

# South Korea's Geopolitical Code and Inter-Korean Relations: "Northeast Asia+ Community of Responsibility" \*

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**Abstract:** The year 2018 was surely a major turning point in the history of inter-Korean relations. The two Koreas have made a breakthrough in shifting the destiny of the Korean peninsula from a prolonged "security dilemma" to a possible coexistence. It might be premature to discuss about unification, having been divided for 74 years as we speak now, nevertheless recent development shows that inter-Korean relations are on its track to the establishment of peace and ease of tension. In 2018, the number of North Korean military provocation against the South was "zero". Furthermore, the year 2018 has shown a great shift in South Korea's North Korea policy. The purpose of this article is to elaborate on how this great shift has been taken; in order to do this, the concept of "Geopolitical Code" has been used. By analyzing the Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration, the background and context of the Moon Administration's North Korea Policy has been explained. This process has also indicated the policy directions as well as the Grand Strategy and foreign policy goals of South Korea. With this lens, this research has eventually provided some interpretation on some of the key events that took place between South and North Korea in 2018.

**Keywords:** *Korea, South Korea, North Korea, Geopolitical Code*

## Güney Kore'nin Jeopolitik Kodu ve Güney - Kuzey Kore İlişkileri: "Kuzeydoğu Asya + Sorumluluk Topluluğu"

**Öz:** 2018 yılı hiç kuşkusuz Güney ve Kuzey Kore ilişkiler tarihinin önemli bir noktasıydı. İki taraf da Kore yarımadasının kaderini değiştirmek adına uzun süre devam eden "güvenlik açmazından" olası bir birlikte yaşama doğru büyük bir atılım yaptı. Yetmiş dört yıldır bölünmüş bir halde olanın birleşmesi hakkında tartışmak erken olabilir. Bununla birlikte, yaşanan bu gelişmeler Güney ve Kuzey Kore'nin,

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ilişkilerindeki barışın temin edilmesi ve tansiyonun düşmesi yolunda ilerlediğini göstermektedir. 2018 yılı içerisinde Kuzey Kore tarafının Güney Kore'ye karşı yürüttüğü askeri provokasyon sayısı "sıfırdı". Ayrıca 2018 yılında Güney Kore'nin Kuzey Kore politikasında da büyük değişimler gerçekleşti. Bu makalenin amacı bahsi edilen bu büyük değişimin nasıl meydana geldiğini ayrıntılı olarak incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda "Jeopolitik Kod" kavramı kullanılmıştır. Moon idaresinin Jeopolitik Kodunu analiz ederek, Kuzey Kore politikasının arka planı ve bağlamı açıklanmıştır. Bu süreçte aynı zamanda Güney Kore'nin siyasi istikametinin yanı sıra Büyük Strateji ve dış politika hedeflerine de işaret etmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, işbu çalışma Güney ve Kuzey Kore arasında 2018 yılında gerçekleşen bazı önemli olaylar üzerine yorumlar sunmuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Kore, Güney Kore, Kuzey Kore, Jeopolitik Kod*

## Introduction

The year 2018 was surely a major turning point in the history of inter-Korean relations. The two Koreas have made a breakthrough in shifting the destiny of the Korean peninsula from a prolonged "security dilemma" to a possible coexistence. (Yoon, 2018: 23) It might be premature to discuss about unification, having been divided for 74 years as we speak now, nevertheless recent development shows that inter-Korean relations are on its track to the establishment of peace and ease of tension. In 2018, the number of North Korean military provocation against the South was "zero"<sup>1</sup>.

Rather than provocation, North Korea concentrated on opening "talks" with the South as well as the U.S. Starting from February, with its participation in Pyeongchang Olympics, the mood for reconciliation was ripened. On 27<sup>th</sup> of April, both Koreas announced that the "Era of Peace" has come; President Moon and Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, have met in Panmunjom, agreeing on ending the war in the Korean peninsula and move on to denuclearization in the future. The momentum of confidence-

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<sup>1</sup> As a reference, North Korean provocation in 2017 was quite severe. In New Year's address on January, North Korea announced that it has successfully developed an ICBM; On March, North Korea test-fired an ICBM, and until November, the number of North Korean test-fire reached up to 20; The 6<sup>th</sup> Nuclear Test on September, and North Korea also announce that it has acquired a hydrogen bomb technology. Please see: Radio Free Asia, "North Korea's 6th Nuclear Test and Missile Test-fires", *Radio Free Asia* (21 December 2017). [https://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/nk\\_nuclear\\_talks/sp-ab-12182017154544.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/nk_nuclear_talks/sp-ab-12182017154544.html).

building accelerated in 26<sup>th</sup> of May, with a surprising second inter-Korean Summit of the year. Two consecutive Summits prepared the ground for a historic U.S.-North Korean dialogue on 12<sup>th</sup> of June, between President Trump and Kim Jong-un. The "Panmunjom Spring" was fructified on 12<sup>th</sup> of September, with the "Pyongyang Joint Declaration" at their third Summit.<sup>2</sup> South Korea is looking forward to inviting North Korean leader to Seoul as a return visit this year.

As elaborated above, the year 2018 has shown a great shift in South Korea's North Korea policy. The peacemaking process of the Moon Administration has been gradually built up after his inauguration in May 2017. The purpose of this article is to elaborate on how this great shift has been taken; in order to do this, the concept of "Geopolitical Code" will be used. By analyzing the Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration, the background and context of the Moon Administration's North Korea Policy will be explained. This process will also indicate the policy directions as well as the Grand Strategy and foreign policy goals of South Korea. With this lens, this research will eventually provide some interpretation on some of the key events that took place in 2018 and move on to provide some prospects for inter-Korean relations in 2019.

## **Geopolitical Code of South Korean Administrations**

### **1. Definition and Significance of the Geopolitical Code**

The term "Geopolitical Code" was first introduced by professor Colin Flint at Utah State University. In his book, he defines it as follows: "The manner in which a country orientates itself toward the world is called a geopolitical code." (Flint, 2006: 55-56) In other words, the Geopolitical Code is more or less a "representation tool" which articulates and expresses the foreign policy direction of a certain state.

If we analyze the Geopolitical Code of a certain Administration, which is mostly represented through official documents and pronouncements, we can figure out the basic ideas and goals of that

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<sup>2</sup> The Joint Declaration is composed of six articles and fourteen clauses; the two sides agreed on making the Korean peninsula a ground for peace, absent of nuclear weapon and nuclear threats. In addition, they agreed to share the perception to make substantial progress in fulfilling their agreements. Please see: The Korea Times, "Pyongyang Declaration", *The Korea Times* (19 September 2018). [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103\\_255848.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103_255848.html).

Administration. Moreover, by tracing how it is projected, usually through Doctrines or certain sets of policies, one can comprehend the direction and context of the policies that have been implemented.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Geopolitical Codes of the past Administrations

It is not always easy to distinguish the Geopolitical Code of a certain Administration. The largest impasse comes from "implication." Some Administration might openly pronounce and represent its Geopolitical Code; whereas, some Administrations do not openly release their ideas. Another distinct feature that needs to be considered is the unique characteristic of South Korea's foreign policy. Due to its historical and political circumstances, or so-called "Cold War tradition," (Oh, 2012: 107) South Korea's geopolitical field was more or less foreshortened to the North East Asia region, or sometimes abstracted to the Korean peninsula. Due to its archenemy in the North, South Korea inevitably had to commit its national resources at a regional level; also, most of the resources, including human resources, were arranged to heighten its military strength.

This was the very case for the Rhee Syngman Administration [1948-1960, three-terms], the first president of South Korea. His Geopolitical Code, considering the fact that he was in the middle of the Korean War, was naturally "Liberalization of North Korea." (Nam, 2012: 133-164) He believed that South Korea was the only legitimate regime in the peninsula, noting that only "One State, One Government, and One People" exist. He argued that it was South Korea's responsibility to restore North and to liberate the people from the USSR influence. (*bid*: 137)

The Geopolitical Code of "Liberalization of North Korea" was inherited by the second president of South Korea, President Park Chung-hee [1963-1979, five-terms]. In his "Revolution Commitment," which he announced in 1961 after his coup d'état, he urged to cultivate South Korea's ability - in terms of economic development and liberal democracy - to counter Communism and to restore the North. (CCHKMR, 1963) The Geopolitical Code of "Liberalization of North Korea" was once again succeeded to

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail, please see chapter three in: Joosong Lee, "The U.S. Counter-Terrorism Policy as a Geopolitical Code and Global Jihadism: Analytical Description from 1989-2017", *Doctoral dissertation* (2018), Graduate School of International and Area Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

president Chun Doo-hwan [1980-1988, two-terms]. Similar Geopolitical Codes and entailing policies continued for over 40 years.

President Roh Tae-woo [1988-1993], however, came up with an offbeat. Roh Administration modified its Geopolitical Code as a "Nordpolitik." The Roh Administration was the first to widen its scope to the North East Asia region from a myopic Korean peninsula. His targets were the Communist states, namely USSR, China, East European states, and exclusively North Korea. His Geopolitical Code, which he represented in his inauguration speech, had three stages: first, improve relations with USSR and China to promote peace and stability in the region; then, through economic cooperation with the Communist states, promote inter-Korean exchange and cooperation; and lastly and ultimately, normalize diplomatic relations with the Communist states to encourage Korean unification.(Lee, 1998) The projection of the Geopolitical Code "Nordpolitik" was initiated with establishing diplomatic relations with USSR in June 1990, and with China in August 1992.

Subsequent president, Kim Young-sam [1993-1998] did not have a clear Geopolitical Code. As the first democratically elected president of South Korea, he did not have much room for maneuver in the international level due to domestic issues. He was more or less involved in normalizing the state system and cleaning up the debris of prolonged military dictatorship. To make things worse, he was faced with a financial crisis in 1997.

The Kim Dae-Jung Administration [1998-2003] probably was the very first Administration in South Korea to have a concrete Geopolitical Code. His Geopolitical Code was based on his philosophy and vision. The Geopolitical Code of Kim Administration can be abstracted as "Sunshine Policy." (Yang, 1990: 27-30) It was a great shift of perception as well as its strategy. It meant that South Korea would take the forward-looking policy. By taking the initiative in showing amicable attitudes and helping the North to "change," Kim Administration hoped to see some corresponding responses. In order to show its sincerity, South Korea steadily provided economic aids and investment to North Korea in spite of North Korea's military provocations and hostile rhetoric (Ministry of Unification, 1998). His détente efforts have achieved a historic Summit meeting in 2000 in Pyongyang. However, there

were criticisms that he has “bought” temporary peace without receiving any assured change from the North Korea regime.

Kim Administration's Geopolitical Code was inherited by his successor, president Roh Moo-hyun [2003-2008]. The goal of his Geopolitical Code of “Peace and Prosperity” was to promote mutual peace and prosperity of the two Koreas in order to reach the stage of peaceful unification. In other words, it was another three stage of peacebuilding, making a cooperative atmosphere, and at last, tackling the thorning issues such as a nuclear weapon. (Ministry of Unification, 2004) Moreover, he moved on to represent his newer Geopolitical Code of “Balancer of North East Asia.” His vision was to become an independent variable in the region, by making an “independent diplomatic ways” vis-à-vis the U.S., Japan, China, and Russia. (The Korea Times, 2005) His ideas, however, received contrasting critics due to its feasibility.

The 17<sup>th</sup> president of South Korea, President Lee Myung-bak [2008-2013], announced his Geopolitical Code as “Mature World State.” His basic ideas were to take a utilitarian approach in its foreign policy, based on the separation of economy and politics (The Bluehouse, 2009). He tried to promote “Perestroika and Glasnost” in North Korea through economic exchange and cooperation, on the condition that the North give up its nuclear weapon. (Seo, 2008: 23-27) However, his wishful thoughts were never fulfilled.

The Park Geun-Hye Administration [2013-2017] also nurtured a quite concrete Geopolitical Code. After witnessing previous shifts in Geopolitical Codes, back and forth from bashing and seducing North Korea, the Park Administration tried to balance the both. She came up with “Korean Peninsula Trust-Building Process.” It was a vision of building trust between the two through communication, but under some principles: denuclearization and sincere attitude in return. (Park, 2011) She resolved to become the “leading role” in inter-Korean relations, rather than being swayed by. Even though her ideas and policies were supported by the international community, the result from the projections of the Geopolitical Code – namely the North Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiatives (NAPCI) – was rather below expectation. The main criticism was on the discrepancy between vision and practice. NAPCI failed to build trust between the two Koreas; rather, it was a platform that proved to show that hard security issues couldn't be handled by wishful

thoughts. (Um, 2015: 12) Moreover, strong emphasis on principle and lack of flexible responses failed to create any substantive improvements in inter-Korean relations.

## **Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration: Northeast Asia+ Community of Responsibility**

### **1. Background and Significance**

The Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration [May 2017~] is also quite clear. Through his announcement in the "Five Year National Political Agenda," which was officially presented in July 2017, he represented his Administration's Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility." He urged that peaceful and cooperative environment through this "Community" will guarantee survival and prosperity. (E-today, 2017)

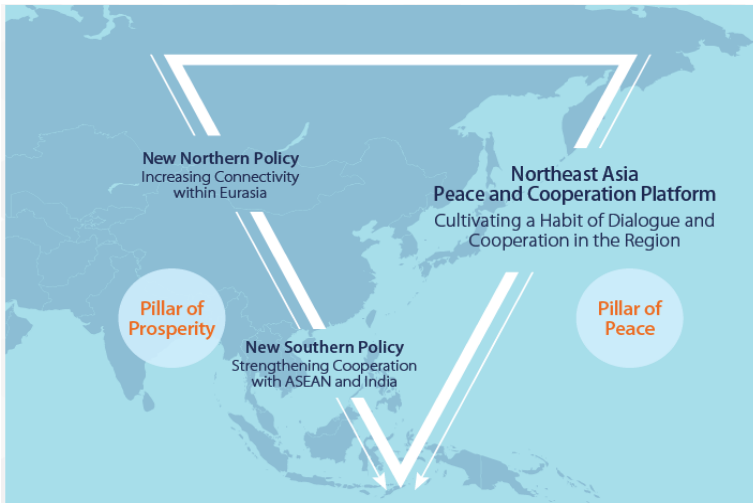
Compared to other Geopolitical Codes from previous Administrations, the so-called "Northeast Asia Plus Community" implies that South Korea's geopolitical calculation and scope has been enlarged. It connotes a vision that South Korea would reach out beyond the players in the Northeast Asia region for support and cooperation. In other words, it is a long-term regional vision of "building a community that involves relevant countries to take responsibility for regional peace and prosperity beyond the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia." (MFA, 2017) It involves the key players in the Northeast Asian region, India, the ASEAN states, and beyond the states in the Eurasian region. It is a Grand Strategy of South Korea, which seeks to enhance multilateral cooperation in the region, with an ultimate goal to institutionalize the multilateral security cooperation regime such as "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)." (Lee, 2018)

### **2. Main Pillars: Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform, New Northern Policy, New Southern Policy**

The Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility" consists of three main subsections. It involves an "Axis of Peace (Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform)" and "Axis of Prosperity (New Northern Policy and New Southern Policy)". (Cho, 2017) It means that South Korea will build the peaceful and cooperative environment in the region through the "Axis of Peace," and at the same time, construct a bridge of peace and prosperity through the "Axis of Prosperity" which connects the

Northern continent and Southern Maritime region with South Korea. This platform is quite similar to the NAPCI of the previous Park Administration, which was also a multilateral platform to promote peace and cooperation; it received amicable evaluation since policy coherence with the past is very important. The main difference, however, is that the main method in the inducement is "enticement" rather than "hare coursing." In other words, the Moon Administration is taking a functionalist approach to prompt North Korea to cooperate in the "low politics" issues, hopefully extending the cooperation towards "hard politics" issues such as the nuclear weapon.

**[Diagram 1. Northeast Asia+ Community of Responsibility]**



**Source:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018)

**1) Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform:** The purpose of the "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform" is to provide a platform or a venue for the stakeholders in the region to share ideas and to enhance mutual understanding. South Korea seeks to contribute to enhancing regional peace and cooperation.<sup>4</sup> The Moon Administration believes that through this platform, the regional actors will find an "order" to manage regional tension and shift long

<sup>4</sup> This platform is based on an open and flexible approach. Even the other regional and international organizations who share interest in promoting peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia can participate as a partner. In addition, South Korea is making efforts to persuade North Korea to join the platform. Please see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Booklet on Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).



history of confrontation into peace and cooperation. This idea was based on the premise that, unlike Europe, the region lacks the experience of fostering cooperation through dialogue. Moreover, in the long run, this platform of mutual trust and cooperation can also effectively address transnational threats such as terrorism, epidemics, cyber-crimes, and so on. (*ibid*: 3) Being successful, this platform will contribute as a core task in fulfilling the goals that the Moon Administration is eager to achieve, the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility."

**2) New Northern Policy:** The "New Northern Policy" is another core task which supports the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility." If the "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform" were an effort to achieve peace in the region, this task is more or less related to achieving prosperity in the region. This core policy is to increase connectivity with the Eurasia region, in order to create future growth engine and to construct foothold for peace in the region. (NECC, 2017) South Korea has paid attention to the potential of the Eurasian market and to the possibility of making links with China's "One-Belt One-Road" policy. Moreover, the Moon Administration believes that this task can attract North Korea into the South Korea-led Community. The signature program of "New Northern Policy" is the "9-Bridge Strategy." President Moon announced as a keynote speaker in the "Eastern Economic Forum" that South Korea will build "nine bridges"<sup>5</sup> that can connect South Korea and the Eurasia region simultaneously. In order to carry out these tasks, the Moon Administration launched "Northern Economic Cooperation Committee" in June 2017.

**3) New Southern Policy:** The "New Southern Policy" is also one of the core tasks to support the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility." In fact, it is regarded as the third leg of the Moon Administration's Geopolitical Code triangle. This task is also related to achieving prosperity in the region, just like the "New Northern Policy," targeting the ASEAN region for cooperation. South Korea took notice of the value of the ASEAN

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<sup>5</sup> The nine bridges, or cooperation field, are fisheries, farming, electricity, railroad, North Pole route, gas, shipbuilding, harbor, and industrial complex. For more details, please refer to the "Northern Economic Cooperation Committee" homepage: [http://www.bukbang.go.kr/bukbang/vision\\_policy/9-bridge/?jsessionid=7LzNp5iPnQ1ucU-h2-KP-sTj.node20](http://www.bukbang.go.kr/bukbang/vision_policy/9-bridge/?jsessionid=7LzNp5iPnQ1ucU-h2-KP-sTj.node20).

market and its fast-growing economy. The main idea is to realize a human-centered community of peace and prosperity between South Korea and the ASEAN region. This can be achieved by promoting mutual understanding, building a foothold for reciprocal economic cooperation, and by establishing the secured environment.<sup>6</sup> The cooperation field of "New Southern Policy" is consisted of sixteen sub-projects. The issues are related to tourism, cultural exchange, overseas training, trade and investment, infrastructure, smart industry, security cooperation, defense cooperation, and so on. The Moon Administration launched the "Southern Economic Cooperation Committee" in August 2018 to carry out the task.

### **3. Representation and Projection of the Geopolitical Code**

The Moon Administration repeatedly represented its Geopolitical Code to both domestic and abroad. Among the two pillars of the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility," however, "Pillar of Peace (Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform)" received more attention. Even though the other pillar, "Pillar of Prosperity (New Northern Policy and New Southern Policy)," was regarded as equally important, the security environment and circumstantial reality led the Moon Administration to concentrate on the North Korea issue first. The other pillar, yet, was not regarded as a second priority; rather, it was another important axis that goes in line with the first pillar. In fact, representation of the second pillar was also actively propagated.

#### **1) Pillar of Peace**

The representation of the first pillar, "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility," received more attention, as expected. Starting with the message in July 2017, through "Five Year National Political Agenda," president Moon consistently propagated his vision and South Korea's Grand Strategy. His representations were provided through major interviews, speeches, and official documents. The background information of the Geopolitical Code and its following steps were explicitly stated in the booklets published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Unification.

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<sup>6</sup> For more details, please refer to "Southern Economic Cooperation Committee" homepage: <http://www.nsp.go.kr/policy/policy01Page.do#thus>.

Key messages, however, were laid out through official declarations after inter-Korean Summits. After a historic Summit in April 2018 with the North Korean leader, which was the first time since November 2007, the Moon Administration reiterated its vision in "Panmunjom Declaration" that both Koreas will focus on making the peaceful and cooperative environment in the region. (Lee, 2018: 1-2) It gave a significant momentum in opening the U.S.-North Korean Summit in June 2018. The Moon Administration showed its positive reaction to the Summit and showed its anticipation that the Summit became a milestone for permanent peace establishment in the region. (Moon, 2018)

Another significant representation of the Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration was revealed in the congratulatory address of the National Liberation Day in August 2018. In his message, he reiterated that the two Koreas have established a stepping-stone for economic cooperation and furthermore the possibility of multilateral security cooperation as a result of two important Summits. (Yonhap News, 2018) His messages were reemphasized through the "Pyongyang Joint Declaration" in September 2018. President Moon has shown his unwearied vision of forming a peace and prosperity community based on mutual understanding and responsibility. The Moon Administration organized its Geopolitical Code and published its "National Security Strategy" report in December 2018, which is the first official strategy report in his term. (Bluehouse, 2018)

## **2) Pillar of Prosperity**

**(1) New Northern Policy:** Representation of the second pillar, "Pillar of Prosperity (New Northern Policy and New Southern Policy)," was promoted through two major committees. In case of "New Northern Policy," "Northern Economic Cooperation Committee" was established in June 2017. Then, its importance was reiterated in the "Five Year National Political Agenda," which represented the main ideas of the Moon Administration's Geopolitical Code. In September 2017, president Moon has made a keynote speech in the "Eastern Economic Forum" to propose a new vision for South Korea's policy towards the Eurasian continent. He emphasized the importance of cooperation between two Koreas and Russia in developing the Far East region. The ideas were

represented through booklets published by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through Bluehouse issue briefs.

**(2) New Southern Policy:** The second tier of the "Pillar of Prosperity," the "New Southern Policy," headed off in August 2018. It was primarily introduced in the "Five Year National Political Agenda," and reiterated through "South Korea-ASEAN Future Community Initiatives" which was announced in November 2017. The official propagation of the "New Southern Policy" was presented as the "Southern Economic Cooperation Committee" was established in August 2018. The "Southern Economic Cooperation Committee" held several international seminars and academic conferences to introduce Moon Administration's vision, exchange views on ways to enhance cooperation, and to promote comprehensive exchange between South Korea's policymakers and experts from ASEAN states.

### **Geopolitical Code of Northeast Asia+ Community of Responsibility and Inter-Korean Relations**

As briefly mentioned above, "Pillar of Peace (Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform)" received more attention than the other pillar, "Pillar of Prosperity (New Northern Policy and New Southern Policy)." Even though the second pillar, regarding prosperity, is equally important, it can be obsolete in the absence of peace and stability in the region. In other words, if North Korea raises tension and threatens regional security, the question of prosperity becomes the second priority. This has always been a chronic problem in the region. Even in times of détente during Kim Dae-Jung Administration and Roh Moo-hyun Administration, economic cooperation and peacebuilding efforts were hindered by North Korea's provocation from time to time. Lack of trust and responsibility between the two Koreas raised the incentive of betrayal for the North Korean leaders.

The game of betrayal and security dilemma in the region was shifted with the introduction of new leaders in the region. President Moon came up with a new Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility," which provides a platform for dialogue and contribute to enhancing regional peace and cooperation, including North Korea. It was a message of peace and coexistence.

The North Korean leader has also taken a big step. In order to overcome its economic stagnancy from prolonged international economic sanctions, which might destabilize his regime survival, Kim Jong-un announced its "New Strategic Way" at the third plenary meeting of the seventh "Central Committee of the Workers' Party" on 20th of April 2018. (Lee, 2018: 4) The key message was that North Korea will focus on its socialist economic construction, rather than developing its nuclear technology and that it will hold dialogues with its neighbors and the international community.

Another key player was Donald Trump, the president of the U.S. Trump, typically a Washington D.C. outsider, refused conventional U.S. security stereotype of "No talks and no negotiations with the rogue state." He even mentioned about "Hamburger Meeting" with North Korean leader during his presidential campaign in June 2016. (Gass, 2016) He emphasized the importance of a dialogue; rather than cutting off the retreat route, he left the room for a change. President Moon also did his part in making efforts to revive the U.S.-North Korean dialogue channel.

New leaders and new approaches made 2018 a year of a great shift in the Korean peninsula. The Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration's "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility" was aptly met with the circumstantial environment of North Korea, which resulted in a series of inter-Korean Summits in 2018. Moreover, with South Korea's efforts to mediate a dialogue between Kim Jong-un and president Trump, historic U.S.-North Korean Summit was held in 2018.

### **1. Panmunjom Declaration (27 April 2018)**

The third inter-Korean Summit, which was held on 27 April 2018, opened the era of peace in the Korean peninsula. The Summit has not been held since October 2007, for almost eleven years. The place "Panmunjom," which has been a place for division and confrontation, has become a place of trust and cooperation. Two Koreas agreed on three key issues: Improve inter-Korean ties, Ease tensions in the Korean peninsula, and Peace-regime building and denuclearization. (Reuters, 2018)

The two sides agreed that the purpose of improving inter-Korean ties is to mutually prosper and for independent unification in the future. The action plans were as follows: hold dialogue and

negotiations in various fields including at high level, establish a joint liaison office with resident representatives of both sides in Kaesong, and encourage more active cooperation, exchanges, visits, and contacts at all levels. Article 2 declares that two Koreas will reduce tensions in the Korean peninsula; they agreed to alleviate the severe military tension and practically eliminate the danger of war in the peninsula. They have also agreed on making the West Sea into a maritime peace zone, with a rare stipulation of the NLL (Northern Limit Line). (Lee, 2018: 2) Article 3 deals with Peace-regime building and denuclearization, which is the most nettlesome issue. The two sides concurred that the current armistice should be terminated; also, in Clause 4, they have declared that our common goal is realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

One of the most significant achievements from the Summit was a joint liaison office with resident representatives of both sides in Kaesong. This signifies that two Koreas have acquired a "hot-line" which will function as a platform for dialogue and communication. (Kim, 2018) This is one of the key factors of the Geopolitical Code of the Moon Administration. Also, it was the first time that North Korean leader mentioned about a complete denuclearization. Even though rhetoric, it signals a major shift in the keynote of a Supreme Leader of North Korea. Moreover, the two leaders have agreed to end the Korean War later this year and to establish a peace regime. This implies that North Korea will take some actions in complying with the denuclearization schedule.

The declaration, nevertheless, was not fully rosy. The two sides could not stipulate any action plans to carry out their economic cooperation; even though the Moon Administration has the plan for economic cooperation in his Geopolitical Code, it seems that it was premature to discuss about any implementation measures under international sanctions. One other limitation was regarding denuclearization. Article 3 Clause 4 only states the C of the "CVID (Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement)", which is what the U.S. demands; this left the U.S. with a daunting homework to deal with the V and I.

## **2. U.S.-North Korean Summit (12 June 2018)**

The Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility" has reached an upper stage with the progress in

convincing North Korea and the U.S. to hold a dialogue. As mentioned above, President Moon has contributed a lot to revive the U.S.-North Korean dialogue channel. In order to convince president Trump, the Moon Administration received a confirmation from North Korea that they will abort further nuclear tests and missile test-fires. (Jeon, 2018: 8) President Trump's pragmatism and Kim Jong-un's calculation proved right. The two sides have made a historic meeting in Singapore in June 2018, which was the first Summit between the two states. President Moon has praised both leaders for their courage and resolution in making this historic encounter (Moon, 2018). The last island of the Cold War was finally dismantled (Yonhap News, 2018).

The joint declaration was less inspiring than their encounter. Rather than a comprehensive agreement as many anticipated, it was more or less a political announcement that suggests goals and direction for improving mutual relations. (Jeon, 2018: 16) Both sides agreed on establishing renewed relations, building an enduring peace regime in the Korean peninsula, and complete denuclearization of the peninsula. (NYT, 2018) It implies that their first meeting was simply an opener; regarding the fact that the two sides have admitted that they will hold follow-up negotiations, substantive development might be deduced later.

The major development, however, was that president Trump committed to providing a security guarantee to North Korea, which signifies that the U.S. has finally recognized North Korea tacitly. North Korea, in return, reiterated that it will make efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. This implies that the two sides seek to build confidence for further cooperation and peacebuilding. It is another fruitful outcome for the Moon Administration and it accords to the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility." Nevertheless, the biggest limitation was that the homework from the "Panmunjom Declaration" - getting more than C from the CVID - has not been completed.

### **3. Pyongyang Joint Declaration (19 September 2018)**

The fifth inter-Korean Summit, which was held in September of 2018 in Pyongyang, signified that the Moon Administration's Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility" is getting the shape. The two sides have met for the third time in 2018- April, May, and September - as a response to

their commitment to hold a fixed dialogue. Also, one other significant development is that president Moon has made a speech in front of the North Korean people for the first time. He delivered his Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility," outlining his vision and hope for enhanced relations, preventing war, and denuclearizing the peninsula. It was another historic moment to witness mutual communication for the first time. (Jeon, 2018: 1) Moreover, Kim Jong-un, for the first time, announced to the world that North Korea will make efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. We can never assure anything in international relations, but this implies that the two sides have gradually built some confidence.

The two sides reconfirmed their will to abide by the agreements they have made in prior "Panmunjom Declaration." They have agreed to improve their relations, alleviate military tension and threat of war, and to promote follow-up U.S.-North Korean dialogue for executing denuclearization. The two sides have also signed a military agreement to implement their will to alleviate military tension and the threat of war. "Pyongyang Joint Declaration" have made some progress in connoting practical implementation measures regarding the improvement of mutual relations. Article 2, 3, 4, and 6 deals with various agreements: Hold groundbreaking ceremony for railroad and road connection; normalization of Kaesong industrial complex and Geumgang Mountains tourism; start negotiation on establishing special economic zones in West and East Sea; early opening of the permanent meeting room for dispersed families; Seoul visit of Kim Jong-un; and several ceremonies and cultural exchange schedules. (Ibid: 3)

Even though the fifth inter-Korean Summit failed to make any further progress in denuclearization, many experts concur that they are making progress. It is a fact that further mutual understanding and recognition will build up trust and peace.

## **Conclusion**

The year 2018 has been a year of dramatic change and progress. Archenemies have met, exchanged ideas, and have agreed to end the hostility and mistrust. The Moon Administration has shown his vision and strategy in his Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility." On the basis of this Geopolitical



Code, South Korea has made efforts to build trust and mood for cooperation. The first step, improvement of relations, has been taken; the second step, alleviating military tension and threat of war, is about to move.

The changes in 2018 were rather an "over speed." South Korea has taken advantage of the opportunities and so far used it as momentum to make progress. However, South Korea need to look back and contemplate on the changes. Over-optimism might lead one into self-deception. (Lee, 2018) It might be too naïve to blindly trust the North Korean regime; a cautious tit-for-tat approach would lead the region into peace and prosperity. Without a Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement of the nuclear weapon, normalizing North Korea might be too dangerous. South Korea should, however, take two-track approach. The pace of dialogue and negotiations should be sustained and accelerated. In fact, inter-Korean exchange and economic cooperation are expected to continue and expand, as it has been discussed in "Pyongyang Joint Declaration."

Young North Korean leader, who received a Western education, might sincerely cooperate and abide by their mutual agreements. His attitudes and setting of the New Year's Address showed that he is eager to become a "normal" leader of a "normal" country. (Jeon, 2019: 1) He has also mentioned about the U.S.-North Korean Summit, stating that he hopes to satisfy the world.

On the contrary, North Korea might go back to betrayal and hostility, as it has been repeated for over 70 years. South Korea should not be a prisoner of history, but should never forget the history as well. The follow-up U.S.-North Korean Summit cannot be all-optimistic since there is a "variable" called Mr. Trump. The negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea might enter into a stalemate if the two sides lose confidence.

Due to the dramatic impact of North Korea factor, other foreign policy of South Korea had been buried under. Even though the Geopolitical Code of "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility" propose diversification, namely targeting the Eurasia and ASEAN, most of the diplomatic assets and resources were put into a single pillar. The year 2019 might be full-out testing on the second pillar, the "Pillar of Prosperity (New Northern Policy and New Southern Policy). (Jang, 2018) Facing his third year, if the

Moon Administration fails to show tangible results, he can face criticism that the second pillar was merely rhetoric.

The Moon Administration has a great chance with the "New Northern Policy." Improvement in inter-Korean relations indicates a northward opportunity ahead. As the two sides agreed in "Panmunjom Declaration" and "Pyongyang Joint Declaration," groundbreaking ceremony for railroad and road connection between the two Koreas has been held on 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2018. Connecting the Korean peninsula with a railroad can be a breakthrough for the Korean economy. When the "Trans Korean Railroad" is complete and be connected to the Eurasian region, it can function as a new engine for growth in transportation, logistics, and energy infrastructure industry. (Choi, 2018) Its connection to the "Trans China Railroad," "Trans Mongolian Railroad," and "Trans Siberian Railroad" will realize the "Iron Silk Road" which connects East Asia with Europe (Jang, 2018).

[Diagram 2. The Iron Silk Road]

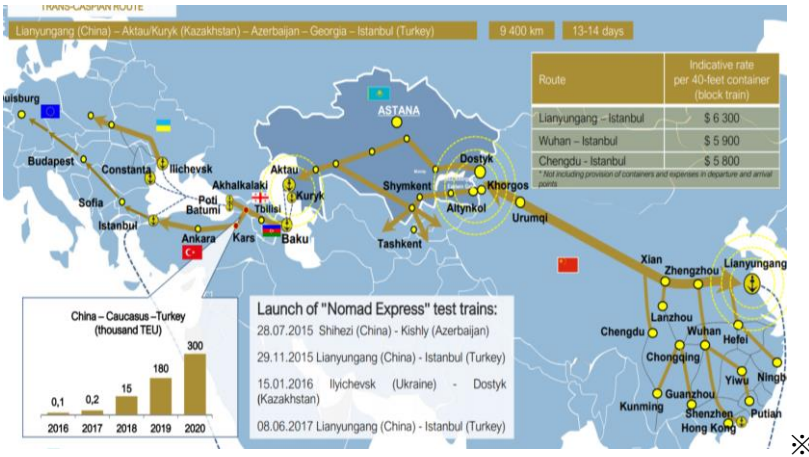


**Source:** Korea International Trade Association (2018)

Central Asia and Caucasus region, including Azerbaijan, will mutually benefit from this development. As China plans to connect its line with Azerbaijan and its "Trans Caspian International Transport Route," both South Korea and Azerbaijan could develop an economic cooperation belt using China. It will lead to mutual prosperity of South Korea as well as the Eurasian states as the Moon Administration has represented in its Geopolitical Code. The Moon Administration should make good use of the "Northern Economic

Cooperation Committee" to implement coherent and efficient policies towards the Eurasian region. It should discover a business that can mutually benefit both parties.

**[Diagram 3. Trans-Caspian International Transport Route]**



Source: Middle Corridor (2018)

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