



The Future of the Demolished Inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office

Young-Sun Ha (East Asia Institute, Seoul National University)

Translated by Jinkyung Baek

North Korea blew up the Inter-Korean Liason Office, which was built under the auspices of the Panmunjom Declaration of April 27, 2018. The first thing that came into mind while watching its collapse was Chairman Kim Il-sung's *Mainichi Shimbun* press conference, held two months after the July 4th South-North Korea Joint Statement of 1972. Heavily criticizing South Korea for not observing the "Three Principles of Unification," Kim Il-sung foresaw the tragic future of the July 4th Joint Statement.

Firstly, by contending that South Korea is not faithfully committed to the inter-Korean agreements and has taken a double-sided approach after following the statement, Kim Il-sung claimed that "To be frank, reunifying the country independently means forcing the U.S. imperialism out of South Korea and preventing other foreign forces from interfering in the reunification of our country." Second, Kim Il-sung insisted that tensions on the Korean Peninsula are continuing to rise, even with the mutual consensus that unification should occur through peace, and not by force. North Korea, at the time, anticipated that the improvement of inter-Korean relations through a peaceful approach would contribute to the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula. Third, Kim Il-sung lamented the continuation of the "Anti-Communist Act" or the "National Security Act," stating that South Korean authorities are exercising continued political oppression upon its people. Around the same period, in a personal letter that Kim Il-sung sent to President Nicolae Ceaușescu of Romania, Kim stressed the importance of democratizing the South Korean society through a revolution in resolving the inter-Korean situation. Thus, the July 4th South-North

Korea Joint Statement – the first of its kind since the Korean War – was abandoned within a year.

Chairman Kim Il-sung's press conference from a half century ago still holds significant weight: Kim Jong-Un's decision to demolish the Inter-Korean Liaison Office shows that his political perspective remains dated, resonating that of his grandfather. Chairman Kim Il-sung, amid the shifting global order throughout the mid-1960s, decided to pursue the theory of "revolution-unification" by emphasizing the "three revolutionary capabilities" of North Korea, South Korea, and the world. As it became realistically unfeasible to pursue the theory of a "unification through war," North Korea embodied such "unification through revolution" theories in the July 4th South-North Joint Declaration by addressing them in its "Three Principles of Unification." Since then, and throughout more than half a century during which it adopted the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement of December 1991, the June 15th South-North Joint Declaration of 2000, the October 4th Declaration of 2007, and the Panmunjom Declaration/the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of 2018, North Korea remained adamant on the basic principles and languages of the three revolutionary capabilities.

Thus, to come up with effective measures following the demolishment of the Inter-Korean Liaison Office, it is important to refrain from insisting on superficial allopathies such as the banning of anti-North Korea leaflets and the dismantlement of the ROK-U.S. Working Group. Instead, North Korea's speeches and actions since the breakdown of the February 2019 Hanoi Summit should be interpreted from a perspective that encompasses North Korea's survival strategy based on its three revolutionary capabilities. Chairman Kim Jong-Un, at the First session of the Fourteenth Supreme People's Assembly, gave a policy speech under the title of "On Socialist Construction and the Internal and External Policies of the Government of the Republic at the Present Stage," which adhered to the basic principles of the three revolutionary capabilities. First, Kim stressed the importance of economic self-sufficiency, increased political-military might, advancement of socialist culture, and enhanced roles and capacities of governmental organs by referencing the revolutionary line of independence, the people-first principle, and party leadership. While Kim positively assessed the Panmunjom Declaration and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration in the context of inciting revolutionary capabilities within South Korea, he also stressed that South Korea "should not waver in their attitude as they see the tide nor pose as a meddling 'mediator' and 'facilitator,' as they busy themselves with foreign trips, but be a responsible party that defends the interests of the nation speaking what they have to say squarely with the mind of their own as members of the nation." He also mentioned that "it is imperative to smash the underhand schemes of the hostile anti-reunification and anti-peace forces within and without in order to sustain the atmosphere of improved inter-Korean relations" if South Korea truly wishes to improve inter-Korean relations,

foster peace, and pursue unification. Lastly, in terms of improving its international revolutionary capabilities, Kim Jong-Un meaningfully appraised the June 12th U.S.-DPRK Singapore Summit Joint Declaration from 2018 while questioning the Hanoi Summit in February 2019. Kim asserted that U.S. disregard for the basic idea of ending its hostile policy towards North Korea and its misjudgment that a full-force sanctions regime would bring North Korea down to its knees were what had led to the breakdown of the summit. In following, Kim emphasized that the U.S. should bring new calculations to the table in order to continue a third round of U.S.-DPRK talks.

At the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea in December 2019, held 8 months after the aforementioned policy speech, Chairman Kim Jong-Un once again presented the blueprint for "follow[ing] the course of victorious fights under the unfurled banner of achieving prosperity by dint of self-reliance." He also declared that "challenges that have faced [North Korea] in the past several months have been so harsh and dangerous that others would not withstand even a single day but be forced to yield, but no difficulties could ever stop or delay the march of [the North Korean] people advancing undauntedly as a whole of solid integrity." In regard to North Korea's political obstacles, Kim emphasized that the founding principle of the plenary meeting is to break through head-on and dominate the objective factors inhibiting its regime, rather than waiting until the coast is clear.

Kim also highlighted U.S. hostile policy towards North Korea as North Korea's biggest threat. As the end-of-year deadline set by North Korea passed without tangible developments in U.S.-DPRK negotiations, Kim blamed that the prolonged U.S. hostile policy toward North Korea placed the Korean Peninsula in a more dangerous situation, reaffirming the need to strengthen its military capabilities. It also stated that new strategic weapons will soon be witnessed as North Korea cannot risk its own security in exchange for the lifting of current sanctions in the face of increasing hostility and nuclear threats. At the same time, North Korea clarified that sanctions can only be confronted by self-reliance. These statements highlight problems that need to be addressed in the fields of state management and economic projects under the banner of strengthening self-reliance.

North Korea's effort to break through the impasse in 2019 is facing an even more difficult phase with the global spread of COVID-19 in 2020. It faces practical limitations in increasing its domestic and international capabilities. The improvement in inter-Korean relations over the past two years was expected to contribute to the strengthening of its domestic and international capabilities but has failed to yield any significant developments. Kim Yo-jong, the first vice director of the United Front Department of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) harshly criticized the South

Korean government for its two mistakes twice in mid-June: for anti-North Korea leaflets and for the ROK- U.S. Working Group. During the first announcement, she stated “I feel it is high time to surely break with the South Korean authorities,” while mentioning “anyway, now the South Korean authorities are left with nothing to do with us.” Such statement warns of a bleak future in inter-Korean relations unless South Korea amends its two mistakes and decides to align with a new strategic line. In North Korea's perspective, the fundamental problem related to the distribution of anti-North Korean leaflets is that they defame the highest and sacred dignity required for the strengthening of its domestic revolutionary capabilities. Therefore, North Korea is demanding that South Korea's policymakers choose between assuming either traitor and trustee roles based on the principle of national unity residing within the July 4th Joint Statement. In addition, the issue North Korea raised regarding the ROK- U.S. Working Group is not just a practical matter. It rather insists that South Korea choose between the path of self-reliance versus subordination. Although Kim Jong-un ordered the suspension of military actions against South Korea on June 23, Kim Yo-jong's threatening statement illustrates North Korea's true intentions.

At home and abroad, policy debates are focused on tactical solutions for resolving the anti-North Korea leaflets and the ROK- U.S. Working Group issues. However, the core of the problem is elsewhere. The reconstruction blueprint of North Korea is still based on its goal of augmenting its three revolutionary capabilities, which dates back half a century. If South Korea agrees to the principles of the North Korean blueprint—as indicated in the July 4th Joint Declaration—it can reconstruct its relationship with North Korea in the short term. However, the bigger problem lies in the fact that North Korea's barren blueprint cannot help bolster the Korean Peninsula into an advanced and civilized nation in the 21st century; rather by embarking on the blueprint, the Korean Peninsula would stray back to the shadows of the past. It is urgent to create a blueprint that would strengthen Korea's three revolutionary capabilities to fit the 21st century; the true Sunshine Policy that would befit such a blueprint would be one that embraces a futuristic North Korea and helps it adopt into the 21st century. For attaining these goals, it is necessary for North Korea to reorganize itself politically, economically, socially, culturally, ecologically, and technologically, to adjust itself to the 21st century. At the same time, South Korea, as an advanced and civilized 21st century nation, should also support the advancement of North Korea, alongside other neighboring countries. Most importantly, South Korea should improve its own domestic political capabilities befitting the 21st century in order to achieve the reconstruction of the Korean Peninsula.

- *Young-Sun Ha* is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the East Asia Institute, and also a professor emeritus at Seoul National University. Dr. Ha received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington.

- *Jinkyung Baek* is a Program Manager and Research Associate at the East Asia Institute.

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Typesetting: Jinkyung Baek

For inquiries:

Jinkyung Baek, Research Associate/Project Manager
North Korea and National Security Research Group
Asia Democracy Research Group

Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 209) j.baek@eai.or.kr

The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, Eulji-ro 158, Jung-gu,
Seoul 04548, South Korea
Phone 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1697
Email eai@eai.or.kr Website www.eai.or.kr