Building Trust on the Korean Peninsula:
An Assessment of *Trustpolitik* for
Inter-Korean Relations

By Stephanie Nayoung Kang

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Executive Summary

Amidst increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula following a series of North Korean military provocations and a third nuclear test, the Park Geun-hye administration entered office in 2013 on a political platform aimed at building trust with the South Korean public, between the two Koreas, and among regional neighbors. The Park administration's policy toward North Korea, known as *trustpolitik*, calls for inter-Korean trust-building for future Korean unification based on verifiable compliance with existing agreements, a strong foundation of security, and efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

Despite describing South Korean policy toward North Korea as a "trust-building process", a closer examination of *trustpolitik* reveals an approach less reliant on actual trust and largely dependent on reciprocity and *quid pro quo*. The biggest challenge for Seoul will be to define trust in the inter-Korean context and how trust can be operational in pragmatic policy. President Park has yet to conceptualize her trust-building process in practice and has not shown how trust can be used to reduce North Korean military provocations and implement a balanced approach of both pressure and engagement. In the absence of a clear conception of trust, *trustpolitik* fails to establish standards to measure success in building inter-Korean trust and provide pragmatic policies that increase cooperation between Seoul and Pyongyang.

The following paper provides several policy recommendations that the Park Geun-hye administration should adopt to better implement *trustpolitik* for building inter-Korean trust and cooperation. First, Seoul should seek to increase inter-Korean cooperation in numerous areas, such as economic and cultural cooperation, that are not solely conditional upon North Korean denuclearization. Second, Seoul should refrain from rhetorically retaliating against North Korean provocations and belligerence to ensure its intentions to cooperate are transparent. Third, the Park government should not place ultimatums on multilateral or bilateral negotiations with North Korea, such as the threat to completely dissolve the Six Party Talks in response to a fourth North Korean nuclear test. Most importantly, the Park administration needs to clearly define trust in the inter-Korean context by explaining how inter-Korean trust can be measured, how trust is factored into the implementation of *trustpolitik*, and how trust between Seoul and Pyongyang can be established despite security tensions.

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"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." — Ernest Hemingway

In a *Foreign Affairs* article entitled "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust Between Seoul and Pyongyang," Park Geun-hye, at the time a leading candidate for presidency, provided the foundation of what would later become her policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) – *trustpolitik*. While the concepts of trust and trust-building are central to the Park administration's approach to North Korea, an examination of *trustpolitik* reveals a policy less reliant on confidence and positive expectations from Pyongyang and instead dependent on measured responses backed by national strength. This paper analyzes the underlying components of the Park administration's trust-building process – its core principles, objectives, and initiatives – to assess the effectiveness of *trustpolitik* in building substantial trust between the two Koreas. How does Seoul define "trust" with Pyongyang and can the North Korean regime be a trusted partner for cooperation? How effective is a policy reliant on trust for reducing North Korean provocations and providing steps toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula?

The first section introduces the changing security situation on the Korean Peninsula and provides a brief overview of the policy initiatives adopted by previous South Korean administrations toward North Korea. The following section outlines the Park government's trust-building process and its responses to North Korean actions under *trustpolitik*. Lastly, the paper examines the limitations of *trustpolitik* for increasing cooperation and reducing security tensions between the two Koreas, followed by policy recommendations to address the challenges ahead for effective inter-Korean trust-building.

Current Security Situation on the Korean Peninsula

The security situation on the Korean Peninsula is marked by a high degree of tension following the transfer of power from Kim Jong-il to his son Kim Jong-un, who has showcased aggressive acts in what is perceived as an attempt to consolidate his power in Pyongyang.[1] Following the sinking of the *Cheonan* warship and the North Korean shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in March and November 2010 respectively, inter-Korean relations experienced a serious downturn under the Lee Myung-bak administration from 2010 to 2012.[2] Contrary to any hopes

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[1] See Max Fisher, "Kim Jong Un just had his own uncle killed. Why?" *The Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 2013, accessed June 24, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/12/12/kim-jong-un-just-had-his-own-uncle-killed-why/; Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "Kim Jong Un's First 500 Days: Consolidating Power and Clearing Political Space for National Revival," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), 81-108; Seong-chang Cheong, "The Anatomy of Kim Jong Un's Power," *Global Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 8-13.

[2] Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun, "Cheonan and Yeonpyeong: The Northeast Asian Response to North Korea's Provocations," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 156, No. 2 (April/May 2011), 74-81; Aidan Foster-Carter, "Plumbing the Depths," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (May 2012), 89-106.

that Kim Jong-un would open North Korean society to the international community and abide by global rules and norms, inter-Korean relations in late 2012 to 2013 were subject to North Korean military provocations, increasingly belligerent rhetoric, and severe mistrust between the two Koreas.

In December 2012, North Korea tested a controversial long-range rocket and, in February 2013, conducted its third nuclear test despite strong international condemnation. In addition to military provocations, the North Korean regime continued its belligerent rhetoric against South Korea and its allies by threatening to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire" and issued warnings for foreign embassies to evacuate in case of conflict.[3] Mistrust between the two Koreas became solidified as the North severed key military hotlines with the South, closed entry to and eventually shut down the joint-Korean economic zone known as the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), and cancelled separated family reunions at the last moment.[4] Efforts to reconcile inter-Korean tensions, such as the reopening of the KIC and high-level talks held in Panmunjom in February 2014, have been limited due to repeated provocations by the North including continued missile launches and the March announcement of a 'new form' of nuclear test.[5]

Past approaches to North Korea: from sunshine to isolation

Previous South Korean administrations have adopted numerous approaches to address the humanitarian, economic, and security crises in North Korea, but policy initiatives have produced limited results. Under the Sunshine Policy, the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations relied on intense engagement with Pyongyang through large-scale humanitarian assistance, economic aid, and unconditional dialogues in an effort to induce the North Korean regime into complying with international rules and norms.[6] Yet continued military provocations and underground nuclear tests sparked sharp debates in South Korea over the effectiveness of an engagement policy with a belligerent and distrustful actor such as North Korea. The Lee Myung-bak government, on the other hand, adopted a policy of isolation and pressure on the North in

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[3] "North Korea threatens 'sea of fire' for South Korean presidential office," *The Telegraph*, November 22, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/10466908/North-Korea-threatens-sea-of-fire-for-South-Korea-presidential-office.html, accessed April 29, 2014; Will Englund, "North Korea urges embassy evacuations, diplomats say," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/north-korea-urges-embassy-evacuation-russia-says/2013/04/05/ffd3db6e-9df1-11e2-a941-a19bce7af755_story.html, accessed April 29, 2014.

[4] Sang-hun Choe, "North Korea Cuts Off the Remaining Military Hot Lines With South Korea," *New York Times*, March 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/asia/north-korea-shuts-last-remaining-hotline-to-south.html?_r=0, accessed April 30, 2014; Steven Borowiec, "Why is North Korea's Kaesong industrial park closing?" *Christian Science Monitor*, April 8, 2013, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/0408/Why-is-North-Korea-s-Kaesong-industrial-park-closing, accessed April 30, 2014; Madison Park, "North Korea blames South, cancels family reunions," *CNN*, September 21, 2013, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/21/world/asia/korea-family-reunions-cancel/, accessed April 30, 2014.

[5] Sang-hun Choe, "North Korea Vows to Use 'New Form' of Nuclear Test," *New York Times*, March 30, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/31/world/asia/north-korea-promises-new-form-of-nuclear-test.html, accessed April 30, 2014.

[6] Refer to Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002); Leif-Eric Easley, "Building trust or giving it away? The Roh administration's engagement of the North," *PacNet* 32A, July 24, 2006.

response to the sinking of the *Cheonan* and bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island.[7] President Lee placed sanctions, also known as the May 24 sanctions, on economic activities with North Korea (with the exception of the KIC) and stringent preconditions on talks with Pyongyang dependent on steps toward denuclearization. Pyongyang retaliated with a string of threats and vehement rhetoric against the Lee government.[8] Policies that attempted to solely apply pressure on the North also fell short as any real military options are limited and sanctions fail to place significant stress on the North Korean society and economy due to Chinese aid.[9] As such, the policies of the past administrations have set parameters for the Park Geun-hye government to adopt approaches toward North Korea that steer away from the previous Lee administration's isolationist policies while also avoiding the appeasement of the Sunshine Policy.

***Trustpolitik* and the Trust-building Process under the Park Geun-hye Administration**

To assess the effectiveness of *trustpolitik* in building genuine trust between Seoul and Pyongyang and subsequently reducing North Korean military provocations against the South and its allies, one must understand how President Park defines trust and evaluate what forms of cooperation constitute substantial steps toward trust-building on the Korean Peninsula. The first section analyzes the principles and objectives behind *trustpolitik* to determine how the Park government defines trust for inter-Korean cooperation and whether the threshold of trust proposed by Seoul is a viable measure for initial trust-building. The following sections assess the policy initiatives under *trustpolitik* to conclude if, in fact, the Park administration is relying on its defined framework of trust to establish sustainable cooperation with North Korea and evaluate how North Korea responds to South Korean calls for trust despite recent and ongoing tensions in inter-Korean relations.

Main principles and objectives of trustpolitik

The key word of the current Park administration's policy initiatives – whether in domestic social policies or in foreign diplomacy – is trust. In the inter-Korean context, the 2014 Unification White Paper refers to trust as a form of 'social capital' that serves as the foundation of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, incorporating the support of the Korean people and extending to cooperation with the international community.[10] Jinwook Choi, Director of the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), defines trust as "slightly different from *confidence*" in that "[t]rust is a social and cultural term" rather than a political or technical term, where the "degree of trust determines a country's welfare and competitiveness."[11] Yet such

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[7] For an overview of the Lee Myung-bak administration's North Korea policy, see Jae Jean Suh, *The Lee Myung-bak Government's North Korea Policy: A Study on its Historical and Theoretical Foundation* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009).

[8] Foster-Carter, "Plumbing the Depths," 89-95. While Pyongyang directed vehement comments against President Lee, the ROK president was also involved in exchanging harsh rhetoric against the North. See Steve Herman, "South Korea Renews Harsh Rhetoric Against North," *Voice of America*, Dec. 1, 2011, http://www.voanews.com/content/south-korea-renews-harsh-rhetoric-against-north-134895218/149001.html, accessed June 3, 2014.

[9] David C. Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of Trust-building on the Korean Peninsula," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), 7-11.

[10] Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *2014 Unification White Paper* (2014) (in Korean),, 17.

[11] Jinwook Choi, "The Park Geun-hye Government, Trust-Building Process and Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity*, July 30, 2013, 1.

conceptions of trust do not clearly define what constitutes inter-Korean trust, and President Park has yet to provide an operational conception of trust for *trustpolitik*.

President Park Geun-hye identifies trust as the foundation for sustainable inter-Korean cooperation when she wrote, "A lack of trust has long undermined attempts at genuine reconciliation between North and South Korea."[12] Trust is viewed as the essential missing component in efforts to achieve Seoul's main objectives on the Korean Peninsula, which include improving inter-Korean ties, resolving the North Korean nuclear issue for peace and stability in the region, and laying the groundwork and infrastructure for Korean unification.[13] To end the "vicious cycle" of crisis followed by compromise that has characterized inter-Korean relations, the Park administration introduced three main guiding principles under *trustpolitik*: a balanced approach, evolving North Korea policies that require flexibility, and international cooperation.[14]

In her *Foreign Affairs* article, Park lays out the principles of *trustpolitik* and the trust-building process for the Korean Peninsula by stating:

> "Trustpolitik" does not mean unconditional or one-sided trust without verification. Nor does it mean forgetting North Korea's numerous transgressions or rewarding the country with new incentives. Instead, it should be comprised of two coexisting strands: first, North Korea must keep its agreements made with South Korea and the international community to establish a minimum level of trust, and second, there must be assured consequences for actions that breach the peace. To ensure stability, trustpolitik should be applied consistently from issue to issue based on verifiable actions, and steps should not be taken for mere political expediency.[15]

For Seoul, inter-Korean trust does not imply unconditional concessions to North Korean demands – it requires verifiable steps that begin with Pyongyang's commitment to uphold existing agreements and promises made with Seoul and the international community. This means North Korea must take genuine steps toward denuclearization by halting its nuclear activities and disclosing its nuclear weapons programs in a transparent manner that is compliant with international procedures, such as those specified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). At the same time, a balanced approach under *trustpolitik* is built on a foundation of security and a strong, credible deterrent against North Korean military actions through a robust US-ROK security alliance and domestic capabilities.[16]

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[12] Park, "A New Kind of Korea."

[13] Ministry of Unification, "Trust-Building on the Korean Peninsula," 22; Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *2014 Unification White Paper* (in Korean), 16-25. See also Choi, "The Park Geun-hye Government, Trust-Building Process and Peace on the Korean Peninsula." For the characteristics of trust, see also Jinwook Choi, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), 31-3.

[14] For a description of the "vicious cycle" of North-South Korea relations, see Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *2014 Unification White Paper* (in Korean), 14; Choi, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula," 25-6.

[15] Geun-hye Park, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 5 (September/October 2011).

[16] Bruce Klingner, "The U.S. Should Support New South Korean President's Approach to North Korea," *Backgrounder*, No. *2789*, Heritage Foundation, April 11, 2013, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/04/the-us-should-support-new-south-korean-presidents-approach-to-north-korea#_ftn13, accessed April 30, 2014; Park, "A New Kind of Korea"; Ministry of Unification, Republic of

Trustpolitik also requires evolving North Korea policies that are flexible and adapt to changing dynamics on the Korean Peninsula. South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Yun Byung-se refers to trustpolitik as a "policy of alignment, which is neither a coercive policy nor an appeasement policy, but rather an effective and balanced combination of contending or competing policy options."[17] Emphasis is placed on flexibility when dealing with the North and actively responding to Pyongyang whether it is making threats or calling for dialogue and negotiation. President Park Geun-hye calls for "aligning South Korea's security with its cooperation with the North and inter-Korean dialogue with parallel international efforts" and "assuming a tough line against North Korea sometimes and a flexible policy open to negotiations other times."[18]

Lastly, the Park administration's trust-building process extends beyond the Korean Peninsula to strengthen international cooperation with regional neighbors, namely (but not limited to) the members of the Six-Party Talks.[19] In an effort to address "Asia's paradox", the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) aims to foster multilateral dialogue and cooperation on 'softer issues' while staying rooted in a strong US-ROK security alliance.[20]

Korea, "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," September 2013. For the President Park's response to the North Korean nuclear test in February 2013, see Sang-hun Choe, "New Leader in South Criticizes North Korea," *New York Times*, February 13, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/14/world/asia/incoming-south-korean-president-steps-up-criticism-of-pyongyang.html, accessed April 30, 2014. See also Geun-hye Park, "Reinventing the Inter-Korean Relationship," *Project Syndicate*, January 7, 2014, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/geun-hye-park-lays-out-her-government-s-plan-for-building-trust-between-north-and-south-korea, accessed April 30, 2014.
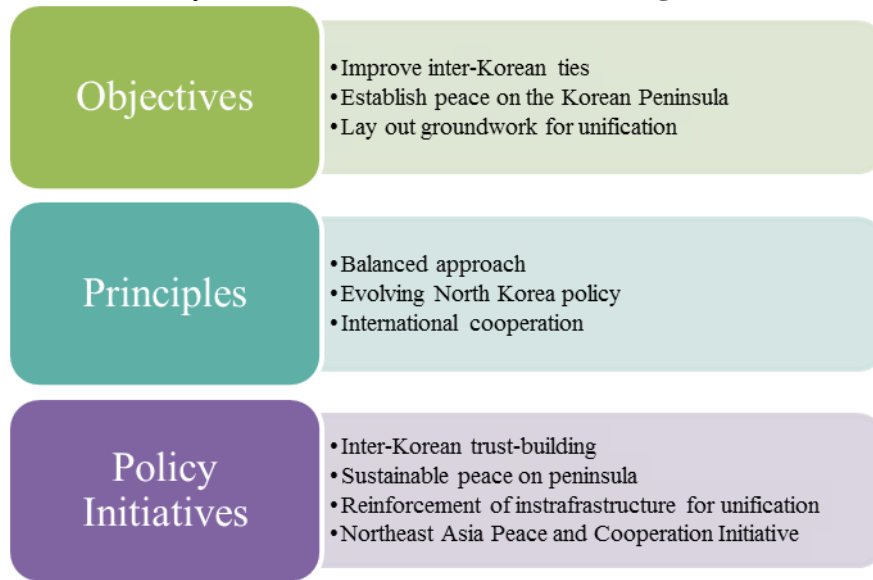
[17] Byung-se Yun, "Park Geun-hye's *Trustpolitik*: A New Framework for South Korea's Foreign Policy," *Global Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 2013), 9.

[18] Park, "A New Kind of Korea."

[19] For the purposes of this paper, discussion on the Park administration's trust-building process will be limited to inter-Korean relations because the application of *trustpolitik* to Northeast Asia warrants separate and extended research that is beyond the scope of the current paper.

[20] For more on "Asia's paradox", see Park, "Address by President Park Geun-Hye of the Republic of Korea to the joint Session of the United States Congress." Geun-hye Park, Cheong Wa Dae Republic of Korea, "Address by President Park Geun-Hye of the Republic of Korea to the joint Session of the United States Congress," May 8, 2013, http://english1.president.go.kr/activity/speeches.php?srh[page]=3&srh[view_mode]=detail&srh[seq]=2623&srh[detail_no]=7, accessed April 23, 2014; Byung-se Yun, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, "New Strategic Thinking: Planning for Korean Foreign Policy," at East Asia Institute, April 29, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/press/pressreleases/index.jsp?menu=m_10_20&sp=/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engreadboard.jsp%3Fboardid=302%26typeID=12%26tableName=TYPE_ENGLISH%26seqno=312215, accessed April 24, 2014.

Figure 1. The Park Geun-hye Administration's Trust-building Process

Objectives	• Improve inter-Korean ties • Establish peace on the Korean Peninsula • Lay out groundwork for unification
Principles	• Balanced approach • Evolving North Korea policy • International cooperation
Policy Initiatives	• Inter-Korean trust-building • Sustainable peace on peninsula • Reinforcement of instrafrastructure for unification • Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative

Source: Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification, 2013

Conceptual gap: significance of defining inter-Korean trust

President Park notes that the lack, or even absence, of trust between Seoul and Pyongyang gives South Korea the opportunity to rebuild it. [21] Despite the South Korean government's calls for inter-Korean trust-building, President Park Geun-hye does not provide an operational conception of trust for *trustpolitik*. Defining trust in inter-Korean relations is essential for determining the role that trust plays in improving North-South ties and explaining how increased trust can reduce tensions and lay the foundation for Korean unification. The failure to provide a clear definition of trust presents a conceptual flaw in *trustpolitik*, where Seoul cannot determine at what point inter-Korean trust is established and how actual trust is used to increase cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and among regional partners.

While the Park administration views trust as a variable for cooperation rather than a process,[22] the lack of a clear definition of trust also presents challenges for inter-Korean trust-building as it remains unclear how trust can be incorporated into pragmatic policy to improve relations between Seoul and Pyongyang. Without clear parameters on what constitutes genuine inter-Korean trust, one cannot measure whether policy initiatives under *trustpolitik* are successful or fail to build trust between the two Koreas. Although the Unification White Paper refers to trust as a form of "social capital" and differentiates it from confidence building, there is no concise definition of trust that establishes at what point inter-Korean trust is built, between which actors trust must be established, and how trust can be maintained despite tensions in the inter-Korean relationship.

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[21] Park, "A New Kind of Korea."

[22] Dean Ouellette, "Building Trust on the Margins of Inter-Korean Relations: Revitalizing the Role of South Korean NGOs," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2013), 124.

In her inaugural address, President Park stated, "Trust can be built through dialogue and by honoring promises that have already been made."[23] While citing small conciliatory measures between Seoul and Pyongyang – such as reopening the KIC and holding family reunions – as steps toward establishing inter-Korean trust, the Park administration places a much higher threshold for deep and meaningful cooperation at denuclearization efforts by the North.[24] This implies that inter-Korean trust cannot be established until Pyongyang sends signals to Seoul that it is ready to take genuine steps toward dismantling its nuclear weapons program. Yet it remains unclear if inter-Korean trust-building can take place in spaces that are separate from the nuclear issue, such as economic cooperation and cultural exchange. In her Dresden address, President Park made several policy proposals to expand social and economic cooperation with North Korea, including humanitarian assistance for North Korean citizens, agricultural cooperation, and inter-Korean exchanges. But significant progress in inter-Korean cooperation remains contingent upon a North Korea that "must choose the path to denuclearization."[25]

Additionally, *trustpolitik* does not explain how trust can be built between Seoul and Pyongyang when North-South confrontations persist – whether in the form of rhetoric or physical threats. How can inter-Korean trust-building be initiated when political and security tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain high? Despite attempts to persuade North Korea to forgo its nuclear program in favor of large scale economic cooperation and humanitarian aid, the Park administration has been more reluctant to engage North Korea unless Pyongyang first reciprocates. The Park administration defines trust in terms of reciprocity, where Pyongyang is rewarded for its cooperation and punished for breaking agreements and disregarding law. Although the Park government emphasizes that a lack of trust between the two Koreas hinders real progress and perpetuates a cycle of provocations, it fails to explain how trust can be measured and how a breach in inter-Korean trust can be restored. Thus it is important to evaluate the Park administration's policy initiatives under *trustpolitik* to determine if trust is indeed the guiding principle behind its implementation of North Korea policy, followed by an assessment of *trustpolitik*'s effectiveness in increasing cooperation and reducing political and military tensions between the two Koreas.

Trust vs. reciprocity: policy initiatives under Trustpolitik and North Korean responses

Under *trustpolitik*, the Park administration proposes four major initiatives to implement its key policy objectives for inter-Korean relations (refer to Figure 1). First, trust-building between Seoul and Pyongyang will be accomplished through small, gradual steps that include addressing humanitarian issues, establishing channels for dialogue, and socio-economic exchange as outlined in the previous administration's Vision Korea Projects. Second, peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula will be maintained by a credible US-ROK deterrent, strong

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[23] Geun-hye Park, Cheong Wa Dae Republic of Korea, "Opening a New Era of Hope," 18th Presidential Inaugural Address, February 25, 2013,
http://english1.president.go.kr/activity/speeches.php?srh[page]=3&srh[view_mode]=detail&srh[seq]=2617&srh[detail_no]=1, accessed April 23, 2014; Park, "A New Kind of Korea."
[24] Park, "A New Kind of Korea." President Park states: "Trust can be built on incremental gains, such as joint projects for enhanced economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance from the South to the North, and new trade and investment opportunities. See also Park, "Reinventing the Inter-Korean Relationship."
[25] Geun-hye Park, "An Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula," speech at Dresden University of Technology, March 28, 2014. Refer also to Park, "A New Kind of Korea."

national defenses against North Korean attacks, and efforts to denuclearize the peninsula. Third, the groundwork for Korean unification will be built by improving infrastructure such as public engagement in unification efforts and assisting North Korean citizens. Last, the trust-building process will be extended to Northeast Asia to foster international support for Korean unification and jointly address the North Korean nuclear issue.[26]

Yet a closer examination of President Park's trust-building process reveals an approach toward North Korea that is not dependent on 'trust' and, instead, demands reciprocity from the North in the form of abiding by agreements made and ceasing military provocations against the South. Pyongyang's bellicose rhetoric and provocations against Seoul and its allies have fostered severe South Korean doubt in the North Korean regime's willingness to adopt international norms and rules. *The Economist* characterizes South Korean policy toward North Korea as "distrustpolitik" because the "south does not trust the north to keep its promises; the north does not trust the south to follow through on its admonitions."[27]

Although Kim Jong-un has been overt in his attempt to simultaneously pursue economic development and a nuclear weapons program, as outlined in Pyongyang's *byungjin* policy, constant military provocations by the North make it difficult for Seoul to acknowledge the potential for reform within North Korea – coupled with the US and ROK demand that North Korea make a "strategic choice" to abandon its nuclear weapons in exchange for massive aid.[28] The North Korean leadership has made it clear that it intends to remain a nuclear weapons state as evidenced by Pyongyang's revised constitution to reaffirm its claim and Kim Jong-un's 2013 address to the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) where he stated that North Korea's nuclear tests are "self-defense" and "part of practical countermeasures for defending the country's sovereignty and security."[29] As a result, Seoul's efforts to cooperate with Pyongyang are largely based on policies of reciprocity and tit-for-tat strategies instead of confidence and positive expectations that North Korea will comply with existing agreements because it is in its best interests to do so.[30]

While North Korean threats place significant limitations on efforts to build trust between Seoul and Pyongyang, David Kang argues that "sound policy-making will only occur when [US and ROK] leaders realize that North Koreans, despite having an odious regime, have legitimate

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[26] See Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *2014 Unification White Paper* (in Korean), 26-37; Choi, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy," 42-6.

[27] "Bad or Mad?" *The Economist*, October 26, 2013, http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21588196-kim-jong-un-likely-realise-his-nuclear-ambitions-two-sides-already-face, accessed April 24, 3014.

[28] Scott Snyder, "The Motivations Behind North Korea's Pursuit of Simultaneous Economic and Nuclear Development," *Asia Unbound*, November 20, 2013, http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2013/11/20/the-motivations-behind-north-koreas-pursuit-of-simultaneous-economic-and-nuclear-development/, accessed May 21, 2014; Rüdiger Frank, "Can North Korea Prioritize Nukes and the Economy At the Same Time?" *Global Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 38-42.

[29] Jong-un Kim, "Unofficial translation of Kim Jong Un's speech at the March 2013 plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea," *The National Committee on North Korea*, March 31, 2013, http://www.ncnk.org/resources/news-items/kim-jong-uns-speeches-and-public-statements-1/KJU_CentralCommittee_KWP.pdf, accessed May 22, 2014.

[30] In this context, reciprocity does not necessarily mean equal exchange in terms of value and cost. For a comprehensive discussion of reciprocity in international relations, see Robert O. Keohane, "Reciprocity in international relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Winter 1986), 1-27.

national concerns as well."[31] Reassurance is essential for building trust between adversaries and "costly signaling" by one party – sending signals that persuade the other side that one is trustworthy, or prefers cooperation – can assuage doubts associated with the risks of defection or exploitation.[32] It is important to note that the South Korean leadership must also show the North that it can be trusted to keep its commitments,[33] which the Park administration can do through costly signaling, and to reassure that Seoul will not seek to fundamentally change the North Korean regime through military force. President Park often uses the Korean metaphor that "it takes two hands to clap" to assert that "[t]rust is not something that can be imposed on another."[34] Although the Park administration claims that it is open to dialogue with Pyongyang, it has shown a relative unwillingness to engage with North Korea first and a reluctance to cooperate with the North without reciprocal action.[35]

Policies based on reciprocity belie traditional conceptions of trust as *quid pro quo* approaches do not require a foundation of trust for cooperation.[36] If one defines trust as placing confidence in another to meet a certain expectation, then *trustpolitik* does not operate on a basis of trust. Scott Snyder argues that inter-Korean cooperation is "not based on trust, but on the establishment of joint structures that require cooperation to operate," most notably the joint KIC, because both sides have high stakes to maintain cooperation even in the absence of trust.[37] Because the Park administration does not clearly define trust and the role trust plays in the implementation of *trustpolitik*, it is difficult to determine when trust becomes a factor in improving inter-Korean relations and how genuine trust-building can be initiated in spite of the current tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

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[31] Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of Trust-building on the Korean Peninsula," 13.

[32] Andrew Kydd argues that costly signals must be balanced so that they are not too costly at the risk of exploitation by the other side, but risky enough not to appear as "cheap talk." In addition, trustworthy states or security seekers are the first to send costly signals to display their trustworthiness and to find out if their counterparts are, in return, trustworthy or untrustworthy. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 187-8. See chapter 7 for explanation of reassurance and the Reassurance Game. For a comprehensive discussion on costly signaling and reassurance, see also Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2000), 326.

[33] For more on past North-South Korean agreements (and the US), refer to the Agreed Framework and 2002-03 Korean nuclear crisis. See Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

[34] For the analogy, see Park, "Address by President Park Geun-Hye of the Republic of Korea to the joint Session of the United States Congress." See also Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of Trust-building on the Korean Peninsula," 13.

[35] In a *The Washington Post* interview in response to a question if President Park would meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, Park answered that the "trust-building process is about keeping open the window to dialogue with North Korea at all times… But what use would it be at this moment?" "South Korean President Park Geun-hye answers questions," *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/south-korean-president-park-geun-hye-answers-questions/2013/05/07/d7482e5a-b761-11e2-b94c-b684dda07add_story.html, accessed April 30, 2014.

[36] For iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games and the 'tit for tat' strategy, see Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) and Keohane, "Reciprocity in international relations."

[37] Scott Snyder, "North Korea's Test of Trustpolitik," *Asia Unbound*, January 31, 2014, http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2014/01/31/north-koreas-test-of-trustpolitik/, accessed May 1, 2014.

Instead, President Park Geun-hye has practiced principled rigidity in dealing with the North to avoid the risk of North Korean exploitation and to ensure the Kim regime is not rewarded for its incompliance. In the summer of 2013, attempts to hold high-level talks between the two Koreas failed to materialize due to the Park administration's emphasis of "form controls content" and the North's retaliatory response.[38] President Park's conception of Korean unification as a 'jackpot' has raised arguments that the current administration views unification as absorption of the North.[39] Additionally, the Park administration has not answered to calls among South Koreans to lift the May 24 economic sanctions placed on North Korea by the previous Lee administration due to persistent demands for an apology from Pyongyang.[40]

Yet, Seoul has made policy efforts to promote North-South cooperation despite Pyongyang's provocations. Following inter-Korean dialogues in February 2014, the South Korean government in coordination with the US and Japan agreed to lower conditions for nuclear talks with North Korea.[41] The Park administration is also actively pursuing economic cooperation with North Korea through the KIC, expanding involvement into the Rason economic zone, and attempting to spearhead multiple economic initiatives proposed in the President's Dresden speech.[42] President Park is also utilizing her close ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping to employ Beijing's aid in efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula by encouraging the Chinese to apply diplomatic and economic pressure on Pyongyang while cooperating closely with Seoul and Washington.[43] Although the South Korean government has expressed its commitment to improve inter-Korean relations through small conciliatory gestures, *trustpolitik* places conditions on trust-building with North Korea that Pyongyang refuses to meet.

Ways to improve *Trustpolitik* for inter-Korean trust-building

In spite of the challenges that the Park administration faces in dealing with a belligerent and incompliant North Korean leadership under Kim Jong-un, there are several policy steps that Seoul can take to effectively improve *trustpolitik* for building trust and increasing cooperation between the two Koreas. How do Seoul and Pyongyang build sustainable trust and what does inter-Korean cooperation based on trust look like? How can the Park administration build trust

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[38] John Delury, "Park vs. Kim: Who Wins This Game of Thrones?" *38North*, June 18, 2013, http://38north.org/2013/06/jdelury061813/, accessed May 2, 2014. In fact, North Korea frequently is the initiator for inter-Korean talks – though arguably in an attempt to get concessions from the South and international community.

[39] Hyun-june Choi and Oi-hyun Kim, "Does Park's 'jackpot' mean unification by absorption?" *Hanryoreh*, March 31, 2014, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/630572.html, accessed April 23, 2014. See also Aidan Foster-Carter, "Sound and Fury," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (May 2014), 89-90.

[40] "Park advised to ease sanctions, engage North," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, January 3, 2014, http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2982965, accessed April 30, 2014.

[41] "S. Korea, U.S., Japan lower bar for nuclear talks with N. Korea," *Yonhap*.

[42] John Delury, "Form Controls Content: The Two Koreas Move, Washington Stands Still," *38North*, February 17, 2014, http://38north.org/2014/02/jdelury021714/, accessed May 2, 2014; Ministry of Unification Republic of Korea, *2014 Unification White Paper* (in Korean).

[43] Sang-hun Choe, "China and South Korea Reaffirm Efforts Aimed at North," *New York Times*, June 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/28/world/asia/china-and-south-korea-reaffirm-efforts-to-end-north-koreas-nuclear-threat.html, accessed May 2, 2014. Presidents Park and Xi also held a successful summit meeting at the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit at The Hague which was the third meeting between the two leaders. See also Scott Snyder and See-won Byun, "China's Red Line on the Korean Peninsula," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2014), 104.

with the North Korean leadership when its national interests run directly counter to the demands and conditions that Seoul places on genuine trust-building?

First, the Park administration should adopt a more flexible policy approach that promotes inter-Korean cooperation in incremental steps without conceding on the nuclear issue. One area in which the Park government could show more flexibility with the North is increased economic cooperation, especially through the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in South Korea.[44] Stephan Haggard suggests considering a "Chinese-style engagement" with North Korea, which focuses on private-sector led economic initiatives instead of reliance on joint public projects that depend primarily on government support and are vulnerable to political relations.[45] To do so, Seoul must first lift the May 24 sanctions against North Korea that restrict trade and investment with the North outside of the KIC, including some forms of humanitarian aid through South Korean NGOs.[46] This would be an effective costly signal to reassure Pyongyang that Seoul is committed to cooperate and would provide a preview of the scale and multitude of benefits that the North stands to receive from massive South Korean aid if it complies with agreements and takes genuine steps toward denuclearization.

Second, Seoul must refrain from engaging in rhetorical battles with Pyongyang that perpetuate greater inter-Korean suspicion and hostility. North Korean propaganda often instigates verbal attacks against the South, and reached a new low when it launched a misogynistic and racist offensive against Presidents Park and Obama during the latter's visit to South Korea.[47] In response to such vitriolic, the ROK Defense Ministry spokesman publicly denounced the North Korean regime by stating that North Korea is not a real country and "exists for the benefit of only one person," Kim Jong-un.[48] Kang argues that "[t]o respond directly to North Korea's rhetoric is to allow the North to determine the pace and intensity of the relationship."[49] While the Park administration should not condone vehement rhetoric from the North, it should not retaliate with verbal attacks of its own especially if such comments send conflicting and threatening messages to Pyongyang about South Korean intentions behind its trust-building objectives, including unification and improving inter-Korean ties. The South Korean government needs to be consistent in its policies and rhetoric toward the North so that Pyongyang's accusations that Seoul seeks regime change and unification through force do not raise doubts or questions in domestic and international support of President Park's trust-building policies.

[44] Stephan Haggard, "The Political Economy of Trustpolitik: What is Ahead for North-South Trade and Investment?" *Korea's Economy 2013*, Vol. 29 (2014), 55-62.

[45] Ibid., 59-62. See also Stephan Haggard, Jennifer Lee, and Marcus Noland, "Integration in the absence of institutions: China-North Korea cross-border exchange," *Journal of Asian Economics*, Vol. 23, Issue 2 (April 2012), 130-45.

[46] Foster-Carter, "Sound and Fury," 88-9.

[47] Tania Branigan, "North Korea launches misogynist tirade against South Korean president," *TheGuardian*, April 4, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/04/north-korea-misogynist-tirade-south-korean-president, accessed April 30, 2014.

[48] Hyung-jin Kim, "South Korea Says North Korea 'Must Disappear Soon'," *Associated Press*, May, 12 2014, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/south-korea-says-north-korea-must-disappear-soon, accessed June 4, 2014.

[49] Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of Trust-building on the Korean Peninsula," 16.

Third, Seoul should not close doors to potential avenues for dialogue and negotiation with North Korea even if Pyongyang defies international laws and engages in provocative military behavior. Although there is debate over whether a fourth North Korean nuclear test is imminent, it is necessary to formulate a prepared response if and when a nuclear test occurs.[50] In her press conference with President Obama in Seoul, President Park Geun-hye stated that a fourth North Korean nuclear test would "completely dissolve" efforts to resolve the nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks by triggering a "nuclear arms race" in the region and that South Korea would "lose the momentum for…efforts to improve [the inter-Korean] relationship."[51] In a similar statement, Yun Byung-se referred to another North Korean nuclear test as a "game changer." [52] While conditioning resumption of the Six-Party Talks on progress in denuclearization by North Korea is correct for avoiding 'talk for talk's sake',[53] South Korean statements on the possible dissolution of the Six-Party Talks hinder multilateral efforts to address the North Korean nuclear issue. In other words, Park would close key channels of communication with the North and especially with regional partners who share interests and hold influence in denuclearizing the peninsula peacefully. Thus Seoul should lead efforts to develop a joint response to a North Korean nuclear test before it takes place to ensure regional partners coordinate their separate policies toward North Korea.[54]

Yet South Korean costly signals and trust-building initiatives should not be seen as unconditional concessions to North Korea. *Trustpolitik*'s emphasis on adherence to international rules and norms is significant for maintaining a firm but flexible policy approach given the fact that low level provocations from the North will continue to occur. Continuing military exercises with the US, sharing military intelligence with trusted allies, and building South Korean domestic capabilities, such as developing strategies against the penetration of its airspace by North Korean drones, are important for deterring larger North Korean provocations and

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[50] For differing viewpoints on whether a North Korean nuclear test is imminent or not, see "Why a Nuclear Test May Not Be Imminent: Update on North Korea's Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site," *38North*, May 13, 2014, http://38north.org/2014/05/punggye051314/, accessed June 4, 2014; Jack Kim, "North Korean nuclear missiles 'imminent,' some experts fear," *Reuters*, May 22, 2014, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/22/asia-pacific/north-korean-nuclear-missiles-imminent-experts-fear/, accessed June 4, 2014; Hyung-jin Kim, "North Korea Preparing For Nuclear Test: Seoul Defense Minister," *Associated Press*, May 8, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/08/north-korea-nuclear-test_n_5287238.html, accessed June 4, 2014.

[51] Geun-hye Park, "Press Conference with President Obama and President Park of the Republic of Korea," at Blue House, Seoul, Republic of Korea, released by The White House Office of the Press Secretary, April 25, 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/25/press-conference-president-obama-and-president-park-republic-korea, accessed June 4, 2014.

[52] Byung-se Yun, "The Future of History: A New Korea, a New Asia, a New World," keynote address at Asan Plenum, April 22, 2014, http://en.asaninst.org/forums/keynote-address-by-h-e-yun-byung-se-minister-of-foreign-affairs/, accessed June 4, 2014.

[53] See Scott A. Snyder, "Is It Really Possible To Get Back To Six Party Talks?" *Asia Unbound*, May 15, 2014, http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2014/05/15/is-it-really-possible-to-get-back-to-six-party-talks/?cid=nlc-korea-korea_update_june_2014-link2-20140602&sp_mid=46097576&sp_rid=c3RlcGhhbmllbmthbmdAZ21haWwuY29tS0m, accessed June 4, 2014.

[54] For example, the Cheonan sinking and shelling of Yeongpyeong Island in 2010 displayed a divergence in policy toward North Korea between the US-ROK-Japan and China when Beijing did not recognize the North's actions as threats to regional security. See International Crisis Group, "North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea," *Asia Report*, No. 198 (December 2010), 35-6.

preparing appropriate responses to reduce miscalculation and escalation in lower level acts of force.[55]

Finally, the Park Geun-hye administration must define trust in the context of *trustpolitik* to establish how inter-Korean trust can be built and maintained for eventual unification. Trust-building is the pillar of the Park administration's policy toward North Korea but, in the absence of a well-defined and operational conception of trust, one cannot determine when and how trust can be built over time. Additionally, there exists a gap between how Seoul and Pyongyang conceptualize inter-Korean cooperation. Dean Ouellette points out that, while the Park government conditions improving North-South ties based on trust, the Kim Jong-un regime's "conditions for inter-Korean relations are the Korean people and Korean solidarity," referred to as 'by our nation itself' (*uriminzokkiri*).[56] To build sustainable inter-Korean relations, Seoul needs to first define the role of trust in inter-Korean cooperation and then persuade Pyongyang that trust is at the foundation of improved North-South ties, where meaningful dialogue and cooperation cannot take place without mutual trust. Inter-Korean cooperation based on trust should entail setting aside or aligning certain national interests to improve ties between Seoul and Pyongyang, and gradually induce positive expectations and choices. Only when trust is clearly defined can President Park state when inter-Korean trust has been established and how trust can be made operational to endure even contentious North-South relations.

Inducing North Korean 'right choices' and expanding inter-Korean cooperation

By defining trust in the Korean context, *trustpolitik* can implement pragmatic policies that induce North Korean compliance to cooperative agreements. Yet this requires both Koreas to take steps to initiate and maintain inter-Korean cooperation during the trust-building process. For North Korea, verbal attacks against the South and its allies that do not necessarily increase domestic unity but only serve to increase political tensions with Seoul need to be reduced. Pyongyang should also not seek ways to retaliate against routine US-ROK military exercises, as threats against the US and South Korea – whether they hold weight or not – decrease trust in the North as an actor that keeps its promises and do not present real political gains for a Kim regime that cannot deliver such threats. The North Korean leadership must also realize that improving its relations with the South could create a more conducive atmosphere to engage in high-level dialogues with China and even the US, which both support improved inter-Korean ties.[57]

For South Korea, the Park administration should recognize (but not necessarily accept) North Korean proposals for reconciliation, even if Pyongyang proposes unrealistic conditions. In

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[55] For an example of one of these initiatives, refer to the proposed three-way information sharing agreement among the ROK, US, and Japan. See Min-uck Chung, "Seoul, Washington and Tokyo to hold trilateral defense talks," *The Korea Times*, May 19, 2014, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/05/120_157471.html, accessed May 22, 2014.

[56] Ouellette, "Building Trust on the Margins of Inter-Korean Relations: Revitalizing the Role of South Korean NGOs," 124-5. Refer to Jang Jin-sung, "Kim Jong-un's New Year Speech: What It Really Means (Part 2 of 2)," *NK News*, January 3, 2013, http://www.nknews.org/2013/01/kim-jong-uns-new-year-speech-what-it-really-means-part-2-of-2/, accessed June 4, 2014; Jong-un Kim, "New Year Address Made by Kim Jong Un," in Pyongyang, January 1, 2013, http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201301/news01/20130101-13ee.html, accessed June 4, 2014.

[57] Jack Kim, "North and South Korea seek better ties at rare high-level talks," *Reuters*, February 12, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/12/us-korea-north-talks-idUSBREA1B07220140212, accessed June 4, 2014.

January 2014, the North Korean leadership offered its "Crucial Proposal" to the South Korean government, which called for improved inter-Korean relations by halting slander and holding high-level talks in addition to the cancellation of US-ROK military exercises. In response, Seoul disregarded the North's overture by labeling it as "distortion of the facts and absurd claims, intended to manipulate public opinion."[58] Although Pyongyang's efforts at conciliation can be interpreted as deceptive moves to gain short-term concessions, the Park administration under *trustpolitik* should at least acknowledge such gestures and discuss ways to potentially turn North Korean conciliatory gestures into real agreements. As such, Ouellette notes that trust should be viewed as a process, as opposed to a variable for inter-Korean cooperation.[59] Seoul should also recognize that Pyongyang's strategic decisions are influenced heavily by external factors, such as shifts in US foreign policy, and certain patterns of provocative behavior from the North are due to changes in Pyongyang's strategic calculus and not directly related to exploiting South Korean trust.[60]

In the context of a complex strategic environment on the Korean Peninsula that requires a careful balance between maintaining national security and dispelling mistrust for cooperation, the Park administration's *trustpolitik* reflects a policy that is restrained by limited pragmatic options to address the dilemma of dealing with a nuclear North Korea while attempting to build inter-Korean trust. The present study reveals that the Park Geun-hye administration's *trustpolitik* operates on a basis of reciprocity and principled rigidity, where trust is absent and not clearly defined in the context of pragmatic policy. North-South Korean cooperation under *trustpolitik* does not rely on a foundation of trust, but instead calls for a relationship that depends on verification over confidence and a demand for reciprocal actions over positive expectations. While based on strong principles aimed at establishing inter-Korean conciliation, the Park administration needs to first establish an operational conception of trust to increase cooperation between Seoul and Pyongyang and build a foundation for Korean unification.

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[58] Hyun-june Choi and Hyun Park, "Seoul snubs North Korea's "important proposal"," *Hankyoreh*, Jan. 18, 2014, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/620320.html, accessed June 4, 2014; "North Korea Repeats Its Conciliatory Gesture Toward South Korea (North Korea Newsletter No. 298)," *Yonhap*, Jan. 30, 2014, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2014/01/28/40/0401000000AEN20140128008000325F.html, accessed June 4, 2014.

[59] Ouellette, "Building Trust on the Margins of Inter-Korean Relations: Revitalizing the Role of South Korean NGOs," 119-22.

[60] Yeon-chul Kim, "Inter-Korean Relations: What Accounts for Kim Jong Un's Changing Attitudes?" *Global Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 24-9.

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