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The Korean Peninsula Peace Initiative has nearly lost its momentum after the no-deal Hanoi Summit in February 2019. The peace process set up by South Korea in 2018 had been centered on prioritizing the North Korea-United States negotiations. This was because the issue of nuclear proliferation was a matter of maintaining the United States-led world order, and North Korea had insisted its explicit desire to discuss nuclear issues with the United States. The greatest challenge in the past 30 years has been reaching negotiations between North Korea and the United States. However, this only implies that North Korea-United States negotiations are the most difficult stage in achieving denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and thus not inclusive of the whole peace process. Although peace and denuclearization are closely intertwined, indeed, “peace through denuclearization” is not the only means. The main steward of peace on the Korean Peninsula should still be South Korea. The “driver’s role” of South Korea in peacefully resolving the nuclear issue was initially proposed for this purpose, and it should continue to proceed this way.

A stalemate signifies something different from “sustained confrontation.” A stalemate is a situation in which during the pursuit of a certain change, progress comes to a halt. Looking at the faltering peace process, it seems rather natural to ask, “Why are North Korea and the United States at a

standstill?" The so-called 'politics of stalemate' refers to an intellectual exercise to figure out the cause of such stalemates. When trying to explain international political phenomena from the viewpoint of one state's external affairs, namely, foreign policy analysis, the starting point must be to question "Why nations act?" We ask questions regarding the causes and effects of a state's action and seek explanatory answers. But beneath this initial question is another implicit question, the question of "Why nations NOT act?"

It is not easy to find causes of inaction. Moreover, the latter is relatively more difficult of the two questions. Even when observing history under the theme of change and consistency, most of our attention is placed on change. When studying dynamic phenomena, it is easy to identify factors that led to changes, that is, variables. On the other hand, it is more difficult to confidently provide an elaborate analysis to the question of why such phenomena persist. If we find the answer to the question of "why nations NOT act," we will simultaneously be able to identify the causes of why certain phenomena persist and the mechanisms behind maintaining the status quo. The politics of stalemate serve to facilitate this task.

Two things can be considered when presupposing state action as a result of strategy and judgment. The first is judgment based on profit theory. Every nation decides its strategy and action based on whether something will be in their own interests. It is also based on this line of thought that states show behaviors of either opportunity seeking (risk-taking) or risk-avoiding.

The other consideration is the psychological factor. This is the premise that the core of a state's decision to act can be reduced to the psychological state of policy makers. In reality, such psychological factors are very broad and diverse. One key component is the realm of sentiment and emotions. Examples include hatred, hostility, fear, scorn and contempt, restoration of honor, vengeance, and saving face. Between profit-seeking behavior and psychological factors, there is no set answer as to which of the two has a greater impact on state action, as it varies from case to case.

North Korea and the United States have not acted since the no-deal in Hanoi. If we must attempt to explain this bilateral stalemate from the perspective of profit theory, we may bring up risk-avoiding judgment as a potential factor. It can be inferred that both sides have strategically determined risk-avoiding rather than risk-taking to be currently more profitable. However, this alone is an insufficient explanation, since both sides have declared to each other that they will "act" once conditions are met.

Greater gains await in the course of various changes that will occur alongside the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, such as cooperation and support, exchanges, institutionalization of peaceful coexistence, and normalization of relations. This applies to both North Korea and the United States. For North Korea, such gains are part of its greater interest in regime survival, whereas for the United States, management of North Korea is closely linked with its greater strategic interest of containing China. In light of this, the question we now need to ask is "But why have they not acted?"

This is where we may need to revisit and bring greater significance to the psychological factor. North Korea is currently angry and afraid. Behind its frequent accusations of "the United States imperialists' oppressive policy" show their accumulated fear. Their remarks on not being afraid of the United States and being determined to achieve a breakthrough by their own methods are, when translated, another way of expressing fear. Considering the economic circumstances in North Korea worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, every tick of the passing hour may well be as loud as thunder to their ears. With desperation follows fear.

Sentiment as a factor is no different for the United States. Their contempt is reflected in their choice of words, such as "rogue state" and "axis of evil." The demonization of North Korea similarly expresses an unfavorable psychological state. There exists widespread "North Korean Fatigue" in the United States, which asserts that due to a long history of deception by North Korea, its actions cannot be trusted. In fact, as with bilateral relations, in interpersonal relationships, 'distrust' is a conjoined, mutual sentiment from both parties. The intertwined nature of distrust makes it difficult to shift the blame entirely to either side. However, the United States is trying to rationalize its distrust through its one-sided contempt for North Korea. Such attitudes suggest an unwillingness to find potential faults from within.

For both North Korea and the United States, there lies a bigger problem in their reluctance to get out of their emotional impasse. One might see it as inertia, but also as a product of laziness. Both sides claim to each other that they

have served the ball into the opposing court. This is a typical instance of a mirror image. Preoccupied with sentiment over profit, both try to hide their irrationality with such logic. Being engrossed in emotional factors also indicates a lack of foresight regarding profit. Courage stems from "the anticipation that subsequent gains will be greater than the magnitude of fear of what might be lost." From this viewpoint, it seems that both North Korea and the United States are lacking in courage.

Sentiments of fear, inertia, and self-justification dominate present-day bilateral relations between North Korea and the United States, making it difficult to form a virtuous triangular relationship among South Korea, North Korea, and the United States. Stalemates due to fear and inertia characterize the current situation. Nevertheless, if we were to break the stalemate and move toward change, who will lead such efforts? Outside of South Korea, no other actor possesses strategic options. Truthfully, South Korea is also afraid. One cannot ignore the Cold War-era hatred that remains as inertia in the contemporary domestic political environment. Those who take into account this domestic political atmosphere may brush off the proposal of a proactive South Korea, claiming it as biting more than we can chew. However, if even South Korea cannot free itself from the impasse of emotional factors, the severity of the stalemate will only increase with time.

So what are we to do? It is important to convert the mindset of strategists from both North Korea and the United States, who currently have retracted themselves inside their thick shells of emotion and are unwilling to budge, to focus

more on the theory of profit. In other words, they need a paradigm shift, or a change in the existing framework. The foresight and creativity of South Korean strategists must serve as the foundation in leading the strategic paradigm shift towards greater profit. South Korea should first approach and apply the paradigm of profit theory. It must also be the first actor to desperately anticipate that greater benefits can be generated through change. Such prospects and change are not impossible. Rather, the first signs of this possibility were what we gained from the events of 2018.

Missing the opportunity to act leads to incremental costs onwards. The greater the intensity of a stalemate, the higher the costs of a resolution. Furthermore, this cost is to be eventually borne in some form or another by future generations. The peace process on the Korean Peninsula has stalled at only the initial stages of establishing a stable and functional structure for peaceful coexistence for the next generation. Therefore, now is the time to examine motives, or even the possibility to rekindle the pursuit for a sustainable coexistence. In addition, one key task of our present age is to give greater attention and detail to analyzing the politics of the stalemate. No one other than South Korea has the greatest responsibility in seeking such analysis. This is a mere observation of our times in which South Korea's strategic position lies at the midpoint of the stalemate.