

Abstract

Reflecting on 30 Years of the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement

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The “Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation Between the South and the North,” also known as the “Inter-Korean Basic Agreement,” came into effect in 1992 as the first accord between the two Koreas to reflect the substantial changes in inter-Korean relations. The Basic Agreement also created the momentum to turn from confrontation and opened the era of dialogue and negotiation for the two Koreas. The Basic Agreement has since functioned as the framework for numerous inter-Korean agreements. During the past 30 years after concluding the Basic Agreement, the two sides occasionally met for talks

during the rare periods of detente. However, inter-Korean relations have mostly been at an impasse or in conflict. Had the contents of the Basic Agreement been fully executed, it would have contributed to a more substantial and institutional inter-Korean relationship.

The Inter-Korean Basic Agreement consists of a preface, four chapters, and 25 articles. As the first official document to contain a mutual acknowledgement of the counterpart, the Basic Agreement provided the groundwork for peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas. The Agreement provided practical measures to develop inter-Korean relations and created a foundation for peaceful unification. Among the various inter-Korean agreements concluded, the Basic Agreement is significant as a comprehensive and detailed agreement that stipulates the basic principles of inter-Korean relations and non-aggression, and practical tasks for exchanges, cooperation, and denuclearization.

The Basic Agreement was adopted during the post-Cold War period amid North Korea’s escalated sense of crisis at home and abroad. Thirty years after its conclusion,

with inter-Korean relations still at an impasse, it seems timely to revisit the meaning and implications of the Basic Agreement. In addition, regarding the unresolved nuclear issue, it is necessary to review the “Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and derive measures to induce North Korea’s denuclearization.

The international community should encourage North Korea to open up and improve inter-Korean relations while helping it realize the importance of reform and dialogue. Hence, the global society should strive to create an environment similar to that of the Basic Agreement to coax North Korea back to the negotiation table.

Although the 21st century is described as the post-Cold War era, the Korean Peninsula has become the stage of confronting military alliances and cooperative systems. North Korea’s deliberate escalations of tension on the Peninsula instigates a confrontation of North Korea-China-Russia vs. South Korea-U.S.-Japan alliances. In addition, the nuclear issue, which was the main reason the Basic Agreement was nullified, seems ever more difficult

to resolve as North Korea has become a de facto nuclear state. In this regard, it is also important to demonstrate to North Korea that its military provocations or hard-line policies against South Korea no longer work.

This study reviews the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement and reinterprets it according to the current situation to suggest a North Korean policy for the Yoon administration that enables peaceful coexistence while strengthening deterrence against North Korea. To this end, the study examines the background and significance of the Basic Agreement, its contents, and the negotiation process. It also reflects on 30 years of the Agreement and derives implications and future tasks for South Korea.

Keywords

Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, inter-Korean relations,
post-Cold War, nuclear disarmament