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The Changing Approach of North Korea Towards America, South Korea and the Prospects of Inter-Korean Relations

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Abstract

North Korea's international integration strategy and the normalizing process of inter-Korean ties forced North Korea to modify its attitude to the US and South Korea. Observing inter-Korean relations in recent years, we do acknowledge the adjustments of both sides to each other and in relations with the US; in which, the most notable is the adjustment in North Korea's approach to South Korea and to the US. In relations with the US, there are significant shifts in North Korea's approach from the "maximum cordiality" approach to a parallel one: constructing "a new peace" in accompaniment with "a new threat". The US has been such an important factor in inter-Korean relations which have been affected by US relations with the two sides of Korea peninsula. With South Korea, North Korea has built a new type of relationship with four matching objectives: jointly reform personnel in the direction of respecting the spirit of reconciliation between the two regions; jointly promote economic self-reliance alongside the military policies to diminish dependence on allies of both sides; establish inter-Korean trade activities unaffected by international sanctions; and support mutual communication to gradually change negative public opinion trends about North Korea in the region and around the world. This paper is to focus on analyzing and explaining the changes in North Korea's approach to the US as well as to South Korea after the 2nd U.S.-North Korea Summit in 2019 failed. It will conclude by making predictions about the prospects of inter-Korean relations in the coming years.

Keywords: Inter-Korea relations; The U.S.-North relations; The U.S.-Korea relations, Nuclear problems

1. Introduction

During the period 2016 - 2017, North Korea deployed a "maximum threat" strategy towards the United States by repeatedly announcing that it would launch a nuclear attack on its territory (the most intense time was in September 2017 with North Korea claiming to have a "strategic threat" - an intercontinental ballistic missile that can carry a nuclear warhead), and succeeded in getting President D. Trump to agree to bilateral talks in January 2018 (leading to the US-North Korea Summit in Singapore in June of the same year). This achievement has sparked coordinated action between the two Koreas to "maximize" and "multiply" public pressure at home and abroad for the US to come to the US-DPRK bilateral negotiation table, on the basis of (i) identifying the US as a party directly involved in the peace process on the Korean peninsula (as well as North Korea's ability to fully integrate into the region and the world), (ii) recognizing that only absolutely peaceful measures could build the trust of Western public opinion, which North Korea views as having a history of distorting North Korea's policy, and (iii) determining that public pressure within the United States exerts a weighty impact on President Trump's North Korea policy.

The "maximum cordiality" approach that was employed throughout 2018 and ended after the 2nd US-North Korea Summit in Hanoi failed to produce results for two reasons: (i) excessive demands of the US to control North Korea's entire nuclear capability (Tran V.T, 2019) and (ii) instability in the US political system affected the ability to maintain negotiations and enforce President Trump's terms in the long run (C. Rodrigo, 2019). The disagreement in the second US-North Korea Summit thus showed the ineffectiveness of the "maximum cordiality" approach as well as the way of defining the issue of denuclearization negotiations as an indispensable focus in the negotiations. North Korea's international integration strategy in general and the normalization of inter-Korean ties in particular, forced North Korea to modify its new attitude to the US and South Korea.

2. North Korea Changes Approach in Interactions with US

The year 2019 witnessed significant shifts from the "maximum cordiality" approach to a parallel one: constructing "a new peace" in accompaniment with "a new threat". Based on this perception, North Korea has changed its objectives towards: (H1) The US is not necessarily directly technically involved in the North Korean issue (opening up action options whilst downplaying cooperation with the United States); (H2) absolute peace is not the optimal solution when limiting North Korea's ability to act (opening up the process and maintaining threats while creating new peaceful projects); and (H3) mobilizing multilateral public opinion is more important than just mobilizing public opinion within the United States (promoting the process of partner multilateralization), as follows:

With regard to (H1), North Korea stated that restarting negotiations would be arduous if the US side was unwilling to change its position (in March 2019) [D. Shesgreen - J. Fritze, 2019] and at the same time deploy announced moves to: (i) maintain North Korea's uncompromising stance even after D. Trump conceded to participate in the 4th Moon-Kim Summit, resulting in the US-North Korea Summit (the third time) (6/2019) in South Korea, (ii) reiterate the deadline for the US to consider the negotiating conditions in the fourth quarter of 2019, and finally (iii) North Korea decisively announced the end of denuclearization negotiations with the US at the end of 2019 when the US side did not show the flexibility that North Korea wanted.

With regard to (H2), North Korea resumed its program of developing new tactical weapons with 13 test launches in 2019 interspersed with implementation of the "tourist nation" strategy. The completion of North Korea's defense system is not only completely within the "gray zone" (D.S. Cloud, 2019) but also confirmed by the US within the framework of North Korea's defense sovereignty due to: (i) confined to short and medium range does not violate the terms agreed with the US side regarding the suspension of long-range ballistic missiles testing (D. Brunnstrom - D. Chiacu, 2019), (ii) not firing over or endangering the territories under the control of Japan and South Korea and (iii)

North Korea has not made any threatening or hostile statements to the parties concerned such as tests missiles before 2019. By the fourth quarter of 2019, North Korea began to partially announce its plan to develop into a tourist country (P. Hoa, 2019) - an area of peace not on the sanctions list of the United Nations. The white horse riding activities to the top of the sacred mountain of Paektu by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in October 2019 and December 2019 conducted at the same time as the North Korean statements about tourist city projects in Samjiyon town at the foot of Mount Paektu - the country's highest mountain, considered a campaign to "promote the image" of North Korea's tourism industry to international visitors. In addition, North Korea is also completing tourist sites in the eastern coastal city of Wonsan, which is near the launch location of three short-range missiles in July and October 2019, demonstrating a mix of "conflict making" and "peace keeping" efforts by North Korea. In other words, (H₂) is the cornerstone of North Korea's "smart power", combining "hard power" exercised within the framework of the "gray zone" in the US-North Korea negotiations and "soft power" about the tourist potential that North Korea possesses. Prior to 2019, goal (H₂) was jointly pursued by both Koreas within the framework of a coordinated code of action including four orientations and culminated in a joint operation between the two heads of state of North Korea and South Korea conquering the sacred mountain of Paektu in September 2018, immediately following the 3rd Inter-Korean Summit. However, with new awareness since February 2019, North Korea has turned to "self-reliance" and reduced its cooperative role with South Korea, gaining greater initiative in attaining the aim (H₂).

And finally, North Korea promotes partner multilateralization to gather worldwide support for the national integration process (H₃). Following the debacle of the US-North Korea summit in February 2019, North Korea immediately made an official visit to Russia (April 2019), welcomed Chinese President Xi Jinping (June 6, 2019), and held a trilateral meeting of the US - North Korea - South Korea (June 2019), unlocking more alternatives in strategy of "multilateralization and diversification" to demonstrate America is no longer the sole party that can guarantee the security of North Korea in the post-denuclearization period. The US government's de-escalation statements over 13 missile launches by North Korea (even the US did not join Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium and Estonia in the October 08 Joint Statement with conviction that North Korea's missile launches violate UN Security Council Resolutions (L. Phuong, 2019), along with proposals from both Russia and China on a draft resolution to exempt North Korea from embargoes on joint projects and industries (statues, seafood and textiles) worth hundreds of millions of dollars in December 2019 is the immediate success of the new approach (H₃).

Thus, since February 2019, with reference to new perceptions about futility of depending on the international integration process on the results of the US-North Korea negotiations, North Korea has taken steps to change its approach from "maximum peacemaking" to "peacebuilding based on minimal conflict maintenance" with 3 foundations (H₁), (H₂) and (H₃). In particular, North Korea has cultivated the spirit of "self-reliance" and pushed towards a comprehensive "multilateralization and diversification" plan, expressing a desire to avoid passive reliance on the actions of any party (including both USA and Korea). Orientation (H₂) is considered an important policy with activities showing "hard power" conducted decisively accomodating "dual goals": both to protect the "peace projects" under large-scale construction in DPRK's tourist cities in parallel with ensuring the "tactical threat" of North Korea in the post-denuclearization period (with short- and medium-range missile systems but mounted on mobile launchers or submarines).

3. North Korea in a New Type of Relationship with South Korea

Contrary to the predictions of the international public, North Korea's abrupt halt in the drastic execution of activities to increase pressure on the South Korean side (shortly after demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office in June 16) in fact ushered in a new phase of "détente" in inter-Korean relations. This period is called a "reconciliation", not a temporary "détente" because both Koreas have now officially entered a new process of normalizing relations with four matching objectives: (D₁)

jointly reform personnel in the direction of respecting the spirit of reconciliation between the two regions, (D2) jointly promote economic self-reliance alongside the military policies to diminish dependence on allies of both sides, (D3) determined to create inter-Korean trade activities unaffected by international sanctions and (D4) support mutual communication to gradually change negative public opinion trends about North Korea in the region and around the world.

All four orientations are included in the previous set of inter-Korean coordination rules, in which (D1) and (D2) function as a framework to fulfill "economicizing the multilateral interests of the peace process". (D3) are the actions to establish "a fait accompli", while (D4) proves a quieter yet flexible implementation of "international propaganda for the spirit of inter-Korean solidarity". At this new stage of "conciliation", the international propaganda for inter-Korean solidarity has to be temporarily delayed, North Korea is still pursuing the "public opinion" tactic to flexibly create more new foci besides Yongbyon nuclear center such as: (i) new generation ballistic missiles, (ii) new heavy unmanned submarine (XLUUV) model, (iii) miniaturization capacity nuclear warheads and (iv) the ability to launch nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles from submarines. North Korea's threats to this "accumulation of public opinion" (most of which are conjectures from Western media, and North Korea has yet to officially launch any activities in violation of the agreement with the US in June 2018) can practically be removed at any time in exchange for international sanction alleviation. Maintaining such a "threat" both helps North Korea secure a "brinkmanship" status in the region (which helps it avoid the risk of being attacked first), and creates a shell of "virtual belligerence" in which North Korea fully handles its coordinating role.

The South Korean persistence in coordination with North Korea under President Moon Jae-in is demonstrated through activities to promote the aforementioned inter-Korean coordination orientations (even when the North is causing concerns by incessantly developing new offensive weapons) indicating a positive prospect for the process of normalizing inter-Korean relations. Specifically, both parties have enacted the following directives:

First, efforts to restructure the apparatus in a way that respects the spirit of reconciliation (D1). While South Korea completed the appointment of more senior officials with ties to North Korea in early July (S. Kim, 2020), North Korea also expanded the leadership in the Presidium of the Workers' Party Politburo in mid-August, replacing the traditional "three pillars" with one leader and "four pillars" model. Although this is a consistent and radical move in President Moon Jae-in's efforts to purge the incompetent bureaucracy and fight corruption, Moon intends to create a high-ranking bureaucracy that takes a radical stance and not stagnated by conservative views, especially on the issue of inter-Korean dialogue. This view of Moon is closely related to Kim Jong-un's expansion of its key leadership to include those that follow this radical stance. The absence of Ms. Kim Yo-jong (Kim Jong-un's younger sister, currently serving as First Deputy Director of the Ministry of Propaganda and Agitation of the Korean Workers' Party) from a series of high-level Party conferences North Korean labor since the end of July (C. O'Carroll, 2020), as well as the abrupt suspension of "waging war again" with South Korea in mid-June has further reinforced the position of "harmonizing" at this time.

Second, the two regions jointly promote self-help policies (D2). While North Korea ostensibly shows that it is actively deploying the shell of "virtual belligerence" (as analyzed above), the Kim Jong-un regime is encouraging the consolidation of the self-reliance policy, together with construction of a series of major works in agriculture, light industry, healthcare and science - high technology to minimize economic dependency on the outside. In particular, the construction of more chemical industrial plants helps North Korea achieve two goals at the same time in the third quarter of this year: (i) reducing the shortage of fertilizer for agriculture, (ii) mitigating energy shortfalls by coal-to-oil gasification (B. K. Silberstein, 2020); thereby reducing the national reliance on Chinese fuel and fertilizer imports, as well as maximize the energy source from coal - an advantage resource of North Korea. North Korea's plan of establishing a 'tourist country' has been temporarily halted construction of large-scale resorts in order to focus on vital economic regions, rendering development of economic infrastructure even more crucial. This is a crucial basis for North Korea's ability to pursue its own independent foreign policy without relying on any other party. On the

contrary, South Korea is steadily lessening its military reliance as it becomes more self-sufficient in the manufacturing of sophisticated military equipment [M. Yeo, 2020]. Despite having signed a contract to buy F35-A, F35-B fighters and a new generation of anti-submarine weapons from the US (even becoming the world's fourth largest weapons importer from the US in 2019), the announcement of the KF-X stealth fighter project and the plan to build the first domestic aircraft carrier in the third quarter demonstrates President Moon Jae-in's commitment to national defense self-reliance. Additionally, the process of transferring wartime command (OPCON) from the US to South Korea is also being promoted by the latter to the final stage. In other words, both North and South Korea are taking most advantage of their time to overcome the flaws that have led to their dependence on traditional partners and allies, helping to create flexibility and necessary independence to promote the normalization of inter-Korean relations.

Third, both regions seek to maintain economic activities that do not violate the embargo (D3). This is the specific strategy to create a "fait accompli" in the process of normalizing bilateral relations without the involvement of the US. Clearly stated in the policy of "Peace First", the South Korean government under President Moon Jae-in has always prioritized and actively carried out efforts to unify the two Koreas as well as reduce sanctions pressure on North Korea. Nevertheless, the period from 2018 to 2019 was ineffective. Citing the unstable position of the U.S administration as a major impediment to restoration of inter-Korean ties, President Moon confirmed in January 2020 the inter-Korean issue should be conducted independently. By July 2020, Lee In-young, the new Korean Unification Minister, also confirmed his willingness to promote this direction. Currently, apart from the multilateral and bilateral sanction relief campaigns for North Korea (H.J. Kim, 2020) the South Korean government also: (i) promotes barter plans with North Korea, (ii) add provisions to allow North Korean companies to operate in South Korea and (iii) maintain large-scale food aid operations to the North. Meanwhile, the North Korean side, although being more passive, acknowledged and supported selective operations from the South to sustain inter-Korean economic relations (D. Albright - S. Burkhard - S. Faragasso, 2020) for the period 2019 - 2020.

Fourth, both Koreas also make efforts to sway public opinion in favor of a more positive view of North Korea (D4). This is also the implementation of "international propaganda of the unifying will of the two regions" but executed more independently and flexibly on the information and communication front. Unlike 2018, when the two Koreas co-organized summit diplomatic activities and numerous shared cultural and political events on a large scale but produced little specific achievements. South Korean movies "ordered" in the period 2018 - 2019 also tend to build a positive image of the North Korean army (J. Kim, 2020) in the second half of 2020, each side will be independently promoting this tendency both ways: (i) South Korea broke the rules to facilitate North Korean state television channels (such as KCTV) to broadcast on South Korean satellite television (under an agreement from 2018), (ii) South Korea also directed public opinion at home and abroad to respect the agreements with the North in the move to issue a ban on the activities of distributing anti-North Korea leaflets on the border of the two Koreas, (iii) and the North Korea actively expands the broadcasting capacity of Chinese satellite TV stations (M. Williams, 2020) and (iv) coordinates with influential multimedia communication channels (such as Youtube, DW, etc.) transmit documentaries about real life and development of the wealthy class in North Korea, actively breaking up the previous one-sided propaganda from many Western news outlets. The moves taken in response to the incident of dropping anti-North Korea leaflets in mid-June also showed the "red line" between the two Koreas on the information and propaganda front as well as South Korean tenacity in resolving this communication problem. North Korea also acknowledges South Korea's sincerity in promptly suspending the entire all large-scale "counter-propaganda" activities immediately after South Korea decisively handled the leaflet distribution incident. Otherwise stated, *this is the clearest and most feasible orientation that is quietly and independently deployed by both regions to jointly promote activities directing public opinion more positively in service of bilateral normalization at three tiers: with Korea, East Asia and Western countries.*

4. North Korea's Self-Reliance Creates a New Foundation for 2021

True to the trend of retaining the *threat close to the U.S red line* in parallel with concentrating resources to implement new economic policies announced in January 2021, the moves in the military parade commemorating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea convey the flexible transformation of the Kim Jong-un regime. North Korea sends forth 3 distinct messages: (i) shifting from a foreign policy "with enemies" to that of "no enemies", (ii) affirming its ability to "denuclearize" its military threat through demonstrations of new conventional weapons and (iii) announcing the final roadmap for the strategy of "economicizing the multilateral interests of the peace process" to create economic leverage in January 2021, specifically as follows:

Firstly, the message of "no enemies" was expressed in the speech of leader Kim Jong-un on October 10, which included statements such as "no first strike", "no military development to target any country" and military development solely for the sake of "self-defence". The above message has officially shown the process of creating a foreign policy of "no enemies" from the top leader of North Korea, laying the foundation for the foreign orientation of "more friends and less enemies", gradually reducing the tempo of conflict and securing peace. In other words, this is one of the rare times that Kim Jong-un has delivered a speech whose aim is not to lash out at any hostile country, even before (in June 2020) the North Korean government and media have repeatedly criticized the United States, South Korea and Japan – indicating a trend to officially abandon "limited threat" that North Korea used to deploy flexibly in 2017.

Second, despite the economic sanctions from the United States and the United Nations, North Korea has developed its military power by refining its deterrence capabilities (with a wide range of new weapons, ICBMs, MLRSs, MIRVs, etc. , PBV, MRV and SLBM) (V.V. Diepen – M. Elleman, 2020) The 2017 parade only showed ICBM containers with medium-range ballistic missiles (In July 2017, the country successfully test-fired its first ICBM), but no ICBMs featured in 2018's two parades. The parade on October 10 was also the first time North Korea has publicly exhibited an image of an ICBM (Hwasong-15) since there was no demonstration in 2019. Noting that ICBMs tests before 2017 were not as successful as the KN-14 (or for fake product images like the KN-08), this ICBM demonstration shows that North Korea has taken advantage of the effectiveness of the KN-14. The result was a period of détente with the US to perfect the ICBM missile system (with all kinds of supporting weapons) as well as its own "war deterrence" capability (with the US and its allies). This is also a move that proves that international sanctions are less likely to influence the decision of the North Korean government, as Kim Yo-jong has previously affirmed on behalf of the government (J. Masterson, 2020). Kim Jong-un also deftly minimized the interpretation of North Korea's belligerence by repeating the concept of "war deterrent" (rather than the term "nuclear deterrence") and asserting "no first strike", "military development not directed against another country" in his October 10 speech, as well as incorporating symbols showing some military assets are only allowed to be used inside North Korea. Thus, North Korea now has enough potential to "denuclearize" its war deterrence through a series of modern weapons it has recently acquired (instead of focusing on developing nuclear weapons as previously), thereby unfolding: (i) the option of "denuclearization first" without sacrificing the ability of "strategic self-defense" and (ii) demonstrate irrespective of international sanctions, North Korea's strategic directions are beyond influence.

Third, North Korea devised a development roadmap until the end of 2020 with a focus on economic goals to create the foundation for policies starting in 2021. With the launch of the "80-day campaign" to restore economic recovery nationwide, North Korea has determined to make the most of the remainder of 2020 to overcome the consequences of natural disasters (floods) and promote consolidation of the necessary fundamental infrastructures for economy, agriculture, science and technology, healthcare, etc. which calls for the new economic plan in January 2021. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic raging in the world, North Korea cannot officially open its economy or take measures to "denuclearize first" to create momentum for regional economic integration. The consolidation of economic growth capabilities (such as science and technology, high technology, healthcare, etc.) has now become an inevitable choice of North Korea.

5. Forecast

Thus, as can be observed from developments of 2019 so far, North Korea has adopted a much higher proactive stance than in previous periods when it *possessed the ability to "deter war" without nuclear weapons*, opening the possibility of "first denuclearization" or "denuclearization" of the Korean peninsula in absence of American influence. The next steps would be: (i) international lobbyings to lift multilateral sanctions (possibly just 5 of 11 of the UN civil embargos that North Korea had proposed on February 2019) when North Korea actively took "first denuclearization"; (ii) North Korea chooses an appropriate time to open its economy in special economic zones and "tourist cities" (P. Makowsky – J. Town – M.Y. Kae – S.J. Pitz, 2020) (the South Korean side is also promoting the resumption of tourist routes to Panmujom) and (iii) North Korea's participation in regional organizations to gradually integrate into the international economy.

However, currently, the US and some Western countries are: (i) publicly propagating measures to circumvent North Korea's sanctions (through joint ventures with China and South Korea, or through legal outside Asia) (R. Frank – P. Ward, 2020) and (ii) drafting technical platforms for economic sanctions against foreign companies that do business with North Korean companies involved in the ICBM production activities [US Department of Commerce, 2020] following the model of economic sanctions that the US has applied to Chinese companies in the South China Sea (Nectar Gan, 2020) or as the model of Iran sanctions after the US unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA agreement). Concurrently, the Japanese government's policy of amending the Constitution in the direction of "active defense", rendering North Korea-Japan relations irreconcilable is also a disadvantage for North Korea's reconciliation plans although the country has implemented "denuclearization first". Therefore, to be effective, North Korea's plan for "first denuclearization without giving up ICBMs" requires the assurance of a group of countries with high prestige in contemporary international relations, including: Russia, China, Sweden, South Korea, India, Iran., which will work together to ensure the removal of multilateral sanctions after North Korea "denuclearizes first". At the same time, as soon as multilateral sanctions are abolished, North Korea should also join the following economic triangles, as a foundation for worldwide economic integration: North Korea - South Korea - Russia (developed under trilateral railway project), North Korea - Russia - China and Korea - India - Russia (developed along the Vladivostok - Chennai maritime corridor of the Russia - India axis) that are all sympathetic countries to North Korea. All of these undertakings will be scheduled to coincide with the end of 2020 when the world is anticipated to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control thanks to a race for vaccines amongst Russia, China, the United States and the United States and European countries.

Based on the four directions that the two Koreas have developed, combined with the foundations of economic self-reliance on the part of North Korea (it should be noted that North Korea has had many financial options to survive with the multilateral sanctions) and defense self-reliance on the part of the Republic of Korea, it is possible to make three promising forecasts for the normalization of inter-Korean relations in 2021 as follows:

Firstly, both regions continue to promote policies to normalize relations in the direction of independent performance and gradually reduce dependence on outsiders (including allied countries). In particular, two directions (D3) on inter-Korean trade relations in the form of barter and (D4) on the information front beneficial to North Korea will be promoted. Both of these orientations will be carried out discreetly, rather than overtly, and will be ramped up in an "oil slick" fashion to take advantage of the time the relevant powers are struggling with Covid-19 during the first half of 2021.

Second, both regions are waiting and preparing to release important "leverages" to make qualitative adjustments in the strategy of creating "economic common denominators" at the right time. In this strategy, North Korea is an active player as it possesses multi-trillion-dollar mineral reserves (Patricia Schouker, 2020) that are essential for the semiconductor industries (an important element for high-tech products), whereas South Korea is solely responsible for promoting and supporting energy as a powerhouse in technology and nuclear power. Kim Jong-un's new economic plan

announced in January 2021 (after conceding the failure of the 2016-2020 plan at the meeting in August 2020) has revealed the prospect of advancing the “economicize benefits” strategy to a new turning point. He will most likely implement “tourist country” projects (without sanctions) and open economic zones (Rason, Unjong, Wonsan and Sinuiju - 4 national priority areas) for international investment in exploiting North Korea's huge rare earth mines (P. Schouker, 2020) – to attract the US and other countries to participate in the context of both Japan and South Korea – China and many great powers are in a high demand for semiconductor materials. The transition time from 2020 to 2021 will be used to deploy these “nudges”, and both regions will jointly optimize efficiency in recruiting related countries depending on their economic interests.

Third, the two Koreas will jointly handle external pressures and coordinate actions in the direction of hard (North Korea) and soft (South Korea) combination. Since June 2020, the US has continually presented a negative image of North Korea, intensified warnings to private companies to avoid doing business with North Korea and laying the groundwork for additional sanctions against this country. The possibility of North Korea violating agreements on long-range missile tests, or resuming its nuclear program, or openly threatening to attack US military bases in Northeast Asia / U.S territory is *very low*. It is highly likely that North Korea will maintain the threat *close to the US red line* but expand many new forms (such as officially testing/announcing a submarine-launched ballistic missile SLBM, putting on an ICBM/IRBM/MRBM parade), but still have to keep everything within the shell of “virtual belligerence” that might be relinquished at any time and focus resources on economic “nudges” after the pandemic Covid-19 is under control around the world.

6. Conclusion

After a series of summit-level dialogue efforts aimed at creating a breakthrough in relations with the US and South Korea in the whole year of 2018 and the unsuccessful ending of the 2nd US-North Korea Summit in Hanoi, North Korea has flexibly adjusted both the approaches as well as the order of foreign policy priorities with both the US and South Korea in accordance with developments in the new situation. For the US, through the establishment of 3 new foundations in the relationship, including: (H₁) reducing the role of the US in issues related to the Korean peninsula, (H₂) enhancing defense self-reliance in the direction of developing a defensive arsenal that does not violate future nuclear agreements and (H₃) strengthening multilateralization activities, diversifying foreign relations, North Korea has moved from a “maximum denuclearization” orientation in order to normalize relations with the US before multilateralizing foreign relations” to the orientation of “minimum denuclearization to diversify foreign relations before normalizing relations with the US”. As for the Republic of Korea, North Korea has moved from a period of confrontation back to a peaceful one, and continued to maintain four orientations within the ability to coordinate between the two Koreas, including: (D₁) reforming the political apparatus in the direction of strengthening forces advocating inter-Korean reconciliation, (D₂) jointly promoting economic self-reliance activities, reducing dependence on foreign imports, (D₃) jointly creating inter-Korean economic exchanges that do not violate sanctions and (D₄) jointly improving a more positive international perception of North Korea as well as the need for the normalization of inter-Korean relations. Both of these tailored outreach platforms demonstrate initiative, flexibility, and focus to reduce high-risk collaborations as well as increase effective collaborations after a pilot phase of intense opening to both the US and Korea.

In order to achieve foreign policy goals according to such new priorities and approaches, North Korea also consistently promotes three important pillars to convey positive messages about the country to the world: (i) propagating a new foreign policy of “more friends, less enemies”, (ii) developing modern defense capabilities showing the ineffectiveness of multilateral sanctions and emphasizing compliance military development limits within the framework of self-defense agreed with the US and South Korea and (iii) affirming the development path of international economic integration (especially the national tourism development strategies) remained pivotal in North

Korea's strategies for the period after 2021. North Korea also seems to be open to the possibility of replacing nuclear defense capabilities with fully developed non-nuclear defense capabilities, and ready for a situation where it is necessary to exchange nuclear capabilities for peace. These three pillars form a key foundation that not only helps North Korea gain more leverage and power to approach the US and South Korea in a more equal position, but also creates a friendly and positive image of a North Korea for regions and international organizations committing that the country will implement economic integration, post-denuclearization political integration. Therefore, although there are many obstacles and challenges coming from the United Nations' multilateral sanctions as well as the vague policy of maintaining an unstable Korean peninsula from the US side, North Korea has revealed many signs showing the consistent promotion of effective self-reliance in both defense and economy together with promoting multilateralization and diversification of foreign relations in order to maximize options in the context of wanting the world to improve a more positive view of this country.

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