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## **Park can better tackle NK issue**

*This is the first in a series of contributing columns by experts and our staff on priority issues for the Park Geun-hye government. — ED.*

By Donald Gregg

I've been watching South Korean politics closely for the past 40 years, and I rate the just-concluded election as the best ever held in Korea. The election pitted two excellent candidates against each other, the voting rate was very high, the result was close, and a woman was elected in a society where male chauvinism remains alive and well. How and why did this come about?

Park Geun-hye was not elected primarily because of her gender. She won because she is a proven politician; cool under fire, physically brave, intelligent and charismatic, who happens to be a woman. She is also Park Chung-hee's daughter, and this has left many of Moon Jae-in's supporters gnashing their teeth in despair, as they see Park's election a major step backward, away from the liberalism of the "sunshine policy," toward a more calculating, hard-edge leadership style exemplified by her father. Despite this pessimism on the part of some of my friends, I find myself both intrigued and excited by her presidency, and am delighted that she has received such a warm welcome from President Barak Obama.

I served in Seoul as CIA chief of station from 1973-75, and knew President Park fairly well. I was in Seoul in August 1974 when his wife and first lady Yuk Young-soo, was shot and killed in a botched assassination attempt directed at him. I saw Park Geun-hye a few times when she returned from studies abroad to help her father, but cannot recall having conversed directly with her.

In early 2002, on my way back from my first visit to Pyongyang, I talked with Lim Dong-won in Seoul, who was then head of Korea's National Intelligence Service. Lim told me of a recent conversation he had had with Chairman Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang. Kim told Lim that he read the South Korean press every day on the Internet, and that he had also read about Park Chung-hee with high interest on the Blue House web-site. Chairman Kim said that he would like very much to meet Park Geun-hye, who was then serving in the National Assembly. Lim agreed to pass this information on to Ms. Park, who agreed to travel to Pyongyang, which she did in 2001, meeting and talking with Kim. I was most interested to hear this.

Later in 2002, I attended the opening soccer match of the World Cup, jointly hosted by South Korea and Japan. At that game in Seoul, I spotted Park Geun-hye, and went over to speak to her. She knew who I was, and I congratulated her for her willingness to travel to Pyongyang, given

the fact that North Korea had twice tried to kill her father, and had in the process killed her mother. Her answer was unforgettable: "We must look to the future with hope, not to the past with bitterness."

On the strength of that encounter, I invited Park to speak to The Korea Society in New York, which she did the following year. I also accompanied her to Columbia University, where she gave a talk to a large audience of students and faculty. She performed impressively on both occasions, and had a strong impact on those in her audiences. In her decisiveness and realism, she reminded me of her father. In her warmth and friendliness, she reminded me of her mother.

President-elect Park has apologized to the Korean people for some of the things that her father did, but there were many things he did that were praiseworthy. In 1972, only four years after the 1968 Cheong Wa Dae raid, in which North Korean commandos, dressed in South Korean uniforms, tried to assassinate Park, he sent his intelligence chief, Lee Hu-rak, to Pyongyang. Lee met with Kim Il-sung, and began the first North-South dialogue, which involved direct talks about eventual reunification. In 2000, when the first North South summit was held in Pyongyang, Park Geun Hye wanted to attend as part of Kim Dae Jung's delegation, but was kept from doing so by the conservative party that she then represented.

The current young North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, was carefully chosen by his father to succeed him. Park Geun-hye's meeting with Kim Jong-il is well-remembered in Pyongyang. This will work favorably when Park decides to make her first move toward the North. When Park makes this move, as I am sure she will, she will carry with her the credibility of conservatism which Richard Nixon took with him to China in 1972. Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, both full-blown liberals, were never trusted by large segments of South Korea's conservatives when they took the "sunshine policy" to the North. Moon Jae-in would have suffered from this same disadvantage.

President Park is a realist, and as such she will quickly see the need to reestablish meaningful dialogue with North Korea by taking Kim Jong-un seriously and meeting with him. In five years, when her term comes to an end, I am certain that Park Geun-hye will have left North-South relations in far better shape than they are now, and that her presidency will have gained both support and respect from her neighbors in Tokyo and Beijing, and from Moscow and Washington as well.

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