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UNIFICATION DOCTRINE

FOR FREE, PEACEFUL, AND PROSPEROUS

UNIFIED KOREAN PENINSULA

BY KIM YUNG HO



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kim Yung Ho is the Minister of Unification of the Republic of Korea and a scholar of international relations. He earned a B.A. in International Relations from Seoul National University, an M.A. in International Relations from Boston University, and a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Virginia.

From 1999 until recently, he served as a professor at the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy at Sungshin Women's University, where his main focus was research on international security and unification issues related to the Korean Peninsula. He held the position of the Unification Secretary at the Office of the President from 2011 to 2012 and served as the Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade from 2012 to 2013. He has also been active as a policy advisor for the Ministry of Unification, the Peaceful Unification Advisory Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of National Defense, conducting comprehensive research on South Korea's security and unification policies.

In 2023, as Chairman of the Unification Future Planning Committee at the Ministry of Unification, he laid the foundation for the Yoon Suk Yeol administration's mid- to long-term unification plan. He was appointed as the Minister of Unification on July 28, 2023, and is currently leading the Yoon Suk Yeol administration's new unification vision, "August 15 Unification Doctrine".



Kim Yung Ho
Minister of Unification

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AUGUST 15 UNIFICATION DOCTRINE FOR FREE, PEACEFUL, AND PROSPEROUS UNIFIED KOREAN PENINSULA

KIM YUNG HO

Minister of Unification

September 2024

Since the end of World War II in 1945, humankind has experienced both the harsh winter of the Cold War and the new hope of post-Cold War globalization. However, after the 2008 global economic crisis, the international order led by the liberal camp was challenged by the decline of neoliberalism and free trade. The emergence of a multipolar system, the intensification of regionalism and competition between countries, and the strategic competition between the United States and China have led to the rise of not only traditional security threats such as an arms race, but also new security threats such as the intensification of protectionism and the reorganization of supply chains.

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Moreover, as the spread of COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 strengthened alliances and deepened the ties among different regional blocs, the transitional period and the complex crises we are facing has become the "new normal" for all of us.

Shifts in the Global Landscape and the Vision of the Yoon Suk Yeol Government

Amid this transition, in May 2022, the Yoon Suk Yeol administration of the Republic of Korea was inaugurated with a historic mission to build a country based on universal values such as freedom, human rights, fairness, and solidarity, “a country where the people have power, and a country that fulfills its responsibilities and earns respect in the international community”. As a "global pivotal state," the Republic of Korea, which emerged from the ruins of war to become one of the world's top 10 economic powers through the miracle on the Han River, aims to uphold the values of liberal democracy and contribute to global peace and

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prosperity. To this end, the Yoon Suk Yeol administration has been working tirelessly to normalize inter-Korean relations and realize a peaceful Korean Peninsula.

The administration has developed an "Audacious Initiative" to denuclearize North Korea.

First, the Yoon Suk Yeol administration has been working to induce changes in North Korea by pursuing a principled North Korea policy. Determined to achieve sustainable peace by resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, which is the root cause of the deteriorating situation on the Korean Peninsula, the administration has

developed an "Audacious Initiative" to denuclearize North Korea. The idea is that we respond firmly and with restraint to North Korea's provocative actions, such as nuclear weapon development and missile testing. But if North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons and comes to the table for dialogue, then the two Koreas can build a "denuclearized, peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula" together. This "Audacious Initiative" has been welcomed not only by the neighboring countries, but also by the international community. In particular, at the trilateral summit between the United States, South Korea and Japan, held at Camp David in the United States on August 18, 2023, the U.S. and the Japanese leaders praised the goal of North Korea's complete denuclearization, and South Korea's "Audacious Initiative" and the vision for a "free, peaceful, and prosperous unified peninsula".

We are also working to improve human rights in North Korea and resolve the abductee issue in order to promote universal human values and fulfill our responsibility to protect our people. On July 14, 2024, at the commemoration of the first North Korean Defectors' Day, President Yoon Suk Yeol emphasized that "resolving the North Korean human rights issue is an important foundation for peace on the Korean Peninsula and a unified Korea." North Korea's nuclear and missile development runs counter to human rights values not only because it threatens neighbors, but also because it perpetuates human rights violations against the North Korean people. The North Korean regime blames sanctions for its people's hardships, but uses the profits from exploitation of its people to accelerate the nuclear and missile programs. The government of the Republic of Korea actively promotes international solidarity and concern regarding human rights in North Korea in order to break the vicious cycle of exploitation and abuse, and to accurately inform the international community of the human rights violations committed by the North Korean regime. We are also calling on the North Korean authorities to resolve cases of human rights violations committed under the division of South and North Korea, such as abductees, detainees, and unrepatriated POWs, and providing protection and resettlement support to North Korean defectors who have fled North Korea and come to South Korea in search of freedom.

Unification Policy Based on Universal Values of Freedom and Human Rights

Despite the South Korean government's efforts, the North Korean regime has characterized the inter-Korean relationship as "two hostile states" in order to dismiss the instability and discontent of its people due to isolation, and to block the people's longing for the South. The North Korean regime has given up on its vision of unification

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and is pushing the relationship between the two Koreas to the brink of war solely for the sake of maintaining its regime. It is threatening the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and the entire region by providing weapons to Russia and signing treaties that could lead to Russian military

intervention on the Korean Peninsula in the event of an emergency.

The North Korean regime's anti-unification and anti-historical behavior is reminiscent of East Germany in the 1970s. The East German regime, which had clearly lost the competition with the West, sought to legitimize its own survival by claiming that they were "two separate nations". However, West Germany maintained the position that East and West Germans were 'one German nation' and focused on managing and overcoming the division, ultimately achieving reunification. The reunification of Germany was a symbol of the end of the Cold War, and it served as a catalyst for democratization and economic transition in Eastern European countries, contributing to political stability and economic prosperity in Europe through the establishment and expansion of the European Union, including the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU.

Historical experience and lessons clearly show that it is the Republic of Korea that has the responsibility, willingness, and ability to reunify the Korean Peninsula, and that it must take on the fate of the entire Korean Peninsula through liberal and democratic peaceful reunification efforts. Of course, with peace under immediate threat, reunification may seem like a distant prospect. However, depending on the goals we set as we prepare for the future, we will face completely different outcomes, and the reunification of the Korean Peninsula may not be a distant possibility. What is clear is that the Republic of Korea will lead the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula and thus contribute to peace and prosperity in the international community by ensuring that every citizen of the two Koreas is guaranteed dignity and equal rights based on the best universal values of freedom and human rights.

The discourse of "freedom" pursued by the Republic of Korea is not new. During World War II, when the United States was fighting a fierce war against totalitarian dictatorships, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his 1941 State of the Union address to Congress, identified four freedoms that humankind should defend and advance. These were freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Roosevelt's four freedoms are reflected in the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and are not unlike the direction of freedom that South Korea is pursuing today: elimination of nuclear war threat on the Korean Peninsula, which remains an island still stuck in the Cold War, and to building a future of freedom and hope for the people of North Korea, who have suffered totalitarian oppression and human rights abuses.

The discourse of freedom that South Korea is pursuing in the reunification process signifies **first and foremost** freedom from the fear of nuclear war. The Republic of Korea has the responsibility to make the Korean Peninsula a denuclearized zone of peace through the complete denuclearization of North Korea, freeing the people of the two Koreas from the nuclear threat. To fulfill this responsibility, the government has proposed an "Audacious Initiative"

to North Korea: If North Korea sincerely returns to denuclearization negotiations, we can create a denuclearized, peaceful, and prosperous Korean Peninsula through the simultaneous and phased implementation of North Korea's denuclearization measures and our economic, political, and military measures. For our administration, peace means not just words, but "peace from the position of strength". That is why, our government is bolstering deterrence against North Korea's nuclear threat by strengthening the ROK-U.S. alliance, facilitating deeper security cooperation between South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, and enhancing self-defense capabilities. Furthermore, based on 'deterrence', we are continuously pursuing a 3D policy that 'dissuades' North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and missiles through sanctions and pressure, and encourages North Korea to engage in 'dialogue'.

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The second is freedom of information exchange. The freedom to acquire information from outside sources and to express one's opinions based on that information is the foundation of democracy. Yet, North Koreans are denied this basic right by the North Korean state. The good news is that despite state controls, information from outside the country continues to flow in. According to "The Report on North Korea's Economy

and Society," which South Korea's Ministry of Unification released in February of this year, survey results of 6,351 North Korean defectors indicate that 83% used to watch videos from outside the country. North Koreans are consuming "Juche culture by day and Hallyu culture by night," meaning that the regime's Juche culture and the people's Hallyu culture are competing fiercely for North Koreans' hearts and minds. The fact that more than half of the 196 North Korean defectors who entered South Korea last year were in their 20s and 30s or were high-ranking officials is a sign of the cracks in the Juche ideology's sturdy walls. It's a sign that while North Korea may still be surviving despite the economic sanctions, its cultural and ideological foundations are being undermined. The North Korean authorities are trying to stem the tide by taking extreme measures, including executing teenagers for watching South Korean dramas, but they can't stop a flood with a sponge. Free communication with the outside world will lead to greater awareness and empowerment of the North Korean people, which will put pressure on the regime to change.

Thirdly, it is freedom from oppression. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, North Koreans are undeniably citizens of the Republic of Korea, and working to ensure their freedom and human rights is a fundamental responsibility of the government. In 2023, the government of the Republic of Korea publicly published its first "Report

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on North Korean Human Rights,” and on June 27 of this year, it released its second annual report. The government of the Republic of Korea will not stop until the North Korean people are free from the systematic and widespread violations of their basic human rights by the North Korean regime.

Fourth is freedom from want. Food, clothing, and shelter are fundamental to human survival. As a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, North Korea is responsible for ensuring the right to survival and basic necessities for vulnerable populations. However, the situation of North Koreans, as detailed in the Ministry of Unification’s “Report on North Korea’s Economy and Society,” shows that they are deprived of even basic living conditions. The local hospital system has collapsed, forcing people to procure medicines from the market, and many children have not been immunized despite vaccine support from UNICEF and other international organizations. In August, heavy rains caused significant human and material damage in the North Korean provinces of North Pyeongan and Jagang. The Republic of Korea has offered humanitarian assistance for the flooding, but the North Korean authorities have remained unresponsive. The longer the North Korean authorities turn a blind eye to the needs of their own people, the more their basic needs will be compromised. The North Korean authorities should immediately stop the provocations that are causing diplomatic isolation and economic hardship, and openly respond to humanitarian assistance from South Korea and the international community.

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A free and peaceful unified peninsula led by the Republic of Korea

Since its inauguration, the Yoon administration has emphasized freedom, peace, and prosperity as the core values of national governance. In this context, in his March 1st Independence Movement anniversary speech, the President pointed out that unification is an extension of the universal values of freedom and human rights. Furthermore, on August 15 of this year, the President proclaimed the “Aug. 15 Unification Doctrine” in his speech on the 79th anniversary of Liberation Day, clearly presenting the future vision of “a unified Korea based on freedom, peace, and prosperity.”

The “Korean National Community Unification Formula” released in 1994 in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union, proposed a plan to achieve national reunification through negotiations and agreements between the authorities of South and North Korea. This year’s “Aug. 15 Unification Doctrine” inherited and maintained the framework of the “Korean National Community Unification Formula” and sought to present a practical vision of reunification in light of the changed unification and security environment over the past 30 years, including changes

in the international order, North Korea's nuclear advancement, and the deteriorating human rights situation in North Korea.

The "Aug. 15 Unification Doctrine" is characterized by the fact that it first clarified the goal of unification. It made it clear that reunification is not a superficial negotiation between regimes, but a free and peaceful reunification of the people of South and North Korea, and that through reunification, all people on the Korean Peninsula will be able to enjoy freedom. Second, it presented a reunification

strategy and a specific action plan that is consistent with the changing times and realities. The three components of its future vision are (1) a country full of happiness where people's freedom and safety are guaranteed, (2) a strong country prospering through creativity and innovation, and (3) a country that contributes to global peace and prosperity while spearheading international harmony and development. It also presented three key objectives: (1)

**Three key objectives:
(1) strengthening the unification capabilities of the Korean people,
(2) promoting the desire of North Koreans for unification based on freedom, and (3) securing international support for a liberal and unified Korea.**

"International Korean Peninsula Forum". The significance of the "Aug. 15 Unification Doctrine" is that it critically examined the circumstances of the past 30 years, during which even the first steps of the "Korean National Community Unification Formula", reconciliation and cooperation, have not been properly promoted, and prepared a reunification strategy and action plan that the Republic of Korea can lead in implementing, instead of relying on North Korea's willingness to change.

It is a historic task for the Republic of Korea to ensure that the freedom and prosperity it has built be enjoyed by all the people of both North and South Korea. At this historic crossroad, the Republic of Korea will embrace the North Korean

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strengthening the unification capabilities of the Korean people, (2) promoting the desire of North Koreans for unification based on freedom, and (3) securing international support for a liberal and unified Korea. In order to implement the unification vision and strategy, the plan proposed specific initiatives to: (1) activate unification programs, (2) improve human rights in North Korea, (3) promote humanitarian assistance, (4) expand access to information for North Koreans, (5) empower North Korean defectors in the unification process, (6) propose a "dialogue council" between the authorities of the two Koreas, and (7) establish an

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people and become a leader in promoting freedom and human rights. We will reject peace gestures that rely on North Korea's goodwill and patiently create the conditions for real reunification without focusing on short-term results. A liberal and peaceful Korean Peninsula will serve as a base for spreading freedom and democracy around the Northeast Asian region and the Eurasian continent and will contribute significantly to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world. So, I ask for your support in our journey to fulfill this historic responsibility.

The ROK-US Policy Brief is a joint publication between the Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) and The George Washington University Institute for Korean Studies (GWIKS) dedicated to exploring current Korea-related policy matters within regional and global contexts.

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