

This interview piece on PCI Chairman Donald Gregg appeared in the Korea Times on November 4, 2013.

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National

## 'NK leader eager to learn about Park Chung-hee'

Korean



Donald Gregg, former U.S. ambassador to Korea, speaks during a recent interview with The Korea Times at the Lotte Hotel in downtown Seoul.  
/ Korea Times photo by Shim Hyun-chul

### Gregg challenges President to reach out to North Korea

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By Oh Young-jin



Donald Gregg has challenged President Park Geun-hye to become the fourth great head of state of Korea.

“Park has the basic equipment,” Gregg said in a recent interview. “Her chance is for her to recognize, difficult as it is, the need for eventual unification to take place and for her to be the one who starts it.”

The U.S. ambassador to Korea from 1989 to 1993 said that the alternative is for her to be remembered as a “B+ President.”

He recalled how President Park’s 2001 meeting with then North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang came about.

Lim Dong-won, the architect of President Kim Dae-jung’s “Sunshine Policy,” said the now deceased leader of the North told him that among biographical sketches on the Cheong Wa Dae website: “The one that was the most interesting to me was that of Park Chung-hee.”

In that Lim-Kim meeting in 2001, a year after the first inter-Korean summit, Lim pointed out that the North tried to kill Park. Kim replied that was in the past, asking Lim to arrange for Park’s daughter, then a lawmaker in the National Assembly, to visit him.

Lim again observed that Park’s mother, first lady Yuk Young-soo, was killed by a Korean-Japanese assassin sent by Pyongyang.

“We need somebody like Park who would do the same as he did in the early days,” Lim quoted Kim as saying.

When Lim relayed Kim’s offer to Park Geun-hye, she accepted and visited the North.

During the opening ceremony of the 2002 World Cup football championship, Gregg met Park and congratulated her on her trip.

“I never forget what she told me: ‘We must look to the future with hope, not with bitterness,’” Gregg said.

Gregg invited her to New York to speak to the Korea Society, and she also spoke at Columbia University. “She inherited her mother’s grace and father’s intelligence,” he said. “She has the potential to be terrific president.”

Gregg cited Park Chung-hee, Roh Tae-woo and Kim Dae-jung — affectionately known by his initials “DJ” — as the three great presidents.

He credited Park with rapid economic development, said Roh’s achievement through his Northern Policy is very much underappreciated and highly regards Kim, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his Sunshine Policy of engaging the Stalinist country.

When asked how soon unification would come, he looked to Kim’s forecast. “Kim Dae-jung thought it would take between 20 and 30 years,” he said, adding that Kim made his prediction, when the two met in 2008, a year before his death.

Gregg’s first association with Korea happened at the height of the Korean War when he trained southern commandoes in Saipan as an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

It lasted for the next 60 years — as CIA station chief in 1974, the year when DJ was kidnapped by the Korean CIA; and then as ambassador before moving to the Korea Society. One way or another, Gregg has known all Korean presidents since Park Chung-hee.

When he played a round of golf on the old Army course, Gregg, then ambassador to Korea, was approached by a Korean who blurted out, “Do you remember me? You almost got me killed twice.” When Gregg didn’t recognize him, the stranger told him his alias and explained he was one of Gregg’s students, the two embraced each other, he related

In a way, the former envoy personally thinks the lack of interest in Seoul and Washington in reaching out to the North is because it is not trusted and there is no political benefit in doing so.

“I am one of the few who think it has to be done,” he said. “The longer it goes without being done, the greater the Chinese influence on the North.”

Gregg thinks now is a good opportunity to influence the North’s future course of action because Kim Jong-un, the current leader, is young, and is expected to be around for 30 or 40 years so he should be molded and shaped in his early years.

He thinks Chinese have recently come to realize how dangerous the North can be with its nuclear programs because it may set off a chain reaction among its neighbors such as Japan in going nuclear.

With regard to China he said if Korea winds up unified, it shouldn’t be made to appear to be a victory for Americans; rather it should be seen as a victory for stability.

For Park, he said that she needs to do what Richard Nixon did in reaching out to China.

“Mao Zedong’s hands were dripping with the blood of 20 million Chinese,” Gregg said, explaining that he did it against a great deal of criticism to attain a global balance of power that made for peace. He noted that he despised Nixon personally. Then, what is in it for Park in reaching out to the North?

He said that it is a chance to redeem “Koreanness” that runs throughout its history, which has been disrupted by the division of two Koreas.

At times during the hour-long interview, he showed no signs of giving up on Kim Dae-jung’s policy.

People asked him, he said, why he is dealing with rotten people in the North, who are starving their people and corralling them in gulags. “How can you stop them? Fight another war? We opened up China. Why not North Korea?” he asked.

As a leader, he called on Park to have courage to move on with her North Korea policy “not on the basis of popularity but on the basis of what she recognizes has to be done.” He noted that she has no re-election to worry about.