

Reinventing the Relationship Between the 2 Koreas

By [Park Geun-hye](#)

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On Feb. 12, North Korea carried out its third nuclear test in the run-up to the inauguration of a new administration in the South. Around that time, the Presidential Transition Committee adopted the "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula" as a key policy of the new administration. Though North Korea's nuclear test created pressure to revise the trust-building process, I made it clear that I would stay the course. Indeed, since its conception, the trust-building process has taken into account possible military provocations from North Korea and is intended specifically to break the vicious cycle of provocations followed by compromise and rewards to placate tensions.

The trust-building process was formulated to overcome the limitations of both appeasement and hardline policies: while the former depended entirely on the North's tenuous good faith, the latter implied only relentless pressure. The trust-building process, based on the strength of formidable deterrence, is intended to build sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula by making North Korea pay dearly for its aggressive acts while ensuring opportunities for change and assistance if it is willing to become a responsible member of the international

community.

Since the launch of my administration, North Korea has escalated its military threats and bellicose rhetoric against the South. Last April, the North took the extreme step of unilaterally barring South Korean workers from entering the Gaesong Industrial Complex, a symbol of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, and withdrawing all of its own workers.

Following the shutdown of the Gaesong facility, some suggested that the North be offered incentives through back-channel contacts to improve inter-Korean relations. But, aware that such contacts with the North had produced adverse effects in the past, I opted for a more transparent proposal for dialogue.

I repeatedly emphasized to North Korea that trust can be built only by cooperating on small but meaningful projects and abiding by our promises — and calling attention to problematic behaviors — along the way. I have also explained to the international community the credibility and necessity of anchoring our policy in the trust-building process, securing support from many countries.

North Korea finally came to the dialogue in mid-July and a month later agreed to normalize the operation of the Gaesong Industrial Complex in a constructive manner. As follow-up measures, a secretariat for the joint management of the complex was established, and government officials from the two Koreas began daily meetings. It was a small but significant step forward, considering that inter-Korean dialogue has been virtually nonexistent over the past five years, and that tensions stoked by the North reached a peak in the early days of my administration.

But there is still a long way to go to full normalization of the Gaesong facility, not to mention inter-Korean relations. The North remains lukewarm on the follow-up dialogue for passage of workers, communication and customs clearance.

Following the recent purge of Jang Song-thaek, known as the North's "second man," the political situation on the peninsula has spurred further concern among Koreans and the international community, serving as a reminder of how unpredictable the current situation is — and thus how difficult it has become to develop inter-Korean relations.

For the past 10 months, my government has sought to abide by international norms in implementing its North Korea policy, while trying to meet people's expectations. We will stick to these fundamental principles and set the following priorities for future North Korea policies.

First, we will pave the way to peace and unification on the Korean Peninsula. My government will maintain a strong deterrent capability because airtight security constitutes the foundation of genuine peace. From this point, the government will strive to forge sustainable peace through dialogue, exchanges and cooperation to achieve unification and improve the quality of life of all Koreans.

Korea will also work to consolidate cooperation with the international community in this process. Unification is certainly a matter for Koreans to decide, but it should be achieved with the support of neighboring countries, ensuring that unification benefits all parties in the

region.

Second, the government will endeavor to upgrade the trust-building process. To chip away at the deep-rooted suspicion between the two Koreas, we will work to strengthen inter-Korean dialogue and discuss matters prudentially while keeping promises on what is agreed.

My government will devise various measures to expand the scope of North-South dialogue and cooperation. And we will continue providing humanitarian assistance to the North, as well as maintaining efforts to hold reunions of separated families and to resolve the issue of prisoners of war and abductees who have been kept in the North.

In addition, we will increase the transparency of our North Korea policies. Of course, considering the nature of inter-Korean relations, not all matters can be disclosed in full detail. But providing as much accurate information as possible to the public is the best way to ensure firm popular support for these policies and their effective implementation.

Third, Korea will seek denuclearization of the North to pursue joint progress on the Korean Peninsula and across Northeast Asia. Indeed, inter-Korean relations can properly progress when the North forswears nuclear development and joins the South in a partnership based on mutual confidence.

If the North shows a firm commitment to denuclearization and takes practical steps to this end, we will take the lead in securing the international community's support for active assistance in the North's economic development. Furthermore, we will endeavor to help the peninsula progress together with our neighbors in the Northeast Asian region.

North Korea has recently shown interest in setting up special economic development zones. But no country including South Korea would invest in the North if it persists in nuclear development. If North Korea truly cares for its people, it must give up the unrealistic twin goals of nuclearization and economic development. Instead, it must abide by international norms and behave predictably if it is to get along with its neighbors and become a credible partner.

Bringing North Korea in from the cold is important to our foreign policy in a broader context as well. That is why I have proposed the Eurasian Initiative, which envisions connecting the Eurasian continent's divided logistics networks and removing obstacles that hinder exchanges to make the continent a viable single entity. Furthermore, it is linked to my plan for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. To make this Initiative succeed, the Korean Peninsula must be the first to dismantle the wall of distrust, for it is the gateway that links Eurasia and the Pacific.

The project to build a World Peace Park in the demilitarized zone that divides the Korean Peninsula could be a starting point. From here, neighboring countries together with the two Koreas must build trust and promote cooperation and disseminate such practices to other areas.

As such, the Korean Peninsula would be able to cast off its old role as a stumbling block and revive itself as a stepping-stone for peace in Eurasia and Northeast Asia.

Park Geun-hye is president of the Republic of Korea. © Project Syndicate

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