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Trust – The Underlying Philosophy of the Park Geun-Hye Administration

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President Madam Park Geun-Hye has a strong conviction that North-South Korean relations are intimately linked with multilateral cooperation in Asia. In an address at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club on November 8, 2012, she said that:

Building sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula is inseparable from fostering prosperity and security in Asia. Yet regrettably, an emerging and a cooperative Asia is clashing with an Asia replete with conflicting tensions.ⁱ

This clash is dubbed the “Asia paradox,” and stems from imbalances between rich economic development and scant security cooperation.ⁱⁱ President Park described the Asia paradox in detail in an opinion article she contributed to the Wall Street Journal during the presidential campaign last year. She explains that:

The world is watching Asia with increasing alarm. This region today is marked by pronounced tensions: North Korea’s self-declaration as a nuclear weapon state, the rise of historical and territorial tensions and accelerated military competition. All this could have negative economic consequences. At the same time, Asia increasingly lies at the heart of the global economy. Hence, the international community is apprehensive that a rising Asia long associated with rapid growth and more open cooperation is morphing

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into a clashing Asia. Such a bifurcated Asia, or what I refer to as “Asia’s paradox,” is the single most important obstacle that has to be overcome by the region’s leaders.ⁱⁱⁱ

While meeting the NATO Secretary General, Anders Rasmussen on April 12, 2013, President Park also pointed out that countries in Northeast Asia depend on each other in economy but face conflicts in territorial, security, and political issues—hence the Asia paradox.^{iv} In order to solve the Asia paradox, she proposed a “Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative,” and a “Seoul Process”—an Asian version of the Europe’s Helsinki Process—as a framework to carry out the initiative.

Trust and the *Trustpolitik*

“Trust” is the key word of President Park’s administration. The President herself has put great emphasis on complying with what she had promised to the people during her campaign and placed great weight on trust between the people and government. Based on the trust from the people, the new administration aims at realizing its administrative vision—happiness of the people and a new era of hope—with five administrative goals: (1) creative economy with emphasis on jobs, (2) tailored employment and welfare, (3) ingenious education and culture, (4) social safety and integration, and (5) establishment of the foundations of a unification era for happiness. It intends to open a new hopeful era where every individual in South Korea can feel happy based on the trust of the people, “Trust net” is the intangible but essential infrastructure without which South Korea cannot enter into the club of most advanced countries.

Trust is not just confined to domestic politics. It is a government philosophy encompassing both international relations and North-South Korean relations. *Trustpolitik* is the grand strategy for President Park’s administration. This strategy consists of three pillars: strong deterrence/defense, trust diplomacy, and the Korean peninsula trust process.

First, it is the basic premise of *Trustpolitik* to confront firmly, based on strong defense, any breach of peace. The new administration will be fully prepared to deal with any kind of North Korean provocation, and is determined to let the North pay an appropriate price for such an act. As President Park has repeatedly made clear, South Korea will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapon state, and will exert every effort to negotiate away its nuclear capabilities. While North Korean nuclear weapons and threats remain, Seoul will reinforce its own defense capabilities and also adjust ROK-U.S. nuclear deterrence posture to meet pending nuclear threats from the North.

Second, while meeting Chen Zhili, the vice chairwoman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China in September 2012, then Presidential candidate Park underlined the importance of trust in international relations. She quoted a Chinese aphorism in

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the Discourses of Confucius—“nothing is possible without trust” (無信不立) and hoped to improve ROK-China relations based on mutual trust. Thus, *trust diplomacy* endeavors to create a cooperative global community connected with trust nets, similar to the world today that is linked with communication webs and the internet. However, *Trustpolitik* and trust diplomacy are not naïve and therefore, will not trust the other side unconditionally. It intends to foster verifiable trust among the concerned parties.

Third, in the context of inter-Korean relations, the philosophy of trust is embodied in the *Korean Peninsula trust process*. The new administration hopes to attain sustainable peace by managing the inter-Korean relations based on mutual trust building. The trust process consists of three gradual stages: (1) humanitarian assistance for the poverty-stricken ordinary people in North Korea, (2) inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation in the economic, social, and cultural areas, and (3) ‘Vision Korea Project’ for establishing a single economic community on the Korean peninsula. The third stage of the Vision Korea Project is conditioned on the accumulation of sufficient mutual trust and progress in denuclearizing North Korea. The core objective of the trust process is to create substantial changes in the North.

Trust process is also a means to achieve President Park’s *Three Stage Unification Initiative*. During her address at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club in 2007, she proposed to achieve peaceful unification based on the three stages—starting from securing peace, going through economic integration, and finally reaching political integration. In this context, the trust process is a bridge to manage the status quo more stably and peacefully and to ultimately realize Korean unification in the future. It is natural that political integration comes at the last moment due to the harsh reality of two diametrically different political systems confronting each other in North and South Korea. The saying is applied here that “a loaf of bread is better than the song of many birds.” It is both sensible and practical to have the North Korean people out of poverty before political integration.

In the context of securing peace on the peninsula, the trust process is a scheme designed to pursue peace more vigorously by refusing to remain in the status quo. If reinforcing deterrence against North Korea’s provocations is for *routine peace-keeping*, solidifying peace through the trust process is for *vigorous peace-making*. The end state of the trust process will be to open a new era of *de facto* economic unification on the Korean peninsula.

During her November 8th address at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club in 2012, Presidential candidate Park proclaimed the *Three Principles of Unification*. The principles are (1) unification based on people’s support and together with the people, (2) unification making every individual in North and South Korea happy, and (3) unification contributing to Asian stability and cooperation and world peace. Trust process is a tool to create a foundation for

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opening a unification era for happiness and to realize such unification based on the three principles.

The fundamental premise that penetrates the entire trust process is the firm establishment of defense posture. It is the grand prerequisite of trust process that no minor crack be allowed in the defense of ROK's national security and safety of its people. Strong deterrence and trust process are the two wheels necessary to carry the cart of peaceful inter-Korean relations. The new administration will actively respond to ever-changing regional situations and thus, attain *dynamic alignment* between deterrence and dialogues *vis-à-vis* North Korea.

Facing a series of highly provocative behaviors, not to mention the harsh uncivilized rhetoric from North Korea, the new administration is emphasizing the deterrence pillar at the moment. However, the other pillar of dialogue will never disappear; it has just become less visible due to *the fog of antagonism* created by North Korea. Based on unwavering commitments to national identity—democracy, freedom, and market economy—and firm defense posture, President Park's administration will keep the window of dialogue open and, based on strong confidence, it will deal with North Korea in a flexible and open-minded way. The new administration has great concerns about the sufferings of ordinary North Koreans and is willing to deliver humanitarian assistances to the fullest extent possible. This is the very point that differentiates the trust process from the sunshine policy and the principled policy for the past 15 years. Of course, as the saying goes it takes two to tango, which means North Korea's positive response is inevitably necessary for the trust process to make meaningful progress. This is why the trust process is different from the unilateral spoon-feeding sunshine policy of the so-called progressive governments from 1998 to 2007.

Trust and Regional Multilateral Cooperation

Trust diplomacy of the new administration in South Korea and multilateral cooperation in Asia are tightly linked. There exists a two-way street in that success on one side will inevitably lead to similar success on the other side. Such a linkage can be identified in the policy agenda and key initiatives proposed by then Presidential candidate Park on November 5, 2012.^v Under the guiding principle of diplomacy that induces trust, she presented three policy agendas:

- Taking the lead in fostering peace in East Asia and cooperation in Eurasia
- Upgrading economic diplomacy and excavating new growth opportunities
- Building an “Attractive Korea” through the opening of a new era in public diplomacy

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Trust process also constitutes an intimate relationship with multilateral cooperation in the region. Addressing her ideas on national security, foreign affairs and unification last November, Presidential candidate Park said that “Progress in South-North [Korean] relations should be pursued simultaneously with enhancing cooperation within Northeast Asia.”^{vi} She presented two policy agendas regarding inter-Korean relations:

- Normalizing South-North relations through a trust building process on the Korean peninsula
- Working from “smaller” toward “bigger” unification

Each of the policy agendas carries a group of key initiatives, many of which will have mutually reinforcing impacts on regional cooperation.

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ⁱ Park Geun-Hye, Presidential Candidate, Saenuri Party, *Korea in a Transforming World: A New Frontier for Peace and Cooperation*, The Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club (SFCC), November 8, 2012.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Park Geun-Hye, “A plan for peace in North Asia,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2012, p. 15.

^{iv} *The Yonhapnews Agency*, April 12, 2013.

^v Park Geun-Hye, Presidential Candidate, Saenuri Party, *Trustpolitik and a New Korea: Foreign Affairs, National Security, and Unification Policies*, November 5, 2012.

^{vi} *Ibid.*