



Shift of North Korea's South Korean Policy to "The One Against Enemy" and Tasks for the ROK Government

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Since the statement issued by Kim Yo Jong, first vice department director of the Central Committee (CC) of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) of the DPRK, on June 4, 2020, the inter-Korean relations is quickly declining toward hostile relations as it was during the Cold War era. First Vice Department Director Kim Yo Jong severely criticized a group of North Korean defectors for scattering anti-DPRK leaflets in the frontline areas. She said that these defectors "had temerity to fault our supreme leadership [Kim Jong Un] and citing "nuclear issue". She further castigated the South Korean government by adding "I [Kim Yo Jong] detest those who feign ignorance or encourage more than those who move to do others harm." In the end, she threatened that North Korea may execute a complete withdrawal of the Kaesong Industrial Park, shutdown of the south-north joint liaison office, and scrapping of the south-north agreement in military field, if the South does not take appropriate measures.

As an immediate response, Cheong Wa Dae (the Blue House) and the Ministry of Unification of South Korea promised to strictly regulate the distribution of propaganda leaflets by groups of North Korean defectors and to adopt relative legislations. However, on the following day of June 5, regardless of South Korea's compromising attitude, a spokesman for United Front Department of CC, WPK, an organization for North Korea's South Korean policy, released a statement saying that North Korea has "come to a clearer conclusion that enemies are enemies after all (emphasis added by the author)." The statement continued that "We [North Korea] do not hide that we have had long in mind decisive measures to fundamentally remove all provocations from the south and to completely shut down and remove all the contact leverage with the south side (emphasis added by the author)," revealing North Korea's stance to completely cut off its relationship with the South.

On June 8, the North Korean authorities held the review meeting of all departments working for South Korean affairs. Kim Yong Chol, vice-chairman of the CC, WPK, and Kim Yo Jong, first vice department director of the CC, WPK, underlined that all South Korean policies should shift to “the one against enemy (대적사업, 對敵事業)” and ordered to utterly shutdown all the communication and liaison lines (통신연락선, 通信連絡線) between the North and the South. In accordance with the instruction, North Korea cut off all communication channels including the hotline between Cheong Wa Dae and the office building of the CC, WPK, starting from noon on June 9, 2020.

More surprisingly, however, North Korea did not stop there but went as far as to explode South-North Joint Liaison Office on June 16. This building has been considered as one of important achievements of April 27th Panmunjom Declaration. Then the North, on June 17, through the statement of a spokesman for General Staff of the Korean People’s Army (KPA), declared its intention to deploy army units of the regiment level and necessary firepower sub-units in the Mount Kumgang tourist area and the Kaesong Industrial Zone, set up civil police posts again in the Demilitarized Zone, and resume all kinds of military exercises in the frontline areas.

The fact that North Korea keeps hostile policies against the South since Kim Yo Jong’s statement on June 4, despite the South Korean government’s exhibition of its strong will to strictly regulate anti-North Korea leaflets, indicates that the recent moves of the North are not solely derived from the issues related to leaflets. In other words, the South Korean government needs to adopt legislations to regulate the distribution of leaflets, but such action will not necessarily ameliorate the inter-Korean relations.

It seems that low expectations of the Moon Jae-in administration’s role have heavily influenced North Korea to decide a complete closure of its relationship with the South. Kim Yo Jong stressed disappointment to the South in her statement on June 13 by saying that “If the south Korean authorities have now capability and courage to carry out at once the thing they have failed to do for the past two years, why are the north-south relations still in stalemate like now?” Therefore, the inter-Korean relations can hardly escape this aggravation unless the South Korean government succeeds in making Pyongyang to realize that cooperation is more profitable than hostilities.

In the future, the North Korean military is expected to quickly dismantle South Korean facilities in the Kaesong Industrial Zone and in the Mount Kumgang tourist zone, which Chairman Kim Jong Un attempted to demolish but failed to make progress last year. North Korea would not wish to leave behind the Kaesong Industrial Zone as it is now as it has been “already desolate” for more than four years with a slim chance of reactivation. Therefore, North Korea is more likely to “hold the South Korean government responsible for scattering anti-North Korea propaganda leaflets” and move towards the complete removal of the Kaesong Industrial Zone. North Korea

has also been strongly against South Korea's introduction of stealth fighter jets, and thus, it seems to strengthen its strike capability against Seoul by redeploying military units in this area through this opportunity. Moreover, North Korea is predicted to restore the Guard Post (GP) within the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), resume gun fire and missile experiments in the West and the East Sea, and restart military training.

From now on, North Korea is expected to seek the survival and development of its regime by severing ties completely with South Korea and slowly resuming human exchanges and economic cooperation with China and Russia. Thus, for the time being, the deterioration of inter-Korean relations is inevitable regardless of the South's effort to ameliorate the situation. At this point the South Korean government needs to take this moment as an opportunity to objectively and fundamentally reexamine its current North Korean policies and denuclearization strategies.

In fact, the denuclearization of North Korea has already been a quite impractical objective. However, it is becoming even more an unrealistic one due to breakdown of the U.S.-North Korea negotiations in 2019. Given such circumstances, if the South Korean government has a rational thinking, it should adjust the focus of foreign and security policies towards countermeasures against North Korea's "strengthening of nuclear deterrence" rather than "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," which is practically an unreachable goal. Nevertheless, if the South desires to continue pursuing the goal of "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," there should first be a comprehensive agreement on the concept and methods of "denuclearization" with the U.S. Also there needs to be summits and working-level talks with four countries, North Korea, South Korea, U.S., and China, to reach an agreement on the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, establishment of peace regime, and the easing of sanctions against the North. However, if Seoul continues to show neither the "control tower" within the government that will push forward the denuclearization of the Peninsula nor any kind of effort as such, denuclearization of North Korea will certainly become an impossible objective as the North will continue to enhance its nuclear weapons and missile capabilities.

At the moment, key figures of North Korea who make major decisions related to inter-Korean relations are publicly expressing animosity towards the South by using language such as "enemy (적, 敵)" and "time to surely break with the south." Under such circumstance, Seoul must swiftly adjust its North Korean policy to prioritize "the control of inter-Korean hostilities" over "the improvement of inter-Korean relations," which the South originally promoted along with small-scale cooperation projects such as individual tourism. Furthermore, the South needs to make the North realize that the transition of inter-Korean relations to a "hostile relationship" will wear both countries out by countering the North's aggression with stern responses. Lastly, the South Korean government should be able to present a feasible blue print for inter-Korean

cooperation aside from one-time projects like individual tourism in a way that both North Korea and the international community can agree. Also, this general outline of cooperation should be designed to restore trust between the two Koreas, strengthen communication, and serve mutual interests.

In the past, the Kim Jong Un regime has shown a sudden switch between a hard-line policy and an appeasement policy, if the initial strategy deemed unfavorable to North Korea. In other words, North Korea can turn away from current hard-line policies and re-initiate appeasement policies after the complete dismantlement of the Kaesung Industrial Park and of South Korean facilities in Mount Kumkang tourist zone. By then, South Korea should be prepared to propose ways for recovering mutual trust, mitigating military tensions, and restoring inter-Korean relations. ♣

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.