

How inter-Korean relations are politicized in elections in Korea

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I . Introduction

National security, North Korean Nuclear nuclear crisis, and the liberal democracy are the terms the conservative politicians and the media in South Korea use and highlight the importance of. Though they stress the important and seriousness of these words, during the last eight years of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administration, the North Korean nuclear crisis has snowballed, the security of the Korean peninsula is still under threat and liberal democracy has been fading away. However, the conservatives repeatedly politicize the issues to win elections by, causing political illusions among ordinary Korean citizens.

By using security issues, the conservatives in Korea have tried to win the elections and tried to create a political environment more agreeable for themselves ever since the founding of South Korea. They manifested their political privilege by labeling their opponents as pro-North Korea follower groups and actively taking advantage of the 'security frame' on the divided Korean peninsula where the Cold War is still on-going.

This report aims to go over how the South Korean conservatives have used the inter-Korean relations for its domestic politics, especially how the Park Geun-hye administration used it for the elections and domestic politics, and the impact of the policies on diplomacy, unification, and the security of the Korean peninsula.

II . Elections in Korea and the "Northern Wind"

As the Korean peninsula was located at the heart of the Cold War and it was even divided after the Korean War according to the ideology, the South Korean government built itself on a very strong anti-communism foundation. In that, the Northern Wind or the North Korean factor was an important factor in South Korean domestic politics. In South Korean elections, if the

candidates were considered Pro-North Korea or North Korea friendly, they were often condemned or even persecuted for being supportive for the enemy.

In 1959, Rhee Syng-man, who became the very first president or a dictator of South Korea in 1948, sentenced his political rival Cho Bong-am to capital punishment because of him supporting for 'peaceful reunification'. This shows how South Korea was an anti-communist state, different from liberal democratic system that South Korea officially chose as the state's system. In the 1963 presidential elections, the opposition party criticized presidential candidate Park Jung-hee using a red complex as he had led a communist cell in the past. This pushed Park to enhance South Korean government's anti-communist policies. After Korea became democratized in 1987, the conservatives took advantage of national security issues and red complex issues more frequently.

One day before the presidential election in 1987, Kim Hyeon-hee, a former North Korean agent who bombed the Korean Air 858, was deported to South Korea. This event helped Roh Tae-woo, the presidential candidate of the ruling and conservative Democratic Justice Party, win the presidential election. Shortly before the 1992 presidential elections, the National Security Planning Agency (NSPA), what is now National Intelligence Service (NIS), announced that there was a big espionage scandal in South Korea. It was followed by the decision of the Ministry of National Defense in both Korea and the U.S. to restart 'Team Spirit' joint military training exercise. These events are also evaluated that it helped Kim Young-sam of Democratic Liberal Party to win the 1992 presidential election.

A week before the general elections (where local politicians are elected) in 1996, North Korea dispatched heavily armed forces to the Panmunjom Joint Security Area. Different from the response of the U.S. government, President Kim young-sam started scare-mongering through media. This led to the landslide victory of the New Korean Party, conservative ruling party, in the elections, though they were predicted to lose before the North Korea's dispatch of soldiers to the JSA area. A week before the presidential election in 1997, a Korean-American figure said that "Presidential Candidate Kim Dae-jung and high officials in North Korea have connections" in Beijing. This was followed by the former Cheondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) leader Oh Ik-je, who defected to North Korea, saying "I thank Kim Dae-jung" on Pyongyang TV. But this event turned out to be manipulated by the Former chief of the Agency for NSPA. But this didn't succeed in keeping Kim Dae-jung from being elected.

Right before the general elections in 2000, the term 'New Northern Wind' was coined. When Kim Dae-jung administration presented that it agreed to hold the inter-Korean summit three days before the general elections, the conservatives who were opposition party back then and the conservative media framed the summit as the New Northern Wind planned for winning the general elections. Similar events happened in 2007. The conservatives were trying to describe

the second inter-Korean summit as the summit for the presidential elections, as it was held two months before the presidential election.

In 2012, as the conservative ruling the Saenuri party couldn't guarantee the victory in general elections and presidential elections to be held that year, it politicized the issue of building the U.S. naval base in Jeju. The conservatives labeled the opposition party as 'pro-North Korea' as opposition party had reservations in building the naval base in Jeju. Two months before the 2012 presidential election, there was an NLL crisis. The Saenuri Congressman Cheong Mun-heon leaked some parts of the inter-Korean summit transcript with his own interpretations. Based on his interpretations, He said that the President Roh Moo-hyeon gave up Northern Limit Line, a disputed maritime demarcation line in the Yellow (West) Sea between South and North Korea, during the inter-Korean summit. While Cheong worked in the Blue House and read the transcript in 2009, he didn't comment about it at all for three years but revealed it right before the presidential election. It is hard to determine to what degree the NLL crisis' and the intervention of the national security organizations affected the victory of the Saenuri party in the elections held in 2012 where Park Geun-hye of the conservative ruling Saenuri party became the president. However, it is obvious that Park Geun-hye administration's birth is not free from the NLL scandal.

III. Park Geun-hye government's wagging the dog or privatization of the issue of diplomacy, security, and reunification

The Park Geun-hye administration has made use of the inter-Korean relations not only to seize power, but also to deal with its problems of the administration. It publicly released the inter-Korean summit transcript, which hardly happened in the history of diplomacy. The NIS manipulated the evidence to accuse an innocent Seoul city official of a North Korean spy. To shape a political situation favorable for the conservatives, it caused the scandal in 2013 that the lawmaker Lee Seok-ki of the Unified Progressive Party was plotting a pro-North Korean insurrection. This event stigmatized the Unified Progressive Party as a group of pro-North Korea followers and led to the dissolution of the party according to the sentence of the Constitutional Court of Korea.

In 2013, the chief at the Supreme Prosecutors' Office Chae Dong-wook, who was investigating the intervention of the NIS on the 2012 presidential elections, had to resign. To cover the failure of the Park administration regarding the Sewol Ferry sinking in 2014, they exaggerated the seriousness of the North Korean drone that fell on the South Korean territory and spread the possibility of strategic provocation from the North Korea among the public. Especially, since the second half of 2015, the Park administration has threatened the security and democracy of South Koreans, by pushing its security and diplomatic policy stubbornly. In August 2015, the Blue House seemed as if it was coping successfully and peacefully with the land mine

provocation of North Korea by completing August 25 inter-Korean agreement well by holding talks.

However, the Park administration summoned North Korea again in September, by authorizing a single history textbook to be used in middle and high schools. The Saenuri party put up banners on the street that read “Our children are learning Kim Jong-il’s Juche ideology from history textbooks”. President Park later said the word ‘Hell Choson (a word to describe how hard it is to live in Korea due to unemployment, widening economic gap, and etc.)’ is popular these days as the young generation doesn’t know the right history of Korea”.

On January 7, 2016, the day after the alleged hydrogen bomb experiment or the 4th nuclear experiment by North Korea, the Defense Minister Han Min-goo came to the National Assembly’s Defense Committee meeting in the morning and reserved his judgement for resuming loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts against North Korea, saying “It should be decided after the government sets up comprehensive countermeasures”. Two hours later, the Blue House announced that “North Korea’s nuclear experiment violated the 8.25 agreement and South Korea will resume loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts” 8.25 agreement says it will renew the loudspeakers only for abnormal situations. But the Blue House interpreted the 4th experiment arbitrarily and resumed the loudspeakers, without making preparatory measures for the safety of soldiers and civilians working and living near the border. The Blue House said that this was according to “President Park’s decision.”

Then, the Saenuri Party’s political support for the Blue House followed. Kim Moon-soo, the former governor of Gyeonggi-do and the lawmaker candidate for Suseong B district of Daegu for this April 13 election, released an official announcement that said Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administration’s sunshine policy and non-conditional assistance to North Korea came back as a boomerang of nuclear bomb and hydrogen bomb.” He attacked his rival Kim Boo-gyeom with this, accusing him as a “lawmaker who betrayed the conservative Grand National Party which provided him a law maker position but joined Roh Moo-hyun administration.” Kim Moon-soo also called Kim Boo-gyeom’s response and urged him to take responsibility for nuclear development in North Korea.

The Saenuri deputy floor leader Cho Won-jin also later said that “It is not clear whether the Minjoo party (current opposition party and the former ruling party during the Roh and Kim administrations) is a party for South Korea or North Korea” and tried to accuse the party of being “pro-North Korea”. The Saenuri Party representative Kim Moo-sung chimed in, saying “there should be all-party cooperation to stop political strife for national security and comfort of citizens.” This was followed by passing of the Anti-terror Act and North Korean human rights act, laws that the Saenuri Party has longed to pass for a long time.

On February 7, a month later, North Korea fired a long-range rocket. After that followed a National Assembly Intelligence Committee meeting, The Saenuri Party lawmakers said that the National Intelligence Service Chief Lee Byung-ho had said, "North Korea made a missile with technology and components from Russia." Three days later, on February 10 which was the last day of the Lunar New Year's holiday in Korea, the Minister of Ministry of Unification Hong Yong-pyo announced that Gaesong Industrial Complex (GIC) is going to be closed. According to Hong, 1.19 trillion won (\$850.9 million) at both the governmental and civic level was invested since the GIC started in 2004, including 616 billion won in cash. Of the total, 132 billion won was made in 2015 alone. He said the investment was not used for peace but developing nuclear weapons and long-range rockets.

If we arrange the statements of the NIS, the Ministry of Unification, and the Saenuri Party, they align in the following order. 'North Korea bought missile components and technology from Russia → the money is from the GIC → GIC is made by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyeon'

When the government held the emergency NSC Standing committee and decided to close the GIC, it seems the report from the NIS played a big role. It seems the Blue House decided to close the GIC after receiving similar report from the NIS. Also, it seems the Blue House knew that the Saenuri Party and some conservative media would support making this a political football.

However, this decision was a self-harming decision that made both South and North Korean laborers of the GIC lose their jobs and suffer. They also refuted what the Ministry of Unification had announced: "Of all wages, however, North Korean government takes 30 percent from it for the social & cultural policy fee which is to provide free education and medical services and support workers and building social infrastructure. The remaining 70 percent are provided to the workers, as vouchers and cash."

In addition, just one day after the launch, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin denied allegations from Seoul that Russia had transferred rocket technology to the DPRK, saying those claims were "complete nonsense and drivel." The head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Department of Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Mikhail Ulyanov, fired back at Seoul demanding an apology for making "irresponsible" and "unprofessional" accusations. Spokesman of South Korean ministry of foreign affairs said the statement was "misinterpreted" but it was already a diplomatic disaster.

The reason why the international community's strong economic sanctions didn't work on North Korea is because North Korea has its own nuclear fuel cycle – from uranium mines to enrichment and reprocessing facilities. North Korea's rocket and nuclear weapons are made from its own natural resources and technology. North Korea's ballistic missile technology is on its own, as it built its own technology by reverse-engineering a scud missile bought from Egypt in 1980s. This also means NIS' argument that North Korea bought rocket technology and

components from Russia or profits from the GIC were used for developing nuclear weapons or missiles lacks evidence.

The conservatives have produced “red complex” rhetoric that attributes nuclear experiment to Kim Daejung – Roh Moohyun administration. However, among the four nuclear experiments, the three happened during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administration. History of South Korea’s policies to address North Korean nuclear crisis shows that the conservative administrations’ failures attributed more to the nuclear experiments of North Korea. But The Saenuri Party doesn’t take responsibility for their failures but politicize the inter-Korean relations for their political gains. Their attempt to pass North Korean Human Rights Acts and Anti-Terror Act that are irrelevant to North Korean experiment are also the typical examples of their political maneuver. Even many political groups admit that the North Korean Human Rights Act is not effective for improving human rights crisis in North Korea. Also, the anti terror bill is no more than the NIS, which already is more of a political group than an intelligence agency, trying to gain more political power. The Saenuri Party ignores this criticism and misleads the public as if the opposition parties disagreeing to the bills or trying to modify the bills caused the North Korean nuclear crisis. They are taking advantage of nuclear experiments to pass the bills they have wanted to pass to gain more power.

With all these moves, Park Geun-hye administration and the Saenuri Party are using pro-North Korea or security frames to seize their power for the long term. They are wagging the dog or prioritizing their privilege over security of the Korean Peninsula. Their pushing of history text books, enactment of the anti-terror bill despite the days of filibuster by the lawmakers from opposition party, and their attempt to pass the cyber terror act are the specific examples.

The history text books will beautify the conservatives’ pro-Japanese or authoritarian past or write little on the subject. The ruling conservative party might think youth learning history from authorized history text book will become politically conservative in the future or at least hate politics. By labeling its opponents who argue for cooperation and peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas as pro-North Korea, they can continuously fulfill their political agenda.

This is already a reality. The army, reserve forces, civil defense forces, and even schools are teaching security in a biased way. Media is also contributing to the recent trend. Also, the young generation has negative views on North Korea and unification, even being called as the “New Cold War generation.” It is also notable many of them have progressive views on social issues, except inter-Korean relations.

Even though not every student who learned from the authorized history text book will support the Saenuri Party, the conservatives will still find the history text book to be quite successful as long as the young generation to avoid or hate politics, at least not supporting the current opponent party. Also, if the Korean Government starts monitoring its citizens’ smart phones as

they have more power due to the recently-passed the anti-terror bill and cyber terror act, democracy in Korea will face even more serious threat.

IV. Conclusion

If the conservatives keep privatizing the national security issue for their own benefits, Korea's future is bleak. Especially, if the young generation grows up learning from text books and media demonizing and provoking North Korea, Hell Choson's economy and security will become even worse. As professor Chang Ha-sung points out, the current young generation is the first generation to be poorer than their parents, ever since the foundation of South Korea. In addition, they are more indifferent and hostile to North Korean than their parents are. If there is no solution or change of the current situation, the young generation will think of the unification cost as their property taken away. Some conservative media and online communities like Ilbe Storehouse (a South Korean humor web site that has political stance ranging from right to far-right) are also taking a role in shaping the young generation's view negatively. In fact, the recent public opinion poll shows that the young generation is already showing most hostility towards giving aids to North Korea. This will help the conservatives to label progressive side as groups who take money from South Koreans and "pour money" for North Korea, extending their rule in South Korea.

Indeed, people on the Korean peninsula are suffering due to their political leaders' abnormal policies. The administrations from both Koreas are showing the typical example of antagonistic and coexistent relations. However, South Korea is different from North Korea as it has a system to change the people in power who don't prioritize security of people and democratic values – elections. If South Koreans citizens show their wisdom and will stating that 'red complex doesn't work on us anymore', they can say end the red complex that has threatened democracy in South Korea. The April 13 general election and the next presidential election and presidential election in 2017 are the chance to make changes.

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