Study Series 10-01

Strategy for Encouraging North Korean Opening: Basic Direction and Sequential Tasks

Choi Jinwook, Lee Kyo-Duk, Cho Jeong-Ah, Lee Jin-Yeong, Cha Moon-Seok

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Research Necessity and Objectives

North Korea has shown a frank aversion to reform and opening, and its obsession with nuclear weapons becomes ever more apparent.¹ North Korea regards reform/opening as a threat to the Kim Jong Il regime, and shows a strong distaste for the very terms "reform" and "opening." North Korea has perceived of previous attempted economic reform policies, such as the 7.1 economic adjustment measures, as nothing more than an escape from the difficulty of absolute adherence to the existing system and the existing line, and as an artifice for concealing previous failed policies and harmful effects while seeking a new "lease on life." In North Korea's case, the only person who can pursue the steps of reform/opening is Kim Jong Il, but he has declared "Don't expect even 0.0001mm of change from me." It has been several decades since Kim Il Sung directly ruled in North Korea, but since he spoke his dying injunctions, adopting a new governing line might be seen as a negation of his past achievements, and thus it has proven difficult to make any a changes representing a funda-

¹⁻Under the "Sunshine Policy," North Korea's leaders were deemed to have a will toward reform and opening, but it was believed that the country was continuously changing. To expedite change in North Korea, it was thought that the core of the "Cold War structure" – South Korea, Japan, and the US – had to transition away from their hostile policy towards North Korea. The positive attitude about change within North Korea led to an optimistic outlook. Rather than pursuing a direct strategy with the goal of changing North Korea, it was believed that if friendship and cooperation could be established between North and South, then North Korea would eventually change and a North-South economic and social community would form, leading to political unification. Thus they adopted a policy of reconciliation and cooperation, maintaining a very firm stand and showing consistency, but this did not produce sufficient changes in North Korea as intended.

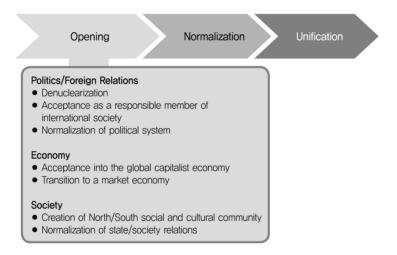
mental departure from the past.

North Korea prioritizes regime security over national security, so it is concentrating on the party and military finances without regard for the public economy. As the elements essential to preserving the system - the military, the leadership, and the people's Security Agency - have come to the fore, they are working to increase their nuclear arsenal and gain recognition as a nuclear power. Therefore we need to stop waiting for autonomous change from within and start promoting more direct strategies for inducing opening in North Korea.

In this research, opening is a concept which includes reform and opening, meaning for North Korea to primarily change through reform, rather than a sudden shock systemic change in the style of Eastern Europe. Yet the objective of North Korean opening is not to strengthen or prolong the life of the North Korean system, but to overcome its economic difficulties through systemic change, and to strengthen the South Korean initiative by increasing North Korea's reliance on South Korea, leading ultimately to the unification of North and South. Thus North Korean opening can be thought of as a process of national normalization leading to unification. For this to happen, denuclearization must be given priority. Externally, this means becoming accepted as a member of the international community, through normalization of US-North Korean relations, and building proper trade relations; internally, it means normalization of the various arms of government through normalized power structures, and

normalizing the relationship between the state and society. In North-South relations, it means forming a social and cultural community. The objective of our North Korea strategy is, through reform and opening, to improve the North Korean economy and achieve harmony between North and South, and with this foundation achieve reunification.²

(Figure 1) Objectives and Concepts in North Korean Opening



This research will analyze examples of reform and opening in socialist states such as China and Vietnam and extract lessons from them, and after analyzing the North Korean situation and its survival strategies from the political, economic, and societal dimensions, it aims to produce strategies for inducing opening

²-Statement by President Lee Myung-Bak at a meeting of the US Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.9.21.

in North Korea. After suggesting a basic direction for inducing opening, we will divide our strategy for inducing opening into two steps: before and after North Korea's strategic decision on denuclearization – and propose objectives and processes for each step.

If North Korea is to become a "normal country" through opening, a new peace structure must be established and North-South Korean relations must show qualitative development. The most important factor in this process is denuclearization. Without denuclearization, the tensions on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia cannot be eliminated, and consequently North Korea's efforts at opening, as well as development in other fields, will remain limited. So the strategy for inducing opening must work in step with the denuclearization process, and thus we suggest a process divided into two phases: before and after North Korea renounces its nuclear weapons. Of course, for the phase following denuclearization, that process requires qualitative changes brought about by the progressive accumulation of results, so it is possible that the process could begin even before denuclearization.

Rather than the technical process of freezing, disabling, verification, and discarding agreed upon at the 6-party talks, "a decision to abandon nuclear weapons" in this case means a voluntary "declaration" by the North Korean leadership (as occured in the cases of South Africa and Libya) guaranteed by follow-up talks. However, even before this "decision to abandon nuclear weapons" is made, in order to proceed with our strategy

for inducing opening, at the very least the nuclear facilities must be disabled and we must have a complete, accurate report of all nuclear programs as well as monitoring of those facilities.

Research Method and Organization

This research begins with the assumption that North Korea's opening will not be resolved by preparing the right regional environment, but rather it will require the North Korean leadership to first make a voluntary strategic decision. North Korea's leaders claim that they have the will for reform and opening, but are held back by to the "Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula" which has at its core the hostile attitude of South Korea, the US, and Japan towards North Korea. Although this attitude may have been partially convincing in the early 90s when North Korea failed in its attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the US and Japan and became isolated internationally, such excuses have lost much credibility since the mid-90s as, in spite of the Geneva accords and South Korea's unprecedented policy of tolerance, North Korea has adhered firmly to its military-first policy, made repeated long-range missile launches and nuclear tests, and is now building up a 3rd generation of hereditary leadership.³

³-Choi Jinwook, "The Lee Myung Bak Government's North Korea Policy and North Korea's Response: Proposals for a New North Korea Policy," *T'ongil Chungch'aek Yeongu*, Vol. 17 No. 1 (2008), p. 56.

In the same context, the examples of reform/opening in China and Vietnam offer implications for North Korea renouncing its nuclear program and rejoining the international community, but in the phase prior to denuclearization there are many disparities between those cases and this one. First, unlike China and Vietnam, North Korea faces limitations in taking fundamental changes that require a critical or reflective view of the past. Kim Jong Il, by upholding the Confucian tradition and appointing his father as the "eternal president," strengthened his own legitimacy as successor and secured the absolute support of the people. In other words, due to the consistency between Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, any formal declaration of "reform" in North Korea could easily be interpreted as a break with the past and is thus extremely difficult. Secondly, as seen in the cases of China and Vietnam, the most important factor in achieving reform and opening is internal political stability. From its unification in 1975 until 1985, Vietnam's economy fell to ruin, leading it to quickly move to enact the Doimoi reforms. At the time, Vietnam had a hostile relationship with the US as well as military tensions with neighboring Cambodia and China, but it was able to adopt reform measures based on the people's high degree of regime loyalty. In China as well, when it began its reforms in 1979, absolute internal support provided the foundation for change. However, North Korea's latent political instability due to chronic economic problems, loosened controls, and Kim Jong II's worsening health have taken a heavy toll on internal policy, and the leadership lacks the confidence to deal with the political unrest

that might accompany policy changes; this is its largest stumbling block in carrying out reforms.

The most challenging task of this research was defining the concept of opening and its goals; it took several workshops and internal debates for the joint researchers to reach an agreement. A similar process was required for establishing a basic direction for encouraging opening, and for selecting the goals for each phase as well as the specific goals and tasks in each area.

This paper consists of 5 chapters including the introduction. Chapter 2 analyzes the reform/opening examples of China and Vietnam, and deducts the implications for encouraging opening in North Korea. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the various dimensions of the situation in North Korea and the strategy it is pursuing for survival. Chapter 4 covers the policy for encouraging North Korean opening. In this chapter we offer a basic direction for inducing opening and a detailed process divided into two phases – before and after North Korea's decision to denuclearize. Chapter 5 is the conclusion.

Strategy for Encouraging North Korean Opening: A Basic Direction

A. Establishing firm goals and understanding of North Korea

Rather than reviving the economy and improving the peoples' lives through reform and opening, North Korea's

primary goal is to stabilize the regime through repression and control. Therefore the military and security agencies are more important than the cabinet, the finances of the party and military take priority over the public economy, and regime security takes priority over national security. This is the basic reason why, despite the strategy of tolerance towards the North taken during the Sunshine Policy, North Korea's leadership and policies have not changed. The Sunshine Policy, which perceived of the North Korean leadership as willing to reform and thus provided them with aid, was destined to run up against its own limitations.

Accordingly, in the future our North Korea policy must more explicitly specify the goal of change within North Korea. South Korea must take a leading role in resolving the problems on the peninsula out of a sense of ethnic obligation grounded in pride in South Korea's democracy and economic growth. South Korea's liberal democracy and market economy are important assets, achieved by the strength and toil of the Korean people over the last 60 years, and while concentrating on further developing these assets, we must also feel sympathy and responsibility towards the North Korean people who have been excluded from the benefits of this development, and do our best to improve their situation.

At the same time, we must maintain the spirit of extending friendship towards the North and prevent their further isolation. As closed off as the North's system is, the transition period is likely to produce violence, and even after system transition the process will be quite slow. For example, during the transitions of

the countries of Eastern Europe, the main factor in why Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia were more successful than Romania was their experience with reforms in the 50s and 60s. When Poland and Czechoslovakia underwent reforms in the 50s and 60s, a so-called "civil society" was able to form, made up of intellectuals, religious leaders, and labor unions, and during the crisis of the late 80s these groups became an alternative force to the Communist governments. In Romania, because there was no reform experience and the Stalinist one-man dictatorship of Ceauşescu endured through extreme policies of isolationism, repression, and idolization, during the crisis of 1989 there was no opposition force for the Party to negotiate with. Due to the weakness of Romanian civil society, after the revolution an alternative force failed to consolidate power, and this was the basic reason why, after a period of confusion, a Communist era nomenklatura reasserted power.

Accordingly, while it may be futile to expect the Kim Jong Il regime to embrace change, through continuous nurturing of friendly relations we must enable the next generation of leadership, or perhaps the one after that, to see the benefits of reform and opening.

B. Encouraging revitalization of the market economy

Successful opening of North Korea means its acceptance as a normal member of international society through normalization of U.S.-North Korean relations, normalization of the relationship between the state and society, and normalization of the power structure. Most important, the *songun* era economic construction, which is the economic embodiment of the *songun* policy, must be discarded. This policy has led North Korea to persist in developing an industrial structure with a high degree of capital integration, which, considering their insufficient or nonexistent capital, has severely aggravated the people's lives. While the current North Korean leadership shows no intention of implementing productive alternatives, our strategy for opening could be defined as leading them in that direction.

As a fundamental reform needed for opening, the first and most essential task is reform in the area of ownership. They must introduce a system of production responsibility in agriculture, while expanding small-scale private production and profitable activities.

Second, market factors must be institutionalized. In order to make use of a market economy generated spontaneously from below, they urgently need to prepare the institutional structures for a market economy. They must gradually reduce the indicators of the existing planned economy, prevent price distortions and expand the functions of currency and finance. They must work to revitalize their market and connect it with the international market. These suggestions operate on the premise of opening to the outside.

Third, positive follow-up measures such as price liberal-

ization, expansion of industry privatization, denationalization of business operations, and direct external opening will work to overcome macro-economic insecurities in the short term and improve the economy, while ultimately contributing to economic development.

Fourth, regarding foreign capital, in the short term it is most desirable to secure capital through direct investment. Using relatively cheap foreign capital to overcome the deficiency in domestic funds, they can transfer advanced technologies into the country through the injection of foreign funds and equipment. In the case of direct investment, foreign capital takes on the investment risk, and because their capital liquidity is low the negative impact on the North Korean domestic economy can be minimized. Naturally, for this to happen, North Korea must first build up an appropriate domestic environment to attract foreign direct investment.

Fifth, state-monopolized trade must be decentralized, and the exchange rate must be rationalized. Obviously exchange rate rationalization is connected with reforming the price system. Further, the special economic zones must be expanded and the system must be reformed to smoothly receive foreign investment.

Sixth, for the global economic system and conditions to benefit North Korean reform and transitioning, it is essential to establish relationships with international financial institutions. In the era when the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were in transition, deregulation, denationalization and the need for intervention were unpopular ideas, and freer relations between nations were emphasized. Thus the agents (states) seeking to apply political control in the transition process were weakened, and the tendency was to transfer this role to international financial institutions. In the case of China, they maintained independent control and were not greatly influenced by the readjustments in the global economy, and the external environment was extremely stable. China circa 1978 was a geopolitical card of the U.S. in its struggle with the Soviet Union, and at the time the existence of a global socialist system itself was not seen as a pressing problem.

However, in the present day, during the process of system transition North Korea is highly likely to suffer exposure to the international economic environment. In practical reality the state authorities' internal control over the country is only going to grow weaker, so that whether it can control the system transition process while establishing internal and external equilibrium will be of vital importance.

Therefore, seventh, rather than extracting capital from global institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, North Korea should utilize national capital (e.g. South Korean capital). If China and Vietnam were able to utilize funds from overseas ethnic nationals, they could sidestep interference by the international economic environment, and the process of opening would not have exerted such pressure on the internal system. However, North Korea is focused on its survival strategy rather than opening, and will struggle hard to maintain the privileged economy. Therefore, to encourage opening in North Korea, we must not create an external environment that benefits the privileged economy, and we should work to encourage the market portions of the economy. The market economy in North Korea exists because of distribution shortages. In order to encourage this market economy and build it up to hold hegemony within the North Korean economic structure, and to induce North Korea to consider opening through use of the market economy, we can explore methods of improving the distribution system.

C. A combination of package deal and South Korean-version salami tactics

The North Korea strategy employed by South Korea and the U.S. has as its goal a "comprehensive package" or "package deal" on the precondition of nuclear disarmament. According to the "Grand Bargain" plan, in which "North Korea destroys the core of its nuclear program in exchange for security guarantees and international economic aid," no significant economic cooperation or large-scale aid is possible until North Korea gives up its nuclear program.⁴ The Grand Bargain stresses that simply agreeing not to

⁴⁻On Sept. 21, President Lee Myung-Bak explained his "package deal" more explicitly, proposing the concept of a "Grand Bargain." That is, without breaking up the negotiation process into various stages, to state from the beginning the ultimate goal of "irreversible denuclearization" and offer up a

proliferate or conduct a 3rd nuclear test is not enough to produce a breakthrough on the nuclear issue or to work as a condition for aid; only North Korea's explicit decision to scrap its nuclear program can produce a breakthrough on the nuclear issue.⁵ In this process, if North Korea accepts our offer while demanding a corresponding payback, we must be prepared to respond in a flexible manner. For example, we cannot exclude the possibility that North Korea will show flexibility on the issues of POWs, separated families, and restarting a joint nuclear control commission.

At the same time, since North Korea carried out its 2nd nuclear test, resolving the nuclear issue has become more difficult, and there is growing conviction that it may be impossible to convince the Kim Jong II regime to give up its nuclear weapons. Therefore until North Korea makes a strategic decision to discard its nuclear program, we must prepare progressive "small deals" alongside the idea of a comprehensive "big deal."

Recently North Korea has sought international acceptance as a nuclear power through its nuclear tests, but if it takes a pacifying stance towards the U.S. and South Korea, we need an intermediary choice between "ostracism" and "a comprehensive package." It is time for us to make use of the "salami tactics" and

comprehensive aid blueprint in return. Yonhap News, www.yonhapnews.co.kr 2009.9.22.

⁵-In the US - DPRK joint talks planned for November 2009, North Korea is likely to make conciliatory gestures such as agreeing to halt proliferation and postpone a 3rd nuclear test in exchange for reduced US pressure on the nuclear issue.

"action for action" methods previously thought to be the exclusive specialty of North Korea. In other words, instead of completely welcoming or rejecting North Korea's pacifying gestures, we need proportionate responses corresponding to North Korea's actions. North Korea's primary concern is regime security, and for this purpose it is concentrating on nuclear development and internal control; in its policies towards the U.S. and South Korea, it can be strong or flexible as the situation requires. Thus to aid in the goal of persuading North Korea to denuclearize, we must preserve the momentum of North-South dialogue and maintain a certain level of North-South exchanges.

In fact, while keeping to the formula of the 6-party talks, the U.S. also positively considers the idea of holding direct talks and has made suggestions such as incentives and comprehensive packages as forms of threat management. So as long as North Korea resists the strategic decision to give up its nuclear weapons, it is unavoidable that we must manage the situation while promoting progressive, piecemeal changes.

For example, while North Korea clings to its nuclear weapons, rather than strategizing for sudden regime change or arranging a radical turning point in the nuclear issue by means of a "big deal" with the Kim Jong Il regime, we need to exercise patience and pursue a long-term goal of change in North Korea. Some believe that ultimately the North Korean nuclear issue cannot be completely resolved until Korea is reunified,⁶ but in fact it may be possible with a post-Kim Jong Il regime or in the

event of a systemic change. So rather than hoping for a 180 degree change in North Korean leadership and strategy, we should maintain the principle of "change through contact." We need to be aware of the fact that over the past several years, while there has been effectively no change in the North Korean strategy or way of thinking, the thinking of ordinary citizens has changed a great deal. Whatever the North Korean authorities say, the people understand that "the Leader" and "socialism in our own style" will not keep them alive; they have to save themselves.

While North Korea holds on to its nuclear weapons, there is little we can do to try to change their leadership or strategy, and even efforts to hold talks with them are not likely to succeed. Thus rather than a "big deal" hoping to convince North Korea to promptly give up its nuclear programs and begin lightning reforms in the style of China and Vietnam, a "small deal" is more realistic objective. In other words, we need to match the shortterm goals of our North Korean strategy with the easing of tensions on the peninsula and economic benefits through stability in South Korea. We should work to create the right environment so that, if North Korea should reach a truly desperate situation, rather than attacking us they will ask us for help.

⁶-Victor Cha, "Future of North Korea and South Korea-US Alliance: Adjusting to Emerging Realities," Presentation at the 4th Ilmin Forum for International Affairs and Security, Korea University International Hall, Sept. 17, 2009.

D. Increasing transparency in North Korean aid and North-South exchanges

In the policy-making phase, we must coordinate North Korean aid and North-South cooperation with the goal of change in North Korea. Previous talk of expanded North-South cooperative exchanges was limited to within South Korea, and North Korea left open only one point of contact (the Unification Bureau of the Worker's Party), so North-South exchanges could not address the goal of national reconciliation and eliminating cultural gaps. We must follow the basic principle of creating a North Korea policy that corresponds with the goal of change in North Korea.

We should rethink the meaning of our aid to North Korea and the changes in North Korea's government-society relationship. We need to pay attention to the changing dependency between the North Korean government and society and the evolving conflict between them. There have been many changes in the state-society relationship in North Korea since the economic crisis of the 1990s. Because of the economic crisis, the government lost a portion of its strict "control and protection" over the people, and the people acquired a degree of freedom in non-political areas related to daily survival. However the state, while abandoning its duty of "protection," did not lose its desire to reestablish "control."

The state's desire for control has shown conspicuously since the attempt in October 2005 to restart the distribution system. This strategy produced adverse effects in the midst of the food crisis. In 2008 as the food problems became serious, a food shortage occurred which affected only the "lower stratum of society," not the entire country. This was because of the development of market relations and the emergence of a gap between rich and poor. Along with the expanding market relations, a new class has emerged of quasi-entrepreneurial new rich, who conspire with and symbiotically depend upon state corruption. Some of these, far from suffering from food shortages, actually accumulate wealth in the niches created by the food crisis and are entering a stage of conspicuous consumption. However, the lower stratum not only fails to receive "protection" from the state, but since October 2005, has faced government interference in activities vital for their livelihoods, such as small vegetable garden cultivation and survival-based market activity.

Amidst the changing state-society relationship, North Korea's economy and its peoples' livelihoods have depended on external conditions. Therefore external actors like South Korea must work to stop the destructive cycle inside North Korea. We should work to correct North Korea's malformed market structure, the collusion between the government and the new rich, the lack of a social safety net, and state policies which work against people's day-today livelihoods. We have to be able to contribute to increasing productivity and protecting the people's way of living. Without these conditions, "humanitarian" aid will be arbitrarily used by the state and will be unable to prevent a "humanitarian" crisis or achieve its natural goals. Accordingly, under conditions in which South Korea's North Korean aid has important direct and indirect influence on North Korea's internal stability, it must be carried out with more strategic consideration.

In short, the methods and quality of exchanges are more important than concerns about the amount of aid or mutual benefits. The crucial thing is not the amount of aid, but the method by which it is carried out, and for the humanitarian aspect, monitoring essential.

〈Figure 2〉 Strategy for Encouraging North Korean Opening: Basic Direction and Sequential Tasks

Basic Direction	 Establish firm goals and understanding of NK Encourage market revitalization Combine a "comprehensive package" with South Korean salami tactics Increase transparency in North-South Exchanges 			
Prior to Denu- cleariza- tion	Objective	Building an environment conducive to North Korean opening and transition to a market economy		
	Area	Detailed Objective	Major Tasks	
	Politics/ Diplomacy	Building an environment to encourage opening	 Easing North Korea's fear of reform/opening Establishing a US/DPRK contact office and initiating talks on normalization 	
	Economy	Expanded North-South economic exchanges and international cooperative aid	 Expanding and deepening North-South exchanges Constructing a distribution center on the China-NK border Building a foundation for int'l economic cooperation Help foster agents of opening/reform 	
	Society/ Culture	Improving North Korean societal awareness of South Korea and importing outside culture	 Expanding humanitarian aid Increasing North-South cultural exchanges 	
	Objective	Comprehensive measures for transition to a market economy an bringing North Korea into the global capitalist economic system		
	Area	Detailed Objective	Major Tasks	
Post Denu- cleariza- tion	Politics/ Diplomacy	Establishing an environment for actual opening	 Systematizing North-South talks Building a peace structure on the Korean peninsula 	
	Economy	Aiding the marketization of North Korean economy and its entry into the global economic order	 Helping revise the laws and structures for the market economy Expanding development aid across the entire economy Expanding South Korea's industrial network into North Korea Developing international cooperative aid 	
	Society/ Culture	Forming a North-South cultural community	 Diversifying social exchanges into multiple areas Systematizing cultural exchanges 	

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