



*The Habibie Center*

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## **Roundtable on the Korean Peninsula: Is Korean Reunification a Cry for the Moon?**

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*October 17th, 2016*



## Introduction:

Korean Peninsula is the location of one of the most challenging strategic situation in the world today. The two countries in the region Korea—South Korea and North Korea—solely remains divided in the world since the mid of 20th century. Meanwhile, although reunification of North Korea and South Korea remains on the table, it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve it. Reunification is likely to incur significant social, political, and economic cost.

This roundtable aims to better understand the situtaion in Korean Peninsula, especially vis-a-vis Indonesia's foreign policy regarding the situation. This is meaningful given that Indonesia's unique position which engages in both Koreas and other neighboring countires. It seems that Indonesia has both interest and is strategically positioned to contribute to the issue. But it needs to first understand the possible ways forward and the challenges to constructively and actively participate in the promotion of peace and security in the region. To do this, there are two sessions in the forum. First is presentation by experts on the issue and second is discussion with stakeholders from Indonesia.





## Presentation Session

During the presentation session there are four points that come into attention regarding Korea reunification. First, the importance to put the reunification into geopolitical context in Asia. Second, the importance to acknowledge the extra regional power. Third evaluating the success of South Korea diplomacy. And lastly, the role of Indonesia and ASEAN position towards the issue.

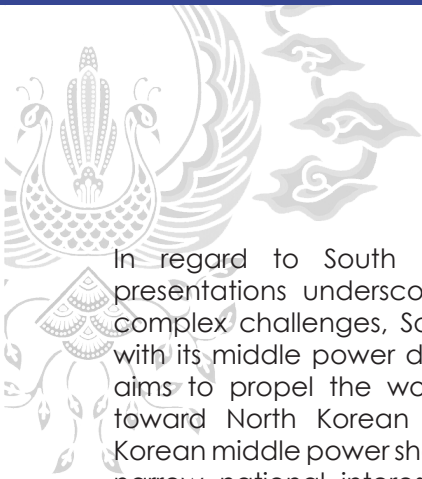
The presentations highlighted that while previously South Korea policy towards North Korea primarily focused on its nuclear capability, in recent years its focus shifted by taking into account the conventional security threats from North Korea, the possibility of further leadership succession and subsequent possibility of instability. At the same time, human security in North Korea remains a major concern. North Korean government not only maintain low protection of human rights but also at times maintain this situation to consolidate its power domestically.

There are several conventional threats from North Korea. It comes into attention that the country has a large army with the ability to push for quick forward deployment. Moreover, since North Korea has high level of military preparedness and

long range artillery it has high capability to launch surprise attack. In addition the deployment of North Korea missile capability has also exceeded expectation. Indeed, this nuclear missile capacity has increased North Korea's threat from regional to global. In recognition of these threats, the main focus of South Korea is not to push North Korea to its collapse but to move to a different path before opening up as a new regime.

Furthermore, discussions about Korean Peninsula cannot only focus on two countries but also to the extra regional powers role such as US, China, Russia, and Japan. Unification would create far-reaching implications for the great powers and the balance of power in the region. Any discussion has to take into account extra regional interest since their roles are very clear through the six party talks. In this regard, the role of US and China are widely discussed during the presentation.

The contemporary geopolitical developments is also an issue of interest. Since power paradigm is now shifting to China, it is important to know how to convince China that reunification of Korea is of their strategic interest. Therefore, it needs institutional arrangement to promote these varying interests.



In regard to South Korea's diplomacy, the presentations underscore that to solve today's complex challenges, South Korea can take role with its middle power diplomacy. This diplomacy aims to propel the world to put higher priority toward North Korean nuclear problem. South Korean middle power should be hedging between narrow national interest to regional interest, to mitigate great power rivalry, and alleviate great power distrust. It is important to import globally established norms to the region such as network among like-minded powers.

The presentation also brought forward potential role for ASEAN and Indonesia. Indonesia should promote norms building, delay denuclearization and promote six party talks. Furthermore, there are divergent views in ASEAN towards human rights issue in North Korea. Myanmar and Vietnam did not support the idea on bringing human right issue to Human Right Council. The reason why both countries did not want to bring this issue forward is to maintain good relations with North Korea and South Korea.

Indonesia and ASEAN are aware of their limited capacity of addressing situation. For example, ASEAN is ill equipped to address the human rights violation in North Korea since human rights issue have been very divisive in ASEAN. Therefore, in



order to maximize their capacity in addressing human rights issue, they are supporting UN resolution, promote cooperation in less politically divisive issue such as energy security. It was also mentioned that It is possible to use non-aligned movement as new modality for diplomacy, but how to make it relevant is still in question. The presentation also highlighted that Indonesia can serve as interlocutor in conflict management in the Korean Peninsula.





## Discussion Session

During the discussion session, there are four points that were highlighted: developments of diplomatic initiatives in regard to the issue, contemporary geopolitics, potential scenarios after reunification and human rights issue in North Korea. On the first point, there is a certain pessimism about the success of diplomatic initiatives for reunification. The discussion highlighted the need for more time to find the right mix between economic, deterrence and diplomacy for reunification, especially in light of limited success of past efforts. It is also important to change North Korea behavior regarding nuclear by stressing that as their nuclear threat becomes higher, they should learn that nuclear build up will not make them more secure because it is possible to cause a negative reaction from extra-regional power..

Regarding contemporary geopolitics, there are concerns over the development of the region vis-a-vis US foreign policy after the new president comes into power. However, the discussion notes that it is unlikely for the US to fully withdraw its Pivot to Asia policy as it will be too politically and economically costly to do so. However, it is important to note that this is a period where all stakeholders are assessing the situation.

Furthermore, potential scenarios after reunification were also an issue of discussion. The Syrian refugee crisis has highlighted the possibility of massive refugee crisis. To prevent such massive refugee crisis from happening in the case of domestic instability in North Korea should be a part of the scenario. South Korea has a roadmap for reunification which contains a lot of reference to political reconciliation. However, there are still outstanding issues such as the question of how to integrate North Korea army, the issue of what to do with nuclear weapons, and what will South Korea do towards political and economic disparity between North Korea and South Korea.

Another point was made that human rights situation in North Korea is uncertain and unstable. The discussion raised that there has never been a greater understanding of international community on the grave violations of human rights in North Korea. If reunification takes place, it is important to address how to avoid misunderstanding from international community and how to ensure that crimes against humanity will be resolved. Therefore, issue of transitional justice should also be considered in the scenario



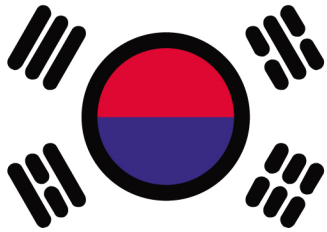
Additionally, the discussion also raised comparison between the situation in the Korean Peninsula with the historical case of West Germany and East Germany. However, in West-East Germany, Soviet Union had glasnost and perestroika which were determining factor in the fall of the Soviet Union and further lead to the reunification of Germany. In the Korean Peninsula, China as one of the determining actor and supporter of North Korea will not change its system in the near future. Furthermore, in Germany case, there was dominant actor such as Helmut Kohl who actively promoted diplomatic solution with Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, but now it seems that there is no any leadership like Helmut Kohl. It is a different global situation and different regional situation.



Moreover, in German reunification, it was happened on the last stage of confrontation between Soviet Union and United States, not like China and US that only at early stage. Additionally, East Germany was highly dependent on Soviet Union that when Soviet Union collapsed, East Germany follow through and lost its support. In North Korea case, although trade relations between North Korean and China is high, they have their own strategic environment so that North Korea is more independent in regard to China compared to East Germany and Soviet Union.



# BASIC INFO



Republic of Korea

**SOUTH KOREA**

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

**NORTH KOREA**



## GDP

**US\$ 1,40 TRILLION**

World Bank 2015

**US\$ 17,4 BILLION**

UN Data 2014

## GDP Per Capita



World Bank 2015

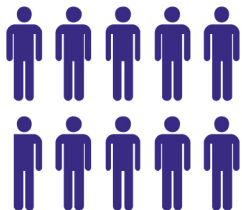
**US\$ 27,221**

**US\$ 696**



UN Data 2014

## Population



**49,115,196**

**24,983,205**



## Military Personnels

Army **495.000**  
Navy **70.000**  
Air **65.000**  
Paramilitary **4.500**  
Reserves **4.500.000**  
Reserves Paramilitary **3.000.000**

**628.000**

**1,190,000**

Army **1.020.000**  
Navy **60.000**  
Air **110.000**  
Paramilitary **189.000**  
Reserves **600.000**  
Worker/Peasant Red Guard **5.700.000**

## Nuclear Capability

**NO**



**YES**

One estimate puts it at 20 nuclear weapons that can soon double.



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