

## Summary

This is a summary of the keynote address given by Dr. Sung-Joo Han, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, at the "Preparing for a Peaceful Unification of Korea" Conference on November 13, 2015.

This summary does not reflect any official position by EAI and it may differ from the opinion of a discussant. This summary was prepared by Benjamin A. Engel.

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# The Diplomacy of Korean Unification: Positives and Negatives Reasons, Policies

Sung-Joo Han, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Dr. Sung-Joo Han, delivered the keynote address at the "Preparing for a Peaceful Unification of Korea" international conference which was organized by the East Asia Institute and co-hosted by the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation and the Ministry of Unification. Dr. Han's speech entitled "The Diplomacy of Korean Unification: Positives and Negatives Reasons, Policies" began by outlining the similarities and differences between the divisions of Germany and Korea and also the historical phases of inter-Korean relations. Then Dr. Han proceeded to outline the policies and interests of the United States, Japan, Russia, and China regarding the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Dr. Han gave special attention to China due to its relatively large influence over North Korea and its deep interest in unification given its immediate proximity to the Korean Peninsula.

Dr. Han argued that there are three similarities between the division of Germany and that of Korea. First, both divisions occurred following the end of World War II and separate regions were occupied by different Allied powers. Secondly, these divided regions became fields of East-West confrontation during the Cold War. Finally, in both cases, surrounding powers were not eager to see the fragmented countries unite and feared a

stronger unified nation.

On the other hand, Dr. Han believes there are five differences between the two cases. First, Korea was inflicted with a case of the "victim complex" while Germany suffered from a "guilt complex." In essence, Korea believed its division to be unjustified while Germany believed that they themselves bore responsibility for their division due to their actions prior to and during World War II. Second, the level of the security threat posed by competing regions to the other during division was different. Due to the control and protection of the Soviet Union, East Germany posed no serious threat to West Germany on its own, while North Korea is and was a constant security threat to South Korea. Third, the youth and leftists in Korea exerted the most effort towards unification while the older generations and conservative elements of society are relatively subdued. Fourth, West Germany was an important member and active participant in many international and security organizations such as the European Community and NATO, while South Korea was largely dependent on the U.S. for security and is a member of no regional organizations or communities. Fifth and finally, East Germany's main protector and benefactor, the Soviet Union, was in a state of rapid decline and fragmentation when unification occurred. Conversely, North Korea's main ally, China, is enjoying a rapid

rise to power and remains under effective one party rule.

Dr. Han then proceeded to outline the historical phases of inter-Korean relations. The first phase (1953-1960) was characterized by internal recuperation from the Korean War and diplomatic competition for recognition by countries in the non-aligned bloc of states. The second phase (1960-1972) was filled with small-scale provocations and periodic larger-scale incidents such as the raid on the Presidential mansion by North Korean commandos and the capture of the USS Pueblo that took place over the course of three days in January 1968. The third phase (1972-1984) was one of co-existence and highlighted by the “Joint Declaration of July 4, 1972.” The fourth phase (1984-1992) was, despite being touched off by the attempted assassination of then President Chun Doo Hwan in Rangoon, Burma, full of dialogues that unfortunately could not overcome distrust between the two Koreas. The fifth stage (1993-1998) was marred by the issue of North Korea’s nuclear weapons. The sixth stage (1999-2008) is that of the “Sunshine Policy” introduced by Kim Dae-Jung and continued by Roh Moo-Hyun and involved efforts to promote peace, improve economic conditions in North Korea, and open up North Korea to the outside world. The seventh and final stage (2009 - ) began with the election of the conservative Lee Myung-Bak who introduced a more balanced policy which was less unconditional, one-sided, and indulgent toward North Korea.

Dr. Han then questions whether it is possible or not to duplicate the experience of German unification on the Korean Peninsula. However, he argues that German unification may have provided North Korea with both incentives and means to prevent a similar process from occurring. Another issue is that the more South Korea aspires to see

unification realized, the stronger the refusals are from North Korea as it does not wish to see itself consumed and absorbed. A similar reaction is observed in South Korea when North Korea speaks of unification.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Han moves on to explore the interests of neighboring powers regarding the unification of Korea. All neighboring countries have incentives to both encourage unification and oppose it. For example, all four members of the six party talks other than the two Koreas (China, Russia, Japan, and the U.S.) would benefit from the removal of the North Korean nuclear threat and all could stand to benefit from increased economic relations with a unified Korea. But in the U.S. case, weakening of the rationale behind the U.S.-ROK alliance and the possibility of a unified Korea moving into the Chinese sphere of influence are some of the reasons Dr. Han points out as keeping the U.S. from outright supporting unification. For Japan, the emergence of a strong neighbor and the loss of rationale for rearming make unification less attractive. Russia, similarly to the U.S., also would not want to see a unified Korea become closer with China.

China is crucial to unification of the Korean Peninsula given its relatively large influence over North Korea. Dr. Han provides several reasons the Chinese would be positive towards unification including the weakening of U.S.-ROK alliance and the dissipation of the security threat on its border posed by potential war between the two Koreas. However there are many reasons China would be against unification including the loss of a buffer zone between itself and U.S. troops that may or may not leave after unification and the possibility of an influx of North Korean refugees, etc. China’s view of the U.S.-ROK military alliance is especially important and Dr. Han discussed this in a more detailed manner. He argues that China’s

initial tolerance of the U.S.-ROK alliance during the Cold War has largely withered away and it now views the alliance, along with the U.S.-Japan alliance, as targeting China. The Chinese are therefore wary of a unified Korea joining this multilateral alliance system. While China may believe the justification for a U.S. presence in Korea will diminish after unification, the U.S. believes that its role in a unification scenario is crucial regarding the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

With these issues in mind, Dr. Han describes six "red lines" China is unwilling to see crossed or demands China would make. The first is no U.S. troops north of the Demilitarized Zone and the second would be no new U.S. military bases north of the Demilitarized Zone. Third, U.S. should not have operational control over South Korean troop

activities in North Korea. Fourth, China would demand the sharing of "exclusive" information on North Korea. Fifth, nuclear weapons dismantlement should be supervised by international organizations. And finally, a unified Korea must pledge to be a nonnuclear weapon state.

Dr. Han concluded his keynote address stating that the active support of all concerned parties will be necessary and that South Korea must proactively consult and coordinate with all four major neighboring powers. Finally, he offers a list of selling points for unification: unification is the best way to solve the problem of nuclear weapons on the Peninsula; a unified Korea will surely contribute to peace and stability in the region; and finally a unified Korea would be an economic powerhouse that would contribute to expanding the economic scale and vitality of the region. ■