

Salvaging the Sunshine Policy

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Shortly before his election as South Korea's president in May 2017, candidate Moon Jae-in issued his most detailed North Korea policy statement. As president, he declared, he would "inherit" the engagement-based, inducements-oriented Sunshine Policy approach of Korea's only other progressive presidents, Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008)¹. Moon judged the North Korea policies of his immediate predecessors a failure; Presidents Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013-2017), both conservatives, had disagreed with key aspects of the Sunshine Policy and suspended the major inter-Korean projects undertaken by Kim and Roh. Moon's emphasis on incentives to Pyongyang contrasted with United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted during the preceding decade; far from offering inducements, the UNSC had imposed increasingly stringent sanctions on the regime in response to its accelerating pursuit of a full-fledged nuclear weapons capability. Moon also struck quite a different tone than the new Trump administration in Washington, which had only recently concluded a North Korea policy review and characterized its approach as one of "maximum pressure and engagement."²

This chapter assesses Moon's North Korea policy, its implementation during his initial year in office, and its prospects under difficult circumstances. It begins by reviewing the Sunshine Policy concept, its practice by previous progressive governments, and the significantly different approach of South Korea's succeeding conservative administrations. It then argues that Moon and many progressives continue to believe in the basic Sunshine Policy approach, even though, unlike when the policy was first formulated, North Korea now already has a limited nuclear weapons capability and may soon be able to credibly threaten the United States homeland with nuclear attack. It reviews how Moon, as president, has attempted to salvage the policy and how North Korea and other concerned countries have responded. The chapter concludes by considering the prospects for Moon's North Korea policy and offering recommendations to modify it to maximize the interests of both the ROK and the international community as a whole.

A Review of the Sunshine Policy Concept and Practice

The Sunshine Policy Concept

It was Kim Dae-jung who, in 1994, first used the term "Sunshine Policy" to refer to a particular approach to dealing with the many and varied problems that North Korea was already posing, including its suspected pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. Drawing on Aesop's fable of "The North Wind and the Sun," Kim argued that reassurance and suasion were the keys to changing Pyongyang's behavior and, ultimately, the system itself for the better. Pressure and sanctions, on the other hand, would only result in North Korea responding in kind (as the regime's propaganda machine itself had long vehemently asserted).

As explained by Moon Chung-in, a South Korean academic and senior North Korea policy adviser to all of South Korea's progressive presidents, including Moon Jae-in:

Kim's Sunshine Policy...was a strategic and holistic approach that aimed at genuine, long-term improvements in inter-Korean relations through the promotion of exchanges and co-operation, trust-building and peaceful co-existence. ...The

Sunshine Policy can be seen as a proactive policy to induce incremental and voluntary changes in North Korea for peace, opening, and reforms through a patient pursuit of reconciliation, exchanges, and co-operation.³

Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy

Although Kim first used the term “Sunshine Policy” very shortly after the United States signed the Agreed Framework with North Korea in Washington’s first major diplomatic effort to prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons, his basic thinking about North Korea had been formed long before. In 1994 Kim was already seventy years old and had been active in politics for a full four decades. He had first run for president in 1971, very nearly defeating the incumbent president, strongman Park Chung-hee. Having entered South Korean politics at age 30 in 1954, the year after the Korean War, Kim could not but have been deeply interested and concerned about national division and relations with Pyongyang.⁴

Kim’s views of North Korea were also shaped in part by his outsider status. He was not from the elite and did not attend college. He was the favorite son of southwestern Honam; the region’s residents felt alienated from the government of Park Chung-hee (1961-1979), who hailed from the rival southeastern Yeongnam region. Throughout Kim’s career, he belonged to a political camp that suffered serious oppression and that never held the country’s presidency until Kim’s own election in 1997. It is thus not particularly surprising that he inherited and further developed a different perspective on North Korea and related issues than that of most members of the country’s longtime conservative establishment.

Just as much of U.S. politics and policy even today can be traced back to divisions and debates from the Civil War and even earlier, South Korea’s politics also continue to be profoundly shaped by its modern history.⁵ Korea experienced violent ideological and institutional differences as the country’s leaders considered how to deal with the entry of western powers into East Asia and Japan’s related rise from about 1870. Different Korean factions supported alignment with different foreign powers to preserve their country’s independence. Japan’s forceful colonization of the country beginning in 1905 was enormously traumatic, forever politically tainting those Koreans who “collaborated” with the Japanese in the run-up to and during its forty-year rule. The South Korean opposition, of which Kim Dae-jung was a leader from the 1960s until his death in 2009, sought to tar the ruling establishment with the collaborationist brush, and did so with considerable success.

Even more relevant to the current differences over North Korea between South Korean conservatives and progressives was the Korean polity’s response to the division of the peninsula in 1945. Progressives were socialistically inclined and vigorously opposed the U.S. project to set up a separate Korean government in the south, fearing not only the permanent division of the country but also the likelihood of continuing conservative rule there. Kim Il-sung’s Soviet-backed invasion of the South in 1950 to reunify the country caused enormous losses in lives and property. While most South Koreans became bitterly anti-communist and anti-North Korean as a result, many opposition thought leaders privately blamed the United States and South Korean conservatives in part for the realization of their worst fears—permanent division, civil war, and enduring authoritarian conservative rule in the

South.⁶ While suppressed during the succeeding decades of authoritarian rule, this strand of thinking did not die out. It found new expression when the progressives, in the person of Kim Dae-jung, first captured the Blue House in the election of 1997.

As soon as Kim Dae-jung was inaugurated, he made it clear that his policy toward North Korea would be very different from those of his conservative predecessors. He disavowed any desire for unification by force, or even absorption, as had occurred just seven years earlier in Germany. He would seek to engage Pyongyang in many different ways, including politically, economically, and culturally, and he was willing to substantially aid the regime economically and otherwise under the rubric of “cooperation.”

Kim’s policy was based in part on the widespread progressive belief that both South and North Korea had been victims of the great powers, including the United States, and that the North’s external security concerns were understandable if excessive. Progressives also tended to be more skeptical and critical of the U.S. role on the Korean Peninsula than conservatives. And while progressives had made democratization of the South their own main mission, they avoided criticism of the political and human rights situation in the North on the grounds that such a focus would not improve the situation and would only make the regime feel more threatened. Kim would therefore seek to do as much as possible to reassure Pyongyang, directly and, to the extent possible, through the United States and others, that its cooperation in a step-by-step approach of engagement would not threaten the regime but would benefit it and the country as a whole in many ways.

Nevertheless, Kim Jong-il did not respond positively until two and one-half years later, when, in mid-June 2000, he received Kim Dae-jung in Pyongyang in the first-ever meeting of the two countries’ supreme leaders. The resulting South-North Joint Declaration consisted of five points, statements of principle and mostly vague promises to engage in various kinds of dialogue and humanitarian, economic, and other forms of cooperation.⁷ In the following months, a number of dialogues were in fact held but no fundamental progress was made in inter-Korean relations.

By the end of the year 2000, Pyongyang was already beginning to slow down and halt cooperation with the South, blaming the advent of a “hostile” administration in the United States. It never clearly explained why the inauguration of the Bush administration required it to forego cooperation with Seoul, although its propaganda suggested that Seoul was Washington’s puppet and thus could not be a serious engagement partner when Washington was taking a critical approach toward Pyongyang.

In retrospect, it seems clear that Kim Jong-il never intended to cooperate nearly as much with Seoul as Kim Dae-jung publicly suggested.⁸ Kim Dae-jung’s sometimes over-the-top rhetoric—for example, on his return to Seoul from Pyongyang, he declared there would be “no more war” on the peninsula—seems to have been hortatory in regard to Kim Jong-il as well as the product of his own wishful thinking and domestic political calculation. Most tellingly, after Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 in part for achieving the summit meeting, a special investigation authorized by the South Korean parliament revealed that his administration had provided half a billion dollars in cash to Pyongyang

immediately before the summit. Not surprisingly, the revelation resulted in what *New York Times* characterized in its obituary of Kim as “opposition accusations that he had ‘bribed’ the Communist leader and [thereby] strengthened his chances to win the peace prize.”⁹

Roh Moo-hyun’s Sunshine Policy

Although the October 2002 revelation that the North Koreans had been cheating on the Agreed Framework with the United States by pursuing the capacity to produce highly enriched uranium to make nuclear weapons further eroded the Sunshine Policy’s credibility in South Korea and abroad, Kim Dae-jung’s successor, Roh Moo-hyun, remained a staunch advocate. To put his own brand on it while also denying critics a too-easy target, Roh called his approach the “peace and prosperity policy,” but in all major respects it was identical to Kim’s Sunshine Policy.¹⁰ A review of Roh’s North Korea policy is especially relevant to that of Moon, because of the lifelong close personal and political relationship between them, which will be discussed later.

Like Kim Dae-jung, but even more so, Roh was an outsider. His family was too poor for him to attend college, so he studied on his own to pass the bar exam. As a lawyer, he became involved in defending members of the activist movement against the authoritarian government of the time. Virtually his entire adult life before becoming president was spent in the “movement” and as an opposition politician. He never learned English and, until becoming president, had never visited the United States. (He had very briefly visited three foreign countries in his entire life up to then.) It was only natural, by dint of both personal experience and political affiliation, that he would staunchly support Kim’s Sunshine Policy.

Nevertheless, Kim Jong-il’s response to Roh’s pursuit of reconciliation with the North was confined largely to cooperating on two of Kim Dae-jung’s signature projects, both hard currency earners for the North. Kim Jong-il continued to allow South Koreans to tour the scenic Mount Kumgang area in North Korea for a fee, and he cooperated in the opening and expansion of the Kaesong industrial park in the North, where South Korean businesses employed North Korean factory labor at low cost. As for the rest, the North Koreans used the excuse that a hostile U.S. policy made it fruitless to engage with what the regime regarded as a not fully sovereign South.

Thus, it was not until October 2007 that Kim Jong-il finally agreed to a visit by Roh to Pyongyang for their only meeting. The summit took place only two months before the South Korean presidential election, resulting in opposition charges in South Korea and widespread suspicion that both Kim and Roh were seeking to influence the outcome in their favor. Even though North Korea had tested its first nuclear device the year earlier despite having agreed in principle at the Six-Party Talks in Beijing to give up its nuclear weapons program, the only reference to the problem in the joint declaration was a pledge to “work together to implement smoothly the [already violated] September 19, 2005 Joint Statement and the February 13, 2007 Agreement achieved at the Six-Party Talks.” This second joint declaration was considerably more detailed than the June 2000 inter-Korean agreement but at the cost of incorporating what were, for many South Koreans, highly controversial provisions, such as establishing a joint fishing area in the disputed West Sea (Yellow Sea) area.¹¹

Lee Myung-bak's North Korea Policy

In the presidential election of December 19, 2007, the conservative candidate, Lee Myung-bak, won by a margin of nearly two to one over his progressive opponent. (Voters were motivated primarily by concerns about the economy rather than by objections to the progressive candidate's support for the Sunshine Policy).¹² As a candidate, Lee did not launch an all-out offensive on the Sunshine Policy but seems to have tried to give voters the impression that his views about North Korea were not really "conservative." As president, Lee too sought improved relations with Pyongyang, including a summit meeting with Kim Jong-il. He demurred, however, when the North Koreans in 2009 demanded ten billion dollars and half a million tons of food for a summit.¹³

Even had the North Koreans not taken their "pay to play" position, they never gave Lee much political space to engage them. In Lee's first year in office, a North Korean guard shot and killed a South Korean tourist who strayed from the authorized path at the Mount Kumgang resort. In response, Lee stopped South Korean tours there while demanding that Pyongyang allow a joint investigation, offer an apology, and take measures to prevent a recurrence. North Korea was unwilling to do so, and the tours never resumed. In 2009, North Korea tested its second nuclear device and, in 2013, just before Lee stepped down, its third; it also conducted numerous rocket and missile tests during Lee's term in office. On March 26, 2010, in what was apparently a sneak torpedo attack, the North Koreans sank a South Korean navy vessel, *Cheonan*, killing forty-six seamen. It prompted Lee to issue the "May 24 measures," unilateral sanctions against North Korea that suspended most forms of inter-Korean exchange, including economic cooperation. At the end of the same year, in an act unprecedented since the Korean War, the North Koreans launched an unprovoked artillery attack on a South Korean island, Yeonpyeong, killing four people. Still, not only did Lee not shutter the Kaesong industrial park, he even allowed its expansion.

Park Geun-hye's North Korea Policy

On December 19, 2012, another conservative, Park Geun-hye, the daughter of Park Chung-hee, won the presidential election to succeed Lee, but by a margin of only 51.6 percent to 48 percent. Her progressive opponent was Moon Jae-in, the current president. Despite North Korea's nuclear and missile tests, Moon campaigned for a resumption of the Sunshine Policy. Even Park Geun-hye expressed support during the campaign for what she called a more "balanced," i.e. less conservative, policy toward North Korea than Lee had pursued.¹⁴ But as with Lee, the North Koreans gave Park little leeway to pursue engagement, as they committed a number of provocations from the beginning of her term in office.

Park was inaugurated shortly after the UN Security Council had passed yet another resolution sanctioning Pyongyang for a rocket launch at the end of the preceding year, to which the North Koreans responded by announcing another nuclear test and long-range missile launch and declaring the United States to be their primary target. North Korea did in fact conduct a nuclear test on February 12, 2013, its third, just two weeks before Park's inauguration. Two months later, Pyongyang manufactured a crisis over an annual U.S.-South Korean military exercise and, on April 8, ordered all its workers to leave the Kaesong industrial park. Park held firm and Pyongyang finally returned the workers to Kaesong on September 16, 2013.

Under Kim Jong-un's rule since his father Kim Jong-il's death in December 2011, North Korea continued to accelerate its nuclear and missile testing. The North conducted its fourth nuclear test—it claimed it was a hydrogen bomb—and another rocket launch in the first five weeks of the year 2016. On February 10, 2016, Park responded by ordering a halt to Kaesong operations and the withdrawal of South Korean personnel. She was clearly motivated by her frustration that North Korea was continuing to develop a nuclear weapons capability and apparently felt that South Korea had to take such steps to be consistent with the U.S.-led international campaign to press North Korea to participate in good-faith denuclearization negotiations. The Kaesong industrial park remains closed, and experts believe it could not be reopened without violating UN Security Council sanctions that have been passed in the meantime.

President Moon and the Return of the Sunshine Policy

After having barely lost to Park Geun-hye in the 2012 presidential election, Moon Jae-in succeeded her as president on May 10, 2017, after she was impeached and eventually removed from office on corruption and other charges. The charges against Park and the widespread perception that she was arrogant and uncommunicative, especially in light of her handling of the Seweol ferry sinking that cost the lives of 304 people—mostly students from a single high school—resulted in a massive loss in public support not only for Park but also for her conservative ruling party. Her party, already riven by warring factions associated with her and former president Lee Myung-bak, formally split before the election. With a third major candidate (the centrist independent Ahn Cheol-soo) running, Moon decisively defeated conservative candidate Hong Jun-pyo, by a margin of 41 percent to 24 percent.

Moon Jae-in's Support for the Sunshine Policy

As in most South Korean presidential elections, the debate over North Korea policy played a relatively small part in the campaign. Moon's victory was primarily due to his being seen as the "anti-Park" candidate, especially in terms of being communicative and having the common touch. Actually, throughout Park's term, she had mostly benefitted in the public opinion polls when she took "firm" measures against North Korean provocations, including her handling of the Kaesong industrial park. In the 2017 campaign, it was conservative candidates who went on the offensive against Moon's North Korea policy, suggesting, in effect, that he remained a Sunshine Policy supporter. Moon deflected such criticism but without either renouncing or prominently reaffirming the Sunshine Policy. It was only a couple of weeks before the election, when it was already clear that Moon would win in a landslide, that he finally detailed his North Korea policy by releasing the statement mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.¹⁵

As with Roh Moo-hyun, it should not be surprising that Moon was and remains an adherent of the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea. Moon was also an outsider. He came from a poor family; his anti-Park Chung-hee activism resulted in his expulsion from university and jailing; later he was a top law student but was unable to become a prosecutor or judge because of his college activism; and he eventually became a human rights lawyer and partnered with

Roh Moo-hyun. Like Roh, Moon does not speak English, and before becoming president he had apparently only visited the United States twice and then very briefly. When Roh ran for president, Moon served as his campaign manager. Throughout Roh's term as president, Moon served him in senior posts in the Blue House, including as Roh's final chief of staff.

Shortly after Roh stepped down as president, prosecutors began investigating him on corruption charges. In apparent agony, Roh responded by committing suicide. This traumatized his circle and embittered many of them against the administration of Lee Myung-bak, whom they blamed for an investigation they felt was an act of political revenge. By all accounts, Moon too was deeply affected by the tragedy. Moon oversaw Roh's funeral and made arrangements for his private affairs. His longtime association with Roh, his visibility during the nation's period of mourning, and his evident intelligence and poise made him the progressive camp's presumptive next presidential candidate. Moon was thus involved not only with most of the Roh administration's North Korea policy deliberations, decisions, and activities, he also identified with Roh personally.

Like the North Korea policy platforms of the successful conservative candidates for presidents in 2007 and 2012, progressive candidate Moon's North Korea policy statement of May 19, 2017, sought to appeal not only to his base but also to moderate voters. Thus, he characterized his policy as "a completely new plan" while in fact including many reassuringly traditional elements, such as a strong defense, full support for the alliance with the United States, and top priority on stopping Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Reflecting his support for a Sunshine Policy approach, however, Moon began his policy statement by blasting conservative forces in South Korea as responsible that "... [inter-Korean] animosity has grown, and 'unification' is turning into something that is only troublesome [to South Koreans]." He decried *both* South and North Korea for blaming each other. "Neither peace nor prosperity can be assured this way," he exclaimed. Instead, "inheriting the Sunshine Policy [of Kim Dae-jung] and the engagement policy [of Roh Moo-hyun] towards North Korea...we will strategically push North Korea towards change." Under his administration, things such as the closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex would be "preventable." More broadly speaking, Moon said he would make "economic unification" a top goal, "so that both the South and the North can prosper."

Moon's statement continued that "instead of urging that 'Pyongyang should act first,'" his administration would take the lead to bring about "simultaneous actions from Pyongyang, Washington and other parties concerned." He also called for the National Assembly to transform previous inter-Korean agreements, including Roh's controversial October 4 Declaration agreements with Kim Jong-il, into domestic law, "so [that] we can establish lasting inter-Korean policies that do not swing back and forth with changes of government."

Regarding the U.S. alliance, too, Moon reverted to Roh administration policy, declaring that "nothing is more dangerous than letting others decide our fate" and that "... wartime Operational Control (OPCON) [of South Korean forces] will be transferred to South Korea in early stages." (Currently, the top U.S. general in Korea would have operational control over both U.S. and South Korean forces in the event of war.) The statement also lays out measures to strengthen South Korea's own "independent" military capabilities.

Released just before the presidential election and as the nation was consumed by Park’s impeachment, candidate Moon’s North Korea policy statement received relatively little attention at home or abroad, even though, as the Korean reporter who did a report and summary translation commented at the time:

...the statement confirms what many believed would be the approach of a future President Moon Jae-in: an unapologetic return to the “Sunshine Era” policies of the early 2000s. His team calls it a “bold” blueprint, and, if enacted, it’s certain to cause friction between Seoul and the Trump Administration, particularly in its proposals for a South Korean defense policy which distances itself from the U.S.¹⁶

Although a campaign platform, Moon’s May 19 statement remains worthy of attention. As president, Moon has continued to use much of its rhetoric and, indeed, has acted largely in accordance with it. For example, it said that Moon would induce Washington to “improve its relations with Pyongyang and bring Pyongyang to the negotiation table.” The statement even anticipated the role that the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics would play in dealing with the North Korea problem: “We will support [both] the North Korean team’s participation and [a] joint [North-South] cheering squad....”

Moon’s continuing support for the Sunshine Policy approach is also evident in his personnel selections. He has filled key posts with people who played major roles in the Roh administration’s North Korea and security policies.¹⁷

- As director of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), Moon chose Suh Hoon. During the Roh administration, Suh was NIS’s North Korea strategist. He was heavily involved in preparations for both the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun summits with Kim Jong-il. (In addition to being the Korean government’s main source of expertise on North Korea, NIS has also frequently engaged in covert contacts and negotiations with the Pyongyang regime over the decades at the direction of South Korea’s presidents.)
- Moon named Cho Myoung-gyun as his minister of unification. Cho served in Roh Moo-hyun’s Blue House from 2006 to 2008 as secretary for unification, foreign affairs, and security policies. There, he worked with Suh Hoon to prepare Roh’s summit with Kim Jong-il. As a career unification ministry official, Cho headed the government’s Kaesong Industrial Complex Support Agency. At his confirmation hearings in June 2017, Cho declared, “The industrial complex should be re-opened... when the opportunity comes.”¹⁸
- Moon selected Suh Choo Suk as Vice Minister of National Defense. As Roh Moo-hyun’s senior secretary for security policy, Sun was, as one South Korean expert has put it, “responsible for a more independent defense policy from the US.”
- Moon also appointed Lee Sang Chul, who has participated in talks with North Korea since 1991, as the first vice chief of the Blue House’s national security office.¹⁹

Two other Moon appointments warrant particular attention in regard to his North Korea policy.

- As his special aide for foreign affairs and national security, an advisory position, Moon named Moon Chung-in, who played similar roles for both presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. An academic, Moon is a prolific and outspoken advocate of the Sunshine Policy. In 2012, he published an entire book in defense of the policy, even though by that time North Korea had already conducted two nuclear tests and numerous rocket and missile tests in violation of UNSC resolutions and the regime's own pledges at the Six-Party Talks in Beijing.²⁰ Moon Chung-in frequently launches what appear to be trial balloons consistent with a Sunshine Policy approach, such as suggesting limits on U.S.-ROK military exercises. Most recently, he wrote that it would be difficult to justify the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Korea if, as President Moon aims to achieve, North Korea signs a peace treaty with the South and the United States.²¹ When criticized, Professor Moon typically responds that he was speaking in his capacity as an academic, not as the president's adviser. In the case of his statement about USFK, the Blue House publicly cautioned him but ignored conservatives' calls that he be dismissed. While observers debate the extent of Moon's influence with the president, one report noted that he was the last person to advise the president before his departure for his first summit meeting with Trump.
- As his chief of staff, Moon Jae-in selected Im Jong-seok, a former top student activist leader who was involved in the controversial illegal dispatch of a South Korean student to North Korea in 1989. Im also managed Moon's presidential campaign. Reportedly, Im played "a pivotal role in an inter-Korean detente fostered by the Winter Games in Pyeongchang..." and Moon considered whether to dispatch him to Pyongyang in response to Kim Jong-un's invitation to Moon to visit for a summit meeting.²²

President Moon's North Korea Policy in Action and the Responses to It

Since his inauguration on May 10, 2017, Moon has consistently striven to take a Sunshine Policy approach toward North Korea. His rhetoric and deeds, however, have been tempered by his apparent recognition that he needed to be cautious and pragmatic given the major changes that have taken place regarding North Korea since Roh Moo-hyun left office in early 2008. At that point, North Korea had only tested one nuclear device, one that, according to most experts, was only partly successful. The Six-Party Talks on North Korea's denuclearization had not yet failed due to the North's unwillingness to allow verification of its undertakings. North Korea was still many years away from demonstrating a capability of launching an ICBM that could hit the United States with a nuclear weapon. Since then, the UNSC has passed numerous, increasingly stringent economic and other sanctions on North Korea, and public opinion in South Korea, the United States, and the international community as a whole has become much more skeptical of North Korean intentions and statements.

As with the newly inaugurated Park Geun-hye, the North Koreans initially gave Moon no quarter or political breathing space in terms of their nuclear and missile tests. Just four days after Moon's inauguration, they tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM).

On July 4, North Korea launched an ICBM that some experts estimated could have reached the U.S. west coast. It launched two more IRBMs on August 29 and September 15, and on November 28, it tested an ICBM it designated as Hwasong-15, which experts estimate might be able to reach the U.S. east coast. On September 3, North Korea conducted its sixth test of a nuclear device. Whether it was in fact a full-fledged hydrogen bomb, as Pyongyang claimed, its yield was far larger than any previous test.

In the face of these tests, Moon was rhetorically firm. He condemned North Korea's actions, stressed the necessity of making "progress toward denuclearization" and eventually complete denuclearization, and asserted his support for international sanctions and combined defense efforts with the United States. But the thrust of the totality of his arguments was fully consistent with the Sunshine Policy approach.

In Moon's first major North Korea policy speech as president, delivered in eastern Berlin on July 6, 2017, he declared that "Germany's unification made us realize how important the process of peace and cooperation based on mutual respect really is."²³ Explicitly hearkening back to the North Korea policies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, Moon said, "I am inheriting these two former government's efforts and...will embark on a dauntless journey towards establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula." While declaring the North Korea missile test just two days before to have been "reckless," he said that he was "pursuing...only peace" by "returning to the June 15 Joint Declaration [by Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il] and the October 4 Declaration [of Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong-il]." He said his government had already "planned a 'new economic map for [North-South cooperation on] the Korean Peninsula'" for realization if "there is progress in the North Korean nuclear issue and if appropriate conditions are met..." He also said his government would "consistently pursue nonpolitical exchange and cooperation projects by separating them from the political and military situation."

In his Berlin speech, Moon concluded by proposing four "easy" steps to Pyongyang: another round of divided family reunions the following month; North Korean participation along with the South in the 2018 Winter Olympics in the South and the following Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2022 and Beijing in 2022; "mutually" refraining from "acts of hostility" around the DMZ; and Moon's own meeting with Kim Jong-un "at any time at any place" under the right conditions.

Pyongyang's response throughout 2017 was to ignore Moon's proposals. Meanwhile, it continued to engage in the nuclear and missile tests noted above, culminating in the massive "hydrogen" bomb blast on September 3 and the November 29 launch of a Hwasong-15 ICBM thought to be capable of reaching the U.S. east coast. Immediately after the ICBM test, the regime stated that it had demonstrated it had the capability of "carrying [a] super-heavy [nuclear] warhead and hitting the whole mainland of the U.S." Kim Jong-un declared that he had "finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force."²⁴ Without announcing it was doing so, it then ceased nuclear and missile tests.

Just as 2018 began, Kim Jong-un suddenly adopted a dramatically different approach to Moon. In his new year's policy address, after reaffirming that the nuclear and missile tests of the preceding year had demonstrated for all to see that North Korea could strike the entire U.S. homeland with nuclear weapons, Kim directly addressed "the south Korean authorities."²⁵ Declaring that they "should respond positively to our sincere efforts for a

détente,” he called on them to stop “siding with the United States in its hostile policy towards the DPRK” by doing such things as holding combined U.S.-Korean military exercises. North and South should, he continued, “improve the frozen inter-Korean relations... by promot[ing] bilateral contact, travel, cooperation and exchange on a broad scale....” He concluded by announcing that “...we are willing to dispatch our delegation [to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics] and...with regard to this matter, the authorities of the north and the south may meet together soon.”

Moon, who had been strategically frustrated and politically embarrassed at home and with the U.S. ally by Kim Jong-un having studiously ignored his proposals, moved with alacrity to realize the North’s participation in the Olympics. (Moon may have not been completely surprised by Kim’s turnabout; it was subsequently reported that his administration was able to engage in covert contact with Pyongyang toward the end of 2017.) Although only a few weeks remained before the Games began, Seoul took extraordinary measures to set up a joint hockey team, help North Korean athletes qualify (even though the North Koreans had missed all application deadlines), and arrange for the entry into South Korea of scores of athletes, coaches, and minders, and hundreds of cheerleaders and performers, including a North Korean popular entertainment group that performed twice in the South as the Olympics were opening. The South Korean government also sought sanctions waivers from international bodies and the United States to facilitate these activities and even covered the North Koreans’ expenses.

But the highlight of North Korean participation in the Olympics was the visit to South Korea as the Games began of North Korea’s nominal head of state and especially of Kim Jong-un’s younger sister, Kim Yo-jong, who carried a letter to Moon from her brother inviting him to visit Pyongyang for a summit meeting at the “earliest date” possible. Kim’s sister is not only personally close to him but is also a senior party official in her own right and works hand-in-hand with her brother, including at public events. Moon, demonstrating his political sensitivity and pragmatism, reportedly responded to the North Koreans: “Let us make it happen by creating the necessary conditions in the future.”²⁶

North Korea’s participation in the Pyeongchang Olympics catalyzed, in short order, a head-spinning series of dramatic diplomatic events. Among these, Moon dispatched his national security adviser to Washington to brief the Trump administration on Seoul’s talks with Pyongyang, and Trump immediately agreed to an unprecedented summit meeting with Kim Jong-un based on Seoul’s characterization to him of Kim’s willingness to denuclearize. Trump said he would meet Kim in May or early June. Kim then made his first visit as North Korea’s leader to Beijing, where he met with President Xi Jinping. Moon held a summit meeting with Kim on the southern side of the Demilitarized Zone at Panmunjom on April 27, and North Korea announced it was suspending nuclear and missile tests and would shut down its nuclear test facility. Washington and Pyongyang continued to negotiate about the site of their summit, ultimately deciding on Singapore.

Prospects and Recommendations

Moon is trying to implement a Sunshine Policy approach under very difficult circumstances. North Korea is much farther along in having a deliverable nuclear weapons capability than a

decade ago. The United States and the international community are much more concerned, and much less inclined to give Pyongyang the benefit of the doubt. The many UNSC and other international sanctions will continue to constitute formidable institutional barriers to a negotiated settlement as long as Pyongyang is not actively denuclearizing. In South Korea as well, there is much greater skepticism about Pyongyang and only limited political support for resuming the kind of large-scale aid that the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations provided.

The situation has led many outside observers to believe that the Moon administration could not really still believe in, much less seek to pursue, the Sunshine Policy. In this they are mistaken. Based on the author's many discussions over the past two decades with South Korean Sunshine Policy advocates, some of whom informally advise the Moon administration, it is clear that they believe that the policy of Kim and Roh would have worked, or at least would have worked better than other options, had it not been for what they regard as the obstructionism of the George W. Bush administration and South Korean conservatives. They further believe that the "hardline" policies of the succeeding conservative Lee and Park administrations were demonstrably a failure. In this they include Obama, whom they believe failed by not being willing to make greater concessions to Pyongyang to facilitate dialogue. They now see a U.S. administration whose policy embodies their worst fears, of another Korean war on the Korean Peninsula or, at best, a "new cold war structure" forcing them to choose between the United States and Japan, on the one hand, and the PRC, Russia, and North Korea, on the other. Thus, while South Korean progressives realize how much more difficult it will be to realize a Sunshine Policy approach under the current circumstances, they genuinely see no alternative to it.

Some outside observers further argue that, even if the Moon administration seeks to salvage the Sunshine Policy, it would not really matter, because circumstances will not allow it. But the very effort matters a great deal. The difficulty of dealing successfully with North Korea is daunting, even under the best of circumstances; when Washington and Seoul differ substantially about how to deal with Pyongyang, it becomes well-nigh impossible. The fact is that both the Trump administration and Kim Jong-un, not to mention Xi Jinping and Putin, are fully aware of Moon's thinking. Despite Trump's desire for a dramatic summit with Kim Jong-un, Washington and Seoul are suffering from a deficit of mutual trust, something that must encourage Kim Jong-un that, if he continues firmly on his current path, he will eventually achieve his goals.

The stunning pace of developments since the beginning of 2018 and Trump's unique leadership style have raised hopes for a diplomatic resolution to the North Korea problem, but the long-term prospects for Moon's effort to salvage the Sunshine Policy remain a major question. Unless North Korea is truly willing to fully denuclearize and to do so expeditiously, any general understanding reached between Trump and Kim at their summit will likely not long be sustained. Trump might then return to his emphasis on a "military option." It is likelier, however, that the Trump administration will ultimately opt for a policy of enhanced deterrence and containment of North Korea's nuclear threat, something most experts in Washington seem to support. Neither the Trump administration nor its successors will likely ever accept North Korea, even tacitly, as a legitimate nuclear weapons state and ease sanctions against it. Doing so, including in the form of some sort of a nuclear "freeze" on

Pyongyang's part, would contribute to the unravelling of the U.S. strategic position in East Asia and the undermining of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. As long as that is the case, any ROK administration would find it extremely challenging to simultaneously maintain its alliance with the United States while, in effect, ignoring North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

If the current diplomatic efforts do not result in a sustainable process of North Korean denuclearization, the Moon administration would be well served by cooperating actively with a renewed effort to apply "maximum pressure" on Pyongyang to enter into genuine, good-faith denuclearization negotiations. In fact, by taking the lead in persuading the international community to help exert such pressure, Moon might be able not only to ensure the degree of pressure needed to change Pyongyang's strategic calculation about nuclear weapons, he might also be able to win the confidence of the Trump administration sufficiently to guarantee that it does not launch a first strike on North Korea. South Korea, especially under a progressive-led government, has much more influence on many countries about how to deal with North Korea than does the United States, especially under the Trump administration. Such a "counter-steering" approach should be Seoul's "Plan B" if the current diplomacy fails.

Endnotes

¹ The statement, "A Strong Republic of Korea and A Peaceful Korean Peninsula," was released on April 23, 2017. According to a partial English-language translation prepared by *NK News*, "It contains proposals for the restarting of the six-party talks, increasing economic cooperation between the two Koreas, and a plan to set inter-Korean policy in stone through legislation that can be ratified by both the South's National Assembly and the North's Supreme People's Assembly." See J.H. Ahn, "Sunshine 2.0? Moon Jae-in's new inter-Korean policies, in summary," *NK News*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.nknews.org/2017/04/sunshine-2-0-moon-jae-ins-new-inter-korean-policies-in-summary/>.

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³ Chung-in Moon, *The Sunshine Policy: In Defense of Engagement as a Path to Peace in Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2012), 17, 21.

⁴ For a biography of Kim Dae-jung that explores in detail the origins of his thinking about North Korea, see Donald Kirk, *Korea Betrayed: Kim Dae Jung and Sunshine* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ To understand South Korean progressives' critical attitude about U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula, see Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, updated ed., 2005).

- ⁶ For historical background on the origins of anti-Americanism in Korea, see the author's book *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2012), 6-48.
- ⁷ The full text of the South-North Joint Declaration may be found at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/n_skorea06152000.pdf.
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- ¹⁰ Chung-in Moon, *The Sunshine Policy*, 3.
- ¹¹ See the full text and related information at http://world.kbs.co.kr/special/northkorea/contents/archives/summit/summit_2007.htm?lang=e.
- ¹² Norimitsu Onishi, "Conservative Wins Vote in South Korea," *New York Times*, December 20, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/20/world/asia/20korea.html>.
- ¹³ According to Lee Myung-bak's memoirs. See Ju-min Park, "North Korea 'demanded \$10 billion in cash and food' for summit with South," Reuters, January 29, 2015, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-southkorea-northkorea/north-korea-demanded-10-billion-in-cash-and-food-for-summit-with-south-idUKKBN0L207W20150129>.
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