

## The Role of The Humanist Approach to Inter-Korean Diplomatic Relations During the DPRK's Nuclear Crisis

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**ABSTRACT:** Relations between inter-Korean have worsened as tensions from the DPRK nuclear crisis have continued to escalate. Amidst the existing tensions, some of the Republic of Korea regimes have taken a humanist approach in dealing with the DPRK, which has resulted in improving relations between both countries. The author uses Samuel P. Huntington's political order theory to explore a stable and effective political system in managing conflict and making decisions. This study uses qualitative methods with secondary sources from journals, books, reports, official documents, and official websites. The results of this study indicate that the humanist approach is more effective in dealing with the DPRK through meetings held by the leaders of the two countries to build cooperative relations such as the construction of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, economic aid worth hundreds of billions of Won to prevent North Korea's nuclear development, and dialogue conducted through state meetings. In addition, policies made by the Republic of Korea, such as the Sunshine Policy, are able to embrace the DPRK and prioritize dialogue when the DPRK violates the agreement in cooperation without unilaterally terminating the cooperative relationship as was done by the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye regimes with their conservative approaches. Political institutions also play an important role in making foreign policies that have an impact on the security stability of the Republic of Korea.

**Keywords:** DPRK, Humanist Approach, Nuclear Issue, Republic of Korea



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## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are two countries that are divided into two different political entities after previously being one entity, namely the State of Korea ([Chang, 2021](#)). The Republic of Korea is one of the countries in the East Asia region whose security stability is threatened by the DPRK's ongoing nuclear development program ([Wishanti, 2016](#)). In 2003, the escalation of tensions increased significantly due to the DPRK's withdrawal from the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and its recognition of possession of nuclear weapons, which caused the DPRK to conduct nuclear and missile tests in the following

years increasingly ([Abe, 2020](#); [Schneider & Ramana, 2023](#)). The DPRK uses nuclear weapons as a deterrence tool and a bargaining power tool ([Anastasia & Yuniasih, 2020](#); [Cimbala & Lowther, 2022](#)). North Korea also sees nuclear as the best way to maintain its dictatorship ([Ardiyanti, 2024](#)). The DPRK has carried out a nuclear program that has gradually grown in size, complexity, and capability from a small scientific research effort to a comprehensive effort to produce nuclear weapons ([Bermudez, 2015](#)). The DPRK adheres to the Juche ideology, which is interpreted as self-confidence and independence ([KAKISIM, 2017](#); [Makhroja, N, 2020](#)). Through the implementation of the Byungjin policy in 2013, the nuclear and ballistic missile programs have become the main sectors prioritized in the country's allocation as a parallel development effort between the economic sector and the military sector toward revolutionary development ([Rooks, 2019](#); [Wrobel & Ralph, 2021](#)).

In its consistency in making the DPRK a strong and independent country with its nuclear weapons stockpile, Global Zero stated that the DPRK spent as much as \$ 642 million on its nuclear program in 2021, or equivalent to 2.14% of the DPRK's total income in 2021 ([Pearson & Park, 2016](#); [Smith, 2022](#)). For comparison, the United States revenue in 2021 was \$23.6T ([World Bank, 2021](#)), and it spent \$42 billion on nuclear development, equivalent to 0.17% ([Congressional Budget Office, 2021](#)). More broadly, the stability of the East Asian region and international security stability are also threatened ([Badan Pengawas Tenaga Nuklir, 2012](#)).

It is stated that the Republic of Korea grew as a democratic country with a capitalist system that made the Republic of Korea one of the largest countries in electronic commerce and exports, so the Republic of Korea seeks to build trade cooperation relations to restore and improve relations with the DPRK in dealing with the ongoing nuclear issue. The Republic of Korea has a strong presidential system and a constitutional republic government system. Even the term 'imperial presidency' in the Republic of Korea refers to the country's constitution as the holder of the highest state office in making domestic and foreign policies ([Dostal, 2023](#)). The seriousness of the DPRK in developing its nuclear weapons requires the Republic of Korea not to be reckless in making policies related to this ([H. Park & Jo, 2025](#)). It is indisputable that inter-Korean relations are influenced by the type of leadership used by the ruling regime. Differences or similarities in leadership style and other aspects have a major influence on the dynamics of inter-Korean relations so far, especially in dealing with the DPRK nuclear issue, which threatens the national security of the Republic of Korea ([Chang-kwoun, 2015](#)).

However, in this case, when inter-Korean relations deteriorated, the regime that took a humanist approach to the DPRK brought relations between the two in a better direction ([Utomo & Maksum, 2020](#)). The pattern of the humanist approach is to carry out long-term cooperation without unilaterally terminating cooperation, as is often done by regimes that adopt a conservative approach. Through a humanist approach, the Republic of Korea tries to embrace the DPRK, which is still difficult to control and continues to test missiles because the DPRK does not trust potential enemy countries, including the Republic of Korea itself. So through a humanist approach, by implementing policies that lead to cooperation, such as the Sunshine Policy, inter-Korean relations are getting better because diplomatic relations are based on trust and cooperation ([H. Y. Kim et al., 2020b](#)). In addition, economic collaboration is the goal of the humanist approach, with the hope of stopping the DPRK's nuclear development program because economic collaboration

can provide a large source of funding to improve the DPRK's economy ([Lestari, 2021](#)). The Republic of Korea, during the Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Dae-jung regimes, provided a large amount of financial aid to the DPRK. It created a good relationship between the two. Unlike the regime that uses a conservative approach, they assist the DPRK in much smaller amounts and even cut off unilateral cooperation when the DPRK began to get out of control ([Yangmo, 2019](#)).

The researcher will focus on the use of a humanist approach in dealing with the DPRK with a foreign policy that adheres to and is based on trust and cooperation using the political order theory of Samuel P. Huntington in his book entitled "Political Order in Changing Societies" by studying social and political change, the importance of political institutions, and the quality of government.

### METHOD

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive analysis research method, namely qualitative. Maxwell, J.A. emphasizes qualitative research methods for understanding the context of a social phenomenon ([Alobaidi & Sandgren, 2021](#)). The researcher will present the problems raised in this study comprehensively in order to obtain in-depth information and answers, as well as collect, compile, and interpret data related to the role of the humanist approach to the relationship between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK during the DPRK nuclear crisis. The data collection technique used by the researcher is a literature study by collecting data and information from various works of literature and references from data searches sourced from written library materials, such as books, documents, reports, newspapers, archives, the internet, and mass media related to the problems that the researcher discusses in this journal article. The unit of analysis of this study is the government of the Republic of Korea, which applies a humanist approach to its foreign policy regarding the DPRK nuclear issue.

For data validity, researchers will use data source triangulation by analyzing various data sources. Data triangulation is identified into four parts, namely: (1) data triangulation: using various data sources to answer research questions so that later, the research results will be easier to generalize. (2) Investigator triangulation refers to the use of more than one data analysis in a study. This step is used to increase the credibility of the findings and reduce the potential for bias in the collection or analysis of research data. (3) Theory triangulation: Theory triangulation refers to the application of various theories or hypotheses in studying a phenomenon. This approach is used to see phenomena from various perspectives. (4) Triangulation method: The main objective is to minimize weaknesses and biases that may arise from the use of a single method ([UNAIDS, 2010](#)). The researcher will analyze data related to cooperation built by the Republic of Korea and the DPRK in the form of financial assistance, the construction of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, inter-Korean diplomatic meetings, and the Republic of Korea's policies that refer to peace and humanist approach such as the Sunshine Policy to produce comprehensive answers with the same view or several different views through previous research and data that the author obtained from official statements from both countries so as to produce a breadth of knowledge to obtain data that has high credibility and is combined with cross-checking of data with other researchers.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Difference of Leadership Types of Republic of Korea's Leaders**

Leaders of the Republic of Korea come from various backgrounds, both military and civilian. These differences in background then give rise to different types of leadership. There are types of leaders who tend to be radical, firm, isolative, and harsh and even choose the military path to face the DPRK (conservative). There are also leaders of the Republic of Korea who prioritize cooperation and peace with the DPRK (Humanist Cooperative) ([K. R. Kim & Kang, 2013](#)). Leaders are accepted if their nature and behavior are in accordance with the leadership style supported by the culture prevailing in the country ([H. K. Kim et al., 2019](#)).

Republic of Korean leaders who are conservative, such as Lee Seung-man, who wanted to unite the two Koreas through military means; Park Chung-hee, who is known to be firm and did not want to cooperate with DPRK; and Kim Young-sam and Park Geun-hye, who established cooperative relations with DPRK, but ultimately failed because DPRK did not want to denuclearize. Meanwhile, the cooperative Republic of Korean leaders can be seen from President Roh Tae-woo, who seeks more cooperation. Kim Dae-jung with the Sunshine Policy, and Roh Moo-hyun and Moon Jae-in who are also cooperative towards DPRK ([Safitri, 2017](#)). The argument in favor of the transformative potential of leaders is put forward by Samuel P. Huntington, who argues that "if he had wanted to, a political leader far less skilled than Lee Kuan Yew could have created democracy in Singapore." Leaders make choices about the kind of regime they want ([Huntington, 1991](#)).

The differences in leadership types have a major impact on diplomatic relations between the two countries ([Hoseinian & Yousef, 2013](#)). During the nuclear crisis, due to the DPRK's consistent nuclear development program, the tension in relations between the two countries was quite bad; this was because the Republic of Korea was worried that its security stability was threatened. Various dialogues and cooperation were attempted so that the DPRK would stop its nuclear development program to maintain peace. However, the DPRK was very difficult to regulate and control, so most of the leaders of the Republic of Korea were furious about the DPRK's action ([MOFA Republic of Korea, 2022](#)).

### **The Regime's Policy Uses a Humanist Approach**

Kim Dae-jung's leadership

Kim Dae-jung, the eighth president of the Republic of Korea from 1998 to 2003, is best known for his leadership during a transformative period in Korean history, particularly for his approach to DPRK through the Sunshine Policy to reconciliation through engagement with the DPRK ([S. Y. Kim, 2020](#)). During his leadership, Kim formed a policy called the "Sunshine Policy". This policy aims to increase cooperation, ease military tensions, build trust, and build peace with the DPRK ([Anindita, 2020a](#)). The policy is based on three core principles: (1) Military provocation from the North will not be accepted. (2) the South will not attempt to annex or occupy the North. (3) The South will actively seek peace and mutual partnership with the North. These principles are

designed to ease fears in DPRK about its sovereignty while promoting economic cooperation ([Pearl Jinju, 2014; Surapati et al., 2021](#)).

With the “Sunshine Policy”, relations between the two countries improved. It was marked by the agreement on a tourism project in Mount Kumgang, which would be built with DPRK in 1998. In addition, in the same year, the two countries agreed to build the Kaesong in order to promote economic collaboration ([Moon & Yin, 2020](#)). There are approximately 124 companies from the Republic of Korea in the Kaesong area and more than 53 thousand people from the DPRK work in these companies. The Kaesong area is also a source of finance for the DPRK ([International Crisis Group, 2019](#)). In 2000, Kim Dae-jung successfully held the Korean Summit in Pyongyang ([Syafiq Rizqullah et al., 2021](#)).

Kim Dae-jung sought to separate political issues from economic interactions, believing that improving economic conditions could lead to political change in the DPRK. This approach contrasted sharply with subsequent administrations, which adopted a more lenient view of the DPRK as a threat requiring tough action ([STRNAD, 2017](#)).

While Kim Dae-jung's presidency did not definitively resolve the nuclear issue, it did lay the groundwork for future dialogue between the two Koreas. His emphasis on peaceful coexistence influenced subsequent policy but also set a precedent for how the Republic of Korea would engage with its northern neighbor in the years to come. In short, Kim Dae-Jung's leadership during a critical period in the Republic of Korea's history was defined by his innovative Sunshine Policy aimed at fostering peace with the DPRK ([Anindita, 2020b](#)). Although initially successful, the Sunshine Policy has faced criticism over time, particularly as DPRK has continued to pursue its nuclear weapons program, and there was still military confrontation between the two countries in the Yellow Sea border area. The sea battle occurred again in 2002, which resulted in the sinking of a South Korean ship. There was a dramatic escalation in the confrontation between the two Koreas due to the sinking of the South Korean corvette, Cheonan, and the Yeonpyeong Island shelling. Pyongyang was blamed for both incidents, though it only admitted the Yeonpyeong attack and denied any involvement in the Cheonan's sinking. ([Hur, 2017](#)). However, it shows that even though there is still conflict between the two countries, with a humanist approach, the conflict does not get worse but can be resolved through dialogue and cooperation.

### Roh Moo-hyun's Leadership

Roh Moo-hyun, who served as the President of South Korea from 2003 to 2008, is recognized for his distinctive leadership style and foreign policy, particularly concerning the DPRK nuclear issue. Roh Moo-hyun is the most controversial and popular political leader who has close ties with ordinary people. Apart from his progressive political stance, the younger generation is pleased with his openness ([H. A. Kim, 2017](#)). His approach was characterized by a commitment to dialogue and engagement, which he believed were essential for fostering peace on the Korean Peninsula. President Roh Moon-hyun's leadership also used the Sunshine Policy previously used by President Kim Dae-jung. Although the foreign policies implemented were more lenient compared to the two policies of the previous conservative government, the Sunshine Policy under the Moon Jae-



in government had not succeeded in achieving the desired goal, namely peace on the Korean Peninsula by denuclearizing North Korea ([Khalilah Mukarramah, 2023](#)). During his administration, relations between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK improved. However, in 2003, the issue of the DPRK's nuclear weapons ownership resurfaced. Roh was committed to maintaining good relations with the DPRK through several meetings and cooperation built by both of them.

### Foreign Policy towards DPRK:

Engagement strategy: A vision of peaceful coexistence and eventual unification primarily drove Roh Moo-hyun's foreign policy towards DPRK. He articulated a three-step strategy aimed at resolving the nuclear crisis while promoting inter-Korean cooperation. These included: (1) dialogue first. Roh emphasized that all issues should be resolved through dialogue and mutual trust ([Farid Darussalam, 2020](#)). He opposed sanctions against DPRK, arguing they would exacerbate tensions rather than foster peace. (2) Bilateral cooperation. He advocated for the South and North to work together with the international community to address issues surrounding nuclear weapons. It included providing humanitarian aid and engaging in economic projects to increase DPRK's reliance on the South. Roh Moo-hyun and his predecessor, Kim Dae-jung, disbursed hundreds of billions of Won to prevent North Korea's nuclear development ([ANTARA, 2013](#)). (3) Long-term peace regime. Even though the purpose of the foreign policy led to a better connection between both countries, in 2006, the situation deteriorated when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test ([Hahn & Scouras, 2020](#)).

### Moon Jae-in's Leadership

Moon Jae-in, the 12th President of the Republic of Korea from 2017 to 2022. The foreign policy formed by Moon Jae In towards the DPRK shows a reorientation from previous policies, resulting in changes in the dynamics of relations between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK ([Nadhiva et al., 2019](#)). The ideology adopted by Moon Jae-in is the liberal ideology that focuses primarily on the issue of individual freedom ([N. Park, 2020](#)). Moon Jae-in's leadership is well-received and respected in South Korea because of his ability to maintain good relations with the DPRK, even though the DPRK occasionally still conducts missile tests ([H. Y. Kim et al., 2020a](#)).

Currently, the Republic of Korea's government is dominated by a liberal democratic party called the Democratic Party of Korea. The Democratic Party of Korea is a party that supports human rights values and market-based economic policies and supports improving relations with the DPRK. The Democratic Party of Korea usually uses soft methods such as using approaches or dialogue. South Koreans have historically been active participants in their democracy. There are a variety of challenges in the country which must be addressed by its democratic institutions ([Melhem, 2022](#)).

### Leadership style and vision:

Moon Jae-in demonstrated strategic and visionary leadership, striving for a new era in relations with DPRK. His "Korean Peninsula Peace Initiative (KPPI)," unveiled in Berlin in 2017, aimed to reset inter-Korean relations, prioritizing reconciliation and coexistence over unification. Moon's

approach emphasized dialogue and cooperation with the international community to address the DPRK nuclear issue ([John, V, 2017](#)).

Foreign policy towards DPRK: (1) Engagement and Dialogue. In 2018, Moon met with DPRK Chairman Kim Jong-un at inter-Korean summits, becoming the third South Korean president to meet with a DPRK leader (Nadhiva et al., 2019). He also met with Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump at the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in 2019 ([Hahm & Heo, 2020](#)). (2) Denuclearization. Moon emphasized the need for the dismantlement of DPRK's nuclear weapons program. His KPPI declared North Korea's nuclear and missile program as the "biggest challenge" and demanded "complete, verified, irreversible denuclearisation." ([Malevich, 2020](#)). (3) Conditional Cooperation. Moon proposed a freeze of DPRK nuclear and missile tests as a condition for dialogue on nuclear issues. Economic cooperation was also contingent on progress in denuclearization. However, he aimed to separate political and military matters from humanitarian and non-political interaction ([Kelly, E, 2019](#)).

### Political Order

Political order is a concept from Samuel P. Huntington in his book entitled "Political Order in Changing Societies". Political order discusses social and political change as a stable and effective political system in managing conflict and making decisions. These governments command the loyalties of their citizens and thus have the capacity to tax resources, conscript manpower, innovate, and execute policy ([Nevins, 2011](#)). There are three components to the concept of political order:

(1) Social and Political Change. According to Huntington, social change is a process that occurs in society which is marked by changes in social structure, values, and social norms. Moreover, political change is a process that occurs in a political system, which is marked by changes in political structure, political process, and political policy. There is increasing attention to the processes of social change towards more sustainable and equitable societies ([Avelino, 2021](#)). Various factors, such as revolution and reform, can cause this political change. Social change can affect political change and vice versa. According to Huntington, a stable political order can be achieved if there is a balance between social and political change. A stable political order can also be achieved if there are strong and effective political institutions and a transparent and accountable political process. (2) The importance of political institutions. Political institutions are the rules about how to organize government, how authority and power are formed, exercised, legitimized, controlled, and redistributed ([Anne et al., 2020](#)). Strong and effective political institutions can create a stable and effective political order that can reduce conflict and uncertainty in society. Political institutions have been linked to the success of cultural evolution and economic development, with the relationship between the two evolving ([Waluya, 2021](#)). Political institutions can effectively and fairly manage conflicts that arise in society, thereby reducing violence and instability. They can also make effective and timely decisions, thereby overcoming problems faced by society. Political institutions can monitor and control the power held by the government and other institutions, thereby preventing abuse of power. (3) Quality of Government. The incentives of some political officials at the top of public institutions, legislators, and executives have been studied and largely explain why institutions are not functioning well today ([Lapuente & Suzuki, 2022](#)). An effective

government is a government that can make timely decisions and implement effective policies. An efficient government can allocate resources effectively and reduce unnecessary costs. An accountable government is a government that can be held responsible for its actions and decisions. A transparent government is a government that can provide accurate and complete information about its activities and decisions. A quality government must have the ability to implement effective and efficient policies.

There are similarities between the three regimes that use a cooperative humanist approach, namely a commitment to dialogue and engagement, bilateral cooperation, and a long-term peace regime. Prioritizing cooperation and dialogue even though the DPRK continues to carry out several provocations with its missile tests so that relations continue to improve amidst the escalation of tensions due to the DPRK nuclear issue. The government that applies a humanist approach aims to ensure that the potential for denuclearization can occur so that the security stability of the Republic of Korea can continue to be maintained, compared to using a conservative approach that makes the DPRK respond in a way that threatens the security stability of the Republic of Korea. If analyzed using the concept of political order, the three regimes that apply a humanist approach emphasize the importance of social and political change, which must be changed for the better in making decisions to break the chain of conflict.

The Sunshine Policy is a policy that brings relations between the two countries in a better direction through sustainable economic collaboration that allows South Korean companies to employ North Korean labor. The Republic of Korea also provides economic assistance by assisting hundreds of billions of Won in the Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Dae-jung regimes. Then the importance of political institutions in this case is very visible, stable, and effective political institutions in policy making can protect the country from conflicts that may worsen when policies made are unstable, for example, during the reign of the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye regimes that implemented a conservative approach and unilaterally terminated cooperation between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK, resulting in escalation of tensions and worsening relations between the two countries. With a humanist approach that implements a democratic system, political institutions are more stable. The quality of government is also very important in reducing conflict. Good governance will consider the policies to be taken into account and their impact on the stability of state security. Humanist policies towards the DPRK have proven to be able to increase economic collaboration and meetings between leaders of the two countries to build dialogue in order to achieve common interests.

## **CONCLUSION**

The government that applies a humanist approach to the DPRK in a nuclear crisis opens up opportunities for better and closer diplomatic relations, and this is shown by several meetings between the leaders of the two countries, which can only be done if the relationship between the two countries is in good condition to achieve common interests, namely the security interests of both countries. Through the concept of political order, social and political changes, the importance of political institutions, and the quality of government greatly influence the quality of foreign



policymaking and the impact of these policies. The humanist approach can bring peace even in chaotic situations because the goal of the humanist approach is to build trust through cooperation and embrace parties whose attitudes are still difficult to control. Gentle methods like this are not to show the hesitation or weakness of the Republic of Korea but to embrace the DPRK so that it trusts the Republic of Korea as a good partner, not an enemy, even as one unit if reunification and denuclearization occur.

The Sunshine Policy which resulted in economic collaboration implemented through the Kaesong Industrial Complex which employs thousands of DPRK people in Republic of Korean companies, financial assistance from the Republic of Korea in large amounts, reaching billions of won, and dialogues conducted through several state meetings show the effectiveness of implementing a humanist approach towards the DPRK compared to a conservative approach which further worsens relations between the two countries due to the absence of dialogue between the two countries and the unilateral termination of cooperation by the Republic of Korea. In the future, policies such as the Sunshine Policy must be emphasized more in order to build sustainable cooperation to suppress the conflict situation and move towards peace on the Korean peninsula. The humanist approach is also better to continue to be applied so that there is no clash of tension between the two countries and that the conflict can be resolved through dialogue.

There is a potential for ongoing conflict of interest between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK, especially security interests. However, this conflict is still being tried to be reduced through cooperation between the two countries so that the DPRK does not conduct more missile and nuclear tests and the Republic of Korea provides economic assistance through cooperation and assistance provided so that both countries feel their interests are met without having to conflict.

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