

ILC2021 UPF Europe and the Middle East (EUME): Session V – Worldviews

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Europe and the Middle East -- The fifth session of the August 2021 International Leadership Conference examined how the worldviews of the two Koreas and neighboring nations affect attitudes toward reunification.

From August 19 to 21, seven sessions of the ILC were held online under the title "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Prospects for Economic Development and Peace, and Ideologies, Worldviews, and International Relations."

The August 20 session was titled "Competing Worldviews Concerning Korean Reunification: How Much Will They Be a Factor in the Outcome?" and was organized by UPF and its International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP).

The webinar had a total of 223 participants on the Zoom broadcast, with 362 watching the livestream on the UPF Europe Facebook page and an additional 4,153 viewers on Russian networks.

Varying worldviews, values, and ideologies will drive the agendas of the six primary stakeholder nations in any process of Korean reunification. What are they, in each nation's case? How do they influence each nation's policy toward reunification? How and to what extent do they make it difficult for all stakeholders to reach agreement on the way forward? And what room is there for compromise, so that lasting peace can come to the Korean Peninsula? With an effort to shine some light on these questions, and as part of a greater effort to explore opportunities for peace through economic development, this webinar was held.



The moderator, **Kaeleigh Moffitt**, the congressional liaison for UPF-USA, extended warm greetings to the participants and introduced the session's five distinguished panelists.

Michael Breen, an author and commentator based in South Korea, the CEO of Insight Communications Consultants, and a former correspondent for *The Washington Times* and *The Guardian* newspapers, spoke about the values at the heart of Korean reunification. He began by quoting a German ambassador who 30 years earlier said that no foreign powers can morally object to Korean unification. Mr. Breen then made the point that if foreign powers have no morally acceptable argument to block Korean reunification, then it's up to the Koreans to unify.



As they haven't, it means that for the Koreans, there is something else more important: "national values." "Political unity isn't a matter of race, language, or shared history," Mr. Breen said. "The North Koreans and South Koreans remain apart because they have conflicting values. Reunification in these circumstances can only happen by force."

To emphasize the differences, he explained that in North Korea, the leader is the state and is more important than all the nation's institutions and symbols. The state's values are notably obedience, loyalty, and the collective over the individual. In contrast, South Korea's values are those of modern democracies: freedom, justice, rights, equal opportunity, primacy of the individual, and so on. With regard to other stakeholders such as Russia, Japan, China and the United States, Mr. Breen made the point that their national values are irrelevant and that what really matters is their perceived interests. When talking about the Koreans, the issue that matters most is the China-US rivalry.

Finally, Mr. Breen proposed three steps to consider before pursuing tactical measures for Korean reunification:

- Creating the vision of the desirable unified Korea – a state with a law-based democracy and a free-market economic system. Thus, the North Korean system and its values must be rejected, as well as any form of a hybrid version.
- Expansion of the vision to include the Northeast Asian region, while making an active effort to "nudge" illiberal states such as China toward that direction;
- Involving the North Koreans in a variety of talks and exchanges.

Following such steps, he said, could bring about a power shift that would lead to a change in values, creating the conditions for real reunification.

Hon. Dr. Yevgeny Kim from Russia, a leading researcher at the Center for Korean Studies at the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences, began by recollecting words he spoke in 1993 in Seoul in front of the members of the consultative committee for the peaceful democratic unification of Korea. Back then, he stated that the hope for a collapse of the North Korean regime through the sudden passing of Kim Il Sung -- and therefore also the country's rapid reunification -- was not feasible. That is because the North Korean regime will not collapse until their own Gorbachev appears there, Dr. Kim said.

Furthermore, in 2011, at the passing of Kim Jong Il, the son of Kim Il Sung, Dr. Kim stated that the DPRK regime would not fall. Even today, Dr. Kim repeated his conviction that there will be no unification in the next 15 to 20 years.

According to his understanding, Dr. Kim said, there is no foundation for the unification of the two Koreas, because they are antipoles of one another and thus are unable to agree on the social, economic, political, and moral principles of the future unified state.

Even the strategy of implementing unification would differ between the North and the South, he said. While the Republic of Korea envisions unification through the total absorption of the North, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, at best, would imagine some form of confederation of two independent Korean states with different political and socio-economic systems independent of each other. The confederation option is not a real solution, Dr. Kim said, since it is a rather loose association that most likely would disintegrate.



However, can religion be the answer for unification? At this time on the Korean Peninsula, existing world religions cannot become the main force for unification, Dr. Kim said, because there is no religion creating a common base between the South Korean society and the North Korea atheistic state.

What about nationalism? Nationalism is strong on both sides of the 38th parallel, he said. However, it is again connected to two different values of two opposing worlds: the democratic and the authoritarian.

Dr. Kim concluded that he does not see any solution through a new religion or customary laws, such as the norms of Confucianism. Therefore, it is necessary to look for ways to unite Korea not in terms of ideological and political concepts or strategies, but through a phased, long-term process of establishing cooperation in the field of economy and trade, then creating multilateral projects with the involvement of the two Koreas and other countries.

Torbjørn Færøvik from Norway, a historian, journalist and author who specializes in East Asia, focused on the Chinese perspective with regard to Korean reunification. For centuries China has been concerned about Korea, he said. Since 1950, when North Korea started the Korean War, there has been no peace agreement.

Even though North Korea was doing better economically shortly after the war began, in the 1960s South Korea's economy rose rapidly, Mr. Færøvik said. After the passing of Chairman Mao in 1976, China changed its view with regard to the Korean problem. By then it was evident that South Korea was an economic success, while the North was a failure. After several years of cautious exchanges, China and South Korea normalized their diplomatic relations in 1992. Since then, trade between the two has increased each year. Today China is South Korea's most important trading partner. As a sign that the Chinese leadership is placing great emphasis on relations with South Korea, President Xi Jinping visited Seoul as early as 2014, and another visit is expected soon.

In contrast, Xi Jinping has not paid the same attention to North Korea, Mr. Færøvik said. The first meeting of the leaders took place only in 2018. It's safe to say that China's relations with North Korea are essentially dictated by military considerations, geopolitics, and duty. Furthermore, as many thousands of Chinese fell on the battlefield during the Korean War, the DPRK was born thanks to China. One of those

Chinese soldiers was Anying Mao, the eldest son of Chairman Mao. This has strengthened emotional ties between China and North Korea.

Although keeping North Korea afloat is a burden, the People's Republic of China has always felt there is no other choice. Indeed, if the North Korean regime were to collapse, millions of people would flee to South Korea and China. In addition, this could pave the way for a unified country leaning toward the United States and the Western world, and China cannot afford to take such a risk.



Even though China does want a peaceful solution of the Korean issue, Xi Jinping and his colleagues are in no hurry, Mr. Færøvik said. The most important thing for them in this phase is to keep North Korea's economy alive, to slow down or at best to halt the country's nuclear program, and to moderate Kim Jong Un and his close colleagues. Furthermore, they also know very well that regarding the Korean reunification process, without the active participation of the United States and China, there will be no movement going in the right direction.



Bruce Klingner from the United States, a senior research fellow for Northeast Asia at the Asian Studies Center of the Heritage Foundation think tank, focused on the trilateral alliance of the United States, Japan, and South Korea. In these trilateral relations, the weak relationship is between Seoul and Tokyo, he said. This is shown also by the promise Seoul made to China, after Beijing retaliated economically for the steps South Korea took to better defend itself, that it will not enter trilateral relations with Japan. Mr. Klingner said that the relations between Seoul and Tokyo have always been difficult, but currently are the worst of the past 28 years that he has been researching Northeast Asia.

Today Japan and South Korea are both worn out from having to deal with and appease the other side. The

United States, as well, is getting tired of the two not getting along and is trying to get them to focus on present-day threats such as China and North Korea, rather than on those of past centuries.

Mr. Klingner made the point that the United States simply cannot defend South Korea without support from Japan. The United States needs to access not only the seven formerly designated UN command rear bases that are in Japan, which would provide support for any conflict rising on the Korean Peninsula, but also the other bases located in Japan which require Japanese permission.

The United States also will need Japanese military capabilities to protect the sea lines of communications, mine clearing, and other necessary abilities for a conflict, he said. Therefore, if bilateral relations between Seoul and Tokyo are tense, Japan may decide not to assist or allow its bases to be used for UN operations on the Korean Peninsula. This would impede the US and the UN in coming to the aid of South Korea. In addition, South Korea, because of its painful history, still objects to allowing the "Korea air and missile defense system" to be integrated into the broader, more effective allied system of the United States because of its connection to Japan.

Finally, Mr. Klingner concluded that the United States could support behind the scenes, encouraging the two nations to work together to better defend not only South Korea but also Japan against the present threats. Moreover, the United States could assist the move toward Korean reunification. However, Japan also could play a major role in the peaceful reunification of Korea by notably aiding South Korea, which on its own would not be able to pay the cost of reunification.



Dr. Thomas Ward from the United States, the president of the Unification Theological Seminary, began by emphasizing the word "ripening." He said that in every conflict there comes the time when the two opposing sides conclude that the conflict is not worth continuing. An example is the case of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, who, to the amazement of all sides, decided to make peace with Israel. Dr. Ward then gave his presentation, which focused on UPF and interstate relations in the Northeast Asia Pacific region.

Dr. Ward mentioned the case of the civil war in Mozambique between 1976 and 1992, which took the lives of over one million people. When things became ripe between the two opposing sides, RENAMO and FRELIMO, the question was: Who could take the role of mediator for them to bring peace? Finally they turned to a small religious group named Sant'Egidio. In 1992, with the environment and platform Sant'Egidio provided, the two sides signed a treaty.

Looking at this example, Dr. Ward suggested that perhaps UPF could provide the same significant facilitative role in the case of Korean reunification.

Taking as an example the issue of the "comfort women" -- which is still one of the causes of conflict between South Korea and Japan -- when the controversy came to light in the 1990s, the UPF founders began bringing Korean and Japanese women together to participate in a ceremony in which they would embrace each other and establish sisterhoods.

In addition, within the Unification Movement there are more than 5,000 Japanese-Korean mixed couples whose desire is to bring lasting peace between Japan and Korea.

With regard to North and South Korea, in 1991 UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon visited North Korea to meet North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. During that visit, Reverend Moon established a deep friendship with the North Korean leader without renouncing his values, principles, and commitments.

Furthermore, two days after the passing of Reverend Moon on September 3, 2012, a flower arrangement was sent to his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, from Kim Jong Un himself. On the same day, Reverend Moon was declared a Hero of National Reunification by the DPRK. Since then, his wife has continued the path and kept the communication channel open. Moreover, UPF has played a major role in the process of mediation and reunification.

The webinar continued with a question-and-answer session. The first question, to Mr. Breen, was: "Can you think of ways for the two Koreas to move toward the acceptance of a common vision? What can be done?" Mr. Breen replied that for quite some time, there have been talks between the South and the North, but always on the terms of the North Koreans. Only when the DPRK wanted to talk, did talks take place.

Moreover, both Koreas see themselves as the "real" Korea, which is a very different situation from two neighboring countries that are just not getting along. In order for the two countries to recognize each other, there must be a Korean Gorbachev that emerges in North Korea and plays that role.

However, Mr. Breen said he does not see Kim Jong Un as fitting that role. Therefore it might take some more time.

Dr. Yevgeny Kim was asked why South Korea hasn't brought the North to the table through its own initiative. Dr. Kim, who has connections with both sides, said that from the North Korean side, many specialists expressed their view of how North Korea has been the only truly independent Korea for several hundred years. Now there is not even one foreign soldier in North Korea, and no foreign teachings have entered the country. That is why North Koreans believe their country is truly independent and can be seen as the real Korea.

They view South Korea as a country very much dependent on the United States, and although the president of South Korea can come up with nice plans and ideas, ultimately he will need US permission when it comes to sensitive things such as water pipelines and railroads. That is why North Korea does not have any respect for the South, Dr. Kim said.

Mr. Færøvik was asked whether China is strategically waiting patiently, or have some steps been taken in regard to North-South reunification? He answered that a lot of people, including himself, find it hard to understand why China, as a superior country to North Korea, is unable to exert more pressure over the North. China provides North Korea with everything, from oil to silk and other goods, and this shows North Korea's dependence on China. Therefore, why doesn't China pressure North Korea more?

One way to understand this, Mr. Færøvik said, is by observing that in the last two decades, China has become a far stronger player in the international arena, in terms of economic and military power. This, in turn, causes a great deal of anxiety and insecurity in many countries, which leads them to view China in a negative light. It also could be said that China has completely failed in international diplomacy in recent years. China's actions in the South China Sea also are showing such a spirit, basically preventing China from being in a position to establish a meaningful dialogue on the Korean issue.

Mr. Klingner was asked, "What can foreigners from the European Union or other regions do to help bring about reunification?" He answered that we cannot want the reunification of Korea more than the Koreans do. Recent polls clearly showed that as time is passing, fewer and fewer South Koreans are interested in reunification. Most of them are fine with the current situation. It is the elderly who support reunification. However, as their numbers are decreasing over time, the younger generation, which is rather opposed to or does not care much about reunification, is increasing proportionately. Therefore, in South Korea, in terms of support for reunification, the statistics show poor results. That said, if the North Korean regime were to collapse suddenly, South Korea would still accept reunification and work to make it happen.

Finally, Dr. Ward was asked to give a more optimistic perspective on what can be done for reunification, particularly from the perspective of UPF. Dr. Ward said that decisions must be made by governments and not by NGOs. Therefore, UPF can maintain lines of communication with North Korea, remain a good listener to both parties, and, at the opportune time, act wisely in relation to reunification.

In addition, UPF can do its best to support the United States, Japan, and South Korea -- democratic nations that respect the rule of law -- to have a cohesive voice and show a united front.

Without the unity and cooperation of those three nations and India, it will be difficult to bring change to the divided paths of the two Koreas, Dr. Ward said. Whenever any rapprochement happens, we will have to be able to take advantage of the situation, and that is why keeping the lines of communication open is critical.

To conclude the session, each speaker gave a final remark. Mr. Breen said that perhaps, instead of pushing for reunification, we should put more emphasis on reconciliation. Reunification is an inherently aggressive policy in which there is no peace, as it means one side will cease to exist. Therefore, because the values of the two sides are so different, reconciliation can be the first step, and that is not impossible.

Dr. Yevgeny Kim stated that from previous conferences with North Korean, South Korean, and Russian scientists, he recognized their capacity to understand each other. He concluded that to support the reunification process, what we can do is encourage Koreans from the North and the South to connect with each other on different levels, without foreign influence. This process could take some time but could yield positive results.

Torbjørn Færøvik brought up the issue of the cult of personality in North Korea. When one ordinary person is elevated to the status of a god, any rational political discussion becomes impossible. To keep such a regime in place, some of the population must be willing to maintain it, and indeed, under Kim Jong Un the political elite, which is enjoying significant economic privileges, plays that role. Therefore, since Kim Jong Un and the elite have much to lose, they will do what is in their power to prevent reunification.

Bruce Klingner said that the United States is hoping for a peaceful reunification process under the principles of freedom and democracy. In the meantime, the US military presence in South Korea, the alliance, and the commitment to determine the defense of South Korea will remain. It is like an overprotective father who is watching over his young daughter, he said. The two Koreas can talk to each other, date each other, and perhaps even get married. However, the United States will be walking three steps behind with a gun to make sure the North does not take advantage of the South.

Finally, Dr. Ward concluded that another area in which UPF can be helpful is in the delicate balance needed when dealing with North Korea regarding the nuclear weapons issues and the Kim regime's human rights violations. A decision needs to be made concerning the way in which to deal with these issues. UPF is in the right place to reflect on those issues, and to make recommendations behind the scenes regarding the best way to proceed toward peace.