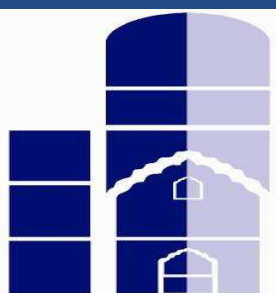


The 17th South Korean Presidential Election: No More Sunshine for North Korea?

Sangsoo Lee
Alec Forss

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785
E-mail: caciz@jhuaig.admin.jhu.edu

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Bert Edström, Editor of the Asia and Policy Paper Series, at bedstrom@silkroadstudies.org

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Introduction

The 17th South Korean presidential election on December 19 takes place exactly ten years and one day after the historic victory of Kim Dae-jung in the 1997 election. Going on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000, Kim's presidency heralded the start of a new era of cooperative relations with North Korea characterized by the so-called "sunshine policy,"¹ which has been continued by his successor Roh Moo-hyun. With Roh's term having come to an end and sunshine policy in perceived need of a makeover, the question arises to what degree the next government will continue to pursue a positive policy toward North Korea. Much depends on the outcome of the election, which pits three main candidates against one another, each with a different vision of how to engage with the issue of their northerly neighbor. With Lee Myung-bak of the conservative Grand National Party looking likely to secure victory, however, a stricter policy based on conditionalities and realistic expectations would seem to be in the offing. Notwithstanding the expected result of the election, an aim of this paper is to highlight the range and depth of political and ideological divisions in the South regarding policy on North Korea, a phenomenon that is often ignored by Western observers. In so doing, this will better capture the domestic political dynamics in the North-South relationship, a relationship that is vital for stability on the Korean Peninsula and for wider Northeast Asia.

This paper starts with an overview of the decade-long sunshine policy before describing the backdrop to the upcoming December 19 election, and introducing the main candidates. The second section offers an analysis of the

¹ This was derived from the analogy of sunshine being more effective than strong wind in peacefully assisting North Korea out of its isolation. See Hyun-Chool Lee, "The Ideological Dispositions of Koreans," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 37, 4 (November 2007), p.493

three main candidates' policies on North Korea, with a particular focus on the issues of North Korea's nuclear weapons and economic cooperation; these issues are closely interlinked and most likely to continue to dominate inter-Korean relations during the next administration. After comparing the policies of the main contenders in the South Korean presidential election, the paper concludes with a more general look ahead to the potential implications of the election result.

Ten Years of Sunshine

Kim Dae-jung's victory in the presidential election on December 18, 1997 represented a milestone in South Korean politics in more ways than one: with the first ever transfer of power to the opposition, a president hailing from Cholla region (south-west Korea) traditionally marginalized from the centre of power, and a politician who had been, since as early as 1970, campaigning for reunification, Kim's presidency broke the mould of previous governments.² Accordingly, it also spelled a new period for inter-Korean relations with the launch of the "recognition and cooperation policy,"³ known by its more popular name as the "sunshine policy."

Although the sunshine policy was a departure both in vision and scope from previous foreign policy toward North Korea pursued by successive South Korean governments, it nonetheless had antecedents in earlier efforts by Seoul to engage the North. Short periods of thawing relations and increasing exchanges sporadically punctuated the 70s, 80s, and 90s, in what was otherwise a largely antagonistic relationship. A notable development did occur in the signing of the Basic Agreement⁴—ratified in February 1992—but

² Gabriel Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation, Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), pp.58-60; Aidan Foster-Carter, "History" in *The Republic of Korea, Europa Regional Surveys of the World, The Far East and Australasia, 2007* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.594

³ Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *Peace and Cooperation, White Paper on Korean Unification 2001*, (Ministry of Unification: Republic of Korea, 2001) pp.24-26

⁴ The Basic Agreement laid out principles of reconciliation, non-aggression, and exchanges between the two Koreas. "Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation Between the South and North," <<http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/agreements/CanKor-VTK-1991-12-13-agreement-on-reconciliation-non-aggressionexchanges.pdf>>(accessed December 3, 2007)

a more sustainable improvement continued to be dogged by negative incidents and the lack of progress in the political sphere.⁵

By comparison, the decade-old sunshine policy has proven to be far more successful, at least in terms of consistency and duration, and has become a significant chapter in the history of inter-Korean relations, having spanned, and also defined to a large extent, the incumbency of two South Korean administrations: those of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Over the course of the past ten years, two historic inter-Korean summits have taken place (the most recent on October 2-4, 2007), various economic and socio-cultural exchanges have been realized, and relations have been maintained, if somewhat undermined, in spite of the North Korean nuclear issue and the Bush administration's hard-line policy.

Indeed, having overcome initial suspicion of the South's sudden overtures in its sunshine policy, Pyongyang went so far as to declare in 2003 that: "It can be said that there exists on the Korean Peninsula at present only confrontation between the Koreans in the North and the South *and* the United States."⁶ Although no doubt intended to disparage the U.S., it is nonetheless an indicator of how far relations have improved between the two Koreas.

Objectives and Principles

To look at the sunshine policy in more detail, it can be described as a "gradual coaxing" of North Korea out of its isolation. Underpinning the policy was a realization that the North Korean system, whatever its weaknesses, was not likely to collapse soon and that any collapse would, in any case, have severe repercussions for the South. As the 2001 White Paper on Korean Unification declared, "...the best and most practical way to preserve peace on the Korean Peninsula, improve inter-Korean relations and move forward toward unification would be to provide a favorable environment for North Korea to change by itself, while assuring stable

⁵ The Basic Agreement was, however, not binding and was soon undermined by worsening relations in light of North Korea's nuclear program. Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, pp.55-58

⁶ Joint New Year Editorial (2003) of *Rodong Sinmun*, *Joseon Immingun*, and *Chongnyong Jonwi* cited in Samuel S. Kim, *Demystifying North Korea, North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War World* (Strategic Studies Institute: 2007), p.76

management of the national division.”⁷ Ruling out armed provocation and unification with the North through absorption, Kim Dae-jung declared reconciliation and cooperation to be the central tenet of his policy.⁸

The implementation of the sunshine policy got off to a quick start with the delivery of 500 cows and, more significantly, a meeting between Hyundai’s founder, Chung Ju-yung, and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il⁹ that launched the Mt. Kumgang tourist project.¹⁰ Cooperation was subsequently concretized in several sets of activities including promoting family reunions, providing food and humanitarian assistance, and encouraging international cooperation.¹¹ Of greater significance has been the expansion of political dialogue, there having been over 20 rounds of ministerial talks between the two sides since 2000. The expansion of economic relations has been as equally noteworthy with South Korean businessmen taking advantage of North Korean labor in showcase projects such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a special administrative district in North Korea for economic collaboration, with 22 South Korean firms employing 13,000 North Korean workers.¹²

Decoupling economics from politics, the sunshine policy has aimed to not hold issues of aid, trade, and investment hostage to the imposition of conditions or requirements. While this has certainly facilitated exchanges and cooperation, it has also been perceived to be one of the main failings of the policy.¹³

⁷ Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *Peace and Cooperation White Paper on Korean Unification 2001*, pp.20-23

⁸ Kim Dae-jung, “Nobel lecture”, December 10, 2000 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2000/dae-jung-lecture.html> (accessed December 3, 2007)

⁹ Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, pp.61-62

¹⁰ Mt. Kumgang is a beautiful mountain located just within the North Korean border and has been a popular tourist attraction for South Koreans, with over 1 million visitors since 1998. “Mt. Kumgang Draws One Million Tourists” <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/2005/dprk-050609-kcna01.htm>> (accessed December 3, 2007)

¹¹ Norman D. Levin, Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea, The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2003) available on internet at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs_reports/MR1555/> pp.26-30 (accessed November 25, 2007)

¹² Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report South Korea, May 2007, pp.4-7

¹³ Levin and Han, *Sunshine in Korea*, pp.24, 29

Success But No Change

Notwithstanding the improvement in relations, South Korea's sunshine policy has been tarnished by the lack of conditionality in its dealings with North Korea, particularly in the provision of economic aid. In the lead up to the first North-South summit in 2000, for instance, it was later confirmed that the Hyundai group, which helped to arrange Kim Dae-jung's historic visit, paid \$500 million to the North.¹⁴ While the money has poured into North Korea, with a five-fold increase in inter-Korean trade between 1998-2005 to \$1 billion,¹⁵ providing the North with a major source of hard currency, critics fail to spot any evidence of broader change in North Korea; and yet this has been one of the sunshine policy's main objectives. Not only has Kim Jong-il failed to repay a visit to Seoul but, with a seemingly absolute grip on power, the regime has pressed ahead with its nuclear program, culminating with the explosion of a nuclear device in October 2006. By not tying aid and investment to good North Korean behavior, critics have accused the South Korean government of directly shoring up Kim Jong-il's regime and have even gone as far as saying that, "unconditional aid to the North only resulted in the explosion of the [North Korean] atomic bomb."¹⁶

Whereas Kim Dae-jung received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, many in South Korea take the cynical view that he personally benefited more from sunshine policy, which although seen as a good idea, is claimed to have been falsely implemented. Consequently, this had led many South Koreans to question the effectiveness of the existing government's policy in bringing about change. Though these attitudes already existed by the end of Kim's tenure in 2002, they have been further hardened by the North's nuclear program. His successor Roh Moo-hyun has, in his "Policy for Peace and Prosperity," tried to structure the policy better (or raising the matter at least) through linking rice and other economic aid to progress on the nuclear issue

¹⁴ "500 Million US Dollars sent to DPRK: Hyundai Chairman," *People's Daily*, 17/02/03, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200302/17/eng20030217_111775.shtml> (accessed December 3, 2007)

¹⁵ Kim, *Demystifying North Korea*, pp.76-77

¹⁶ Hyong Joo-pyo cited by Scott Bruce and Timothy Savage, "Ain't No Sunshine When He's Gone? The Future of Engagement after the ROK Presidential Election," July 26, 2007, Nautilus Institute, <<http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/o7055Sav-ageo7055Bruce.html>> (accessed November 26, 2007)

and by setting dates and deadlines in implementing programs;¹⁷ in essence, however, it remains the same policy that has granted greater concessions than has issued demands.

Ten years after the inception of the sunshine policy Korea is no closer to unification; this in spite of a survey conducted in 2000 that showed that 43.8% of people believed Korea would be reunited within ten years.¹⁸ In the knowledge that time is running out for his government, Roh has, in the last few months, pushed resolutely ahead in trying to keep the sunshine policy on track: such as the signing of the North-South declaration on October 4, subsequently formulated in a North Korea program for 2008 to 2012¹⁹ dominated by economic aid, the implementation of which will fall under the next administration's purview.²⁰ However, attempts to shape the next government's policy belie the fact that a new harder-edged realism has seeped in among a wary electorate that displays deep divisions between conservative and liberal blocs in Korean society, under which fall differing opinions over how to engage with the North. Pitching into the ideological contest, well-known columnist Kim Dae-joong of the *Chosun Ilbo* asserts, "An opportunistic closing of eyes to the North Koreans' plight and the despotic nature of the regime from selfish motives threatens the identity of the Right."²¹ Moreover, with sunshine policy being identified as a policy of the liberal ruling party, and so the chief beneficiary of such, other parties have pledged to tread a different path.

¹⁷ Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report South Korea, May 2007, pp.4-7

¹⁸ This was based on a poll of high-school students in 2000 at the height of the sunshine policy's "success." By 2002, in other polls, the figure had dropped significantly. Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, pp.196, 211-12

¹⁹ The program outlines the principles and goals of the inter-Korean relationship for 2008-2012 which, for example, envisages permanent economic cooperation missions in Seoul and Pyongyang among other things. "Outgoing Gov't Projects Grand N. Korea Program," *Chosun Ilbo*, November 23, 2007, <<http://english.chosun.com.com/w21data/html/news/200711/200711230008.html>>(accessed November 23, 2007)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kim Dae-joong, "The Real Choice We Must Make," *Chosun Ilbo*, December 3, 2007 <<http://english.chosun.com.com/w21data/html/news/200712/200712030009.html>>(accessed December 4, 2007)

December 19 Election: The Contenders ²²

In comparison to the last two presidential elections which were close-run affairs with the liberal Uri party narrowly emerging as victors, the conservatives under Lee Myung-bak of the Grand National Party look likely to regain power after a decade away from the helm. A recent opinion poll had Lee at 39.2% of the vote, with his closest rival trailing with 18%.²³ The gap has been closing, however, with observers speculating that Lee had perhaps peaked too early. Serious allegations of bribery and corruption have also been levelled at him that have dented his approval ratings.

Nonetheless as the frontrunner with credentials as former Mayor of Seoul and CEO of Hyundai Engineering and Construction, Lee Myung-bak has carved out his electoral campaign on a strong economic platform. Under his campaign-banner of the “Korea 747 vision,” he has pledged to achieve seven percent economic growth, 40,000 dollar per capita income, and make South Korea the seventh largest economy in the world.²⁴ Lee has tapped into popular discontent with how Roh Moo-Hyun’s government has handled the “sluggish” economy with a restrictive business environment, high unemployment, and low growth rates.²⁵ Although not as prominent on North Korea policy, Lee Myung-bak has nonetheless criticized the sunshine policy of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun as tantamount to “appeasement,” making it clear that future South Korean aid and cooperation would be made contingent on tangible moves by North Korea to dismantle all of its nuclear weapons. He has also stressed the need to improve relations with the United States after the Roh administration’s neglect of the over fifty-year old alliance.²⁶ Interestingly, however, it would appear that he has

²² There are 12 candidates running in the presidential election in total with three main contenders

²³ “No Change in Ranking a Week Into Presidential Campaign,” *Chosun Ilbo*, December 3, 2007, <http://english.chosun.com/w2ldata/html/news/200712/200712030015.html> (accessed December 3, 2007)

²⁴ South Korea has currently the world’s 12th largest economy, “[stars] 10 Surprises of Korea (1950-2007),” October 23, 2007, *The Korea Times*, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/10/116_12432.html>(accessed December 6)

²⁵ Official website of Lee Myung-bak, “747 Vision,” <<http://english.mtplaza.net/default/korea/?type=html/747&m=2&wgrp=42>> (accessed November 16, 2007)

²⁶ Lee Myung-bak, “A New Horizon and Creative Reconstruction of Korean Foreign Policy,” February 6, 2007 <<http://english.mtplaza.net/default/media/?type=brd&LxID=data&page+1&mpart=&wgrp=27&FD=media&category=&m=1&&field=&keyword=&mode=read&uid=3>> (accessed December 3, 2007)

since toned down his hard-line rhetoric against North Korea in favor of leaving his options open.

His closest rival, Lee Hoi-chang, a former presidential candidate for the Grand National Party (GNP) in the last two elections now running as an independent and distancing himself from Lee Myung-bak's "vague" North Korea policy, has tapped into right-wing opinion and has accused the current government of coddling North Korea. Both candidates have come under intense criticism from Kim Jong-il, furthermore, (with Kim Dae-jung also trumping up the dangers), who has even threatened war should the conservatives come to power.²⁷ Despite the scaremongering, North Korea is certainly worried about a more hostile anti-North Korean policy. The third candidate, Chung Dong-young, former unification minister under Roh Moo-hyun and leader of the newly formed United New Democratic Party, is pro-reconciliation and has billed himself as the "peace candidate," seeing himself as the natural successor to the previous two administrations.²⁸

The election will spell verdict on a decade-long policy of reconciliation, but it would be misleading to view the election as being dominated by the North Korean factor; indeed Clinton's famous riposte "it's the economy, stupid" would seem equally to apply to the bread and butter priorities of the South Korean electorate. Notwithstanding this, the issue of North Korea will continue to remain an ever-present factor in the next government's calculations, and one that cannot be ignored. The three candidates represent three different visions of how to engage with the issue of their northern neighbour, with frontrunner Lee Myung-bak most likely to shape a more sober, post-sunshine North Korea policy. A more detailed analysis is given in the following section.

²⁷ Ryu Geun-il, "When will Conservative Face the Real Issues, *Chosun Ilbo*, November 27, 2007, <<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200711/200711270010.html>>(accessed December 3, 2007)

²⁸ Donald Kirk, "Korean Race pitting capitalism against conscience," *Asia Times Online*, October 20, 2007, <<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/IJ20Dgo2.html>> (accessed November 12, 2007)

The Pragmatist:²⁹ Lee Myung-bak

Lee Myung-bak's foreign policy platform was announced on February 6, 2007, when competing for the presidential nomination of the GNP.³⁰ Called the "MB doctrine," in reference to his initials, the doctrine outlines three main goals:

1. The denuclearization of North Korea leading to a strategic "opening-up policy toward North Korea."
2. The realization of "pragmatic diplomacy" based on national interest and not on political ideology.
3. The reaffirmation of the South Korea-U.S. alliance, and the strengthening of common values and mutual interest on the basis of their traditional friendship.³¹

Accordingly, North Korea's dismantlement of its nuclear program is at the core of Lee's foreign policy, having stated repeatedly that a North Korea with nuclear weapons is unacceptable. In order to achieve this goal, Lee Myung-bak has outlined the "Denuclearization and Opening 3000" policy:³² conceived of as a two-stage process, the policy envisages that North Korea first denuclearize *before* South Korea responds in kind with "opening-up." Resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem is, therefore, seen as a prerequisite to the success of any policy. This is an obvious break with the sunshine policy that has continued in spite of the North's development of nuclear weapons.

To look at the "Opening 3000" aspect of the policy in more detail, it is clear that the purpose of such is to serve as an incentive to induce North Korea to

²⁹ The names given to Lee Myung-bak and Lee Hoi-chang are given according to their campaign slogans, translated from Korean. See <<http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=2007120701033230680017>> (accessed December 7, 2007)

³⁰ Tong Kim, "Lee Myung-bak's Foreign Policy," *The Korea Times*, December 2, 2007, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2007/12/137_14766.html>(accessed December 4, 2007)

³¹ Official website of Lee Myung-bak, "Pledge Briefing: Foreign Policy and National Security, 'MB Doctrine'-Korea's 7 Tasks of Foreign Policy and Principles" <<http://www.mbplaza.net/default/korea/?type=brd&LxID=policy&page=1&mpart=&wgrp=31&FD=korea&category=외교안보&m=&&field=&keyword=&mode=read&uid=35764>>(accessed November 30, 2007)

³² Official website of Lee Myung-bak, "Pledge Briefing: Foreign Policy and National Security: 'MB Doctrine'(using his initials), 'Denuclearization & Opening 3000' and '5 Priority Projects,' <<http://www.mbplaza.net/default/korea/?type=brd&LxID=policy&page=2&mpart=&wgrp=31&FD=korea&category=&m=3&&field=&keyword=&mode=read&uid=357633>> (accessed December 3, 2007)

abandon its nuclear weapons. Once this is done, Lee pledges that South Korea will help the North to achieve the following:

- Transform North Korea's economy into a more export-oriented one
- Attain an annual economic growth rate of 15-20%
- Raise annual per capita income from \$500 (the current level) to \$3000 in ten years.

In order to achieve the above objectives, a comprehensive package is envisaged comprised of five key projects outlined below:³³

1. **【Economy】** Development of 100 South Korean companies with an export sales potential of over \$ 3 million each to invest in North Korea
2. **【Education】** Education of 300,000 economists, financial, and technological personnel in North Korea
3. **【Finance】** Creation of an international cooperation fund worth \$40billion for the development of North Korea's economy
4. **【Infrastructure】** Construction of Seoul- Sinuiju express highway
5. **【Welfare】** Support of welfare in North Korea for decent human life

Lee Myung-bak's policy is a significant departure from the Grand National Party's previous hardline policy, the "Vision for Peace on the Korean Peninsula,"³⁴ in that Lee has proposed the delivery of a substantial economic package to North Korea, as outlined above. As such, Lee has associated himself with a "thorough and flexible" approach:³⁵ thorough in demanding North Korea's nuclear dismantlement and flexible in offering generous economic aid. Notwithstanding the fact that many South Koreans see the announcement of an economic package as towing a more concessionary line, it could be argued that his stated policy is in fact *inflexible*; that it is a "policy toward North Korea only *after* denuclearization" rather than a policy based on a mutual process of reciprocity. Notably, he also fails to propose alternatives or countermeasures should his economic package fail to be sufficient incentive for North Korea to dismantle its program. Certain steps,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Although soft-sounding, the "Vision for Peace on the Korean Peninsula" outlined the GNP's hardline policy on communist North Korea based on strict reciprocity.

³⁵ "Urgency Policy Discussion: 'Lee Myung-bak's Denuclearization and Opening 3000,'" Yoyindo Institute, November 13, 2007 <<http://shell.windows.com/fileassoc/0409/xml/redir.asp?EXT=hwp>> (accessed December 6, 2007)

however, indicate that he is softening his stance, as described above with the economic policy, and by the fact that he has pledged that humanitarian aid may be provided to Pyongyang without denuclearization first. The shift toward a more ambiguous middle-ground could be deliberate so as to entice voters. It is also possible, moreover, that his “flexible” approach will extend to compromising and reciprocating earlier, especially if North Korea demonstrates progress.

The Principled Candidate: Lee Hoi-chang

Out of the three main candidates, Lee Hoi-chang, former leader of the GNP but now running as an independent, is the most hardline on North Korea. He calls for the “re-formulation of North Korea policy” with a particular focus on human rights improvement and the “restoration of the Korea-U.S. alliance.”³⁶ He judges the sunshine and peace and prosperity policies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun to have failed on account of North Korea’s successful nuclear test. He has also expressed criticism of Lee Myung-bak’s wavering policy on North Korea, saying that it is “no different from sunshine policy.”³⁷

Lee Hoi-chang believes that it is impossible to trust North Korea as it has repeatedly broken rules, agreements, and laws in regard to the conduct of its nuclear program. Therefore, he asserts any policy should *not* be based on a misplaced sense of goodwill that has seen North Korea “take” far too much, but rather on a strict reciprocity that fulfills the South’s demands in return. His two main demands are: 1) the complete dismantlement of North Korea’s nuclear program and 2) the opening up of North Korea’s political and economic system, a main purpose of his policy being the fundamental change of North Korea.³⁸ In return, he has pledged to assist the North in solving its economic crisis, but only when the criteria above have been fulfilled.

³⁶ “Lee Hoi-chang; I’m Doing It for Democracy,” *Chosun Ilbo*, November 8, 2007, <<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200711/200711080007.html>>(accessed December 1, 2007)

³⁷ “Lee Myung-bak’s North Korea policy is too ‘vague’ to prevent a North Korean nuclear disaster or usher in the genuine settlement of peace on the Korean Peninsula,” Lee Hoi-chang quoted by *The Korea Times*, November 7, 2007, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/11/116_13272.html>(accessed December 3, 2007)

³⁸ “Lee Hoi-chang; I’m Doing It for Democracy,” *Chosun Ilbo*, November 8, 2007

However, the details of any economic aid package, should this occur, are not clearly addressed.

While pledging to continue humanitarian assistance, he has outlined the rudiments of a policy that would target the lack of progress made on human rights issues in North Korea. He also strongly advocates the repatriation of South Korean abductees and war prisoners as well as making greater diplomatic efforts to bring North Korean refugees to South Korea.³⁹ The former issue is a delicate one, with the North having threatened to walk out during a round of talks last April upon mention of POWs and abductees.⁴⁰

While he lacks a comprehensive program on North Korea, it is clear that Lee Hoi-chang defines his policy as being in contrast to the existing administration's policy. He and his supporters have strongly abhorred the seemingly free flow of cash to the North Korean regime, and he has strongly criticized the outcome of the Second North-South Summit in October, 2007 as a failure, rejecting the provision of unconditional economic aid to North Korea.⁴¹

The Peacemaker: Chung Dong-young

Chung Dong-young, as the leader of the United New Democratic Party, advocates a comprehensive approach to North Korea based on peaceful coexistence. As unification minister under Roh Moo-hyun, Chung inherited the legacy of Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy and paved the way for inter-Korean economic cooperation such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Accordingly, Chung insists on maintaining his predecessors' policies, with a focal point on the expansion of cooperation.

Although Chung also sees the nuclear issue as a thorn in inter-Korean relations, the means of achieving denuclearization are placed on a different basis to the other two candidates. The following are his main pledges:⁴²

³⁹ Official website of Lee Hoi-chang, "Policy 5 New Relations between South and North," <<http://www.leehc.org/policy.do?cmd=view&boardId=12&type=1>>(accessed December 2, 2007)

⁴⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report South Korea, May 2007, p.4

⁴¹ Kim Hyun, "Major S. Korean presidential candidate divided on N. Korea policy," *Yonhap News*, December 10 <<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/nation/2007/12/10/73/0301000000 AEN 2007/209002/00 31 SF.HTML>> (accessed December 10)

⁴² Official website of Chung Dong-yong, "20 Key Policies: 18. Nuclear and Peace Treaty issue" <<http://www.cdy21.net/bbs/viewbody.asp?code=twoBoard&page=1&id=19&number=19&key field=&keyword=&category=&BoardType=&admin=>>(accessed December 1, 2007)

1. Peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear problem through the Six-Party Talks
2. Try to complete the nuclear abandonment of North Korea during his term, in cooperation with related nations.
3. Establish ties between North Korea-Japan and the U.S. to dismantle the Cold War structure, so as to aid the resolution of the North Korea nuclear problem in Northeast Asia.
4. Institutionalization and regularization of Inter-Summit Talks between North and South Korea and to hold a third Inter-Korean Summit at the beginning of his term in 2008.
5. Reform of the South Korean army
 - 1) Promote phased reduction of the armed forces
 - 2) Abolish reserve force system and change into the form of a volunteer reserve force
6. Create a “special peace and cooperation zone in the West Sea”
7. Develop the Demilitarized Zone into a peace park

Rather than unconditionally demand North Korea give up its nuclear program *per se*, Chung insists on a more conciliatory approach based on peaceful negotiations as the most effective means. Reducing threat perceptions and introducing confidence-building measures can also be seen through the above proposals to reform the army and establish a peace park. His ultimate aim is to open “the grand era of the Korean peninsula”⁴³ by making a peace accord with North Korea, the two nations technically being still at war with each other.

Chung asserts that peace is a fundamental stepping stone for developing the economy and, as such, he strives for the “creation of a common economic bloc of the two Koreas based on a permanent peace mechanism on the Peninsula.”⁴⁴ In thus doing, he does not propose to hold economic cooperation hostage to the rigid fulfillment of certain conditions. Instead he envisions progress on the nuclear issue side-by-side with developing economic relations. Maintaining that economic growth on the Korean

⁴³ “North Korea policies stay out of limelight,” *The Korea Herald*, December 3, 2007

⁴⁴ “Chung Dong-young Vows to Become Leader of Unity,” *The Korea Times*, October 29, 2007, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/10/113_12726.html>(accessed December 3, 2007).

Peninsula can be best achieved through combining the natural resources and labor force of the North with the capital and technology of the South, he proposes to implement an ambitious economic program upon coming to power.⁴⁵

A chief vow by Chung has been to expand the joint industrial complex in Kaesung,⁴⁶ resolving existing problems of passage, communications, and customs, and to create additional special economic zones in areas such as Sinuiju, Wonsan, Chongjin, Najin, and Seonbong as well as expanding profitable businesses such as shipbuilding and promoting non-governmental investment in North Korea. There is also a focus on transportation and logistics infrastructure, with his vision of a “Grand Railway on the Korean Peninsula,” which would see the linking of South Korea’s second-largest city Pusan with Paris and Mokpo with Berlin via the Trans-Siberian railway, among others.⁴⁷ The significance of this is that the railways would run through North Korea, thus for the first time providing South Korea with an overland link to Asia and Europe.

In sum, Chung’s policies indicate a strong continuation with those of his predecessors. The policy is based only on one scenario, however: that relations will continue to improve. More cautious opinion in South Korea is skeptical that the North will give up its nuclear weapons and question the rationality of his strong economic support policy, particularly if North Korea should continually fail to deliver.

Divided South Korean Opinion

Focusing on the two core issues of North Korea’s nuclear program and economic cooperation, there are clear differences as well as similarities between the three candidates’ thinking. While all are clear on the need for North Korea’s nuclear disarmament, Chung Dong-young does not view it as

⁴⁵ “Main Candidates’ North Korea Policy,” *KUKI News*, November 27, 2007 <[http:// www.kukinews.com/news/article/view.asp?page=1&gCode=kmi&arcid=0920731979&cp=nv](http://www.kukinews.com/news/article/view.asp?page=1&gCode=kmi&arcid=0920731979&cp=nv)>(accessed December 6, 2007)

⁴⁶ Chung is also striving for the acceptance of goods coming from Kaesung to be included in the terms of the ratification of the South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Official website of Chung Dong-young, “20 Key Policies: 18. Nuclear and Peace Treaty issue” <<http://www.cdy21.net/bbs/viewbody.asp?code=twoBoard&page=1&id=19&number= 19 &key field=&keyword=&category=&BoardType=&admin=>>>(accessed December 1, 2007)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

a precursor to cooperation, while Lee Hoi-chang has unequivocally stated that not only this but more fundamental change in North Korea must be first achieved before any economic policy or conciliation can succeed. Lee Myung-bak, on the other hand, retains a vaguer policy that, although necessitating North Korea's nuclear dismantlement, leaves options open for cooperation depending on the North Korean "attitude."

In large part, the three candidates' approaches reflect divisions within the South Korean electorate that are also ideological and generational in nature. Lee Myung-bak has won popularity from a majority of the electorate concerned about the state of the domestic economy. On North Korea, meanwhile, he seems to have shifted his position somewhat in consideration of public support for the results of the Second Inter-Korean Summit and rapid progress in the Six-Party Talks. He also seems to be haunted by the fact that Lee Hoi-chang lost two presidential elections, partly because he maintained a rigid stance in his policy toward North Korea. By pursuing his present policy, he hopes to outflank the "extreme" positions of his two rivals and so appeal to the middle ground. This is in contrast to Lee Hoi-chang who is a strong conservative hardliner that draws support for his policies typically from an older generation with right-wing sympathies—hardened by the Korean War and decades of hostile relations—and adamantly opposed ideologically to the two previous Liberal administrations. Chung Dong-young, on the other hand, is more popular with people from the younger generation who have grown up under the optimism of the sunshine policy, and draws support also from voters in the region of Cholla in southwest Korea—the same region as Kim Dae-jung comes from and renowned for its "different mentality." In sum, Lee Hoi-chang and Chung Dong-young represent two sides of a liberal versus conservative dichotomy in South Korea; it is important to remember though that attitudes toward North Korea only form one element of the above dichotomy, which includes a whole range of policy issues.⁴⁸

Given the fractures in South Korean society and politics, there is obvious need for a consensus position. The fact that Lee Myung-bak comes from a traditionally hardline background with strong economic credentials, but, at

⁴⁸ See, for example, Hyun-Chool Lee, "The Ideological Disposition of Koreans," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*

the same time, offers greater flexibility than Lee Hoi-chang on North Korea may help to attract conservatives as well as liberals critical of the flawed successes of unfettered sunshine.

Conclusion

The change of party in government in many cases heralds fresh ideas and a discontinuation of old ones. Accordingly, many people predicted in the last presidential election in 2002 that the departure of Kim Dae-jung would bring an end to the sunshine policy. With Roh Moo-hyun's narrow victory, however, this proved not to be the case. Again five years later, on the eve of another election, the same question mark hangs over the next administration's policy. Unless, however, Chung Dong-young manages an unlikely victory, given that he is trailing by more than 20% in the opinion polls, it would appear that a conservative party under the leadership of Lee Myung-bak will come to power.

North Korea's state-run newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun*, allegedly declared back in January that a GNP victory in December's presidential election could "lead to the horrors of war."⁴⁹ In spite of such noisy warnings, with North Korea understandably worried about the possible end of the sunshine policy, Kim Jong-il will find that he will most likely have to deal with a conservative South Korean government. A decade of economic exchanges and inter-Korean meetings will not be undone overnight and would be damaging for North Korea. Similarly, South Korea's next leader cannot choose to ignore the progress in the improvement of relations that has been made. A majority of people in South Korea applaud the principle of the sunshine policy—if not the way it has been implemented—that has created new peaceful relations with North Korea based on engagement and mutual growth, which has been bolstered by international cooperation in the Six-Party Talks and the signing of the February 13 Agreement. A realization of the above is evident in Lee Myung-bak's current campaign with the prospect that he is likely to engage with North Korea, should he be elected, and may maintain the agreement of

⁴⁹ "It's Springtime for Kim Jong-il in GNP's eyes," *Joong Ang Daily*, March 15, 2007, http://gopkorea.blogs.com/south_korean_politics/2007/03/its_springtime_.html (accessed December 5, 2007)

economic packages which Roh Moo-hyun signed with North Korea at the Inter-Korean summit in October 2007.

It is clear, furthermore, that the United States will play a determining role in inter-Korean relations. While Lee Myung-bak places priority on the U.S.-South Korea alliance and had maintained a tough stance over North Korea that coincided with the hard-line approach of the Bush administration, Bush's abrupt turnaround in policy with even the eventual possibility (however slim) of the normalization of relations between the U.S. and North Korea means that South Korea is not likely to suddenly abandon its current policy. Indeed, it should be recognized that both countries cannot carry out effective policies toward North Korea without pulling in the same direction. Turning back the tide of progress therefore would risk being both anachronistic and counterproductive: continuity in purpose is required.

The above is not to say that South Korea's future policy on North Korea won't be subject to greater scrutiny and more judicious implementation. Greater reciprocity and transparency is needed on behalf of the North Korean regime. For its part, South Korea needs to exercise greater oversight of the allocation of funds and economic aid and incorporate it into more strategic programs. Undoubtedly, tough times ahead await, and North Korea's nuclear dismantlement may yet face many hitches, but tweaking and adapting *not* abandoning or undermining the previous administration's policies would seem the best path forward for South Korea's next government.

About the Authors

Dr. Sangsoo Lee is a Research Fellow with the project on Conflict Management and Energy in Northeast Asia at the Institute for Security and Development Policy. He holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Northeast Asian Studies from Peking University.

Alec Forss is a Junior Research Fellow and Publications Editor at the Institute for Security and Development Policy. He holds an M.A. in International Studies from Uppsala University and has previously published an article on the subject of a peace park in the DMZ between North and South Korea.