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The Impact of Leadership Styles on the Prospects for Unification of North and South Korea

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Abstract

The diplomatic security relations between North and South Korea have been frozen in prolonged stalemate since the 1953 armistice. While structural economic disparities and external geopolitical alignments determine the contours of the conflict, the political will and leadership styles of their respective executive elites pose major obstacles to top-down reconciliation. This paper examines how the concentration of structural power within each country interacts with individual psychological traits to narrow or broaden the prospect for the "One Korea" agenda. By integrating Personalism Theory with Leadership Trait Analysis, this paper systematically analyzes the underlying behaviours of top executive decision-makers. It analyzes Kim Jong Un's centralized, security-maximizing autocracy alongside South Korea's institutionalized but internally polarized democratic executive, highlighting martial law and impeachment crises of late 2024. Furthermore, it examines historical comparative unification frameworks, particularly Germany, Vietnam, and Yemen, and combines macro-level cost-benefit data and conflict archive methodology to critique traditional top-down integration strategies. Finally, this study proposes an alternative educational and ethical framework based on Sangsaeng (living together) and critical peace education to soften the boundaries between nations from below.

Keywords: Korean Unification; Leadership Conflict; Political Will; Sangsaeng Ethics; Conflict Archives; Peace and Conflict Resolution.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical and geopolitical division of the Korean Peninsula is not a static structural inevitability, but rather a dynamic product of external great power rivalry and profound historical shifts. Korea;s initial loss of sovereignty can be traced back to early 20th-century imperialist maneuvers, such as the secret Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905 and the subsequent Eulsa Protectorate Treaty, which effectively stripped Korea of its autonomy without the people's consent (Park, 2017). This imperialist overreach culminated in the post-World War II arbitrary division along the 38th parallel by the United States and the Soviet Union, creating separate military occupation zones and setting the stage for the devastating and fracticidal proxy conflict of the Korean War (Obikaeze & Okwori, 2025). In the decades following the 1953 armistice, this artificial division forced North and South Korea into competing and incompatible nation-building projects, leaving a long legacy of ideological confrontation, military buildup, and systemic differences (Ahn, 1985). Over the decades, the structural boundaries of the division system were reinforced internally as a mechanism for domestic elite consolidation and regime maintenance, reinforcing cross-border alienation (Kang, 2018).

North Korea’s deeply entrenched political culture operates as a highly centralized, idiocratic hierarchy. It is rooted in absolute loyalty to the KIm dynasty and a rigid, status-based class system (Vogel & Best, 2016). This domestic environment prioritizes revolutionary heritage and strict ideological control through the Juche doctrine and creates an elite class that equates national sovereignty strictly with the regime;s physical survival (Ali-Piri, 2001; Goh, 2025). Consequently, the political will of the northern elite is fundamentally structured to resist systemic or market-oriented reforms because the leadership culture views external information penetration as a fatal vulnerability to its domestic legitimacy (Richey et al., 2018).

South Korea’s political culture is characterized by a highly active civil society born out of historical struggles against military dictatorship, along with a strong collective nationalism historically rooted in ethnic homogeneity (Seow, 2013). This pluralistic environment fosters a collaborative but highly volatile style of governance, in which political power and executive mandates are continuously negotiated through democratic consensus and regular electoral cycles (Milani & Fiori, 2025). However, this same openness duels intense and mutually detrimental affective polarization within the domestic electorate, directly causing the country’s political will to swing erratically between progressive engagement and hard-line conservative deterrence depending on which executive faction seizes the presidency (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Vogel & Best, 2016).

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The Korean Peninsula's unique political culture, based on a trajectory of war, peace, and reconciliation, remains fundamentally elite-driven. This means that the personal attitudes, political ideologies, and strategic decisions of executive leaders determine cross-border dynamics (Ali-Piri, 2001). Rather than evolving through bottom-up social or cultural convergence, inter-Korean relations have historically shifted back and forth depending on whether top-level leadership chooses to prioritize competitive coexistence, hardline deterrence, or institutionalized trust-building (Lee, 1994). This creates an environment in which structural systemic integration is constantly held hostage by the immediate security anxieties and governing styles of each administration. Consequently, as leadership on both sides adopts mutually detrimental confrontational stances, the political imagination surrounding the "One Korea" agenda solidifies completely, transforming the executive leadership into a major obstacle to peaceful coexistence (Ali-Piri, 2001; Milani & Fiori, 2025).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To move beyond the use of “leadership style” as an immeasurable or superficial label, this study proposes a two-layered operationalization that synthesizes a structural framework of institutional constraints with an individual-level psychological framework. At the structural level, this approach incorporates Personalism Theory, which evaluates the extent to which political power is concentrated in a chief executive at the expense of collective actors and institutional checks and balances (Song & Wright, 2018). At the individual level, this structural analysis is complemented by Margaret Hermann’s Leadership Trait Analysis, which systematically measures a leader’s personal characteristics, operational codes, and responsiveness to environmental constraints through a distanced content analysis of their verbal and written rhetoric (Hermann, 1980, 2005). By linking these two distinct dimensions, leadership style can be evaluated not simply as a unique character trait, but as the active implementation of psychological predispositions within varying degrees of institutional isolation.

The structural level of this conceptualization relies heavily on Personalism Theory to analyze how dictators or democratic executives shape and manipulate the rule-bound environments they inhabit. In highly personalized political conditions (where a single individual dominates political life), effectively winning internal struggles against organized elites in the military or party bureaucracy minimizes internal veto points (Song & Wright, 2018). To understand how a leader operates within these structural parameters, Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis provides the necessary psychological metrics by examining core traits such as a leader's belief in

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their own ability to control events, their level of conceptual complexity, and their inherent distrust of others (Hermann, 1980, 2005). Leaders who exhibit high beliefs in environmental control and low conceptual complexity are structurally likely to challenge political constraints directly, adopting a rigid, zero-sum worldview that heavily filters incoming information that contradicts their predetermined desires (Hermann, 2005).

The primary utility of this framework lies in its ability to bridge macro-structural constraints with micro-level psychological execution. Personalism Theory effectively determines the structural discretion or executive freedom an executive has to enforce his or her will, while Leadership Trait Analysis defines how they will perform on that stage based on their cognitive blueprint (Hermann, 2005). This approach suggests that the inter-Korean stalemate is not simply a product of state-type clashes, but an explicit consequence of political personalization, where highly centralized authority allows unique individual traits such as deep cognitive closure or high operational distrust to readily translate into volatile state-level political choices (Vogel & Best, 2016; Hermann, 1980a). By tracking these interrelated configurations, conflict resolution scholars can better determine when a changing domestic landscape might alter an executive's calculations, thereby moving beyond rigid and dead-end diplomatic strategies.

OVERVIEW OF NORTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP

When evaluating the structural architecture of the political regime in Pyongyang, Personalism Theory provides a highly predictive model for understanding the state's unbridled political will. Under Kim Jong Un's leadership, North Korea operates as an extreme manifestation of personalist autocracy, a system in which traditional institutional constraints such as collective party leadership in the Workers' Party of Korea or bureaucratic accountability in the military have been systematically dismantled or subordinated to executive will (Song & Wright, 2018; Vogel & Best, 2016). Because personalist regimes lack meaningful internal veto points, policy direction does not emerge from bureaucratic consensus but is instead generated directly by the supreme leader and a highly insulated inner circle. This high degree of political personalization affords Kim Jong Un near-absolute structural discretion, ensuring that his personal leadership style and psychological orientation translate directly into state-level strategic choices without the moderating influence of institutional accountability (Song & Wright, 2018). On the Korean Peninsula, North Korea represents an extreme manifestation of this personalist autocratic rule, where power is so concentrated in the ruling Kim family dynasty that institutional accountability is virtually non-existent, leaving the supreme leader's personal choices completely unconstrained

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by internal oversight or veto points (Richey et al., 2018).

This absolute structural freedom enhances the significance of individual-level assessments through Leadership Trait Analysis, as Kim Jong Un's specific psychological profile actively determines the survival of his regime and military strategy (Hermann, 1980a; Richey et al., 2018). In terms of LTA metrics, the northern leadership exhibits a very high belief in its ability to control events, coupled with a baseline profile of low conceptual complexity and intense and systematic distrust of external actors (Hermann, 1980a, 2005). This specific trait configuration manifests in a rigid, zero-sum operational code that prioritizes regime survival through aggressive and proactive deterrence over situational cue-taking or diplomatic compromise (Richey et al., 2018; Hermann, 2005). Driven by an unwavering distrust of the United States and South Korea, the personal leadership sifted through hints of reconciliation, viewing external offers of cooperation not as genuine peace-building opportunities but as devious components of a structural deception scheme designed to undermine the country from within (Richey et al., 2018; Mazarr et al., 2018).

The concrete policy results of this personal, low-complexity, and distrustful leadership style were evident in the historic strategic reorientation of 2024 (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Hermann, 2005). Leveraging his absolute structural freedom, Kim Jong Un unilaterally froze decades of pan-Korean diplomatic precedent by formally abandoning the traditional framework of temporary special relations oriented toward reunification and redefining South Korea as a permanent "enemy state" and the regime's primary adversary (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Goh, 2025). This structural shift was not a situational reaction to geopolitical changes, but the direct execution of a rigid psychological preference for clear and uncompromising boundaries, as symbolized by the physical destruction of inter-Korean transit routes and the complete rejection of humanitarian or economic compromises (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Hermann, 2005). Furthermore, because its individual trait profile prioritizes absolute military power as the sole guarantor of sovereignty, this personalized regime has combined its conventional military posture with a formalized and highly escalatory first-use nuclear weapons doctrine (Anderson & Press, 2024; Mazarr et al., 2018). In short, the personalization of absolute power in Pyongyang allows Kim Jong Un's characteristic psychological closure to permanently narrow the political imagination of reunification, effectively closing off the peaceful integration agenda at its structural source (Song & Wright, 2018; Hermann, 1980a; Milani & Fiori, 2025).

OVERVIEW OF SOUTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP

When evaluating the structural architecture of the political executive in Seoul, Personalism

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Theory suggests that South Korea has a low level of structural personalism due to its strong democratic consolidation, constitutional oversight, and highly institutionalized veto power (Song & Wright, 2018; Vogel & Best, 2016). In stark contrast to the unfettered freedom enjoyed by the northern regime, South Korea's executive operates under strict institutional accountability, where the state's political will is constantly constrained by a coherent legislature, an independent judiciary, and a vibrant civil society (Song & Wright, 2018; Milani & Fiori, 2025). This rule-bound environment means that the uniqueness of individual leadership is routinely checked, contested, or blocked by countervailing political elites. However, this institutional resilience is often tested by excessive personalist power fluctuations during periods of acute and mutually detrimental domestic deadlock (Song & Wright, 2018; Milani & Fiori, 2025). A stark illustration of this structural tension occurred in late 2024, when President Yoon Suk-yeol attempted to bypass the democratic veto point through a unilateral declaration of martial law. Rather than consolidating the personalist regime, this executive overreach provoked an immediate and unified response from parliamentary elites and civil society, culminating in a unanimous legislative vote to revoke the decree and the swift initiation of impeachment proceedings, testifying to the low structural scope and robust constitutional safeguards inherent in Seoul's democratic framework (Milani & Fiori, 2025).

Despite these formidable structural constraints, the individual trait profiles of South Korean presidents have drastically altered the focus, tone, and implementation of cross-border policies (Hermann, 1980a; Lee, 1994). Through Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis, contemporary conservative executive leadership on the Korean peninsula often displays a high degree of confidence in personal ability to control events, combined with low conceptual complexity regarding inter-Korean security and deep systemic distrust of Pyongyang. This specific psychological configuration manifests itself in an operational code that dispenses with incremental and functionalist engagement strategies, favoring a binary, zero-sum worldview in which conflict is managed through a peace-through-strength paradigm (Hermann, 2005; Milani & Fiori, 2025). Driven by an individual trait profile that prioritizes hardline deterrence and military preparedness, conservative leadership actively shapes a confrontational foreign policy centered on strengthening trilateral security alliances and advancing aggressive asymmetric counter-attack capabilities, such as the preemptive strike doctrine (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Mazarr et al., 2018).

The central synthesis of low structural flexibility and a polarized individual trait profile explains the highly volatile and oscillating nature of South Korea's political will toward the "One Korea" agenda. Because South Korean executives lack the personalized absolute power found in

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North Korea, their individual psychological execution is constantly swayed by a highly polarized domestic electorate and intense interparty hostility (Vogel & Best, 2016; Milani & Fiori, 2025). When the low conceptual complexity and high threat perception of a conservative executive clash with a progressive-dominated National Assembly, the resulting institutional friction leads to deadlock in the state apparatus, transforming domestic disputes over budget and governance into structural policy paralysis (Milani & Fiori, 2025). This ongoing systemic power struggle prevents South Korea from projecting a stable long-term policy vector, as orderly executive transitions routinely reset the country's political will from reconciliatory confidence-building to hardline deterrence, creating an elite-driven deadlock that mirrors Pyongyang's structural impasse (Lee, 1994; Milani & Fiori, 2025; Mazarr et al., 2018).

THEORETICAL INSIGHT

COMPARATIVE UNIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

Institutional Absorption and Strategic Opportunism of East-West Germany (1990)

At the structural level, West Germany operated with a very low level of political personalism due to its highly consolidated parliamentary democracy, strong federal oversight of the Länder, and a strong institutional veto power (Song & Wright, 2018; Vogel & Best, 2016). Chancellor Helmut Kohl's strategic path toward nation-building was severely constrained by collective cabinet negotiations, shifting coalitions, and the Social Democratic opposition's eventual capture of the upper house, the Bundesrat (Patton, 1993). However, at the individual level, Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis reveals that Kohl possessed a strong personal belief in his own ability to control events, combined with a highly opportunistic response to environmental changes. When the structural window opened in the early 1990s, Kohl's opportunistic trait configuration enabled him to bypass lengthy constitutional conventions, single-handedly defeating conceptually complex domestic rivals who advocated a cautious, needs-based "solidarity bloc" (Kitschelt, 1991).

By framing national unity in terms of economic growth and Western institutional continuity, Kohl successfully leveraged West Germany's vast material machinery to enforce rapid integration under Article 23 of the Basic Law (Harris, 1991). This rapid institutional transfer resulted in the clean replacement of the old German Democratic Republic (East Germany) power elite with an untainted secondary elite (Vogel & Best, 2016). However, because this West German-led framework was achieved through asymmetric top-down expansion that devalued East German

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gains, it failed to produce a parallel assimilation of societal values. Instead, profound cultural and psychological value gaps related to personal achievement, co-determination, and institutional acceptance persisted or widened between 1990 and 1995, as East Germans subjectively distanced themselves from Western benchmarks to maintain the historical integrity of their lived experience (Meulemann, 1997).

Collective Insulation and Zero-Sum Attrition of North-South Vietnam (1975)

In contrast to the pluralistic constraints of the West, North Vietnam's political architecture displayed a low to moderate degree of personalization, operating through a highly institutionalized, collective communist leadership within the Hanoi Politburo (Song & Wright, 2018; Thayer, 1976). This collective power structure insulated the regime's decision-making apparatus from domestic public accountability, enabling the leadership to project a highly focused and decades-long strategic commitment to national liberation (Luu & Tran, 2025; Thayer, 1976). However, at the individual level of analysis, First Secretary Le Duan's psychological profile was clearly characterized by low conceptual complexity and intense and systematic operational distrust of external factions. When the Politburo conducted its crucial strategic review in 1974, Le Duan's personal nature dictated a highly rigid and zero-sum operational code (Hermann, 1980a; Luu & Tran, 2025; Donnell, 1980).

Rather than adhering to the twelve-year, gradual transitional power-sharing agreement originally outlined with the National Liberation Front (NLF), Le Duan's low-complexity and mistrust-ridden blueprint advocated a decisive and total military solution. The resulting conventional military blitzkrieg achieved a swift, de facto absorption of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in April 1975, completely dismantling the southern state apparatus and forcibly disbanding the PRG and indigenous Viet Cong elements (Corson & Minghi, 1994; Luu & Tran, 2025). Driven by this simplistic ideological framework, the victorious northern leadership immediately embarked on a highly coercive socialization program throughout the south, systematically excluding southern elites and neutral peace activists while imprisoning hundreds of thousands of former RVN officers and civil servants in long-term re-education camps. This direct and uncompromising structural imposition effectively destroyed civil society and private commerce in the south, severely decimated databases, and triggered a devastating domestic food crisis (Niehaus, 1979; Samardjian, 2023).

Neo-Patrimonial Personalism and Elite DIsintegration of North-South Yemen (1990)

The level of structural personalization in the Arabian Peninsula was particularly high under

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the leadership of North Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who dominated political life by establishing a complex neo-patrimonial patronage system with tribal confederations in the north. This personalist allocation of power gave Saleh near-absolute structural freedom, minimizing institutional oversight, and allowing his individual leadership style to determine the direction of state-level policy (Song & Wright, 2018; Jung & Rector, 2014). Through the lens of Leadership Trait Analysis, Saleh possessed a psychological profile characterized by high conceptual complexity and a strong strategic need for power (Hermann, 1980a; Dingli, 2012). When the rapid withdrawal of Soviet power cut off the PDRY's strategic southern access, Saleh's high conceptual complexity enabled him to adopt a highly flexible and opportunistic diplomatic style. Rather than opting for a high-risk military invasion, Saleh leveraged his structural freedom to negotiate a swift, top-down confederal power-sharing agreement on May 22, 1990 (Dingli, 2012; Jung & Rector, 2014).

However, because this unprincipled confederal path was tightly engineered through secretive elite arrangements lacking real institutional trust, the unitary state quickly declined. The regimes temporarily shared cabinet seats but left their respective regional militaries intact, failing to develop unified state institutions (Dingli, 2012; Jung & Rector, 2014). When the economic shock of the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent cutoff of Saudi aid plunged the country into a severe employment crisis, the fragile framework of integration fractured along regional lines. Saleh's personalist system ultimately reverted to a zero-sum conflict during the 1994 civil war, in which northern forces militarily conquered the south, imposing a coercive centralization that hampered long-term national integration (Dingli, 2012; Haque et al., 2024). This pervasive, corrupt patronage infrastructure permanently eroded the country's governance capacity, rendering the divided military completely incapable of managing the political upheavals of the 2011 Arab Spring (Haque et al., 2024).

Wartime Records and Transitional justice

Beyond macro-structural arrangements, the systematic preservation and publication of wartime records such as internal memos, investigative reports, and communiques plays a crucial role in uncovering the truth, which is vital for transitional justice mechanisms. When records of past state surveillance and institutional repression are made public, they serve as crucial evidence for victims seeking accountability and memory formation. Access to this raw material allows researchers and legal bodies to get closer to the true nature of historical events, bypassing the standard media bias that tends to highlight only the most visible acts of violence (Balcells & Sullivan, 2018).

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DISCUSSION (THE LEADERSHIP IMPASSE AND THE MIDDLE GROUND)

When these two divergent leadership frameworks interact, they create a highly volatile escalation cycle that actively neutralizes any potential room for negotiation or "middle ground." Because North Korea's authoritarian leadership views any move toward top-down political or economic integration as an existential threat to its regime's survival, it misinterprets South Korea's anti-artillery defense capabilities or deterrence capabilities as a step toward coercive regime change (Richey et al., 2018; Mazarr et al., 2018). Conversely, because South Korea's democratic leadership must remain accountable to a highly polarized public opinion and is sensitive to regional security balances, it cannot tolerate repeated North Korean missile provocations, asymmetric electronic warfare, or unconventional tactics (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Mazarr et al., 2018). These intertwined mistrusts narrow the space for mutually beneficial, functionalist cooperation. Pragmatic channels that could bypass political deadlocks, such as joint industrial ventures, organized family reunions, or joint environmental disaster management, are routinely frozen or shut down entirely by executive order whenever a cross-border crisis arises (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Richey et al., 2018). Without a profound shift toward alternative diplomatic frameworks, such as third-party mediation or a regional collective security infrastructure, the conflicting survival strategies of the two leadership elites will continue to lock the Korean Peninsula into a permanent trajectory of deepening division (Milani & Fiori, 2025; Lee, 1994).

This elite-driven political deadlock is further complicated by the massive structural burdens and economic calculations that dominate contemporary South Korean society. Under the Park Geun-hye administration, official policy discourse shifted toward a "unification paradigm" centered on the rhetoric of "great benefits of unification," which used macroeconomic general equilibrium models to demonstrate that a unified single market of 75 million people could overcome the limitations of South Korea's compressed growth engine, reduce the "Korean discount," and transform the peninsula into a global logistics hub. However, this market-oriented and utility-maximizing framework remains severely constrained by public anxiety over the extremely high costs of unification and deep structural polarization among domestic voters (Cho et al., 2016).

Furthermore, as North Korea remains mired in an unsustainable economic crisis and severe oil shortages, its leadership has chosen to prioritize its nuclear arsenal as a strategic counterbalance rather than risk the consequences of system collapse resulting from economic liberalization. This economic and security dilemma means that North Korea utilizes its weapons of mass destruction as a coercive tool to extract unilateral concessions and ensure regime survival,

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emulating South Korea's doctrine of preemption with an equally escalatory stance (Mazarr et al., 2018; Mack, 1993).

To break through this deadlocked paradigm, the traditional goal-oriented model of unification education must be fundamentally reoriented through the lens of critical peace pedagogy and the ethical framework of *Sangsaeng* (living together) (Park, 2017; Kang, 2018). Traditional unification education in South Korea has historically served as a state-controlled mechanism for ideological transmission, shifting from hostile anti-communism during the Cold War to a rigid national security doctrine that projects a flat, directional view of North Korea while completely excluding naturalized and non-native citizens from the civil community (Goh, 2025; Kang, 2018). By overemphasizing ethnonationalist discourses of cultural homogeneity, the state-led curriculum normalizes the exclusion of minority communities and ignores the pluralistic identities emerging in a global society. To align with the global standard of Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, unification education must transcend these prescriptive limitations and establish citizenship as a lived, reflective inquiry (Goh, 2025; Kang, 2018). This transformation requires the adoption of the *Sangsaeng* paradigm (specifically the practice of *haewon-sangsaeng*) that treats conflict resolution not as a top-down structural merger, but as a process of collective healing, active listening, and the resolution of accumulated historical grudges (*han*) within an inclusive “dining table community” (Park, 2017). By fostering an educational environment based on horizontal openness, loose solidarity, and coexistence, the curriculum can empower young people as autonomous social agents, shifting the focus of peace from military security to human security and shared democratic coexistence (Goh, 2025; Kang, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The historical patterns of division and contemporary operational dynamics on the Korean Peninsula suggest that a straightforward top-down political synthesis remains structurally impossible. Unification cannot be achieved through simple, goal-oriented state agreements, while the personalist power base in Pyongyang views systemic integration as an existential threat to regime survival, and the democratic framework in Seoul remains tied to constitutional accountability, oversight, and deep domestic polarization (Song & Wright, 2018; Vogel & Best, 2016; Milani & Fiori, 2025). North Korea remains committed to an aggressive, security-maximizing deterrence strategy supported by asymmetric nuclear options, while South Korea oscillates between progressive cooperation and conservative deterrence, preventing a stable cross-border foreign policy vector (Lee, 1994; Milani & Fiori, 2025; Mazarr et al., 2018). Consequently, as the

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conflicting wills of the two leadership structures perpetuate a cycle of elite-driven mistrust, the traditional administrative and territorial integration approach becomes counterproductive and consistently stalemated.

To break this rigid deadlock, future strategic efforts must shift entirely from state-centric demands and leverage long-term middle-power mediation, non-governmental second-way networks, and local economic nodes to gradually soften interstate boundaries. Overcoming leadership barriers requires replacing flat ethnonationalist rhetoric about a quick "unification bonanza (*daebak*)" with critical peace pedagogy and the practical ethics paradigm of Sangsaeng (Park, 2017; Kang, 2018; Cho et al., 2016). Rather than treating unification as an abstract, top-down goal, policymakers and educators should promote horizontal collaborative spaces for shared human security, recognition of shared values, and cross-cultural dialogue (Goh, 2025; Kang, 2018). By developing a transformative curriculum that focuses on everyday reconciliation, restorative justice, and economic cooperation at the community level, both societies can slowly lay a substantive foundation from the bottom up for peaceful coexistence before formal political reconciliation can realistically occur (Fraser, 2009; Park, 2017; Kang, 2018).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future peace and conflict studies must move toward a new agenda focused on systematic analysis of conflict archives to map the "grey zones of power" between state institutions and political violence. By analyzing the internal reporting structures and covert surveillance channels that combatants use to simultaneously obtain and distribute information, scholars can unravel the hidden mechanisms of preventive repression and covert mobilization (Balcells & Sullivan, 2018). Methodologies should prioritize developing clear and replicable measurement rules and cross-verifying archival findings with population-based surveys to eliminate the political bias of state secrecy laws.

Future empirical studies should apply game theory modeling to evaluate the threshold at which South Korea's deterrence doctrine triggers a launch protocol based on North Korea's warnings during diplomatic standoffs.

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