



No Other Way to
PEACE
IN
KOREA?

A Practical Path to Reunification

MICHAEL SCHLUTER

Book Summary

Relationships, personal and organisational, are the key to creating lasting stability for any region's political system and for its economic growth.

An alternative framework

How can peace be achieved in the Korean peninsula?

Why does it matter so much, not only for the Korean people but also for the East Asian region – and, indeed, for the world?

Here is a radically different approach from that of most contemporary commentators. Rather than focusing on persuading North Korea to denuclearise, either through the stick of ever greater sanctions, or through the carrot of the economic benefits, this book presents the case for a mutual and practical path to peace, which is also perhaps the only path to peace.

That path lies in an alternative framework, acceptable to both Koreas, which may in time lead to reunification of the Peninsula. The path offered here, one of mutual convergent development, is in fact an approach that could be applied to many of today's international conflicts.

There have been several insightful attempts to create a vision for a reunified Korea. However, these attempts have generally assumed either an implosion of North Korea's political system, or North Korea's voluntary adoption of a liberal-style democracy and market economy similar to that of South Korea. Both these assumptions seem unrealistic, because North Korea has consistently and determinedly resisted both of them, in spite of more than 30 years of international isolation as well as recurrent economic challenges arising for other reasons.

In other words, for any realistic chance of progress towards peace, is not a total rethink required about the fundamentals? Can peace really be built between North Korea and South Korea based on a collectivist vision which focuses on the role and power of the state? Or do we seriously believe that peace can be built by focusing on the extreme personal freedom and choice which marks the modern West, simply because it provides material progress, compromised as it is by the increasing damage caused by underlying social disintegration?

Should not the priority rather be, as this book suggests, to build close and strong relationships, which will result in greater social interdependence between the North and the South – at the level of individuals, organisations, and regions? After all, a good society is defined surely by how well it connects its members. Relationships, personal and organisational, are the key to creating lasting stability for any region's political system and for its economic growth. It provides a way for

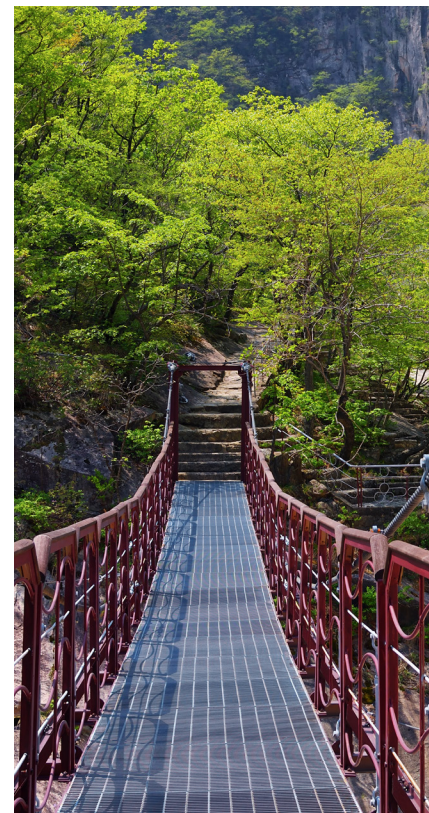
Korea after unification to be *ideologically* multi-connected, as well as politically and economically multi-connected, with nations which are committed to more individualistic or collectivist ideologies.

Given the current geopolitical stand-off, how could better relationships in fact be built? This book will argue it can be done by a five-phase process that commits both North and South to explore the possibility of bringing values, institutions, and policies into alignment across all the major sectors of public policy. As I mentioned above, I refer to that process as ‘Mutual Convergent Development’.

However, before we examine that challenging option, it is essential to remind ourselves that there were a number of inter-Korean discussions about reunification, which are described in chapter 1. A key moment was in 1980 when it was Kim Il-sung who suggested that North Korea and South Korea should establish a national unification government with equal participation from both sides. In 1993, Kim Il-sung issued a ‘Ten Point Programme for Reunification of the Country’, which has been considered since then as the official unification policy of North Korea.

In turn, South Korea since 1994 has had a National Community Unification Formula, and President Kim Dae-jung published a book in 1997 on a three-stage process leading to a Confederation, then a Federation.

In 2000, both Koreas made a joint declaration, though that has not so far been implemented, for what was in essence a Confederation, even if it was to have no executive or legislative power. In other words, in the past both Koreas have deeply wished to be reunited. They just haven’t found any mutually agreeable path forward. It is precisely such a mutually acceptable process for sustainable long-term peace and social harmony between North Korea and South Korea that is envisaged by mutual convergent development.



**Mutual
convergent
development
anticipates a
phased process,
where the initial
steps are those
which do not
require high
levels of trust.**

What is ‘Mutual Convergent Development’?

If trust is based on mutual respect, then is it not obvious that it is essential to respect the most positive aspects of the economic and social capital in both North Korea and South Korea? And is it not equally obvious that this will necessitate either an endless series of pragmatic compromises from both administrations, or an alternative framework which they both find acceptable?

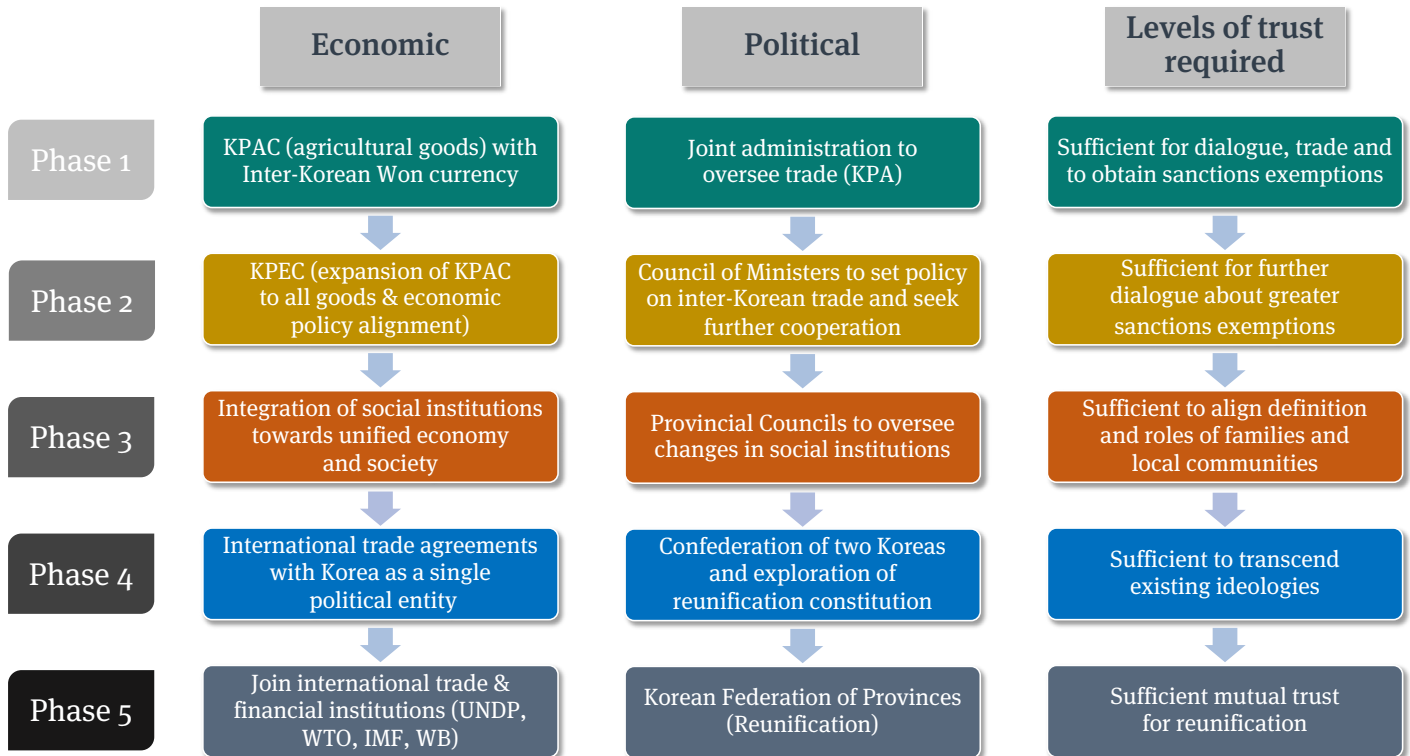
The framework proposed here would envisage both Koreas, step by step, making incremental yet significant changes to values, institutions, and policies. Thus, adoption of this framework, or a similar one, would provide them with a roadmap against which to test the reality of their willingness to bring their nation back together, and thereby avoid the unsettling, wasteful and dangerous consequences of continued tension and eventual military conflict.

What the framework will require is a tough process of defining shared values, agreeing shared institutions, and then identifying shared policy goals to bring two very different societies into alignment and maximising synergy.

That is why *mutual convergent development* anticipates a phased process, where the initial steps are those which do not require high levels of trust, with the later stages only taking place once a significant level of trust has been established. The five phases of the mutual convergent development process are summarised in the diagram opposite.

Before exploring the five phases, three introductory chapters describe the alternative way of thinking which underpins the five-phase process. The first chapter focuses on the immediate opportunities of initiating a peace process, even though many believe that the situation between North Korea and South Korea, and between North Korea and the US, still make this impossible. The second chapter introduces the case for a relationships-centred approach to public life in terms of what this means in practice. The benefits are described, as well as how the quality of organisational and personal relationships can be measured and therefore developed into markers of progress towards reunification. The third chapter explores how this relationships-centred approach resonates with the different religions, philosophies, and ideologies currently prevailing in the Peninsula.

Parallel steps towards peaceful reunification in each Phase



After the first three chapters, in order to progress mutual convergent development which is to take place in the five-phase process, each of the following chapters explores a specific economic sector, social institutions, or political structures from three perspectives – relational norms, life in North Korea and South Korea, and possible shared policy goals in relation to specific sectors, institutions or political structures.

Phase 1 – Initiating the reunification process



The first phase to start the reunification process is described in Chapter 4. The proposal is to establish a Korean Peninsula Agriculture Community (KPAC).

This approach to get a process moving towards a Confederation has been carried out successfully before. In Europe, after the Second World War, there was danger of renewed war between France and Germany in 1951. To overcome this danger, a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established by France and Germany, along with four other countries, within a context which they declared to be ‘ever closer union’. That initial one-sector trade agreement was extended incrementally over the next six years to include all economic sectors – and became, in 1957, the European Economic Community (EEC). Eventually this led in 1993 to Confederation of 12 countries (the European Union, EU).

Korea could initiate such a path by establishing KPAC. This would include a bilateral trade agreement for agricultural products and the inputs required to produce them, in the context of ‘ever closer union’, just as it was in the European precedent.

It could potentially also include healthcare products and become KPAC+, depending on the need to address immediate health issues in the Peninsula. Addressing these immediate health issues could also facilitate trade as it would reduce the health risks associated with trade, as well as addressing the humanitarian concerns of the international community. Importantly, this chapter also explores how KPAC or KPAC+ might gain international support and the necessary sanctions exemptions.

Phase 2 – Korean Peninsula Economic Community

In the same way that the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) evolved into the European Economic Community (EEC) over a period of six years, KPAC could develop into Korean Peninsula Economic Community (KPEC). Step by step, trade could extend into different sectors of the economy, for example through including minerals and textiles from North Korea and transport and infrastructure machinery from South Korea. Although KPEC would include potentially all goods

produced in the Peninsula, it would probably not extend to freedom of movement of labour or capital, or the ability to buy land or property because such mobility of people and resources would require much higher levels of trust. This transition towards a ‘single market’ for goods in the Korean peninsula would require greater political cooperation, which could be institutionalised through a jointly-appointed ‘Korean Council of Ministers’.

In chapter 5, the enormous economic growth potential and benefits of KPEC are explored for both Korea’s economies, as well as environmental concerns of the Peninsula. For greater coming together of the economies of the two Koreas, there would also need to be alignment of the purpose and management of privately-held corporations and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which is discussed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 explores how financial institutions in both Koreas can be redesigned and aligned to strengthen regional and local development and identity.

Phase 3 – Korean Peninsula Economic and Social Community (KPEC)

Alignment of social institutions could come about in Phase 3. The biggest challenge may well be that, even if mutual economic convergent development is achieved through sanctions exemptions and rapidly increasing trade, this will not necessarily lead to *social* convergent development. The fundamental institutions of family and community will still be differently defined and have different roles. So, although no internal political and social changes would be required for either North Korea or South Korea in Phases 1 and 2, in Phase 3 significant changes would take place in the social institutions and daily lives of families, farming communities and urban communities. This is because strengthening relationships in families and communities will become a priority of both governments.

The definition, role, and resilience of the key social institutions – families, farming communities and urban communities – are considered, in order to bring alignment between those of both Koreas.





Amongst many other issues, problems of domestic abuse and declining birth rates are affecting both Koreas at the time of writing in 2022, and may well continue to affect both through Phases 1 and 2, creating pressure to address these issues at the latest by Phase 3. I explain why one essential contribution to the solution would be to define families not as nuclear or joint families but rather as ‘*extended families*’. Chapter 8 includes multi-sector policy proposals to address the declining birth rates and other social policy issues.

The role of *farming communities* to meet not only the needs of food production and employment, but also environmental priorities and a wider range of social welfare needs, is discussed in chapter 9 in the context of agricultural sector policy.

Urban communities in chapter 10 are also envisaged having a greater role in delivery of health and welfare services, as well as resolving many local disputes rather than them being necessarily referred to the national or regional courts. Chapter 10 also includes discussion of the role and vision of cities, as a community of communities, as key to their economic growth and cultural development.

How *healthcare* is currently delivered in both Koreas, and how relational norms could help identify possible shared policy goals for the health sector in the Peninsula, is explored in chapter 11.

Such changes in social and healthcare institutions would require and result from a growing level of trust between the two Koreas. This is because the policy proposals suggested here would require further steps towards decentralisation of government responsibilities for welfare and some aspects of healthcare provision by both Koreas. Oversight of the new roles for families and communities in local welfare delivery, it is suggested, would be exercised through new Provincial Councils.

With these or similar steps in place, both North and South would be ready for Phase 4 which would create a Confederation of North Korea and South Korea; it would also lay the foundation for Phase 5, a Korean Federation of Provinces (KFP).

Phase 4 – Confederation of North Korea and South Korea

A Confederation linking the current North Korean and South Korean administrations would allow the two governments to work together without ceding any of their power, and would be flexible and reversible allowing both governments to initiate new national institutions without risking their own power and dignity.

So, Phase 4 would be characterised by greater political integration, on the basis of the trust and commitment generated from the previous three Phases. Greater trust would be necessary to move on to discovering and agreeing shared structures and priorities for the political system as a whole.

Both governments would commit to moving towards a shared identity gradually, as they feel able to. At the most profound level, that involves the consideration of mutually acceptable alternatives to their respective state-centred and individual-centred frameworks. However, that process can and must be progressed gradually, step by step.

Political representatives and civil servants from both Koreas could work together to align institutions and policy goals in three essential areas of public policy. These are:

- ‘*Steps to rebuild national unity*’ through use of combined media, and cultural as well as sporting activities (chapter 12).
- In *education*, the focus would be on schools, to bring alignment in the goals, content and style of the systems of both Koreas. This will require, for example, that students focus as much on cooperation as competition, and learn ‘relational literacy’ skills to enable them better to relate to those from the other Korea (chapter 13).
- The *justice system* of a reunified Korea will require a more contextualised vision of rights, duties and public goods, and also would require greater community participation in resolution of a wide variety of local disputes (chapter 14).

In political terms, a two-state Confederation would involve the establishment of an additional legislative assembly of representatives drawn equally from the existing provinces of both Koreas, and a small joint executive to manage inter-Korean affairs and international trading agreements. This is all explored in chapter 15.

A Confederation linking the current North Korean and South Korean administrations would allow the two governments to work together without ceding any of their power.

Phase 5 – Korean Federation of Provinces (Reunification)



Chapter 15 proposes that at a moment that is acceptable to both Koreas, a constitutional conference would be convened by the two governments with representatives from both Koreas. Together, they would explore options for constitutional reunification. The possibility explored in this book is for a *'Korean Federation of Provinces'*. Under this Federal model, to protect either Korea dominating the other, political power could be vested in the Provinces, which would have responsibility for around two-thirds of total government income and expenditure. The Provinces would delegate certain powers up to Federal (central) government and down to Local government. To demonstrate the practical feasibility of this option, chapter 15 draws on *Switzerland* as a case study in terms of its division of responsibilities between the three levels of government, its fiscal structure, and its organisation of defence to protect national sovereignty.

Chapter 16 considers international relations for the Korean Federation of Provinces (KFP). It explores how the KFP could become what is described here as a *neutral multi-connected state*. Multi-connectedness does not refer only to formal political and economic ties. It includes connectedness with other countries at the level of ideas and the framework that is used to build social cohesion. This is possible because the relational focus of policy across all sectors in the KFP would have significant points of resonance with the constitution and policies of 'liberal countries' which focus on personal freedom and choice, and the more collectivist understanding of the state in many countries in Asia such as China and India. In a sense, therefore, a unified Korea could then be said to be *'ideologically multi-connected'*, which would give greater meaning to its neutrality.

The KFP would probably wish to apply to join the UN, WHO, WTO and other international bodies as a single national entity. Its multi-connected neutrality status would also help to realise the full trade, investment, and economic growth potential of a reunified Korea. Korea becoming a neutral multi-connected state would probably be acceptable to the US and Japan, as well as to China and Russia, as long as they are all able to trade and invest in the Korean Federation. However, it would also be important to China and Russia that the final political settlement between the two Koreas includes withdrawal of US troops and missile systems from the Peninsula, on the basis of an international and ideologically multilateral group of observers, and some other multilateral guarantees of Korea's neutrality.

Epilogue

Personal reflections on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation for lasting peace

Based on my personal experience of peacebuilding in other countries, I suggest one more essential ingredient for lasting peace: forgiveness and reconciliation. This requires institutions which are created, resourced, and empowered for the specific purpose of working to put right publicly those injustices and wrongs of the past, especially those which are still felt acutely at personal, family or community level.

South Africa held a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to enable people to tell their stories and to seek a greater measure of justice; this included an amnesty for all who told the whole truth of their involvement in torture, killings and human rights abuses in the period 1949 to 1994.

In *Rwanda*, there was no TRC. However, to help bring about some degree of reconciliation, as well as ensure justice for 152,000 people accused of genocide in 1994, the government established local courts, locally called gacaca courts, to enable as many people as possible to participate in the justice process, and thus to come to terms with their anger and grief.

In *Sudan*, no reconciliation process was implemented after the war finished in 2005, although this had been agreed in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This may have weakened cooperation between the two states in spite of the constitutional settlement in 2011.

In my view, a reunified Korea would find it highly beneficial to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. Buddhism and Confucianism with their emphasis on social harmony, and Christian churches with their emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation, would have an important part to play in helping the psychological and emotional healing process.

In other words, political and economic cooperation can restore the body politic at a certain formal and material level. However, only forgiveness and reconciliation, by building trust and love between people, can bring healing of the soul. Total healing of relationships across the Korean peninsula – contributing to peace in the region and the world – must surely be the ultimate goal of reunification.

In my view, a reunified Korea would find it highly beneficial to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms to promote forgiveness and reconciliation



Political and economic cooperation can restore the body politic at a certain formal and material level. However, only forgiveness and reconciliation, by building trust and love between people, can bring healing of the soul.

To pre-order your hardback copy of the book, at the special pre-publication price of £49, please go to the RPI website:

www.relationalpeacebuilding.org/now