of liberal values into its society. Moreover, the North Korean government

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<sup>12</sup> ROK Ministry of Unification, Statistics on the North-South Human Exchange (<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/kr/KUL/KUL0601L.jsp?title00=2> accessed on August 28, 2007)

<sup>13</sup> ROK Ministry of Unification, Statistics on Humanitarian Exchange (<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/kr/KUL/KUL0601L.jsp?title00=3> accessed on August 28, 2007)

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does not want to let its people realize how much they are poor compared to its Southern brothers whom were supposed to be suffering misery under American imperialists. The ever increasing gap between the two societies' social and political value, as well as its economic well being makes it difficult to achieve free and full contacts between the two societies any time soon.

### **Politics**

Both Koreas have always emphasized national unity and cooperation. But, they had different ideas regarding how to achieve such goals. In particular, the presence of U.S. military has been the main cause of tension between the two Koreas. It has been a policy of North Korea that the fate of the Korean peninsula should be decided by the Korean nation alone barring any foreign influence. The North always argued that the imperial ambition of the United States has been the biggest obstacle for national unification of Korean people. Meanwhile South Korea considered the U.S. presence on the Korean peninsula critical to its defense against North Korean attack. Yet, as South Korea became stronger militarily as well as economically than North Korea, it began to have second thought about the role of U.S. As such, the dissolution of the U.S.-ROK alliance may be regarded as enhancing South Korea's legitimacy and leverage in discussing the national unification of the two Koreas. Korean people can freely discuss its future among themselves. South Koreans will enjoy more pride as a truly independent nation.

According to the Basic Agreement, the two Koreas would make political reconciliation through formal recognition, no slandering, no efforts of insurrection, and non-interference in the internal affairs. The 2000 summit marked official recognition of each other as legitimate two political entities on the peninsula. The two stopped defaming by scrapping huge propaganda speakers

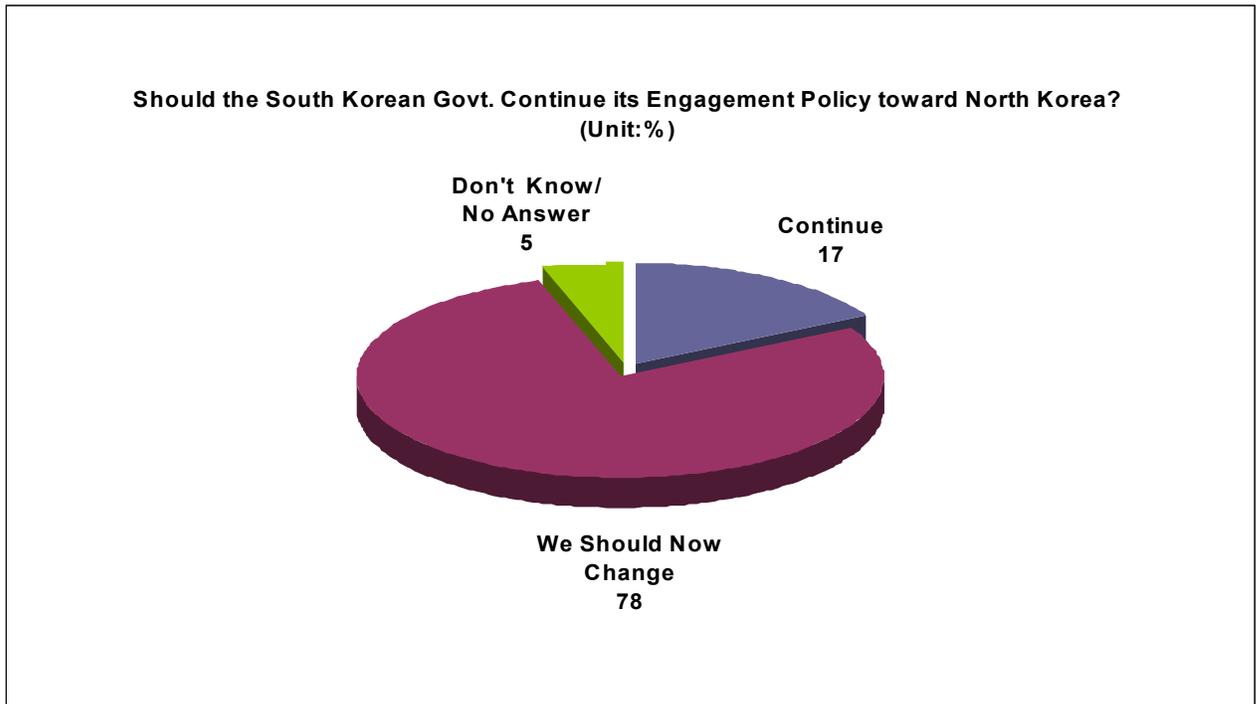
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across the DMZ. Since 2000 summit, there has not been a report of discovering any major spy networks or infiltration into South Korea sent by Pyongyang. Instead the two exchanged twenty-one rounds of ministerial meetings discussing how to make further progress in political reconciliation. At the end, the most important political reconciliation would come through replacing the current armistice with a peace treaty between the two Koreas as said in the Basic Agreement. Indeed, Beijing six party talks in February 2007 reached an agreement to create a working group on a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. In their October 2007 summit between Roh and Kim Jong-il, the South Korean government pushed hard for a breakthrough in inter-Korean Peace regime.

One could say that the withdrawal of U.S. troops would create a favorable condition for an inter-Korean peace regime. The problem is that a peace treaty just between the North and the South would be impractical if not impossible. Pyongyang has always argued that a true peace should involve the U.S. Most security experts argue that at least the four countries, two Koreas, the U.S. and China, would have to agree to replace the current armistice with a peace treaty. Yet, it would be impossible for Washington to agree on a peace treaty with nuclear North Korea, which makes nuclear resolution a critical precondition for a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Unfortunately, Seoul does not have much to say on the nuclear issue as Pyongyang insists talking to no other than the U.S. Consequently, the inter-Korean peace regime will largely depend on the Pyongyang-Washington dialogue, not between the two Koreas. And South Koreans are becoming increasingly weary of North Korea's nuclear defiance. Following the nuclear test in October 2007, 78 percent of South Koreans said that the government should limit its engagement policy toward North Korea.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *JoongAng ilbo*, October 11, 2006



(Source: JoongAng ilbo)

While welcoming the second inter-Korean summit in October 2007, most South Koreans thought that the nuclear issue should be the top agenda (29.2 percent), along with the discussion of the peace regime (27.9 percent). Expanding economic cooperation came only in a distant third priority (16.1 percent). And the vast majority (72.8 percent) answered that South Korea should not make any more concession/reward toward North Korea. Most people (58.7 percent) were pessimistic about the possibility of solving nuclear problem at the summit while only 35.5 percent expressed some hope for the summit result.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the termination of South Korea's alliance with the U.S. would underscore

<sup>15</sup> Korea Gallup Poll on the Prospect of the 2<sup>nd</sup> North-South Summit (August 8, 2007)

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fundamentally different nature of regime between the North and the South and may cause more direct political confrontation. As times go by, the two societies already face serious gap in their political and social value system. The U.S. military presence in South Korea provided a good excuse for such gap as North Korea called South Korean regime a puppet of American imperialism. With no one to blame for South Korea's deepening liberalism, North Korea's totalitarian regime will exhibit complete opposite nature of South Korea's maturing democracy. It is highly unlikely that North Korea will give up personal cult of top leadership based on *Juche* (self-reliance) ideology and the military first policy. Meanwhile, South Korean society will become increasingly liberal and individualistic. South Korea's liberal political system will be a source of political tension between the two very different political regimes.

One good example would be South Korea's increasing concern of North Korea's human rights abuse. The South Korean government has been very careful not to provoke North Korean regime for its notorious human rights violations. South Korea has abstained from UN resolutions against North Korea's human right abuse in past years.<sup>16</sup> However, South Korea's civil society becomes increasingly aware of North Korea's human right problems and having serious debates about how to deal with the issue. It will be inevitable that South Korean society will become more vocal and critical of North Korea's human rights issue as South Korean themselves regards human rights as one of its core social values along with rule of law, individual rights and freedom. South Korea's emphasis on human rights may create new strain on political reconciliation of the two regimes.

### **Military Security**

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<sup>16</sup> The government voted for it in 2006 in the aftermath of North Korea's nuclear test. It however withdrew again in 2007 after the 2<sup>nd</sup> North-South summit in October.

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Some say abolishing alliance with the U.S. will give more leverage for South Korea in discussing security issues with North Korea. Indeed, North Korea has refused to discuss military issue with the South. It has consistently argued that South Korea does not have much to say on military issue since it is a surrogate of American imperialist. North Korea maintained that South Korea is not a legitimate party to the armistice treaty of the Korean War since it was signed between the U.S. and North Korea along with China. As such North Korean military representative refused to talk to the United Nations Military Armistice Committee headed by a South Korean general at Panmunjum. Accordingly, military dialogue between Seoul and Pyongyang has been least productive despite South Korea's aggressive reconciliation efforts since the 2000 summit. Out of twenty one rounds of the North-South Ministerial Level Meetings, the two defense ministers met only once. Since 2000, five high level military general meetings produced no significant agreement as each side exchanged widely different positions on major military issues such as Northern Limit Line in the Yellow Sea.<sup>17</sup>

Seoul would hope that Pyongyang may acknowledge it as a legitimate counterpart in military security dialogue once American military is gone from the South Korean soil. Especially it hoped to have a stronger voice in nuclear talks with North Korea who emphasized bilateral talks with the U.S. However, it is most likely that the North Korea's main security concern will focus on its relations with Washington, not Seoul. Since the Korean War, Pyongyang always identified the U.S. as its main enemy. North Korea has argued that its nuclear program is an outcome of the U.S. hostile policy. Therefore, it perceives that no other country, except the United States, can

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<sup>17</sup> North Korea insisted that the NLL drawn after the Korean War by the United Nation Command was too close to their land and demanded renegotiation.

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guarantee its regime survival. The dissolution of U.S.-ROK alliance would not alter the fundamental security concern of the North Korea.

One could argue that North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons once the U.S. forces are gone from the Korean Peninsula. U.S. forces in the South of its border presented a main threat to North Korean regime. Pyongyang demanded the withdrawal of U.S. forces as the most important condition of peace on the Korean peninsula. Now with the U.S. military is gone, North Korea may feel safe enough not to worry its regime security. For withdrawal of U.S. forces could be a most powerful and concrete statement that U.S. has dropped its hostile policy toward Pyongyang. If North Korea does not perceive major U.S. military threat any more, it would not need to develop nuclear weapons. Once the North dismantles its nuclear program completely, this could bring normalization between Pyongyang and Washington. The two will declare official end of the Korean War along with Seoul and Beijing, and replace armistice to a Peace treaty. It will greatly facilitate military CBMs and arms controls between the two Koreas. In sum, optimist would say that the dissolving U.S.-ROK alliance could help resolving nuclear talks and eventually bring a peace to the peninsula.

However, even if the U.S. forces are withdrawn from the South, Pyongyang may not feel safe enough to give up its nuclear programs. Two issues will make it difficult, if not impossible, to resolve nuclear confrontation between Pyongyang and Washington; mistrust and technical difficulty of verification. First, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea would be a necessary, but not enough condition, for North Korea to trust U.S. guarantee of non aggression. North Korea's threat perception would not change simply because of the U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea. The U.S. military forces in the region such as in Japan will still pose the same

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threat to Pyongyang. And it is not likely that Washington will easily accept Pyongyang's demand, such as removing North Korea from the terror sponsoring country list, let alone full diplomatic normalization, before North Korea make substantial move in dismantling its nuclear program. Consequently, the nuclear dilemma between North Korea and the United States will remain same as each side demands the other to make the major concession first to prove the other's real intention.

Second, even if the two genuinely want to make a grand bargain, the process of dismantling nuclear program and verifying it could prove to be almost impossible for technical reasons. Many still doubt that North Korea would sincerely produce and report its known and unknown nuclear programs. Yet, even if that is possible, it will take much more tolerance and patience for both parties to inspect and dismantle them. In particular, the challenge inspection by IAEA, a mandatory procedure for all NPT members, will be almost impossible for North Koreans to accept. Given their secrecy and pride with thousands of fortified undergrounds tunnels and facilities, North Korea will be extremely sensitive in allowing inspectors snooping around suspicious sites. After years of hide-and-seek game over Iraq's WMD programs between the UN inspectors and Saddam Hussein government, the U.S. went to the Second Gulf War over inconclusive result and nuclear defiance of the Iraqi government. Even worse, it took more than eighteen months for the U.S. occupying forces after the war to perform through inspection of all suspicious parts of Iraq and to conclude there was no evidence of nuclear programs.<sup>18</sup> One could argue that the U.S. demands of complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of nuclear

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<sup>18</sup> "Report: No WMD Stockpiles in Iraq," *CNN* October 7, 2004 (<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/06/iraq.wmd.report/> accessed on August 27, 2007) and *Iraq Survey Group Final Report* (Global Security Organization, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/report/2004/isg-final-report/isg-final-report\\_vol2\\_nuclear-02.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/report/2004/isg-final-report/isg-final-report_vol2_nuclear-02.htm) accessed on August 27, 2007)

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programs can be achieved only through complete and sustained occupation of North Korean territory. It will be very difficult to expect North Korea to have a complete trust of U.S. intention to allow such measures.

In spite of the dissolution of U.S.-ROK alliance, North Korea may continue its nuclear program citing unchanging nature of U.S. hostile policy toward Pyongyang. With continuing North Korean nuclear weapons program, inter Korean military relations could experience more tension without the alliance. North Korea's military will pose more menacing threat to South Korea who has to face it alone. Despite its deteriorating quality and maintenance of conventional weapons, North Korean military enjoys superiority in numbers in almost every category of major platforms. Table 1 below demonstrates numerical advantage of North Korean military.

Table 1. North-South Military Figures (2005)

	Personal	Tank	Artillery	Battle ships	Sub-marines	Fighter Jets	Reserves
North Korea	1.16 mil	3,700	8,700	750	70	830	7.7 mil
South Korea	0.68 mil	2,300	5,100	160	10	500	3 mil

Source: Joint-Chief of Staff, ROK Defense Ministry

Some suggests that North Korea's numerical superiority is largely offset by its poor quality. Most of its weapons system comes from the Soviet Model in the 1950s and 1960s. North Korea's

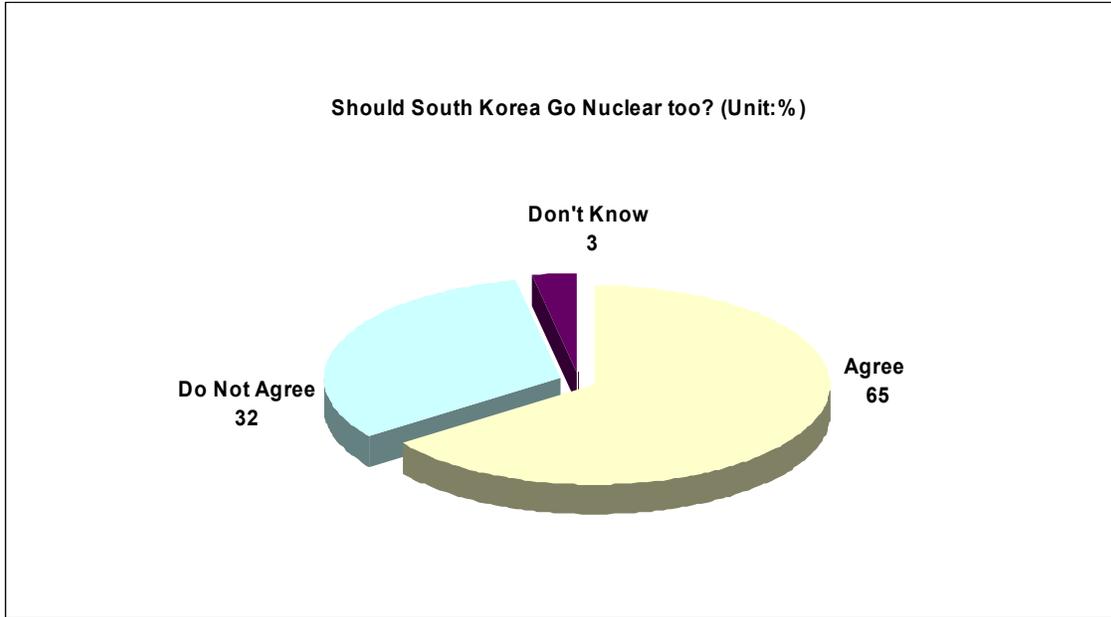
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economic difficulty created serious limit in Korean People's Army (KPA) military activities, such as regular exercise, supply, maintenance, and military welfare. Yet, the military is highly trained and disciplined with average eight years of service. As Kim Jong-Il put every emphasis on military first policy, royalty and morals of soldiers appear to be high. When the two Koreas were engaged in a naval battle in 2002, North Korean navy, despite its obsolete weapons, inflicted serious damages to South Korean navy with six sailors killed. Many military experts predict that North Korean military could destroy large part of Seoul with heavy artillery fire alone in case of war across the DMZ. North Korea's 100,000 commandos force poses another lethal threat to South Korean military.

Even worse, North Korea's WMD capability will pose most serious threat to South Korea. In addition to nuclear weapons, North Korea has developed serious WMD capabilities including biological and chemical weapons. North Korea also possesses 600 Scud missiles and 200 Rodong missiles both of which can reach any target in South Korea. And North Korea's nuclear capability will be a source of most serious instability for the Korean peninsula and its surroundings. Without the guarantee of U.S. nuclear umbrella, South Korea will feel North Korea's nuclear weapons much more threatening. To match North Korea's WMD capability, South Korea will eventually consider developing independent nuclear capability. After North Korea's nuclear test, 65 percent of South Koreans supported counter program by South Korea even with U.S.-ROK alliance and nuclear umbrella.<sup>19</sup> The number will certainly grow without the alliance.

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<sup>19</sup> *JoongAng ilbo*, October 11, 2006



It is not very difficult imagine that South Korea's nuclear development will led to nuclear arms race in the region followed by Japan and Taiwan. Nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia will be a disaster for both South Korea and the United States.

#### **4. Conclusion**

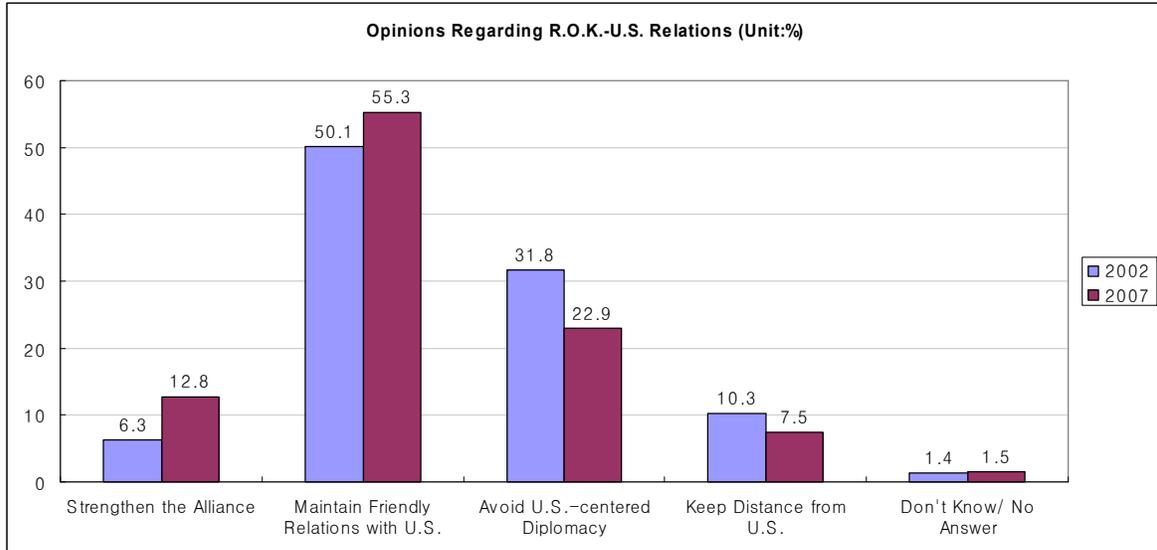
It seems that the two Koreas share common goals and interests in peace, national unity and independence, and economic prosperity. The two agreed to comprehensive measures to achieve those goals in the 1992 Basic Agreements. Yet, the two still remain highly suspicious of each other's true intention leaving the 1992 Agreement largely a political rhetoric without actual implementation. Since then the Korean Peninsula saw two nuclear crisis by North Korea who finally has become a de facto nuclear state with a nuclear test in October 2007. North Korea has

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argued that the U.S. hostile policy is the main reason for its nuclear development. Consequently, one could wish that the termination of U.S.-ROK alliance may help the resolution of nuclear issue as well as the inter-Korean reconciliation fulfilling the spirit of the Basic Agreement.

However, withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea and termination of the alliance alone would not be enough for the two Koreas to achieve full reconciliation. In fact, the absence of U.S.-ROK alliance may cause a new nuclear arms race on the Korean Peninsula. Even without U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea may feel insecure for its fundamental problem in economy with totalitarian political system. Deep seeded mutual distrust between Pyongyang and Washington compounded by technical difficulties of dismantling North Korea's nuclear programs will most likely continue even after U.S. forces are gone from the Korean Peninsula. With continuing North Korea's nuclear programs, inter-Korean relations will face the same security dilemma despite the desire for national unity. Continuing military tension between the two Koreas will fundamentally limit the reconciliation and cooperation in other areas. Indeed, it could make the bilateral relations and the whole regional security even worse if South Korea tries to develop its own nuclear weapons in the absence of nuclear umbrella by the United States. This could be a disaster for security interests of all parties in the region.

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(Source: Hankuk ilbo)

Despite the ideal of inter-Korean reconciliation, the reality of Northeast Asian geopolitics is well understood by South Korean public. As shown above after years of engagement with North Korea, more Koreans now support keeping better relations with the U.S. than five years ago. More people (68.1 percent) in 2007 supported U.S.-ROK alliance than in 2002 (56.4 percent).<sup>20</sup> As South Koreans has become more realistic on inter-Korean reconciliation after years of sunshine engagement, the U.S-ROK alliance will remain a crucial component of peninsula as well as regional security. .

<sup>20</sup> *Hankuk ilbo*, June 8 2007

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