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CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY, TECHNOLOGY, AND POLICY (CISTP)

“German Unification: Are There Any Lessons for Korea?” by Dr. Manhak Kwon and Dr. Katja Weber, moderated by Dr. Taehyun Kim

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On the afternoon of April 9, 2008 at Georgia Tech’s Wardlaw Center, Professor Manhak Kwon of Kyung Hee University in Seoul and Associate Professor Katja Weber of The Nunn School spoke about the nature of German unification and whether any of its lessons could be applied to the eventual reunification of the Korean peninsula. The program was moderated by Visiting Professor Taehyun Kim of The Nunn School, who noted that although Germany unified quickly and successfully, eighteen years had passed and still Korea is not unified at all.

Dr. Weber spoke first and set the stage for the success of German unification. Helpful external influences included the end of the Cold War; UN support for the Two Plus Four talks; support from the Commission on Security and Cooperation (CSCE); and the ability of NATO and the European Union to absorb a unified Germany.

The division of Germany occurred shortly after World War II; the Soviet Union gained control of the East while the United States, the United Kingdom and France gained control of the West. For Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of West Germany, his priorities were to pursue amicable relations with the West and regain his country’s trust within the international community. With the ascendancy of Willy Brandt to the Chancellorship in 1969 came the implementation of Ostpolitik, normalized relations with several eastern European countries, and de facto relations with East Germany. Mr. Brandt signed a formal treaty with East Germany in 1972, which included agreements for the reunification of family members as well as cultural, educational, and economic exchanges between the two German states. This policy of rapprochement was continued by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

During the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the US, the Cold War intensified. Nevertheless, talks between the two German states continued under the umbrella of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Thus, CSCE provided institutional support for the eventual unification of the country.

The late 1980s marked *perestroika* and the break-up of the Soviet Union as the empire started to crumble. Premier Mikhail Gorbachev renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1988, thereby allowing the East European countries to choose their own path. In the summer of 1989, Messrs. Kohl and Gorbachev met in Germany. Kohl remarked:

Look at the Rhine that flows by us. It symbolizes history; the latter is not static. You can dam this river, it is technically possible. But then it will overflow its banks and will find another way to reach the sea. And this

is how it is with Germany unity. You can try to prevent it from coming about, and then both of us may not live long enough to see it. But, just as certain as the Rhine will flow to the sea, just as certain Germany unity will come—and also European unity.

Also that summer, tens of thousands of East Germans left for the West, culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall in November.

As the East German economy unraveled, Kohl did not want to miss the window of opportunity for unification. There followed quick “shock-like” integration of the economy and currency. Internationally, Germany needed the cooperation and consent of the Two Plus Four powers and had to make clear that unification was part of the larger peace process in Europe. In 1990 a treaty was signed between East Germany, West Germany, USSR, US, France, and Great Britain. Most importantly, Germany agreed that it had no irredentist claims on the territory it lost as a result of World War II. Also Germany renounced the use of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons, and attested that war would not be initiated by the new state.

Dr. Weber concluded her remarks by explaining that unification should be studied in multi-layers: international, domestic, and individual. She also explained that the term *unification*, as opposed to *reunification*, was applicable to Germany as not all their former territory was included in the new German state.

Dr. Kwon began his presentation with photos of the respective German and Korean checkpoints and borders. He also presented maps of the two geographic areas.

Korea, a casualty of power politics, was divided after World War II. Two US colonels, neither having much familiarity with Korea, divided the peninsula at the 38th parallel and this line was accepted by the Soviet Union. The two areas became separate states in 1948 and the division was consolidated after the Korean War. The two foreign occupations determined which socio-economic system developed: DPRK (North Korea), occupied by the USSR, developed communism and ROK (South Korea), occupied by the US, developed capitalism.

A current contrast and comparison of the DPRK and ROK shows the following;

- Population Divided: 23 million vs. 49 million
- Territory Divided: 120,000 km² vs. 100,000 km²
- Political System Divided: totalitarianism vs. liberal democracy
- National Ethos Divided: hostile brotherhood
- Sovereignty Divided: DPRK vs. ROK

Facilitating factors for reunification include a North Korean collapse, willingness of the North to give-up WMD, and international support. Although a reunified Korea would be larger and more powerful than a divided territory, it will not be the most powerful nation in Northeast Asia, unlike Germany in Europe.

A rational analysis of Korean reunification shows the following benefits: power enlargement, a larger market, elimination of division costs, humanitarian reunion of divided families, and humanitarian salvation for North Korea's impoverished residents. However, despite the possible benefits, South Korean politics are divided over a continuing co-existence versus a reunification costing a high price and creating social conflict.

A lively discussion ensued following Dr. Kwon's presentation. A retired Korean-American medical doctor, himself a refugee from North Korea and ROKA veteran of the Korean War, reminded the audience that North Korea was a Stalinist, rather than a socialist, state. Due to the ruthless nature of Stalinism, reunification would not be possible in the foreseeable future.

In response to a question from Dr. Kim, Dr. Weber suggested that Korean reunification might not have taken place for the following reasons:

- Normalization is a precondition for reunification. In the case of Germany, steps toward normalization began twenty years before unification. As the process is just beginning now in Korea it may be too soon for reunion.
- There was more regional integration in Europe than in Northeast Asia so Germany could take its place in NATO and the European Union.
- West Germany could absorb East Germany because it had collapsed and that has not yet happened with North Korea.