

# International Journal of Korean Unification Studies

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# *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*

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Korea Institute for National Unification

275, 4-19(Saigul)-Gil, Gangbuk-Ku, Seoul 142-728, Republic of Korea

TEL: (82-2) 9012 658

FAX: (82-2) 9012 545

E-Mail: [kimmik@kinu.or.kr](mailto:kimmik@kinu.or.kr)

Webpage: <http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng>

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## CONTENTS

*Feature Theme: Power Succession Process in North Korea and  
Analysis of its Internal and External Factors*

Political Dynamics of Hereditary Succession in North Korea

*Hyeong Jung Park* ..... 1

Kim Jong-un Inherits the Bomb

*Ralph Hassig & Kongdan Oh* ..... 31

Hedging Opportunities and Crises against

Pyongyang's Hereditary Succession: A Chinese Perspective

*You Ji* ..... 55

Rethinking the Six-Party Process on Korea

*Stephen Blank* ..... 88

Moscow Ponders Korea Unification

*Richard Weitz* ... 123

The Peace-keeping Role of the American Troops in South Korea

*Gabriel Jonsson* ... 155

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## Contributors

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**Hyeong Jung Park** is a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU). His main research covers the politics and economy of North Korea, inter-Korean relations, the East Asia policy of the United States, comparative dictatorships and development assistance. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Philipps University in Marburg, Germany. He has been active as a policy adviser to the government as well as humanitarian and human rights NGOs and as a commentator for Korean and foreign media. He was an Eisenhower Fellow in 2002 and a visiting fellow at the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at Brookings from 2006-2007. He has written a number of books and research and policy papers in Korean and English. His recent articles include “Changes in the Political System since the 1990s in North Korea,” *Policy Studies*, Vol. 168 (Spring 2011); *Revisiting North Korea’s ‘Change’ and Suggestions for North Korea Policy* (in Korean) (Seoul: KINU, 2009); and *North Korea’s Political System during Kim Jong-il’s Rein* (in Korean) (Seoul: KINU, 2004).

**Ralph Hassig** is an independent scholar specializing in North Korean affairs and an adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Maryland University College, where he teaches courses in social psychology, organizational behavior, consumer psychology, and political psychology. He was educated at Albion College (B.A. in psychology), UCLA (M.A. and Ph.D. in social psychology), and the University of San Francisco (M.B.A. in marketing). He has taught psychology at Albion College, George Mason University, and the

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University of Maryland University College in the United States and abroad. He has also taught marketing at the University of Southern California and California State University at Los Angeles, and English at the University of San Francisco. He is the co-author of *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Brookings Institution Press, 2000) and *The Hidden People of North Korea* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009). His recent articles on North Korea include “Military Confrontation on the Korean Peninsula,” *Korean Journal of Security Affairs* (in press), and “North Korea in 2009: The Song Remains the Same,” *Asian Survey* (January/February 2010).

**Kongdan Oh** is a research staff member at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. She was formerly a member of the political science department of the RAND Corporation and has taught courses at a number of universities. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a Korea Working Group member at the United States Institute of Peace, a member of the Board of Directors of the United States Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, and the co-founder and former co-director of The Korea Club of Washington, D.C. She received her B.A. at Sogang University and her M.A. at Seoul National University. She subsequently earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her recent publications include “North Korea’s Clash of Cultures,” *North Korean Review* (Fall 2008); “The United States between

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Japan and Korea,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* (June 2010); and *Military Confrontation on the Korean Peninsula* (IDA, 2011). Her new co-authored book on North Korea, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom*, was published in October 2009 by Rowman & Littlefield.

**You Ji** is a reader at the School of Social Science at the University of New South Wales. He has authored three books, including *The Armed Forces of China* (Allen & Unwin, 1999), and numerous articles. His papers appear in journals such as *The Problem of Communism*, *The China Journal*, *The Pacific Review*, *Comparative Strategy*, *Asia Policy*, *Japanese Studies*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *The Naval War College Review*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and *Contemporary Security Policy*. His latest articles include “China’s Response to the Deadly Triangle: Arms Race, Territorial Disputes and Energy Security,” *CLAWS Journal* (Summer 2010); “Politics as the Foundation for a Healthy Balance of Power,” *Asia Policy*, No. 8, 2009; “Friends in Need or Comrades in Arms: Sino-Russian Military Cooperation,” in Andrew Tan (ed.), *The Global Arms Trade* (Routledge, 2010); and “The Soviet Military Model and the Breakdown of the Sino-USSR Alliance,” in Thoms Bernstein and Hua-yu Li (eds.), *The Soviet Influence on China in the 1950s* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010). You Ji is on the editorial board of *The China Journal*, *Provincial China*, *East Asia Policy*, *Asian and Middle East Studies* and *Journal of Contemporary China*.

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**Stephen Blank** is a professor of Russian National Security Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College. Dr. Blank has been a professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute since 1989. From 1998-2001 he was the Douglas MacArthur Professor of Research at the War College. Prior to this appointment Dr. Blank was an associate professor for Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education at the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base. Dr. Blank received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Russian History from the University of Chicago. He has published over 750 articles and monographs on Soviet/Russian, U.S., Asian, and European military and foreign policies. His most recent book is *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command* (London: Global Markets Briefing, 2006). He has also edited and published the following books: *Prospects for U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009) and *Natural Allies?: Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005). Dr. Blank is also the author of the study *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994).

**Richard Weitz** is a senior fellow and director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute. His current research includes regional security developments relating to Europe, Eurasia, and East Asia as well as U.S. foreign, defense, and homeland security policies. Dr. Weitz also is a non-resident senior advisor on the Project on

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National Security Reform (PNSR), where he oversees case study research, and a non-resident senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), where he contributes to various defense projects. Dr. Weitz has published or edited several books and monographs, including *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow* (Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2010); *Global Security Watch-Russia* (Praeger Security International, 2009); a volume of *National Security Case Studies* (Project on National Security Reform, 2008); *China-Russia Security Relations* (Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2008); *Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2008); and *Mismanaging Mayhem: How Washington Responds to Crisis* (Praeger Security International, 2008). Dr. Weitz is a graduate of Harvard College (B.A. with highest honors in government), the London School of Economics (M.Sc. in international relations), Oxford University (M.Phil. in politics), and Harvard University (Ph.D. in political science).

**Gabriel Jonsson** is an associate professor and a lecturer in Korean Studies in the Department of Oriental Languages at Stockholm University, where he received his Ph.D. in Korean Studies in 1996. He also has a B.A. in East Asian Studies with a major in Korean language from Stockholm University in 1987. His research focuses on inter-Korean relations. He published *Peace-keeping in the Korean Peninsula: The Role of Commissions* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009) and “Challenges and Conflict Management on the Korean Peninsula:

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The 1968 Pueblo Incident,” in Ramses Amer and Keyouan Zou (eds.), *Conflict Management and Dispute Settlement in East Asia* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011). Previous publications include *Towards Korean Reconciliation: Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006). He is a regular visitor to Korea and was a guest researcher at the Korea Institute for National Unification in 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2010.



# *Political Dynamics of Hereditary Succession in North Korea*

*Hyeong Jung Park*

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the background, problems and political dynamics related to the hereditary succession currently underway in North Korea. The succession to Kim Jong-un has been prepared amid relatively challenging internal and external conditions. The consolidation of Kim Jong-un's power should solve three political challenges. The first is to inherit and repackage Kim Jong-il's power legacy. The second is to reorganize the party-state's higher power agencies and adapt them to new realities in the country. The third is to build Kim Jong-un's own personal power base. There are four main structural factors which can influence the future trajectories of political succession and North Korean politics: regime survival and hereditary succession; ruler-state relations; ruler-society relations; relations between foreign powers and domestic actors. The combination of these four structural factors and the four political actors within and without the regime - hard-liners, soft-liners, moderate oppositions and maximalist oppositions - will determine the future trajectories of North Korean politics.

**Key Words:** hereditary succession, regime survival, Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un, political change

## **Introduction**

Kim Jong-il suffered a stroke in August 2008 and retreated from the public stage for two months. Following his return in October 2008, two important changes were initiated. First, North Korea's internal and external policies have become significantly tougher. Second, the hereditary succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un has been promoted in earnest. In fact, these two factors have become intermingled, making it hard to differentiate the one from the other.

Since 2009, North Korea's core political agenda has been to promote the hereditary succession. In this regard, there have been several reorganizations of personalities and agencies, and Kim Jong-un has been named as the initiator of North Korea's major actions and policies. The major elements of the reorganization included: a revision of the Constitution and a reshuffle of personnel and agencies carried out from February to April 2009; the selection of Jang Sung Taek as a vice chairman of Defense Commission and the appointment of a new premier and ministers at the extraordinary Supreme People's Assembly session in June 2010; and the restoration of various offices of the Central Party and the emergence of new officials at the Party Delegate's Congress in September 2010. The incidents and policies reportedly made for or initiated by Kim Jong-un included the '150- and 100-day production battles' in 2009, the launch of the 'Kwangmyong satellite' in April 2009, the fireworks rally in May 2009, the currency exchange measures in November 2009, the artillery firing exercises in the West Sea and the attack on the Cheonan in March 2010, Kim Jong-il's visits to China in May and August 2010, the second meeting in a year of the Supreme People's Assembly in June 2010, and the Party Delegate's Conference in September 2010. The second nuclear device test in May 2009 was the only major event for which Kim Jong-un was not made responsible.

This paper analyzes the background, problems and political dynamics related to the hereditary succession currently underway in North Korea. Section two is devoted to pointing out the deteriorating conditions threatening regime survival as coincidental background to the political succession. The third section elucidates three political challenges to be overcome in establishing the succession. First is the task of inheriting and repackaging Kim Jong-il's power legacy. Second is the need to reorganize and adapt the party-state's higher power agencies to new realities in the country. Third is the need to build Kim Jong-un's own personal power base. Section four of this paper specifies four main structural factors which may influence the future trajectories of political succession and North Korean politics: the first is regime survival and hereditary succession; the remaining three concern the development of ruler-state, ruler-society, and foreign power-domestic actor relations, respectively. Section five of this paper will assess regime stability and the possibility of political change in the process of or after the succession.

### **The Advent of the Double Crisis of Regime Survival and Hereditary Succession**

The period from late 2008 to early 2009 could be seen as a turning point which opened a new era in North Korean politics. In this period the regime was confronted with a double crisis of regime survival and political succession. Usually the two are unrelated. When Kim Jong-il was designated as successor, North Korea remained relative stable internally and enjoyed relatively secure environment externally. Conversely, as will be discussed, Kim Jong-un's succession is being prepared amid relatively challenging internal and external conditions. In a nutshell, North Korea currently suffers from the dual stresses of planning a political succession and struggling for regime survival amid demanding conditions. Of the

two, regime survival is more important than the success of the hereditary succession. Only when the regime was able to overcome the challenges to its survival can the succession be accomplished.

### ***Challenges and Crisis for Regime Survival***

North Korea has pursued five strategic objectives, which will be discussed below, since 2005. By August 2008, it had become clear that all five objectives have run up against serious difficulties. There are two options in this situation. The first one is to change or revise the objectives and the second is to break through the difficulties. North Korea opted for the latter in late 2008 and early 2009, by toughening its policy positions both domestically and externally.

What, then, are these five strategic objectives? The first is to increase and enhance the North's nuclear arsenal and to gain acknowledgment as nuclear power. The second is to normalize relations and conclude a peace treaty with the U.S., while still being acknowledged as a nuclear power. The third is to avoid discussing nuclear issues with South Korea and to manipulate inter-Korean relations in such a way as to induce the South to assist the North Korean regime economically. The fourth is to maintain an anti-reformist policy domestically through such measures as strengthening repression against the market while actively promoting foreign currency-earning businesses through export enclaves, mineral exports, and foreign assistance. The fifth is to maintain internal political supremacy by strengthening various internal security organizations and measures, and thereby create favorable conditions for the hereditary succession to be successful.

The prospect for achieving those objectives was not so bad at least from February 13, 2007 to the end of that year.<sup>1</sup> While the second inter-

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<sup>1</sup>- Park Hyeong Jung, *Bughan 'byeonhwa'eui jaepyeonggawa daebugjeongchaeg banghyang* [Revisiting North Korea's 'Change' and Suggestions for North Korea Policy] (Seoul: KINU,

Korean summit seemed to have guaranteed a continuous flow of assistance from the South, North Korea strengthened its repression of market activities noticeably since October 2007. Regrettably for North Korea, however, conditions have deteriorated since 2008 with the emergence of a conservative administration in South Korea. South Korea's new administration took a more principled position on such issues as denuclearization, assistance to the North, and the conclusion of peace treaty, and intensified cooperation with the U.S. By August 2008, it had become clear that the negotiations on denuclearization had reached a deadlock. Simultaneously, Kim Jong-il suffered a stroke. All this meant that North Korea was confronted with not only worsening external conditions but also a high potential for internal instability. It was believed that North Korea would not only be contained and sanctioned because of its nuclear weapons development but also not be able to maintain internal stability under its anti-reformist economic policy without a continuous flow of massive assistance from the South. If North Korea could not reverse the situation, its regime would become doomed. In reaction to these grim prospects, the North Korean regime took on aggressive postures both internally and outwardly. Since the end of 2008, North Korea has taken a tougher line in foreign policy in an effort to coerce South Korea and the U.S. to accept the strategic objectives mentioned above, while also toughening up its domestic policy to increase control over the society.

### **Three Political Challenges to a Successful Succession**

From the Kim Jong-il's standpoint, the problem of succession came up at an unfavorable time. Just when external and internal conditions

were getting worse, Kim Jong-il's health deteriorated, making it imperative to start the hereditary succession in earnest. The problem is that in personal dictatorships, the changing of the supreme leader creates a period of increased potential for instability.<sup>2</sup>

For Kim Jong-il and Co., hereditary succession must have been the best option. This is because power has been based on personal loyalty to Kim Jong-il and authority has been concentrated in him. Thus, hereditary succession is advantageous in several ways. First, it protects the incumbent ruler during the process of power succession.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other candidates, the son is less inclined to betray the incumbent ruler in order to accelerate the speed of succession or to protect himself from the incumbent. Second, the hereditary succession is a better choice for guaranteeing the continuity of the current distribution of power and established privileges. In such an extremely concentrated system of power as North Korea has, if one of the incumbent's lieutenants were to become a successor, the power distribution would be seriously disturbed. This could lead to serious power struggles among the elites, driving the whole political system into crisis or making it necessary to eliminate some of them. In comparison, a hereditary succession could be achieved rather peacefully without seriously disturbing the current status of the elites or their system of privileges.

Based on this background, in consolidating Kim Jong-un's power the regime must solve three political challenges: first, the inheritance and repackaging of Kim Jong-il's power legacy; second, the reorganization of central agencies so as to make them more compatible with the changed conditions; third, the building of Kim Jong-un's independent power base.

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<sup>2</sup>- Gordon Tullock, *Autocracy* (Norwell: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), pp. 151-161; Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics* 59 (July 2007), pp. 595-828.

<sup>3</sup>- Jason Brownlee, *ibid*, pp. 595-828.

### ***Inheriting and Repackaging Kim Jong-il's Power Legacy***

As mentioned, a hereditary succession attempts not to disturb the established privileges of incumbent elites. This involves an informal contract in which loyalty is offered to the new leader in exchange for preservation of established privileges. In this regard, Kim Jong-un's power structure should inherit the organizations and personalities established during Kim Jong-il's rein without many changes. After the Party Delegate's Conference in September 2010, it has been mostly the existing members of the elite who have been promoted and have filled the empty posts of the restored central party organizations.<sup>4</sup> It is also observed that many sons of the old guard have been elevated to the status of new leaders of the system, and some of the younger ones in their early forties and late thirties have organized an exclusive club called 'Pongwhacho' and promoted themselves.<sup>5</sup> All these developments tacitly signal that in general the status of incumbent elites will not change much, even with the power succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un. This does not mean that the new power structure for Kim Jong-un will remain the same as his father's. The central power organizations and their relations may experience changes, while some may have to be purged and new ones promoted. This will be discussed below.

### ***Reorganization of Central Power Agencies***

Since the 1990s, not only have North Korea's economy and society experienced significant changes but also the regime's style of rule has been

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<sup>4</sup>- Cheon Hyun Joon, "North Korea's 3<sup>rd</sup> KWP Delegates' Conference: Analysis and Outlook," *KINU Online Series*, co 10-36.

<sup>5</sup>- Jang Yong Hun, "Bugghan '2se jeongchi' myeonmyeon ... seungseungjanggu vs. bangtang group" ["Aspects of the second generation politics ... some are promoting themselves ... some are living a dissipated life"], *The Unified Korea* (May 2011), pp. 30-41.

adapted to a changing environment. Unlike the late 1980s, when the party was regarded as the core instrument of Kim Jong-il's rule, since 1995 the regime's 'military-first politics' have been dominant and other changes have come about.<sup>6</sup> The organizational composition and role distribution in the upper power agencies should be modified for Kim Jong-un's rein to reflect the new conditions of rule in North Korea. In this regard, Kim Jong-un's future rein will be supported by the three main pillars of the military, the security organizations and the party.

### **The Military**

The North Korean power system supporting Kim Jong-il's personal rein was reorganized in the mid-1990s around a central core of the military, replacing the Party which had hitherto filled that role. This change was represented by the introduction of 'military-first politics' in 1995 and was intended to deal with the increased challenges to regime survival at the time due to the virtual collapse of the state's economic planning and ration systems, the decreased impact of the Party's ideological and organizational work, and the increase in activities outside the direct purview of the Party-state structure, such as market expansion.

In early 2009, with the revision of the Constitution and personnel reinforcements, the Defense Commission, as the representative organization of 'military-first politics,' enhanced its stature and practical importance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>- Jinwook Choi and Meredith Shaw, "The Rise of Kim Jong-Eun and the Return of the Party," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2010, pp. 177-185; Park Hyeong Jung, *Kim Jong-il sidae eui bughaneui jeongchicheje* [North Korea's Political System during Kim Jong-il's Rein] (Seoul: KINU, 2004).

<sup>7</sup>- Baeg Seung Ju, "2009 bughan heonbubeui gughangwuiwonhoe(jang) gwonhan ganghwaedamgin gugnae jeongchijeog hameui pyeongga" ["The political meaning of the promoted status of the Defense Commission and its Chairman in the 2009 constitutional revision"], Seminar on the revision of the Constitution in 2009 and changes in North Korean system held by the Research Institute for Security Studies in Seoul (October 20, 2009), pp. 67-82.

This change was facilitated by heightened concerns of a regime survival crisis and demonstrated the regime's readiness to implement tougher policies in order to deal with the crisis. North Korea's tougher external policy since the late 2008 seems to have been implemented by a new group of younger generals who have advanced quickly since 2008.<sup>8</sup> These are led by Lee Young Ho (currently chief of General Staff, vice chairman of the Party Central Military Commission and permanent member of the Politburo Standing Committee) and consolidated in the Party's Central Military Commission, to which Kim Jong-un was nominated as vice chairman at the Party Delegate's Conference in September 2010.

It can be construed that the military has taken advantage of the enhanced feeling of crisis and the necessity for a tougher attitude toward the outside in order to enhance its own political voice and status. In other words, North Korea's tougher external policy originated partly from the military's interest in enhancing its domestic political status and thereby pressuring other domestic actors to respect the military's privileges. As a high-level South Korean official mentioned in February 2011, "The military has taken an important role in North Korea's decision-making from August 2008, when Kim Jong-il had his stroke, up to today."<sup>9</sup> It can also be observed that in economic matters, the military has maintained its voice<sup>10</sup>: the military has rather successfully resisted the measures for downsizing which have been pursued by the Central Party

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<sup>8</sup>- Go Jae Hong, "Bugthaneui daenamjeongchaeggwa woorieui daeung bangan" ["North Korea's South Korea policy and suggestions for our policy"], Annual spring seminar held by North Korea Studies Association on March 27, 2009.

<sup>9</sup>- No Hyodong and Jeong Myo Myeong, "Bug gunbu, Mie idaerogameyeon haegchamhwa gyeonggo" ["North Korea's military warned the U.S. of nuclear disaster, if things continue as they are now"], *Yonhap News*, February 21, 2011.

<sup>10</sup>- Park Hyeong Jung, "Bugthaneui hugyecheje guchuggwa naebu jeongse (2010-2011)" ["North Korea's succession and domestic politics"], Seminar on North Korea's succession and the issue of denuclearization co-hosted by the International Association for Regional Studies and the Korea Institute for National Unification (April 13, 2011), pp. 19-20.

since 2005<sup>11</sup>; some important economic-vested interests were transferred from the Party to the military since 2009; in dealing with the negative aftermath of the currency exchange measures in 2010, the military vetoed measures detrimental to its interests; and the trade companies affiliated with the military still play a critical role in North Korea's foreign currency earning activities.

All these activities by the military hint at its efforts to play a pivotal role in the succession process from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un and to remain as a dominant player in the future North Korean power politics. This means, on the one hand, that Kim Jong-un's power system will be dependent on the military's support and, on the other that Kim Jong-un must reorganize and rein in the military in order to be successful as heir.

### **The Security Organizations**

Next to the military, the security organizations will make up the core of Kim Jong-un's power base. As moves to build up Kim Jong-un's power have started in earnest since January 2009, Kim Jong-il has reportedly given him some basic guidance for setting up his personal power structure: "My political structure has been centered on the military; General Kim (Jong-un) should adopt an information-based political system centered on the Ministry of State Security."<sup>12</sup> In reality, it can be verified that Kim Jong-un has endeavored to construct his power structure mainly based on organizations related to security and information, while enhancing the status of the latter in North Korea's politics. He reportedly took over leadership of the Ministry of State Security in March 2009.<sup>13</sup> In May of

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<sup>11</sup> - Park Hyeong Jung, "Kim Jong-il, the Military and the Party, and Kim Jong-un: The Power Politics behind Market Expansion and Market Crackdown," *KINU Online Series*, no 10-12.

<sup>12</sup> - Kim Jong Hyun, "Bug hugyeja Kim Jong-un choegeun sajin gonggae" ["North Korea goes public with Kim Jong-un's recent picture"], *Yonhap News*, April 20, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> - Bag Seong U, "Kim Jong-uni bughan nae bimilgyeongchal jojigin guggaancheonbowibueui

the same year, U Dong Chuk, the Vice Minister of State Security, was promoted, completing an advancement from major (April 1992) to lieutenant general in 17 years; U was simultaneously elected as vice chairman of Defense Commission. In addition, after one year, he was promoted once again in April 2010 to the rank of general. The status of the Ministry of People's Security was upgraded when Ju Sang Sung, the minister of People's Security, was promoted to the Defense Commission.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Korean affix on the name of the Ministry of People's Security was upgraded from 'seong' to 'bu,' and its affiliation was changed from the Cabinet to the Defense Commission.<sup>15</sup> This signaled that this ministry will prevail among security-related organizations, whereas the Ministry of State Security dominated during the first half of the 1990s and the Military Security Command dominated after 1995. In addition, in early 2009 Kim Jong-un merged the Operations Department and Bureau 35 under the Central Party with the Reconnaissance Department under the Ministry of People's Armed Forces. The new organization was named the General Department of Reconnaissance, and Kim Jong-un reportedly took charge of all authority over its management.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the father and son have increased their on-the-spot guidance visits to security-related organizations.

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'bujang'euro' ["Kim Jong-un has become the chief of North Korea's secret police, the Ministry of State Security"], *Radio Free Asia*, December 31, 2009.

<sup>14</sup>- He was replaced by Lee Myeong Su in April 2011 at the annual session of Supreme People's Assembly.

<sup>15</sup>- Choe Seon Young, "Bug Inminboanbu geubgusang ... jumin bongyeog tongje 'sinhotan'" ["The sudden rise of the Ministry of People's Security ... Signal for increased repression of the people"], *Yonhap News*, April 6, 2010.

<sup>16</sup>- Ju Seong Ha, "Gun-dang jeongbogwonryeog tonghaphan jeongchal chonggugeun Kim Jong-un jaggpum ... mwonga boyeojuryeo ganggyeongdopal" ["The General Reconnaissance Bureau unifies the information power of the military and the Party and was created under the initiative of Kim Jong-un to demonstrate his abilities through hard-line provocations"], *The Dong-A Ilbo*, April 22, 2010.

The enhanced importance of security and information organizations reflects that North Korea can no longer be effectively controlled through its Party organizations and its planned economy system as in the past.<sup>17</sup> As the regime lost much of its capacity to penetrate and control the society and the elites through the Party organizations and the planned economy, it alternately strengthened its security and information organizations as well as its Penal Code. The security organizations were assigned the task of containing various potential sources of political instability such as popular dissatisfaction with ongoing policy failures, the increasing cultural penetration from the outside world including South Korea, the breakdown of social discipline due to an increase in illegal activities for the sake of livelihood as well as organizational crimes. The enhanced importance of security organizations also shows that Kim Jong-un's succession regime will have to maintain a high level of fear among the population to deter political resistance to its policies, which can hardly be popular with the people. In a nutshell, under Kim Jong-un's rein, the security organizations will play the pivotal role in crisis deterrence which the party has played in the past, and their importance will be recognized in the future.

### **The Party**

Till the end of 1980s, the Party has been the core political instrument of the personal dictatorship of Kim Jong-il. The Party's most important function has been to provide political security by penetrating all entities of society and the state and by monitoring and controlling their political activities as well as the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. The

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<sup>17</sup>-Park Hyeong Jung, "Bughaneseo 1990nyeongae Jeongchicheje byeonhwa" ["Changes in the political system since the 1990s in North Korea"], *Policy Studies*, Vol. 168 (Spring 2011), pp. 103-130.

changed environment since the 1990s made it impossible for the Party to continue its traditional political security function. Nowadays, the penal and public security functions of the security organizations are regarded as more effective than the political functions of the Party in deterring and managing social and political deviance. In addition, the policy formulation and implementation roles of the Party have significantly decreased due to the enhanced responsibilities of Defense Commission in this regard. What is worse, because the interests of the military are regarded as supreme, it is not easy for the Party to pursue a set of interests that run contrary to the wishes of the military.

It is true that a number of empty seats in major organizations of the Central Party were filled with new personnel at the Party Delegates' Conference in September 2009.<sup>18</sup> It will be another story, however, to make them effective. This will require a serious restructuring of tasks and authority among the upper agencies of the party-state, a process which will encounter resistance from the military in general, especially the Defense Commission, the main beneficiary of the current structure. As long as internal and external conditions seemingly make it imperative to continue with 'military-first politics,' it will not be easy for the Central Party organizations to recover their previous reputation and effectiveness as the backbone of both the personal dictatorship and the nation.

The good news for the Party is that it is still capable of executing certain political functions which cannot be taken over by other organizations. The first such function is the political legitimization and ideological integration of the elites and the people. The Party will remain politically indispensable to Kim Jong-un because the succession cannot solely depend on coercion and fear. Therefore, the Party will still be useful to

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<sup>18</sup>-Jinwook Choi and Meredith Shaw, "The Rise of Kim Jong-Eun and the Return of the Party," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol.19, No. 2, 2010, pp. 188-192.

him as an instrument for political propaganda and indoctrination. Second, the Party still has the capacity to articulate different policies and interests from those of the military and to be used to realize them. Even if the Party has lost its capacity to be a pivotal political actor, it still has greater potential in this regard than other organizations. In addition, relative to the security and military organizations, the Party has greater political sensitivity to the changing feelings of the population. The political problems stemming from the policy failures of the military-first political regime will have to be dealt with by the Party in the future. The membership of the Party, though weakened in its prestige, still maintains a corporate consciousness and demonstrates signs of participating in the roles and privileges of the ruling group. It is very important in North Korea to have political connections and protectors in order to gain better opportunities for commercial activities and enrichment through corruption and rent assignment.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the reward of Party membership still functions to co-opt individuals as regime loyalists. Fourth, the Party can still play its traditional role of monitoring and controlling the activities of the Party, state and mass organizations, which are still in operation. Also, as long as the state sector remains dominant in North Korea, the Party's traditional role of penetrating and controlling the former will remain essential to regime maintenance. In comparison, the security organizations will be mainly in charge of punishing and controlling deviance originating from increasing activities outside the state sector.

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<sup>19</sup>-Choe Bong Dae, "1990nyeondaemal ihu dosi sajeog bumunenei sijanghwawa dosigagueui gyeongjejeog gyecheung bunhwa" ["The marketization of the private sector in the cities and the economic stratification of city households since the late 1990s"], *Current Studies in North Korea*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (August 2008), pp. 7-41.

### *Construction of Kim Jong-un's Personal Power Base*

Kim Jong-un's methods for constructing a personal power base differ from his father's. Kim Jong-il built his personal power starting from the Central Party, especially the Department of Organization and Guidance and the Department of Propaganda. The expansion of his power fully destroyed the Party's autonomy and legitimacy and transformed it into a political security organization, which monitors and controls all individuals in all aspects of their works and lives.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, Kim Jong-un started from the military and security organizations. This difference in starting points reflects the changed conditions. Because the problems caused by policy failures and reduced legitimacy are much more serious in the son's period of advancement than in his father's, Kim Jong-un has to be more dependent on the coercive organizations of the military and security and transform them into pliant instruments in support of him. Whether the succession is successful depends on whether he can establish firm control over these two agencies. In this context, one of the most important tasks of his domestic policy will be to provide their organizations and operations with enough money and to protect the privileges of their agents.<sup>21</sup> The hereditary succession to Kim Jong-un will remain stable if he can guarantee their loyalty and make them fully subservient to him. In this case, even if some challenges are posed by the population or the elites, his regime will be able to overcome them and ensure restabilization.

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<sup>20</sup>-Hyeon Seong Il, "Bughaneui Nodongdang gyuyaggaejeonggwa 3dae seseub" ["The revision of Party Bylaws and the hereditary succession"], Seminar on the revision of the Party Bylaws and the hereditary succession held by Research Institute for Strategic Studies (February 7, 2011), pp. 19-20.

<sup>21</sup>-About Kim Jong-un's activities in this regard in 2010-2011, refer to Park Hyeong Jung, "Bughaneui hugye chejew guchuggwa naebu jeongse (2010-2011)" ["North Korea's succession and internal situation (2010-2011)"], pp. 2-7.

On the other hand, Kim Jong-un should be provided with counter-mechanisms in case of their betrayal. These should make it impossible for the military to betray him or for him to be held hostage to the military and security organizations.<sup>22</sup> First, for Kim Jong-un's personal safety, praetorian guards should be established with sufficient strength to match attacks by the regular army. Second, he should be personally put in charge of various security organizations inside and outside of the army and empowered with the authority to check up on the military and individual security organizations. Third, the military should be kept internally divided. Fourth, as a balance to the military and security organizations, the Party should be guaranteed a certain level of functionality and authority. In reality, the Party Delegates' Conference of September 2010 was held for this purpose. As mentioned above, though weakened, the Party still carries out essential functions of political security and political engineering which cannot be done by the military and security organizations. The problem is that the advancement of the military and security groups has shrunk the Party. The military-first political structure, however, can become a burden to Kim Jong-un, as it is associated with policy failures, the estrangement of the public, and security conflicts with neighboring countries. Kim Jong-un should maintain the higher profile of the Central Party organizations, avoid being captivated by the military's interests, and keep the civilian elites co-opted. If, at some time in the future, Kim Jong-un decides to take a policy course different from the military-first option, the need for political assistance from the Party organization will become much greater than it is now.

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<sup>22</sup> Barbara Geddes, "How Autocrats Defend Themselves against Armed Rivals," Prepared for presentation at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Toronto, 2009; Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 44-74.

## **Four Factors Influencing the Future of Hereditary Succession**

Various factors can influence the process and ultimate result of the hereditary succession. Four factors will be mentioned here. The first is the external factor of whether North Korea can succeed in coercing neighboring countries to accept its strategic objectives or whether it should accept their demands. The other three are related to three internal structural developments in the future: the ruler's relations with state institutions, the ruler's relations with the elites in the society, and these three actors' relations with foreign powers.

### ***Regime Survival and Hereditary Succession***

As mentioned above, the launch of Kim Jong-un as successor coincided with a toughening of North Korea's internal and external policies. Since then North Korea has attempted to accomplish five strategic objectives to guarantee its survival as a "strong and prosperous country." The problem has been that their goals have been in contradiction with neighboring countries' wishes for denuclearization and reform in North Korea and they have been prone to increased external security tensions and internal economic stagnation. North Korea has stuck to its objectives anyhow, while proceeding with a gradual transfer of power to Kim Jong-un since the early 2009. The questions of whether North Korea can maintain its stability and whether the political succession can succeed both depend heavily on the getting positive results from tough internal and external policies which North Korea has taken since late 2008.

Two extreme cases can be imagined. One is a situation in which South Korea and the United States are coerced to fully accept North Korea's demands. In this case, Kim Jong-un's succession system would have the optimal environment and prosper without any major revision of

the current policy postures. The other extreme is North Korea's complete surrender to South Korean and American demands for denuclearization, reform and opening. This would mean that North Korea would have to shift to policy objectives in total contradiction with those now being pursued. Therefore, this scenario cannot be achieved without torpedoing the power transition to Kim Jong-un and the establishment of an alternative power structure in North Korea.

At some point of time in the future, North Korea could try for a negotiated compromise with South Korea and the United State especially with regard to denuclearization. The more favorable the outcome is to North Korea's regime, the greater the possibility that the political succession will be successful. The more favorable it is to South Korea's current positions, the lesser the possibility of a successful succession.

### *The Development of Ruler-State Relations*

Ruler-state relations are related to the degree to which the patronage networks radiating from the ruler penetrate the state institutions - especially the military - and the dictator's success in wresting autonomy away from the state institutions and incumbents of those institutions who seek to retain autonomy.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned above, Kim Jong-un primarily took control of the military and security organizations, subsequently restored the organizations of the Central Party, and in general reemployed established elites. As long as he can maintain firm control over the military and security organizations, alienation against the hereditary succession will not become strong enough to threaten its success. Inevitably, it will be necessary to reshuffle the personnel and organizational structure in the

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Snyder, "Paths out of Sultanistic Regimes: Combining Structural and Voluntarist Perspective," H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz (eds.), *Sultanistic Regimes* (Washington, D.C.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 53.

process of the political succession to purge some of the established elites and promote new personnel. Nevertheless, open opposition will remain sporadic and ineffective, since the risks of joining in dissident behavior will remain high as long as the military and security continue to be tightly controlled by Kim Jong-un. Individual elites will calculate that it would be better to remain a cooperative part of the ruling group, even with reduced benefits, than to participate in a conspiracy to overthrow the regime and risk everything without an overwhelming probability of success.<sup>24</sup> If Kim Jong-un can successfully rein in the elites through above-mentioned mechanism, the regime will be unified under the dominance of the hard-liners and there will be little political space left open for soft-liners aspiring for independence from the dictator.

### *The Development of Ruler-Society Relations*

North Korea's system depends on how well the patronage network penetrates civil society, co-opting societal elites through material rewards.<sup>25</sup> In the past, the Party organization and the planned economy played the essential role in penetration and co-optation, eliminating any noticeable opposition in North Korea. Since the 1990s, with the weakening of these two instruments, the regime has tried to strengthen coercive intervention through the military and various penal security mechanisms. Despite the regime's countermeasures, its patronage toward and control over society have seriously weakened since the 1990s. As a consequence, various conflicts between the regime and society will inevitably increase, though they will remain sporadic in the near future. Even worse for North Korea, human rights groups and other NGOs outside of North Korea

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<sup>24</sup>-Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup>-Snyder, *ibid.*, p. 55.

could function as a sort of maximalist opposition which wishes to overthrow the regime. Despite the increased potential for conflict between the regime and society, in the foreseeable future discontent cannot be openly expressed and accidental clashes and disturbances, if they occur, will remain under the regime's control.

The important factor in the future development of ruler-society relations in North Korea will be regime's attitude and policy toward the market. Though the regime might not like the expansion of the market, it cannot deny reality. It would be better for the regime to accept the reality of the expanded market tacitly, if not formally, and attempt to penetrate and control it to its benefit. This could also open up opportunities to use the market to support regime survival, rather than be threatened by it. The regime's policy toward the market can be summarized in three points: the first is to guarantee the transfer of economic surpluses produced by the market to the state and its officials through state tax policies and coercion. The second is to co-opt the emerging merchants and entrepreneurs to form a power coalition to hinder the emergence of capitalists independent of state control. The third is to prevent the market from growing too strong through intermittent direct attacks and the establishment of obstacles to growth.<sup>26</sup>

These policies have been relatively successful. The North Korean regime, its organizations and officials have financed themselves by taxing and exploiting market agents and directly participating in commercial activities.<sup>27</sup> It is not considered peculiar to see officials enriching themselves

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<sup>26</sup> - Similar examples can be found in Senegal and Cuba. Catherine Boone, "State building in the African countryside: Structure and politics at the grassroots," *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4. (1998), pp. 1-31; Javier Corrales, "The Gatekeeper State: Limited Economic Reforms and Regime Survival in Cuba, 1989-2002," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2, June 2004, pp. 35-65.

<sup>27</sup> - Park Hyeong Jung, "Bughan 'Byeonhwa'eui jaepyeonggawa daebug jeongchaeg," pp. 23-124.

through corruption and securing privileged niches in the market. Anyone who wishes to be rich should carry out his or her private commercial activities as a public employee of a trading company run by an influential party-state agency and extract patronage from powerful organizations and/or officials through regular payments and/or bribes. The regime enforces various regulations to prevent markets from becoming too powerful and to keep them docile under its control. It has even tried to reinforce the 'planned system' and has carried out direct attacks on the market through currency exchange measures.

### ***The Development of Foreign Power-Domestic Actor Relations***

This category concerns the degree to which rulers or domestic actors are dependent on foreign patrons.<sup>28</sup> For now, China is Kim Jong-un's patron and South Korea and the United States are his foreign adversaries. Though there is no organized opposition to the regime inside North Korea, an increasing number of North Korean citizens are establishing contacts with maximalist opposition groups outside North Korea.

Up to now, the North Korean regime and China have established friendly relations of convenience while harboring mistrust.<sup>29</sup> North Korea's five strategic objectives, mentioned above, are not fully in harmony with Chinese interests. Nevertheless, China has supported North Korea, while accepting some negative expenses uncomplainingly due to worries about the uncertainty that may emanate from any change to the status quo. There are two situations China would like to avoid: the first is for North Korea to become instable, and the second is for the North to improve relations with South Korea and the United States to the point that they

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<sup>28</sup>- Snyder, *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>- Michael D. Swaine, "China's North Korea Dilemma," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 30, Fall 2009.

supersede its relations with China. North Korea may be useful to China because its existence can divert the power of South Korea and the United States and thereby lessen their pressure on China.<sup>30</sup> For its part, North Korea depends on to China's patronage without a deep degree of trust because it lacks an alternative. Although North Korea asks for Chinese help, it rejects China's demands for reciprocity. Short of all-out war or a serious infringement on Chinese interests, China will remain relatively indifferent to North Korea's provocative foreign and security policies, because any attempt to interfere with them would seriously harm North Korea's leverage against South Korea and would doom the former in its relations with the latter. North Korea is prepared to accept Chinese support in its management of the domestic economy and politics, but it will reject or limit any constraints or influence China may attempt to exert. If North Korea must increase its economic dependence on China, it should be worried about the possibility that, at a critical moment, it may be pressured to accept what China wants. If North Korea's situation were to deteriorate to the level of the mid-1990s, it would have to crack down on dissidence with a similar degree of brutality as was shown during that period. If a foreign power were to restrain its will or capacity to crack down, the regime might arrive at a situation in which it must relinquish its power.

In addition, it should be noted that contacts between North Korean society and foreign patrons have been increasing.<sup>31</sup> Various foreign groups have been trying to increase their contacts with people inside North Korea with various purposes: religious groups for missionary purposes; human rights groups seeking to improve the human rights

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<sup>30</sup>-Shen Dingli, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," *China Security* (Autumn 2006), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup>-Mi Ae Taylor and Mark E. Manyin, "Non-Governmental Organizations' Activities in North Korea," Congressional Research Service, March 25, 2011.

situation in North Korea, etc. In addition, more and more North Koreans are being exposed to South Korean culture and information via commercial smuggling along the border, South Korean public and private broadcasting, and leaflets sent by NGOs. What can be said with confidence is that these kinds of activities will increase and improve their messages and organization in the future. In general these groups carry the maximalist goal of radically transforming the state and society as well as restructuring the nation's links with the international system, not limited to simply removing the dictator.<sup>32</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Future of Political Succession**

In the previous section, this paper discussed the four structural factors which will influence the future of political succession in North Korea. In the following, the different configurations of four political actors will be introduced. These four political actors will then be combined with the four structural factors discussed above to give a picture of the possible future trajectories of the ongoing hereditary succession in North Korea. Based on Richard Snyder's analysis of political changes in Sultanistic regimes, the four political actors are defined as regime soft-liner, regime hard-liner, moderate opposition and maximalist opposition.<sup>33</sup>

The short- and mid-term will continue to see a configuration in which only two political actors interact: regime hard-liners predominate internally, while from the outside, fragmented and small maximalist oppositions continue to try to influence the political situation in North Korea. The regime hard-liners are unconditionally committed to perpetu-

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<sup>32</sup>-Snyder, *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup>-*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

ating the dictator's rule, while the maximalist opposition does not limit its goals to simply removing the dictator but seeks to overthrow the existing regime and seize control of the state.<sup>34</sup> The resulting political situation will be a continuation of stability or a restoration of stability after a crisis. Despite continued policy failures and deepening impoverishment, the space for regime soft-liners and societal opposition will continue to be very narrow and risky. As long as regime hard-liners maintain firm control over the military and security, internal challenges can be handled without much difficulty. Logically, more serious challenges could be imagined. For example, the long-enduring international isolation and sanctions brought on by North Korea's provocations could produce economic hardships comparable to those of the mid-1990s and increased political discontent, which could pose serious challenges to regime stability. In this case, the regime could still crush discontent with brutal force and restore stability. A similar situation has happened recently. The aftermath of the currency exchange measures in 2009 and 2010 resulted in such a case. These measures showed the classic combination of incompetency and irresponsibility implicit in an absolute personal dictatorship, and their negative impact on the economy and popular sentiment has been very serious. Nevertheless, the regime was able to overcome the crisis and restore stability because it could depend on the Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of State Security, while there was no organized opposition.

At this juncture, let us assess the possible future emergence of the missing actors - the regime soft-liners and the maximalist and moderate oppositions. Let us first turn to the possibility of regime moderates and moderate opposition. Regime moderates perceive their survival to be separable from the dictator's and may come to view their association with

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<sup>34</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 51.

him as more of a liability than a benefit; the moderate opposition is committed to the limited goals of ousting the dictator and his ruling clique.<sup>35</sup> Usually the first choice of political alliance of the former is with the latter. Were it not for the widespread disguising of real preferences due to fear of repression, these two moderates groups could reflect the predominant sentiment of officials and the population in North Korea. According to an analysis of political tendencies in North Korea, there are three influential groups.<sup>36</sup> The first is made up of members of the ruling Kim family, the second is the Manju group consisting of the descendants of anti-Japanese guerillas, and the third group is the “new generation” made up of the family members and descendants of soldiers killed during the Korean War and those who gained meritorious distinction during the socialist construction afterward. The Manju group and the new generation have enjoyed a much higher level of freedom in market activities and exposure to foreign information due to their privileged political status. In reality, they have been the driving forces behind the market expansion which reached its peak in 2004. In this regard, they have been out of sync with the conservative trend of economic policy since 2005, which has disregarded the two groups’ wishes for market expansion. If this interpretation of groupings is correct, the Manju and new generation groups could be regarded as potential regime moderates and/or moderate opposition sources.

Let us now turn to the possible advent of maximalist opposition groups in North Korea. As mentioned above, maximalists do not consider it possible to reform the regime and instead desire to overthrow the regime and transform the country. The problem has been that in such a

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<sup>35</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> - Lee Gyu I, “Byeonhwahago issneun ‘jojgisaenghwal’eui nara” [“The changing aspects of ‘organizational life’ in North Korea”], *Imjingang*, Vol. 9 (Fall 2010), pp. 128-131.

strong dictatorship as that of North Korea, where the regime maintains very strong security control over society, it has been altogether impossible for any such opposition to emerge, either moderate or maximalist. In North Korea's case, the only opposition to the regime comes from small and fragmented maximalist groups working outside the country, mainly in South Korea. These groups have been trying to influence the political situation in North Korea through increasing contacts with North Koreans and attempts to increase the information flowing into North Korea. Their influence will increase in the future and can be a significant factor in triggering political changes in North Korea.

Let us now turn to the problem of the types of political changes in North Korea, while taking into consideration the changing relations among the four actors mentioned above. In the short term, the most probable outcome is the continuation of regime stability or the restoration of stability after a crisis. This is most probable because the Kim family maintains firm control over the military and security organizations.

What about the possibility of a revolution? It may be elevated if the following conditions are met<sup>37</sup>: 1) the ruler penetrates the state thoroughly, minimizing the possibility of an impetus for reform coming 'from above' (from within the regime itself); 2) in terms of ruler-society relations, the dictator's patronage circle of elites is narrow and his penetration into civil society is shallow; 3) the regime is economically and politically extremely dependent on foreign patrons. Revolution will be most probable when, at a moment of crisis in which moderates and maximalists are united, a foreign patron intervenes to restrain the regime from a brutal and bloody suppression of its opposition. This scenario may become possible in the future, but the probability seems rather low. It could be possible during a moment of mass revolt if the

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<sup>37</sup>-Snyder, *ibid.*, pp. 67-70.

regime hard-liners within the Kim family become so isolated that they are even estranged from the formerly loyal members of the Manju and 'new generation' groups, and if they are prevented from enforcing a brutal crack down on the opposition by intervention from their chief foreign patron, China.

What about the possibility of a military dictatorship or civilian rule following the Kim dynasty? For either of these scenarios to be realized, a revolt by the military must occur, rendering the regime hard-liners powerless.<sup>38</sup> Only thereafter would it become possible for a military dictatorship or civilian rule to be established. In order for such military moderates with the capacity for determined action to emerge, first the dominance of the regime hard-liners over the military must be slackened. In addition, while organized or coincidental revolts by society may threaten the hard-liners, dissident groups in the military have a legitimate right to exist and also have the opportunity for action.

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## *Kim Jong-un Inherits the Bomb*

*Ralph Hassig & Kongdan Oh\**

### **Abstract**

North Korea's nuclear program has a long history, which serves as a warning that the program is likely to have a long future. The Kim regime's nuclear weapons program will be used by successor Kim Jong-un and his associates for their own benefit and not for the benefit of the North Korean people, and any negotiations relating to this program are likely to be slowed down by Pyongyang's leadership transition but not abandoned. Nuclear talks can accomplish at least four things for a successor North Korean regime. First, they can provide much-needed foreign aid that can be dispensed by the new regime to establish its reputation as a provider for the people. Second, talks can signal international forgiveness for North Korea's 2010 West Sea attacks on South Korea, which Kim Jong-un is being given credit for. Third, talks will confirm that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state, thus setting the stage for negotiations over nuclear arms reduction rather than nuclear arms elimination. And fourth, talks can validate Kim Jong-un as the new leader of North Korea, just as the 1994 talks signaled that the United States accepted Kim Jong-il as his father's successor. In short, talks will strengthen the new Kim Jong-un regime but they will fail to end the regime's nuclear weapons program.

**Key Words:** Agreed Framework, nuclear weapons, regime change, six-party talks, succession

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\* The views expressed in this paper are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any organizations with which they are affiliated.

Nothing more immediately defines North Korea for the international community than its nuclear weapons program. Arguably there are other aspects of the country that are as important, such as its chemical and biological weapons, its conventional and special forces, its poverty, and its abysmal human rights record. But the nuclear issue hangs over everything and is the main reason that the big powers are willing and even eager to meet with North Korean officials.

Since the early 1990s, thousands of newspaper and magazine articles have described and commented on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Policy analysts such as ourselves have written hundreds of reports examining the motives driving the program and offering suggestions about how to curtail or stop it. Not to be left behind, academics, especially in the social sciences, have viewed the program in terms of cause and effect variables and theoretical predictions. Despite this attention – or perhaps in part because of it – the Kim regime in Pyongyang has pushed forward undeterred in its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

The journalistic accounts of the program are written to keep the public informed. The academic papers are intended to test scientific hypothesis. And the analytic reports are commissioned by offices and organizations that seek to denuclearize North Korea. For policy analysts, this program is not an academic problem or puzzle to be solved but rather a mission to be accomplished, and because missions are complicated by myriad real-world factors, the primary tools employed in pursuing the mission must be simple and robust. So simple, in fact, that they will usually be consistent with what scientists sometimes dismissively refer to as “common sense”; that is, the general understanding that has emerged from thousands and even millions of years of human experience. Common sense is usually right – that is why it is so common.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>- Consider, for example, the counter-intuitive predictions of cognitive dissonance theory,

The tool that we use to understand the behavior of the Kim regime is what psychologists call the law of effect, part of the same family of theories as psychological hedonism and economic behaviorism. In every day parlance: “carrots and sticks.” According to this common-sense view, the decision makers in Pyongyang are doing what they believe will bring them the greatest benefits with the least costs. Their behavior is consistent with the behavior of the leaders of the great powers, who have also chosen to arm their own countries with nuclear weapons and who are not about to give those weapons up.

## The Nuclear Program’s Long History

North Korea’s nuclear program has a long history, which suggests that the program is deeply imbedded in the country’s defense and foreign policies. The long history also serves as a warning that the program is likely to have an extended future. Since most readers will be familiar with at least the broad outlines of this history, the following is a condensed version.<sup>2</sup>

In 1956, North Korean scientists began receiving training in the Soviet Union. A small nuclear reactor began operating at the nuclear research complex at Yongbyon in 1965, and by the late 1970s the North Koreans were building their own (five megawatt) nuclear reactor, which

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which became popular in the 1960s. These predictions directly contradicted the predictions of behaviorism (reward-and-punishment theory). Unfortunately, cognitive dissonance results only appeared in a very restricted range of situations, and then only some of the time. The basic laws of reward and punishment continued to provide the best explanations most of the time, and still do (e.g., people seek more money for their work and employers use money and other rewards to keep people working).

<sup>2</sup>- Dozens of books have been written about North Korea’s nuclear program. A readily accessible source of information about the highlights of the program can be found on the NTI (Nuclear Threat Initiative) web site; see North Korea Profile: Nuclear. URL: [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/index.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/index.html) (accessed May 30, 2011).

began operating in 1986. Although too small to be of practical use for electricity generation, it burns uranium fuel that can be reprocessed into weapons-grade plutonium. Construction of 50 and 200 megawatt reactors was begun in 1984 and 1991 but later abandoned.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the North Koreans embarked on a campaign of deception and delay. After initially claiming that a large building, six stories tall and as long as two football fields, was a textile factory, they finally admitted that their “radio-chemical laboratory” was built to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel. In September 1991 Kim Young-nam, then foreign minister, told *Janes Defence Weekly*, “We have no capability to manufacture nuclear weapons and we have no intention to do so.”<sup>3</sup> Kim Il-sung made the same denial in a 1992 interview with a correspondent from *The Washington Times*:

As far as the nuclear issue is concerned, our country does not have any nuclear weapons. . . . And, what is more, we don't need nuclear weapons. What is the use of producing one or two nuclear weapons while the big countries have several thousand. . . . And we don't have a delivery system either. So to be honest with you, we don't need nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup>

Following a delay of several years, North Korea signed an IAEA Non-Proliferation safeguards agreement and provided the IAEA with an inventory of its nuclear program, but when a team of inspectors paid a visit they discovered discrepancies in North Korea's inventory, resulting in a February 1993 call for “special inspections.” The North Koreans refused and promptly announced their intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

North Korean delay and deception were tools of a foreign policy

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<sup>3</sup>- “The JDW Interview,” *Janes Defence Weekly*, September 14, 1991, p. 492.

<sup>4</sup>- “Q&A ‘We Don't Need Nuclear Weapons,’” *The Washington Times*, April 15, 1992, p. A11.

that alternated between initiating actions that were viewed by the United States and many other countries as threatening (such as withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or removing fuel rods from their nuclear reactor) and invitations to talk about terminating those actions. Alarmed by North Korea's withdrawal provocation, the United States entered into negotiations with the North Koreans in June 1993, securing from them a "suspension" of the withdrawal one day before it became effective. Negotiations stalled in July 1993 and the North Koreans began unloading spent fuel in May 1994. The U.S. government then sent former president Jimmy Carter to Pyongyang in June 1994 to discuss the issue personally with Kim Il-sung, who agreed to stop unloading the fuel if the United States would return to the negotiating table. Bilateral talks with the North continued even after Kim's death, and on October 21, 1994 the two countries reached what they called an "Agreed Framework" — less than a formal treaty but more than a diplomatic promise.

By the terms of the agreement, North Korea agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear program in exchange for the construction by a U.S.-led international consortium of two light-water reactors (LWRs). Pending completion of the reactor project, North Korea would receive an annual shipment of a half million tons of heavy fuel oil. The Clinton administration also promised to gradually improve diplomatic and economic relations with the Kim regime.

It is not unusual for large construction projects to fall behind schedule, and nothing slows a project down more than having to negotiate it with the North Koreans. It was not until August 2002 that the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) began pouring concrete for the light-water reactors, the first unit of which was originally scheduled for completion in 2003.

American-North Korean relations remained strained, and relations became much worse when in October 2002 a visiting American State

Department delegation reported that the North Koreans admitted to them that they were operating a uranium enrichment program, although the North Koreans later denied that they had said such a thing. As a consequence of this violation of the Agreed Framework and other North Korean agreements, KEDO discontinued fuel shipments in November. In December the North Koreans expelled IAEA inspectors and announced that they would restart their nuclear program. In January 2003 the IAEA adopted a resolution condemning the DPRK's violations of the NPT and North Korea announced its immediate withdrawal from the NPT. Shortly thereafter the North Koreans began reprocessing the 8,000 spent fuel rods they had placed in storage and in January 2004 they invited a U.S. nuclear scientist, Siegfried Hecker, to Pyongyang to look at their nuclear facilities and inspect two jars allegedly containing newly reprocessed plutonium (which he was not able to confirm).

The United States once again entered into talks, this time trying multilateral negotiations in the form of six-party talks, which were convened in August 2003. The talks continue sporadically and on September 19, 2005, a "joint statement" was agreed upon in which North Korea said it was "committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning at an early date" to the NPT. On the issue of North Korea's receiving the two light-water reactors they had been promised in the 1994 agreement and which the United States now adamantly opposed, the statement said that the parties "expressed their respect and agreed to discuss at an appropriate time the subject of the provision of light-water reactors to the DPRK."

Chris Hill, the lead American negotiator, professed to be very satisfied: "Everybody is a winner. This is a win-win situation. We got an agreement on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."<sup>5</sup> However, the

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<sup>5</sup>- "U.S. Chief Negotiator Praises Joint Statement as 'Good Agreement,'" *Xinhua*, in English,

agreement, referring to “early dates” and “appropriate times,” did not really amount to much, and both the Americans and North Koreans immediately issued statements that effectively gutted the agreement, with the United States saying that discussion of building LWRs could not begin until it was verified that the North Koreans had eliminated their nuclear program, and the North Koreans cautioning that “The U.S. should not even dream of the issue of the DPRK’s dismantlement of its nuclear deterrent before providing LWRs.”<sup>6</sup> With George W. Bush in the White House, American-North Korean relations continued to be hostile and no progress was made on the nuclear question. On October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, which elicited economic sanctions from the United Nations. The six-party talks resumed in December 2006, and on February 13, 2007, the delegates adopted an “initial actions” document that tentatively moved North Korea toward denuclearization, with North Korea once again promising to abandon its nuclear weapons program and return to the NPT. The North Koreans began shutting down their nuclear facilities, and on June 27, 2008 they demolished the cooling tower of their now-idle nuclear reactor. In October the United States took North Korea off its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

In March 2009 North Korea launched its third intercontinental ballistic missile, in violation of the UN resolution of July 2006, prompting the UN to issue yet another condemnation of Pyongyang’s missile launches. North Korea responded by expelling IAEA inspectors and announcing that it would restart its nuclear reactor. Further, it announced on April 29, 2009, that “it would not participate in the six-party talks under any circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> Taking a page out of its 2006 foreign policy

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September 19, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> - “Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry on Six-Party Talks,” *KCNA*, in English, September 19, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> - “DPRK Party Organ. on Pyongyang’s Decision Not to Participate in Six-Party Talks,” *KCNA*,

playbook (i.e., a July 2006 ICBM launch followed by an October nuclear test), North Korea conducted its second nuclear test, slightly larger than the first, in May 2009, for which it was once again sanctioned by the United Nations.

In March 2010 American nuclear expert Siegfried Hecker was invited to return to Pyongyang, where he was told that North Korea would begin building its own light-water reactor and that it had just completed construction of a uranium enrichment facility.

From the history of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, stretching back at least a quarter of a century, one can observe the following. First, the nuclear program, in terms of its domestically processed uranium to fuel a small reactor, its reprocessing of spent fuel into weapons-grade plutonium, its testing of two nuclear weapons, and its manufacturing of enriched uranium in centrifuges, is important to the North Korean leaders. Second, North Korea has lied about its nuclear program. Third, the nuclear program has incurred significant sunk costs for such a poor country, although these costs are largely borne by the North Korean people, not their leaders. Fourth, by pursuing nuclear weapons, North Korea has incurred additional costs in the form of sanctions and embargoes, as well as incurring the extreme displeasure of the U.S. government. Fifth, North Korea says its program is necessary to deter an attack from the United States. Sixth, North Korea has threatened to attack other countries with nuclear weapons. North Korea has also developed long-range missiles, and although it is not known if these missiles can carry nuclear warheads yet, in the future they probably will. And seventh, the North Koreans speak of their nuclear program with obvious pride. The important inference that can be made from these facts is that, for the decision makers in Pyongyang, the benefits of the nuclear program

outweigh its costs, despite international criticism and sanctions.

## Interminable Negotiations

The United States has been involved in nuclear negotiations with North Korea for almost two decades, in two-party, three-party, four-party, and most recently, six-party talks. Going into 2011, the talks have been in recess for over two years but political pressure is building to restart them. China, the host, is eager; the United States is skeptical; and South Korea, still smarting from the two North Korean attacks of 2010, is not ready. Japan and Russia go along for the ride. In April 2009 the North Koreans said they “will never again take part in such [six-party] talks and will not be bound by any agreement reached at the talks.”<sup>8</sup> However, the North Korean regime must return to the talks in order to reach a new agreement that will provide it with much-needed aid and political acceptance.

Two essential and indisputable facts about the six-party talks are often overlooked or ignored. First, North Korea has always insisted that the nuclear issue only concerns itself and the United States, which it views as a threat. Consider this statement from 2003:

The reality requires the DPRK to deter the escalating U.S. moves to stifle the DPRK with a physical force, [and] compels it to opt for possessing a necessary deterrent force and put it into practice. The U.S. is entirely to blame for this development. The U.S. describes this stand of the DPRK as “threat” and “blackmail” to it. It is, however, illogical. The U.S. was the first to have access to nukes and is the world’s biggest possessor of weapons of mass destruction. The Bush administration asserts that it is just for the U.S. to mount preemptive attacks on other countries when it deems necessary and has already perpetrated them in Afghanistan and

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<sup>8</sup>-“DPRK Foreign Ministry Statement on UNSC Resolution, Intent to Withdraw from Six-Party Talks,” KCNA, in English, April 14, 2009.

Iraq. Such a war group of the superpower openly listed the DPRK as part of “an axis of evil” and a target of its preemptive nuclear attack. Isn’t it a threat? How can the possession of means by such a small country as the DPRK for just self-defense along [alone?] be “threat” and “blackmail”?<sup>9</sup>

At multilateral meetings, the other parties to the dispute serve only as a source of material rewards to North Korea, as, for example, when South Korea and Japan provided most of the funds to begin building the two nuclear reactors specified by the Agreed Framework.

Second, the North Koreans made it clear even before the first round of the talks that the talks would succeed only if the United States made a “bold switchover” in its hostile policy toward the DPRK. What would such a policy switchover entail? In August 2003 *KCNA* said that “the only thing the DPRK wants is the conclusion of a non-aggression treaty.”<sup>10</sup> However, according to many other North Korean pronouncements, that is just the beginning. As a nuclear quid pro quo, the North Koreans have demanded economic compensation for energy lost by freezing their nuclear facilities. They also want the removal of the U.S. “nuclear threat,” by which they seem to mean the removal of all U.S. nuclear weapons from the region and an end to the protection provided to South Korea by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. They want a peace treaty and full diplomatic relations with Washington, a guarantee of non-aggression, the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from South Korea, and an end to the U.S.-ROK security alliance. They also want the elimination of U.S. restrictions on international trade and investment with the DPRK and a pledge not to interfere in the DPRK’s domestic affairs, including its human rights policies. More demands are likely to follow.

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<sup>9</sup>- “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Warns U.S. Against Taking Nuclear Issue to UN,” *KCNA*, in English, April 30, 2003.

<sup>10</sup>- “*KCNA* on Main Way for Settlement of Nuclear Issue,” *KCNA*, in English, August 19, 2003.

By 2005 the North Koreans were saying that they no longer considered the negotiations to be about denuclearization but rather about mutual nuclear arms reduction, thereby changing the rules of the nuclear negotiation game. Before the talks resumed for a fourth round in July 2005, the North Koreans declared, “Now that the DPRK has become a full-fledged nuclear weapons state, the six-party talks should be disarmament talks where the participating countries negotiate the issue on an equal footing.”<sup>11</sup> Given the certainty that the United States has no intention of completely eliminating its nuclear weapons stockpile, it is reasonable to expect that nuclear negotiations with North Korea will at best result in a freeze or reduction but not an elimination of its nuclear arsenal.

The Bush administration initially called for a “complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement” (CVID) of the North Korean nuclear weapons program, but because of the virtual impossibility of verifying anything in North Korea, the demand was simplified by insisting that North Korea abandon both its civilian and military nuclear programs. Kim Gye-gwan, North Korea’s head delegate to the talks, responded, “Does it make sense if our country, not a war loser or a criminal country, should be denied peaceful nuclear activities?”<sup>12</sup> This statement shows how far apart the North Koreans and Americans are in their view of the nature of the Kim regime.

The nuclear negotiations, including the six-party talks, are not what they appear to be. Whereas most negotiations are conducted with the hope and reasonable expectation that they will succeed, in the case of the six-party talks, a recognition of their futility has emerged in several stages:

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<sup>11</sup>- “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman On Denuclearization Of Korea,” *KCNA*, in English, March 31, 2005.

<sup>12</sup>- “Nuclear Talks Stretch Into 11<sup>th</sup> Day As N. Korea Resists Deal,” *Yonhap*, in English, August 4, 2005.

first, on the part of serious students of North Korea, who by 2003 shared an almost unanimous consensus that the talks would fail; second, by the media, who began to suspect that the long-running talks were not going anywhere; and lastly by the politicians, who were, and often still are, loathe to admit that the talks are doomed to failure.

The 1994 Agreed Framework allowed the North Koreans to postpone a full accounting of their nuclear program until the LWRs had been constructed. Whether Washington really expected the agreement to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program or whether the agreement was simply viewed an expedient means to freeze the program until North Korea collapsed under the weight of its own political and economic problems is debatable. In hindsight, it is evident that the agreement gave Kim Jong-il several years to consolidate his rule. The defense sometimes offered for the 1994 agreement is that without it, North Korea would have accumulated a much larger nuclear weapons arsenal than it now has, but this argument can be countered with the argument that the Kim regime's future might have been very different without political support and economic aid from the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

If the talks are viewed as political theater, they can be said to enjoy some success because they take pressure off those politicians responsible for ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program. If the talks are supposed to be a serious means of ending that program, they have been a complete failure. Whichever is the case, the talks are likely to be resumed at some point.

Why are the six parties so eager to restart talks that have failed in the past? One possibility is that, although the United States and the other countries have repeatedly insisted that they will not tolerate a North Korean nuclear arsenal, they may be willing to live with a nuclear North Korea that puts limits on its arsenal. Another reason that the United States

chases after talks that have so far failed is that these talks provide an excuse for not having already stopped North Korea's nuclear program. As long as the talks continue, the United States and its negotiation partners can claim that they are actively dealing with the issue in line with the Obama administration's policy of "strategic patience." The great advantage that six-party talks have over bilateral talks is that each of the five countries can point to the participation of the other countries as a way to avoid taking full blame for failure.

China gains political stature by hosting the talks and presenting itself as an impartial actor working for peace, although the Chinese are not willing to end their political and economic support of North Korea for fear of destabilizing a fellow communist neighbor. The Russians are happy to play any role in Asia, although about the only thing they bring to the table is their UNSC vote. Among the six parties, the Japanese probably have the lowest expectation for the talks and the lowest opinion of the North Koreans, but the Japanese already have a stringent embargo against North Korea, which gives them little remaining leverage in the negotiations.

"In one sentence, negotiation with the North is a nightmare," said Steven Bosworth, former U.S. special representative for North Korea policy.<sup>13</sup> DPRK delegations sometimes postpone meetings or fail to appear, even though the Kim regime usually receives some form of payment simply for showing up. Difficult and often fruitless though they may be, negotiations with North Korea are valuable if for no other reason than that they keep lines of communication open and provide the international community with insights into how the North Koreans view their nuclear program.

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<sup>13</sup>-Seung-Ryun Kim, "U.S. Officials: 'In Short, Negotiation with the North Is a Nightmare,'" *The Dong-A Ilbo*, English Internet version, March 12, 2005.

The theater of the six-party talks is likely to continue until the international and domestic audiences get tired of the performance. Judging by the reluctance of the United States and South Korea to rejoin the talks in 2011, it seems that negotiation fatigue has already settled in. The North Koreans have been clear about their goals, if not about their intentions. They want the United States to fully support the Kim regime. This is something that American politicians cannot afford to do, for political as well as moral reasons, but they still pretend that there is a solution to this standoff.

### **North Korean Leadership Succession**

Discussion of North Korea's leadership and succession is necessarily speculative. In 1945, who would have predicted that the 33-year-old expatriate Kim Il-sung would end up leading the country for the next 50 years? And in 1994, with his country in economic collapse, who would have expected that the secretive Kim Jong-il would become as strong a dictator as his father? As for the current succession, foreigners were first betting on the eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, and then the middle son, Kim Jong-chul, before events in Pyongyang signaled that the youngest, Kim Jong-un, was tapped for leadership while still in his late 20s.

The North Korean media have frequently spoken of the importance of passing on the country's leadership from one generation to the next, although they are not explicit about whether they mean passing it down from older to younger leaders or specifically through the Kim family line. Combined with the propaganda exalting the Kim revolutionary family, one must assume that the reference is to generations of the Kim family, and that is presumably how most Koreans understand it, even if they are not happy about it.

Many party officials and military officers in North Korea are standing in the wings of power, but there is no evidence that they are expecting to replace the Kim family. If anyone other than a Kim should become supreme leader, it would constitute a political revolution that North Korea would have trouble surviving. Other dictatorships have passed power down to someone outside the ruling family, for example, China after Mao and Burma after Ne Win, but neither of these leaders had already experienced a father-to-son succession and neither had anything like the investment that the Kim regime has made in building a family leadership cult.

With the coming of Kim Jong-un, it is likely that party and military figures will gain more influence than they had under Kim Jong-il and his father simply because initially the young Kim will not have as much power as his father or grandfather wielded. However, if Kim Jong-un has the same kind of political skill as his father and grandfather, he may eventually be able to consolidate power around himself, just as they did.

Clues about how Kim Jong-un will grasp power may be found in the ways his father and grandfather gained power. It should be remembered that Kim Il-sung needed many years to consolidate his unrivaled position in North Korean politics. In the 1940s, Kim used his political talents, along with advice of his Soviet advisors and support of Soviet troops, to take control of the newly established Korean security and military forces, thereby enabling him to out-manuever rival politicians who lacked a military base. In the years immediately following the Korean War Kim's generalship was questioned and several attempts were made to replace him.<sup>14</sup> Kim used his political skills and the backing of the army and secret police to purge political opponents, some of whom were blamed for

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<sup>14</sup>- Andrei Lankov tells the story in his *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

North Korea's failure to win the war. By the late 1950s Kim had firmer control of the country than before the war, and his economic policy mistakes were covered up by aid from China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe.

As the oldest son, Kim Jong-il had an inside track on succeeding his father, but being a dictator's son was not enough to guarantee him the succession. He had to prove himself to his father and his father's associates. The approval process lasted from the time Jong-il graduated from college in 1964 to the time he was publicly presented as the future leader in 1980. Those who were skeptical of the young Kim's capabilities were either persuaded to change their minds or they were purged.

When Kim Il-sung died on July 8, 1994, no one other than Kim Jong-il was in line to succeed him, but Kim still had to consolidate his political position now that his father was no longer around to back him up. Kim Jong-il placed special emphasis on the military as his main source of support. His distinctive military-first politics, first mentioned in the press in the late 1990s, is now said to have originated with a visit by the 18-year-old Kim to a military base on August 25, 1960.<sup>15</sup> As the years passed propagandists created for the young Kim a personality cult almost as extreme as the one that surrounded his father. Kim Jong-il eventually was credited with all the attributes of his father, including his father's military abilities.

Reports that Kim Jong-un had been tapped as the third generation leader began to appear in early 2009, and from that time a subtle domestic campaign was launched to prepare the public for his political emergence. Kim was officially introduced to Korean citizens at the party congress in September 2010. Rumor has it that the succession has been accompanied

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<sup>15</sup> "45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kim Jong-il's Start of Songun Revolutionary Leadership Marked," KCNA, in English, August 24, 2005.

by purges of officials who are opposed to the young Kim. In any case there will be a realignment of officials favoring those who can be trusted to support the new leader.

To provide him with political power as well as to give him a suitable public persona, he was made a four-star general, although he is only in his late 20s. It is possible he was also put in charge of the State Security Department, the secret police. If the history of his father's and grandfather's rise to power is any indication, in the years ahead a new personality cult consisting of stories, songs, and slogans will be built around Kim Jong-un. The North Korean people may have little interest in him, but the regime seems to feel that, especially in the absence of any concrete achievements on his part, a personality cult is necessary for someone in his political position.

Kim must somehow gain a reputation in economic, foreign, and military affairs. How the youngest Kim will become an economic genius is yet to be determined, although the only apparent path would be for North Korea to receive massive amounts of foreign aid that the regime could distribute under Kim's name.

He can earn his foreign policy credentials in the same way his father did: with high-profile trips to China and Russia. He is also likely to meet foreign dignitaries visiting Pyongyang, although he missed the chance to meet Jimmy Carter when the former American president made an unofficial visit to Pyongyang in April 2010. There will presumably be other opportunities to follow in the footsteps of his father, who hosted a number of world leaders. South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung visited Pyongyang in June 2000, and President Roh Moo-hyun in October 2007. Russia's President Putin also paid a visit in 2000. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang in late 2000. China's President Jiang Zemin traveled to Pyongyang in September 2001, and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi became the first Japanese head of state to visit North

Korea in September 2002 and again in May 2004. “Why on earth do I have to go visit big countries?” asked Kim Jong-il in August 2000, “Even though I stay in Pyongyang, various powerful countries come visit me, do they not?”<sup>16</sup>

For foreigners, the concoction of a military reputation for Kim Jong-un is the most worrisome aspect of the succession. In addition to being appointed a four-star general (in September 2010), Kim Jong-un seems to have been given credit in the domestic media for the two 2010 attacks on South Korea in the West Sea. This campaign to make Kim Jong-un a military leader is consistent with the campaign launched in the early 1990s to give his father, who had never had a military career, a military background by granting him the titles of “marshal” and Supreme Commander of the Korean People’s Army. North Korean propagandists also claimed that when he was just a child, Kim Jong-il was at his father’s side during the Korean War, helping him to plan battles.<sup>17</sup> Kim Jong-il was also given credit for the capture of the U.S. Pueblo spy ship in 1968 and the Panmunjom ax murders in 1976. In the coming years, what real or imagined military feats will be attributed to Kim Jong-un?

### **Political Succession and North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons Program**

Considering the longevity and costs of North Korea’s nuclear program, one should find little reason to predict that a new Kim regime will discount its value. Unless something goes badly wrong with the succession, it is likely to have only a marginal effect on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and on the negotiations relating to it. Rather,

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<sup>16</sup>- “Full Dialogue Between DPRK Leader, ROK Media Delegation,” *Yonhap*, in Korean, August 13, 2000.

<sup>17</sup>- “Comrade Kim Jong-il’s Experience of War,” *KCNA*, in English, October 1, 1997.

the program is likely to continue until North Korea undergoes a revolutionary change, and for this reason nuclear talks will be largely fruitless no matter who heads up the next Kim-style regime. Conversely, the negotiations, or lack of them, are likely to have some impact on the succession, or if not on the succession, on the first years of the successor's regime.

Consider first the role of nuclear weapons in the coming Kim Jong-un regime. Because Kim Jong-un will be inheriting a military-first government that is on poor terms with most of the world powers, he will want the most powerful weapons available to him. The lesson of Libya, which was invaded some years after it gave up its pursuit of nuclear weapons, is very clear to the North Koreans. Kim also needs nuclear weapons for the prestige it brings him as the leader of one of a small (but growing) group of nuclear powers. More immediately, Kim needs nuclear weapons to negotiate with, because without the kind of foreign aid that may come from trading in some of his nuclear program, his country has no hope of pulling out of its perennial depression.

Although Kim needs nuclear weapons, he also needs negotiations aimed at ending or curtailing the nuclear weapons program, which is an irony and also a warning that the negotiations can hardly expect to end the very program that make negotiations necessary in the first place.

The six-party talks, or their substitute, can accomplish at least four things for a successor North Korean regime. First, they can provide much-needed foreign aid that can be dispensed by the new regime to establish its reputation as a provider for the people. Second, talks can signal international forgiveness for North Korea's 2010 West Sea attacks on South Korea, which Kim Jong-un is being given credit for. Third, talks will confirm that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state, thus setting the stage for negotiations over nuclear arms reduction rather than nuclear arms elimination. And fourth, talks can validate Kim Jong-un as the new

leader of North Korea, just as the 1994 talks signaled that the United States accepted Kim Jong-il as his father's successor. In short, talks will strengthen the new Kim Jong-un regime.

Looking at the situation from the other side, the leadership succession is likely to have some impact on nuclear talks, although here the influence is less certain. Very little is known about succession politics in North Korea, including how much power different players exercise, whether Kim Jong-il's decision-making power is intact despite his poor health, and how much influence Kim Jong-un has. Despite this lack of knowledge, it is probably safe to predict that during the political transition period decision making will not be as simple as it was when Kim Jong-il was at the top of his form. Today, decision making is more likely to be split between Kim and his son and other political players. To the extent that North Korea experiences political instability in the coming years, the regime is likely to delay making important decisions. This was not the case in 1994 when Kim Jong-il took over, but we now know that he had been an important decision maker for some years before his father died.

Whereas optimists may embrace the hope that the new North Korean regime will be more accommodating than its two predecessors, such a hope is likely to be groundless. A new leader from the Kim family, even if he were inclined toward reform and opening (and there is absolutely no reason to believe that Kim Jong-un is) would not want to take any significant steps until he had consolidated his political position, which is likely to take some years. North Korean negotiators may be loathe to compromise for fear of sending a signal that the new regime is not as tough as the current regime, which prides itself on taking an "ultra-hard-line position" in the face of what it considers to be foreign provocations. In any case, there is no reason to expect that Kim Jong-un will be any more willing to trade away North Korea's nuclear weapons than his father or grandfather was.

In conclusion, North Korea's nuclear weapons program will be used by Kim Jong-un and his associates for their own benefit and not for the benefit of the North Korean people, and any negotiations relating to this program are likely to be slowed down by Pyongyang's leadership transition.

### **Policy Options for Ending North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program**

North Korea's commitment to developing a nuclear weapons program has not changed in over a quarter of a century. North Korea's approach to nuclear negotiations has not changed either. There is no reason to expect a new Kim family regime to surprise us with any changes.

The most important thing to keep in mind when negotiating with the Kim regime is that it is preoccupied with its own security. Any rewards that foreigners offer for denuclearization must boost the security of the regime. That is why North Korea's first demand has always been an end to the hostility that the United States (and other nations) harbor against the regime. This "switchover" demand transcends the nuclear issue. The Kim regime will not be satisfied until it is treated as a respectable member of the international community, regardless of its abhorrent and dysfunctional domestic policies and history of past international aggression.

The second thing to keep in mind is that if the United States and major powers consider nuclear weapons to be the ultimate military deterrent, the North Koreans would be foolish to forego such a deterrent. Likewise, if the United States believes it to be impossible to abandon nuclear weapons, North Korea will share this belief. Thus even if the United States were to end its hostile policy toward the Kim regime, that regime would still be expected to hold on to its nuclear deterrent.

In short, there is probably no price that could be paid to end North

Korea's nuclear weapons program, and certainly none that could end it in a verifiable manner. Embargo and containment have limited usefulness as long as China supports the Kim regime, and North Korea's plutonium, uranium, and nuclear weapons cannot be easily eliminated by surgical military strikes. In any case, North Korea has other weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons that could be used to threaten the United States and its allies, and any attack on North Korea would likely trigger a second Korean War of incalculable cost.

In 2011 the North Korean nuclear threat is greater than it was in 1994, and as in 1994, no satisfactory solution is at hand. If the military option is rejected as too costly, there remain at least three alternatives. One is to ignore the North Korean nuclear program. This virtually invites the Kim regime to increase its threats, but those stronger threats may register on other countries (such as China) as well as on the United States. Another alternative is to negotiate once again with the Kim regime and settle for a deal that only partially eliminates the nuclear threat.

A third alternative is to go after the regime rather than its nuclear weapons, not with guided missiles but with guided information directed at the North Korean people, who do not gain any security from nuclear weapons. In their present circumstances, these 22 million people lack the power to change or even question their government's policies, but if the people had more knowledge, they might gradually gain the power to govern themselves.

The North Korean media are explicit about the threat of outside information: "[T]hose taken by bourgeois ideology and culture cannot but be vulgar men devoid of any faith and ungrateful to the party and the leader. Then the government, army, and people will be torn into fractions, making it impossible to defend their leadership [i.e., the Kim family]."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>- "Rodong Sinmun Calls for Checking Bourgeois Ideological Penetration," KCNA, in English, quoting a *Rodong Sinmun* article of the same date, August 2, 2005.

Undermining the Kim regime is not the favored policy of the United States or, it seems, of any other country. It is human nature to attend to immediate threats from nuclear weapons at the expense of long-term threats from an irresponsible and hostile regime, and it is the nature of politicians to favor expediency and popularity over realism.

Regime change in North Korea could take a long time and the outcome would be unpredictable. If a regime-replacement operation had been launched in 1994 instead of throwing support to the Kim regime through the Agreed Framework, the Kim regime might not have survived the Arduous March period of 1995-1998 and the debate about how to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program would have already been settled. Instead, the debate continues year after year, with no end in sight.

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# *Hedging Opportunities and Crises against Pyongyang's Hereditary Succession: A Chinese Perspective*

*You Ji\**

## **Abstract**

Beijing passively supports Kim Jong-il's succession plan. This support has been structured into its DPRK policy centered on the principles of crisis aversion, even though it realizes the high costs of this policy: huge economic aid to an unpredictable neighbor and the negative regional response. This status quo-based policy symbolizes not only Beijing's lingering "buffer zone" mentality but also its difficulty in finding any feasible substitute. Therefore, Beijing is not in a position to visibly alter its DPRK policy any time soon. Yet China may have revised the bottom line of its policy vis-à-vis the North in the wake of the 2010 adventurism that dragged China into confrontation against its will. This would be a hedging strategy, setting pre-determined plans to preempt any precarious situation on the peninsula and cooperating with regional countries regarding sudden developments in Pyongyang. At the same time it would hedge against the possibility of a war for regime change on the ground. Beijing's general view of the prospects for the succession is relatively optimistic, since Kim Jong-il is making detailed plans for the transfer of power and he may still have a number of years to live, granting the extra time which is crucial for consolidating the heir's power.

**Key Words:** Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un, succession, Chinese DPRK policy, U.S.-ROK alliance

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2010 witnessed several significant events in the Korean Peninsula which can be organized into two categories. The first was the armed clashes between the two Koreas, namely, the sinking of South Korea's corvette Cheonan in March and North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island on November 23. The second was the anointment of Kim Jong-il's third son Kim Jong-un as the next leader of the Democratic People Republic of Korea (DPRK) in September. In a way, the two military events somewhat diverted international attention away from Pyongyang's planned succession, as they almost brought the peninsula to the point of war. Undeniably, the DPRK's adventurism may have helped Seoul and its allies/partners to generate an important consensus on a coordinated response to any future provocations from the North. This is a strategic feat in itself, contributing to the emerging trend of bipolar alignment in East Asia in which Washington leads a collective hedging endeavor against China's rise and Beijing adopts various countermeasures in response. However, given that no major player involved in the Korean conflict desires an uncontrollable escalation of tension, Pyongyang's brinkmanship in 2010 was likely a specific bellicose response to specific challenges, not representing a fundamental policy change toward confrontation, and thus it can be managed with intervention by other big powers, especially China.<sup>1</sup> In comparison Kim Jong-un's ascendance represents the biggest political gamble in Kim Jong-il's life as it is an unpredictable process which will have a long-lasting impact on the overall security situation on the peninsula.

Many questions arise in regard to Kim Jong-un's anointment and its consequences. Is this the beginning of the end of Pyongyang's succession impasse, or the beginning of a fiercer power struggle among the North's

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<sup>1</sup>-Professor Shen Dingli of Fudan University, "Ending the Tension," [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), November 27, 2010.

elites? Each cycle of succession in the dictatorial regime entails a process of power redistribution that is zero-sum by nature. Can the DPRK's political system, which is already greatly weakened by its internal and external crises, absorb such a tremendous impact? The lead-up to the final takeover is also the most vulnerable period of any power transition; will the DPRK project a reconciliatory stance in order to ease tensions with its foes, or will it seek to shift the burden of its domestic crisis onto its neighbors through further provocations? Any scenario is possible. This is why all the involved parties are preparing for the worst in the years to come.

As far as Beijing is concerned, its basic position on Kim Jong-un's succession is embedded in its central Korean policy of crisis aversion. Logically this dictates that Beijing must follow a policy of assisting in the DPRK regime's survival. Under the circumstances Beijing does not have any choice but to prop up Kim Jong-un, who will be the key to the regime's survival once he is in power. Therefore, considering how Beijing remained "neutral" in the two armed clashes on the peninsula in 2010, it seems determined to exercise a high level of strategic tolerance toward a regime that violates almost all of its vital interests and offers nothing except its dubious value as a buffer zone.<sup>2</sup> Beijing's rationale for "neutrality" is sensible, intended to somewhat rectify the heavily tilted balance against the DPRK on the peninsula for the sake of retaining the status quo. It assessed that "neutrality" was a bad choice, as this could place China in an odd position in major power interactions in East Asia. Yet other choices may have worse consequences if they cause sudden unwanted upheavals in the region.<sup>3</sup> China was simply not ready for that. This paper argues that

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<sup>2</sup>- See You Ji, "Dealing with the "North Korea Dilemma": China's Strategic Choices," *Working Paper 229*, RSIS (Nanyang Technological University, 2011).

<sup>3</sup>- Shotaro Yachi analyzes the rationale for this "neutrality" as a way to prevent further escalation of North/South tension, support peninsular stability and ensure the Pyongyang

China's swift endorsement of Kim Jong-un as successor was both an externally-imposed necessity pertinent to its status quo emphasis and a kind of active pragmatism drawing a sharp line between its non-committal attitudes toward the Kim Il-sung/Kim Jong-il cycle of succession 37 years ago and the present day.<sup>4</sup> However, Beijing has also left itself vulnerable to being hijacked by uncertainties during the Kim Jong-il/Kim Jong-un succession.

### **The Politics of Succession in Socialist States and North Korea**

Ensuring the orderly transfer of power is an unresolved issue in all socialist states. However, North Korea is the only such country employing a heredity succession, in which the top leader selects one of his family members to be his successor. If essential conditions are met, family heredity may have certain advantages over the practice of negotiated transfer of top power, the normal method of succession in other socialist states. One advantage is greater predictability on the part of the successor, who can preempt other power aspirants. China and Vietnam, for instance, face grave transitional voids during succession: the tradition of personal nomination by the Party boss has been discarded for its generally perceived lack of legitimacy, but the practice of open elections as a way of choosing the top leader is still viewed as a threat to regime stability. In the meantime, negotiations may exacerbate factional infighting and animosity among elites, with lasting detrimental effects on leadership

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regime's survival. "ROK Diplomacy: Navigating Uncharted Waters: The Historic Significance of the Cheonan Incident for ROK Foreign Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2010, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>- On October 2, 2010, Hu Jintao received KWP Politburo member Choe Tae Bok in Beijing and expressed his sincere hopes of cooperating with North Korea's *new leadership* after the KWP's September conference. *New China News Agency*, October 3, 2010.

unity.<sup>5</sup> After all, the negotiated selection of a successor is still a product of one-man rule under the guidance of a group of “kingmakers.” It differs from hereditary succession in that the pool of candidates is larger and the agreed heir is more representative of the vested interests of the Party.

Yet compared with hereditary succession, negotiated succession is halfway to an institutionalized power transfer and thus a sign of political progress. It abolishes life-time tenure in office, seeks wider organizational consultation, and thus achieves greater popular endorsement from Party members.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime certain norms and commonly accepted game rules are created and codified to regulate elite competition for the top post. If these are followed in good faith, an orderly power transfer can be sustained, as shown by the relatively smooth successions in Vietnam since 1969 and in China since 1989.

North Korea’s family-based succession system represents its own unique way of tackling the factional infighting and elite animosity that are inevitable in the succession politics of authoritarian states. Heredity sets the limits of rivalry at the apex of power within a small scope of family members and thus makes it easier to manage this struggle under the control of the patriarch and through various mechanisms such as exile or marginalization. Heredity also creates better transparency once the choice is made. As mentioned earlier, if certain conditions are met - such as consensus among power elites around the top family, support from powerful institutions such as the military, and an ample period of time for

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<sup>5</sup> - This is reflected by the difficult transfer of power in China under Mao and Deng when vicious power struggles almost destroyed CCP rule. Lowell Dittmer, “Leadership Change and Chinese Political Development,” in Yun-han Chu & others (eds.), *The New Chinese Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities after the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> - This is not easy but is achievable, as shown by Hu Jintao’s leadership over the last eight years. You Ji, “The 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the CCP’s Changing Elite Politics,” in Dali Yang and Zhao Litao (eds.), *China’s Reform at 30* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2009), pp. 55-92.

the heir to consolidate power - dynastic heredity may not necessarily be crisis-ridden or lead to regime collapse. Kim Jong-il himself is a fine example of this argument.

There are other special features to a family succession. Hereditary succession can help prevent the emergence of policy dichotomies between the incumbent leader and his successor. Kim Jong-un's legitimacy is built upon his father's blessing, as his father's legitimacy was built upon his grandfather's. Thus he is unlikely to reform his father's dynasty once he is at the top. In contrast almost all successors in communist states have tried to alter the policies of their predecessors to build up their own legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> In North Korea this continuation of the father's political line is linked to regime survival in the short-run, as it is the basis of shared vested interests among the elites. Yet at the same time it causes the flaws in the father's policy and in the North's political system to become entrenched. In the long run, the lack of incentives or driving forces for change can simply worsen the regime's predicament, leading to its eventual collapse.

Kim Jong-un's anointment signals the beginning of the end of the DPRK's transfer of top power, but it is just a beginning, not the end. As mentioned earlier, unless certain necessary conditions are met - such as general consensus among the elites, support from powerful institutions like the KPA, and sufficient time for consolidation of the heir's power - the nomination alone cannot resolve the succession impasse in Pyongyang. Kim Jong-il has already been working on borrowed time to arrange Kim Jong-un's takeover,<sup>8</sup> and there are still a lot of uncertainties ahead for the

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<sup>7</sup>- The best examples are Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping, who undid Soviet and Chinese communism and made Russia and China what they are today.

<sup>8</sup>- According to some Chinese sources Kim has been on dialysis for five years. In medical terms, normally people can last for seven or eight years under such conditions. *Debate on Current Affairs*, Phoenix TV, October 11, 2010.

designated heir. It will be interesting to see if he can have the last laugh.

## **Divide-and-Rule and Dynastic Heredity**

Yet the biggest challenge to Kim Jong-un is the fragmented ruling clique itself, the product of the traditional divide-and-rule tactics employed by the Kim family to ensure its firm hold on power.

### ***Divide-and-Rule: The Built-in Mechanism of Dictatorship***

When Deng Xiaoping accompanied Kim Il-sung on a journey by train to his hometown of Sichuan in September 1982, along the way Kim explained to Deng why he had to arrange for his son to take the helm.<sup>9</sup> This was a belated answer to a question that Mao Zedong had raised about Kim Jong-il's hereditary succession plan seven years earlier in Beijing.<sup>10</sup> Kim told Deng that the senior cadres of his own generation were not united. None of them had sufficient legitimacy or authority to rule the DPRK effectively due to their mutual lack of respect. He stated that if he passed power on to one of his peers, there would inevitably be a power rivalry among them. But all of them pledged to support his plan for Kim Jong-il to be the next leader. Their loyalty to the family was the precondition for the North's political stability after his departure.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Mao, Deng gave his immediate consent, which pleased Kim Il-sung so much that he promised Deng that he would arrange for his son to visit

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<sup>9</sup>- This account was related by Zhang Tingyan (Deng's interpreter and China's first ambassador to South Korea), <http://gb.cri.cn>, October 5, 2010.

<sup>10</sup>- Interview with a former senior Chinese diplomat to Pyongyang in Beijing in January 2000; see also You Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 28, 2001, pp. 34-57.

<sup>11</sup>- You Ji, 2001.

China to study Chinese reforms once a year. Following Deng's suggestion the younger Kim went to Shenzhen for a field study of China's reform experiment in June 1983. However, after that he did not make another trip until 2000. In fact, he criticized every major Chinese reform as a betrayal of socialism.<sup>12</sup>

Kim Il-sung's revelation to Deng conveyed subtle insight into the correlation between Kim family politics and regime survival in North Korea. Theoretically, heredity is probably the only viable way for the DPRK to manage a political succession. This is not only because the Kim family is central to North Korea's political system but, more fundamentally, it is rooted in Kim's divide-and-rule method of maintaining family authority which makes any institutionalized transfer of power impossible. Nor does it allow much room for collective leadership at the apex of power. From day one of the DPRK's existence, Kim Il-sung consolidated power by soliciting support from the pro-Beijing faction in order to undermine the pro-USSR faction. Once he attained supremacy he purged the pro-Beijing faction. Throughout much of the 1960s he played Beijing against Moscow and vice versa.<sup>13</sup> Only by fragmenting the power elites was he able to place himself above all of the party and military factions. The divide-and-rule system has proven to be an effective method of internal checks-and-balances against any potential challengers.

Institutionally, the two Kims purposely created powerful agencies which clamp down on each other. The heads of these agencies watch each other on behalf of their institutional missions. Interpersonal animosity is

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<sup>12</sup>- The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a special group to prepare for Kim Jong-il's "study tour," but it never had the chance to welcome Kim. Interview with a member of the group in Beijing in December 1999.

<sup>13</sup>- See Jonathan Pollack's new book *No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and International Security*, Adepti series 418-419, Institute of International and Strategic Studies (London: Routledge, 2011); Yang Jun & Wang Qiubin, *On the Relationship between China and the Koreas* (Beijing: Shehuikexue chubanshe, 2006), p. 240.

a natural outcome of such a ruling method. One typical example was the establishment of the Department of Party Organization and Guidance (DPOG), the so-called “Party within the Party,” charged with appointing and monitoring all senior cadres in both the civilian and military sectors. Together with the Party’s Administrative Department they form the core apparatus by which Kim Jong-il exercises daily control over DPRK politics.

When Kim Junior assumed full control of the DPRK in 1994, he became even more addicted to this control mechanism. He first promoted a number of young lieutenants to key positions in order to weaken the influence of the leaders of his father’s generation.<sup>14</sup> He continued to head the DPOG and made it his personal spy and control agency. Within the Korean People’s Army (KPA), he ordered the three key branches - the General Staff, General Political Bureau and the Political Security Department - to report to him directly rather than through the National Defense Commission (NDC) and the Party’s Military Department. Each of these three also checks and balances the others from within. At the same time, Kim elevated his personal guard agency to a status parallel to the regular command of the KPA, thus splitting the integrated command chain of the military.<sup>15</sup>

By now, the divide-and-rule mechanism is no longer employed as a matter of personal choice by Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un; it has become a strategic necessary for his family to maintain dynastic control over the whole political system. The mechanism has been embedded in the operations of this system and has even become an inseparable part of the system under the Kim family. This further exacerbates an already tight

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<sup>14</sup> - Kim Chong-min, “Kim Jong-il’s New Power Structure and Its Real Power Holders,” *Seoul Pukhan*, October 1998.

<sup>15</sup> - Ken Gause, *North Korea Civil-Military Trends: Military-first Politics to a Point* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006).

hierarchical ruling structure based on family ties which can be traced back to the 1930s. As an outcome, below Kim Jong-il and outside his family there is no generally accepted figure upon whom to confer power. This has been a deliberate systematic design reinforced by organizational procedures, military reinforcement and ideological indoctrination.<sup>16</sup> In a way Kim Jong-nam's remarks on his father's opposition to the hereditary succession may have revealed the true feelings of Kim Jong-il, who knows only too well how tough it is to run the DPRK's affairs. As a father, committing another family member to this tough job must be a difficult choice, but he has no alternative; such are the dictates of the system.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Divide-and-Rule as a Major Challenge for the Successor***

The DPRK's two succession cases have vividly demonstrated this power flow and transfer process. Kim Jong-il's relatively smooth reign since 1994 has testified why family heredity is crucial to achieving regime security through the cruel suppression of internal challenges. It is still a mystery how Kim Jong-il eventually triumphed against his rivals at the time, but his father's support apparently cleared all the obstacles to his coronation.<sup>18</sup> His brother was then effectively exiled to East Europe. This reflects the cruelty of family succession. A situation where multiple family members compete for the top job can evolve into a structure with multiple centers of power, undermining the vital interests of the dynasty. Inevitably all but one must leave. Looking back on the history of the DPRK's dynastic succession, the transfer of power has been relatively

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<sup>16</sup>- Samuel Kim, *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era* (Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>17</sup>- For Kim Jong-nam's remarks, see *The Guardian*, January 28, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>- Kim Jong-il's ability to foster support from the military and his father's core followers was a key contributing factor in his consolidation of power. See Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Brookings Institution Press, 2000), pp. 85-90.

bloodless, although for the losers it was cruel enough. For the rulers, family ties are part of court politics and are oriented toward eventual succession. In working toward this goal, there is nothing that cannot be sacrificed.

Today as the history repeats itself once again, it is questionable if Kim Jong-il can be so lucky a second time. The conditions his father created for his takeover 37 years ago do not exist for his son. Compared with Kim Il-sung in 1974, Kim Jong-Il's health now is fragile, and by the mid-1970s he already had great autonomy in the running of state affairs.<sup>19</sup> By 1993 Kim Junior was made chair of the NDC. With the top leader's blessing, two decades are long enough for any heir to consolidate his power.<sup>20</sup> It is apparent that Kim Jong-un does not have 20 years to achieve power consolidation. His father's tutelage may end abruptly. And it is too risky to entrust the Young General with major state affairs just months after his introduction as heir. The Confucian aspects of *Juche* philosophy may accord a level of automatic legitimacy to the successor.<sup>21</sup> Yet Kim Jong-un's lack of the necessary leadership experience and seniority can serve to magnify major defects of the succession process that could be fatal to regime survival. He is too young to build a strong power base of his own and too inexperienced to handle the factional strife of his father's peers and his brothers' supporters alone. His anointment may change the rules of the game for those DPRK elites who favor him, but in a country that still

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<sup>19</sup>- When CCP Vice Chair Li Xiannian attended the KWP Congress in August 1975, he was seated between the two Kims. He noticed that when people came to the conference platform with documents to be signed, they all approached Kim Jong-il. This clearly showed that just two years after his anointment the power transfer was already well under way. Oral information collected in Beijing, July 2001.

<sup>20</sup>- Sung Chull Kim, *North Korea under Kim Jong-il* (State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>- *Juche* ideologically justifies the Kim family's succession. Grace Lee, "The Political Philosophy of *Juche*," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003, pp. 107-108.

operates in a Confucian political culture, seniority does influence the leader's acceptance by the elite. Therefore, a faltering dynastic transfer of power under circumstances where the patriarch is in poor health may create a power vacuum in the process of transition and leave the regime dangerously exposed to internal infighting. This simply proves the fatal flaw in the mechanism of divide-and-rule: it is effective only for a leader who has already built up firm control. Yet for a new young leader with insufficient authority, the process of consolidation becomes tougher. This reveals another key flaw of the DPRK: when the state's survival depends on the health or life of just one person, the system is bound to be weak, fragile and without a long future.

It seems that all the questions regarding the DPRK's succession may be boiled down to one; that is, how long Kim Jong-il can hang around. Given Kim Jong-il's poor health and personal experience of succession, it is inconceivable that he does not have concrete plans for his son.<sup>22</sup> In fact Kim Jong-un's anointment in 2010 allowed the DPRK to escape the desperate situation of Kim Jong-il's sudden departure leaving no designated successor. That would have been utterly destabilizing for the dynasty. Now Kim can implement a dual succession plan for Kim Jong-un: an emergency arrangement in case of his sudden death, and a gradual power transition if he lives on. The measures for protection are numerous. At the core is a family triumvirate based on Kim Jong-il himself, his brother-in-law Jang Sung Taek and his sister Kim Kyong-hui. These three will collectively assist Kim Jong-un in the takeover. In case of Kim Jong-il being incapacitated suddenly, the surviving couple will oversee major state affairs on behalf of the son until the political situation stabilizes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> - In 2001 Kim Jong-il had a serious car accident, but he recovered well. Since then he has been contemplating this issue. Information by Lu Guangye, former PLA attaché to Pyongyang, in Sydney on July 14, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> - Interview with Beijing's DPRK specialist, January 2011, Beijing.

Jang Sung Taek's role is particularly crucial. His appointment as deputy chair of the NDC in 2010 was part of the succession package. He is a key buffer between the successor and the complicated body politic of the DPRK, given his wide connections in the Party and the military.<sup>24</sup> And behind Jang is his wife Kim Kyong-hui, who embodies the continuation of the Kim family legitimacy beyond Kim Jong-il. At a critical moment in the power struggle she could act as the family representative to influence post-Kim Jong-il politics. This may be the reason why she was promoted to a top military rank and a seat in the Politburo at the same time that Kim Jong-un was named as the successor. And at the next layer is the KPA, which can provide reliable insurance for Kim Jong-un to stay in power.

### **The Military's Role and Its Rising Political Influence**

Indeed the KPA is the key power institution that can prevent the country from sliding into chaos after Kim Jong-il's sudden departure.<sup>25</sup> Kim Jong-il, like his father, relied on both the Party and the military to consolidate power in his first years as the heir-designated. But he has primarily used the KPA for that purpose. Rationally he saw control over the gun as a short cut to control over other state apparatuses. And legally he has made the NDC surpass the Party's Politburo in importance in his running of state affairs.<sup>26</sup> The result is the "military-first" policy, which has given the military not only the biggest share of national resources but a dominant position in society.<sup>27</sup> In the wake of Kim's illness in 2008,

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<sup>24</sup> - Jang is from a military family. His two brothers are top-ranking officers.

<sup>25</sup> - For the military's role in DPRK elite politics, see Joseph Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> - See Ken Gause, *The North Korea Leadership: The Evolving Regime Dynamics in the Kim Jong-il Era* (Alexandria: CAN Corporation, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> - Alexander Vorontsov, "North Korea's Military-First Policy: A Curse or a Blessing," *Policy*

“military-first” is no longer just a policy, but an institutionalized framework of control over every aspect of political life in North Korea.

Therefore, in the ruling hierarchy Kim Jong-il's military deputy in the NDC would be first in line to take the helm after he dies.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of making Kim Jong-un a top military commander is to build a bridge to his eventual command of the KPA, but there is still a gap in the power transfer framework as he has yet to be appointed deputy chair of the NDC. He has not joined any of the key policy-decision bodies such as the Politburo Standing Committee. Apparently Kim Jong-il is sensibly carrying out a phased succession arrangement for his son. The first step is to put the son in the limelight to prepare the nation for his succession plan. Although time is running short for Kim Jong-un, some incrementalism is still necessary in order to see if the son is a suitable heir. Since Kim Jong-il's first deputy to the NDC Cho Myong-rok passed away in November 2010, his post has been deliberately left unfilled pending Kim Jong-un's promotion when he finally passes his father's continuous tests and proves his ability to command the military.

Kim Jong-il deviated from his father's means of control over the armed forces: the father controlled the military through a trusted deputy in the KPA and by subjecting the KPA to the Party. Now Kim Jong-il commands the gun by allowing a number of high-powered military agencies and individuals to report to him directly and personally, most noticeably the three general headquarters.<sup>29</sup> Civilian control of the military has been reduced to his strongman style of control. The KPA has thus become his family army. As a consolidation measure and a divide-and-rule practice, this has been effective. Yet it has generated an overtly

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*Forum Online*, 06-45A, June 8, 2006.

<sup>28</sup>- Michael Green's comments. *Voice Of America*, September 10, 2008.

<sup>29</sup>- Ken Gause, *North Korea Civil-Military Relations: Military-first Politics to a Point*, U.S. Army War College, September 2006.

personalized command chain and stimulated factionalization among senior officers.

The unintended outcome of this is that it will be harder for the successor to possess sufficient personal authority to manage such a fragmented system. He will be forced to expand the divide-and-rule mechanism and further factionalize the armed forces. Doing so is like drinking poison to ease thirst. On the surface an uneasy balance of power among the top brass may be achieved, but the very foundation for a unified military will have been seriously eroded. In addition this may give rise to a natural tendency at the beginning of the succession: the successor's power is weak but the generals' influence is strong, as the military has such privileged status in the political system and in society. Divide-and-rule also forces the Kim family to forge special personal ties with the military, not just for a better position in the process of succession but also for their very survival if a deadly power struggle erupts among their relatives. Therefore, the succession challenge in the DPRK may further politicize the KPA, and this in turn would intensify the uncertainties over the succession.

More concretely, the schism within the KPA is institutionalized along two parallel lines. The first is the regular command structure of the KPA. This consists of field armies and garrison troops. Most of the senior officers are loyal followers of the Dear Leader, who has promoted them to top positions. Moreover, two-thirds of Kim's public activities are visits to KPA units.<sup>30</sup> However, Kim's relations with the first line of command (regular troops) are relatively less personal than those with the second line of command (the Guard Command), whose commanders accompany the leader all the time. The latter actually form the inner circle of the

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<sup>30</sup>-Ilpyong J. Kim, "Kim Jong-il's Military-First Politics," in Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (eds.), *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), p. 61.

military clique with immediate access to Kim. They are in firm control of the information flow and serve as “big brother at the back” in the KPA. Kim is highly dependent on their loyalty to execute his succession plan, as they also maintain close contacts with his sons and other family members. These units are a system within the system, only answerable to Kim, although theoretically they exist within the structure of the regular command.

It is commonly believed that the DPRK's succession process will further enhance the military's influence. Even if the succession falters and the country is thrown into political disorder, it is unlikely that the military will be disbanded. The logical question is whether the collapse of the Kim dynasty will mean the collapse of the DPRK. If there is no U.S.-led war of regime change against the DPRK, a military junta may emerge in Pyongyang to manage the state. As a result North Korea may continue to persist, although in a volatile manner.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is not sensible to assume that the KPA is one seamless entity and will act as a united force in protecting the successor. Although it is not very clear to what extent Kim Jong-il's divide-and-rule has factionalized the KPA, it is a fact that the regular army and imperial guard compete for Kim's favor, and they do not always interact harmoniously. And key commanders maintain individual ties with Kim family members, such as Jang Sung Taek and Kim Jong-hui, who helped in their promotion. If the KPA cannot act as a unified force during the power transfer, and if Kim Jong-il leaves the scene prematurely, the young commander-in-chief will be hard-pressed to exert ultimate authority. Even if this worst-case scenario does not occur, there will inevitably be a protracted period of power negotiation with unpredictable consequences. Certainly Kim Jong-il has taken this into consideration. He promoted Lee Young-ho to

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<sup>31</sup>- The view of Beijing's DPRK specialists, January 2011, Beijing.

the position of the military's primary guardian of Jong-un. Now Lee is the youngest member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the top KPA figure. He was chief of Kim's security force and now heads the regular army as its chief of general staff. This will be useful in bridging the gap between the two parallel commands under one effective general. Recently Kim Jong-il has promoted a number of princelings who are close to his family to key military posts, headed by General O Il-jeong.<sup>32</sup> These will form an inner circle around Kim Jong-un to assist his power consolidation. If they are loyal to the younger Kim and accorded with enough power, a relative orderly succession may be executed according to Kim Jong-il's expectations.

### **North Korea's Succession and China's Reaction: Hedging for the Worst**

China's response to Kim Jong-un's anointment has been unusually swift, in sharp contrast to its response to Kim Jong-il in the 1970s. The worsening security situation on the peninsula in 2010 was a crucial background factor, as Pyongyang adopted ultra-harsh counter-measures against Lee Myung-bak's pressure-based DPRK policy.<sup>33</sup> And inter-Korean tensions may be worsened by the succession uncertainties in Pyongyang. In 2010 Korea replaced Taiwan as the area where China has the greatest fears of war. Dai Bingguo's prompt visit to the South on November 27, just three days after China postponed a scheduled foreign minister meeting in Seoul in protest against a U.S. aircraft carrier entering the Yellow Sea,

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<sup>32</sup>- *Chosun Ilbo*, April 14, 2011, relaying a broadcast of Pyongyang's Central Television on April 13, 2011.

<sup>33</sup>- Talks of Zhang Zujian and Zhang Zhaozhong, *Associated Korean Press*, December 28, 2010.

revealed Beijing's assessment of the explosive situation in the peninsula: that this was no time to place "diplomatic face" above efforts to avert war. Hu Jintao used unusual phrasing such as "very fragile and on the brink of getting out of control" to characterize the tension in his telephone conversation with Obama in December.<sup>34</sup> Beijing's Korean policy is now facing its biggest test of the post-Cold War era.

Beijing's options have become narrower and from now on it will be constantly forced to choose the lesser of several evils. Supporting Kim Jong-un is apparently one result of this consideration. On the other hand, it is too early to assess how Kim Jong-un's anointment has influenced Beijing's Korea policy because he has not been given real responsibility. Thus any analysis must be broadly based and generic.

### ***Structuring Support to Kim Jong-un into Beijing's DPRK Policy***

First, Mao's non-supportive attitudes toward the DPRK succession in 1975 were ideologically driven. Today Hu's approach is based on concerns about national interests that are ultimately defined by China's political stability. Thus Hu's overall diplomacy and national defense strategies have been made to serve his domestic policy priorities.<sup>35</sup> This necessitates an ambiguous foreign policy in which Beijing would rather shelve irresolvable international conflicts than seek unpredictable gains by addressing them. Under this guiding principle, Beijing's emphasis on crisis aversion on the peninsula amounts to support for the DPRK regime's survival. By extension, its response to Kim Jong-un's succession has been structured toward this end. In a way, China is not so much in favor of Kim's hereditary transfer of power as it is for maintaining a

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<sup>34</sup>- *Xinhua News Agency*, December 6, 2010.

<sup>35</sup>- Liu Jixian, "New Development of PLA Political Work: Study Hu Jintao's Military Thought," *Zhongguojundui zhengzhigongzuo*, No. 10, 2008, p. 2.

precarious balance between protecting Pyongyang and creating conditions for Korea's eventual reunification on terms favorable to China.

Secondly, its support for Kim Jong-un does not change Beijing's basic conception of the North as a major source of regional instability, and removing this instability is Beijing's motivation for supporting a German unification model resulting in a reunified Korea friendly to China, keeping a degree of distance from Japan, and without any U.S. military presence along the Sino-Korean border. Logically the reality of 2010 may have convinced more Chinese policy-makers to discard the myth of a "buffer," and more of them may embrace the idea of the North as a liability.<sup>36</sup> Therefore maintaining good relations with Seoul is in Beijing's best long-term strategic interests in regards to forging a congenial regional order. Yet since this path is full of uncertainties, it is better for Beijing to retain the status quo on the peninsula for the time being. Support for Kim Jong-il's succession plan is part of this arrangement.

Third, currently the most realistic security threat to Beijing comes not only from Pyongyang's adventurism but also from the breakdown of the long-held tacit agreement between Beijing, Washington and Seoul that "using the military to resolve challenges from the North is not an option."<sup>37</sup> And each country's change in stance reinforces the others, forming a vicious circle of tension escalation. The enhanced U.S.-ROK alliance following the Cheonan incident has been driven by a more strident hostile intent, concretely embodied by measures of brinkmanship such as continued war drills in areas also claimed by North Korea. To Beijing's

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<sup>36</sup>- On Chinese debate on buffers and liability, see You Ji, "Understanding China's North Korea Policy," *China Brief*, The Jamestown Foundation, Volume 4, Issue 5, 2004.

<sup>37</sup>- The quote is from William Perry's speech to the workshop *Military Alliance in the Post-Cold War Era* in Tokyo, December 2-6, 1998. Since 2008 the basic thinking in Washington has changed. Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun used moderate words to describe this new U.S.-ROK consensus in "The Obama Administration and Preparation for North Korea Instability," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2009, p. 11.

analysts this is as risky as the North's provocations.<sup>38</sup> In policy terms this undermines Beijing's definition of the status quo on the peninsula: namely, North Korea becomes nuclear-free and the U.S. refrains from stifling North Korea through military means. China's "neutrality" in 2010 was symbolic of its opposition to Lee Myung-bak's pro-U.S. policy. Given Kim Jong-il's succession uncertainty as a source of regional instability, Beijing's support for the son is what the Kim family urgently needs. So supporting Kim Jong-un is a strategic necessity, not a personal choice, despite the fact that the Chinese have been well aware from the outset that Kim Jong-un will likely turn his back on his Chinese supporters in the future since the conflicts of vital interests between the two countries are structural and thus rigid.<sup>39</sup> Consequently Beijing no longer has a clear long-term DPRK policy except in terms of crisis management. If anything, its DPRK policy is *ad hoc*, issue-oriented, short-term and driven by domestic politics.

### ***Managing the Fallout of the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Incidents***<sup>40</sup>

The Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents have had a profound impact on regional security, as they threatened to return the peninsula to the Cold-War confrontation between two blocs facing off along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. China has no intention of allowing such a development. The enhanced U.S.-ROK alliance since the Cheonan incident has helped the U.S. military to close in on China through the entry of carrier battle groups into the Yellow Sea. Beijing's biggest dilemma is that it must prop up a regime that it does not like at all. It is caught in the crossfire

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<sup>38</sup> "China firmly opposes U.S.-ROK naval drills in the Yellow Sea," *To Kung Pao*, July 2, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Liangui (a prominent expert on North Korean affairs in the CCP Central Party School), "Pyongyang's wooing Beijing is just a tactical adjustment," *Rennwuzhoukan* [Celebrities], December 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Partly extracted from You Ji, "Dealing with the "North Korea Dilemma": China's Strategic Choices," *Working Paper* 229, RSIS (Nanyang Technological University, 2011), pp. 31-32.

between the two Koreas and is a victim of Pyongyang's provocations, but it has to swallow that bitter fruit. Kim Jong-il strongly resisted Beijing's interference when planning his acts of adventurism. The ROK brought the U.S. Navy in the Yellow Sea, producing a profound military and domestic impact on Chinese strategic thinking.<sup>41</sup> This made it harder for Beijing to take a fair stance on the Yeonpyeong shelling despite Lee Myung-bak's personal plea, although China's security experts criticized Pyongyang for causing civilian casualties.<sup>42</sup> Moreover Beijing's moves to protect the DPRK from collapse can also be seen from another angle: as a way of dealing with a U.S.-led encirclement against China.<sup>43</sup> The North could be used to counterbalance that effort. Neutrality is thus a means to an end, not the end in itself. Although the price to be paid is very high, it is still the lesser of two evils in comparison to the fallout from a North Korean collapse.

Beijing's "neutrality" stems from its enhanced concerns of war on the peninsula since 2008 and especially in 2010. Lee Myung-bak's 2010 Liberation Day Address sanctioned a unification model going beyond "crisis management," implying comprehensive preparations for a sudden collapse of the DPRK. For this he proposed consideration of a unification tax to financially prepare for absorption of the North by amassing a sum of \$US2.14 trillion in three decades.<sup>44</sup> Militarily, this year's Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint U.S.-ROK exercise was not only the largest in scale but was designed to operationalize *Concept 5029*.<sup>45</sup> Although neither Washington nor Seoul sees military intervention as an option against

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<sup>41</sup>- General Ma Xiaotian said in the *Shangri-la Dialogue* in May 2010 that the U.S.-ROK naval drills happened at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

<sup>42</sup>- Shen Dingli, "Ending the Tension," [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), November 27, 2010.

<sup>43</sup>- On this encirclement, see John Garver and Feiling Wang, "China's Anti-Encirclement Struggle," *Asian Security*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2010, p. 258.

<sup>44</sup>- "Lee Lays Out Three-Stage Master Plan for Reunification," *Chosun Ilbo*, August 16, 2010.

<sup>45</sup>- "Sudden reunification would cost \$2.1 trillion," *Chosun Ilbo*, August 16, 2010.

Pyongyang for the time being, their attempt to bring down Pyongyang through sustained military tension increases the prospects of war and thus is at odds with the long-standing Beijing-Washington-Seoul joint effort to avoid war on the peninsula.

China is facing new pressure to rein in Pyongyang. This raises an old question of how much influence Beijing has on the DPRK. Given China's substantial economic aid to the DPRK, i.e., 70% of all international food aid and up to 80% of its energy needs,<sup>46</sup> its influence is logically considerable. More concretely this amounts to one million tons of grain and 0.5 million tons of heavy oil, constituting over half of China's entire foreign aid.<sup>47</sup> Yet using economic aid to change North Korea's behavior is a one-off and an irreversible weapon, as it is linked to the DPRK's survival. Because of its vital nature, if China were to suspend aid and cause a serious crisis in the country, China would replace the U.S. as Pyongyang's number one enemy. In punishing Pyongyang by cutting off aid, China may shoot itself in the foot. China would rather reserve its potential punitive power than put it to practical use.

Fundamentally what emboldens Kim Jong-il is his understanding that none of his neighbors has the stomach for war. Although Washington explores military solution vis-à-vis Pyongyang, it is still highly reluctant to use force, which is opposed not only by China but also by many U.S. allies. Yet these confused signals - war avoidance on the one hand but heightened military pressure on the other - have partially stimulated Pyongyang to mount provocations that fall just short of real acts of war. Under the circumstances Beijing's options are limited in the face of this brinkmanship from both sides.

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<sup>46</sup> - Ether Pan, "The China-North Korea Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations Brief Paper*, July 11, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> - Y. W. Kihl & H. N. Kim, *North Korea: The Politics of Survival* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), p. 197.

For instance, in early June 1999 Kim Yong-nam, the speaker of the DPRK's parliament, paid a visit to Jiang Zemin in Beijing and submitted a request for China to support the KPA in "teaching the South a lesson," referring to the North's planned retaliation in the disputed area in the West Sea. Jiang categorically refused the plea. Just a week after Kim Yong-nam's return to Pyongyang, the first serious armed clash took place in the West Sea, alarming Beijing. In subsequent meetings between senior military officers, the two sides reached an agreement that the North must notify China of any military plans against the ROK.<sup>48</sup> It is obvious that Pyongyang did not bother to inform Beijing prior to the Cheonan event. Its adventurism put Beijing in an awkward position afterward.<sup>49</sup> Nor was Beijing notified beforehand when Pyongyang unilaterally suspended the Armistice Treaty in 2009. The KPA did give Beijing a short notice about the Yeonpyeong shelling in 2010 but went ahead with the action despite the latter's opposition. These events demonstrated the level of influence Beijing has on the North, which takes advantage of Chinese aid but seeks to trap China in unwanted crises. However, signs of a softening of the North's stance toward the ROK since December 2010, such as its backing down from promised retaliation against the South's artillery drills in the Yeonpyeong Island, were due to China's efforts in November 2010 to pressure Kim Jong-il to restrain himself.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the extent to which Beijing's pressure works is also affected by the U.S./ROK hostile intent against Pyongyang, over which Beijing has no control. The North's response to this agenda is logical and Beijing is not in a strong position to

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<sup>48</sup>-Speech by a senior researcher at the Beijing Contemporary Institute of International Relations at the specialist workshop *The PRC at Fifty: Towards a Responsible Power*, Australian National University, October 29, 1999.

<sup>49</sup>-Oral sources from Beijing's experts on North Korea in February 2011.

<sup>50</sup>-Qu Xing (a senior Chinese diplomat), *News in Focus Today*, CCTV-4, April 28, 2011. Also John S. Park, *On the Issues: Tensions on the Korean Peninsula*, U.S. Institute of Peace, December 27, 2010.

oppose it. The cycles of action/reaction are not black and white.

China may have set a different bottom line in dealing with Pyongyang as a result of being forced to swallow some bitter fruit in 2010. Although Beijing has not openly criticised the North, in private it deeply resents Pyongyang's acts and will remember the serious harm they brought to its vital interests. For instance, the Cheonan incident has translated the North/South confrontation into unnecessary Sino-U.S. tension, adversely affecting China's overall standing and security in the region. Beijing's forced "neutrality" hurt its image as a responsible big power, and in particular lost it the trust of ROK elites who may have a key bearing on China's long-term designs for Korean unification. "Neutrality" betrayed Beijing's principle of keeping an equal distance between the two Koreas.<sup>51</sup> For Beijing to create conditions to prevent the 2010 crises from being repeated in the future, its status quo policy has to be reshaped in the context of North Korean brinkmanship that indirectly harms China's strategic interests. The deepening DPRK crisis may trigger a prompt policy change in Beijing, which is now preoccupied with near-term crisis management in Korea.<sup>52</sup> Once the situation stabilizes, Beijing must contemplate a long-term response with new approaches to the DPRK challenge. Specifically, Beijing has already depicted North Korea as a normal neighbor. What it needs to do in the future is to operationalize that concept into concrete policies according to Pyongyang's merits and challenges rather than "historical ties." China's North Korea policy is increasingly in flux.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>-On this principle of balance, see Gong Keyu, "Tension on the Korean Peninsula and Chinese Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2009, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup>- According to Jin Canrong's speech to *Grand Academic Forum*, Phoenix TV, December 13, 2010.

<sup>53</sup>-On the concept of a normal state, Ambassador Yang Wenchang has characterized Sino-DPRK relations as relations between two normal neighbors - probably the first open

## Kim Jong-un and the Future Korean Conflict

At the moment there are many dependent and independent variables involved in the relationship between Pyongyang's complicated succession politics and the hostility among the parties involved in the peninsula crisis. As mentioned earlier, Kim Jong-un has not been given real responsibility, and there are still huge uncertainties about his political fate. Any assessment on his future is premature, especially when we all know that DPRK elite politics is a tightly closed book and the Kim Jong-il family is extremely mysterious. Similarly, except for Beijing's reactive backing of Kim Jong-un, it is not yet clear how the succession will translate into concrete policies regarding the North/South conflict, the nuclear standoff and U.S. involvement in the region.

Yet some scholarly analysis can be pursued based on common sense understanding of DPRK politics. It is a widely held view that the difficult evolution of the DPRK's succession was a key factor behind its provocations in 2010.<sup>54</sup> By such logic, the period of dynastic transfer of power is a time when dictators in rogue states attempt brinkmanship as a way to shift attention away from domestic challenges. North Korea needs to vent frustration over its unresolved domestic problems through adventurism abroad in order to help Kim Jong-un build authority at home. He will be tempted to adopt a hard-line stance to convince his seniors, peers and followers that he can stand firm and face up to the South, U.S. imperialism and Chinese interference. Only then will he be seen as worthy successor of the DPRK's revolutionary course created by his grandfather, continued by his father and now carried forward by himself. Following this line of argument, it is logical to assume that Kim

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expression of this concept from official Chinese circles. *Chosun Ilbo*, June 8, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> "North Korea may have further provocations for power succession," *Yonhap News*, February 10, 2011.

Jong-un will uphold North Korea's military-first policy, protect the vital interests of the KPA and its special status in the political system and in society, and withstand international pressure to denuclearize. Then one may conclude that under Kim Jong-un the KPA will remain tough on territorial disputes with the South; it will be more persistent in its nuclear ambitions; and it will be aggressively vigilant when challenged. All this heralds troubled times ahead for the peninsula. This logic of assertiveness during a succession, common in most authoritarian regimes, may prove to be the source of further DPRK hostility that will drag China and other regional states into an unwanted confrontation.

However, there is another logical argument that mitigates the seemingly sensible argument above. Most authoritarian states would prefer to lay low in crisis as a natural choice for regime survival, unless they are backed into a corner. After all, they interact with major powers from a position of vulnerability. A weaker power's assertiveness often reflects the Sun Tze stratagem of "taking an offensive posture for the real purpose of defense." Under that circumstance, the leaders of such states know the limits of brinkmanship and always back down before being cornered. Leading the weakest country in Northeast Asia and surrounded by powerful enemies, Kim Jong-il has become a master of this stratagem, especially in crisis situations. This is the most valuable trait for his son Kim Jong-un to emulate. If the heir can indeed learn from his father's elasticity, it could become his most effective regime survival strategy.

China's security experts do not buy the idea of shifting from a domestic to an international crisis.<sup>55</sup> This concept may work for a state that is in trouble at home but is still a strong power. It is unaffordable luxury for a country facing the prospect of collapse. Crisis shifting is a tool

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<sup>55</sup>- This is an impression I gained from my interview with China's Korean specialists in February 2011 in Beijing.

for regime survival, not for suicide. In a vulnerable state of affairs during the process of power consolidation, Kim Jong-un is better off not waging uncontrollable provocations against the South. And he is unlikely to engage in suicidal actions. His foreign policy will be based on concerns of domestic stability, not military adventurism overseas.<sup>56</sup> This is the majority view in Beijing.

Chinese security analysts have paid a lot of attention to Kim Jong-un's comment that the primary governing principle is to let the people fill their stomachs.<sup>57</sup> When analyzed in the context of Pyongyang's security policies, this remark may shed some light on his mindset as the next leader. Firstly, the military-first policy will not change in the national policy hierarchy, as it is the DPRK's strategy for regime survival. Yet the economic aspect of it will be more heavily emphasized and this will affect the North's overall foreign policy. Domestically, the new thinking on economics may boost the incentive for economic reforms. Inevitably this will lead the heir to visit China to learn ideas and practices of reform.<sup>58</sup>

Some conciliatory rhetoric has come out of Pyongyang since the beginning of this year. The visit to North Korea by former U.S. President Carter in late April further enhanced the Chinese perception that the ongoing succession in Pyongyang may actually rekindle its efforts to reach out to the world, especially to Washington. This was expressed in the personal message carried by Carter to Lee Myung-bak that he would unconditionally meet Lee to discuss "anything" to ease the tension.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>- Comments by Major General Zhang Zhaozhong of the PLA National Defense University, *News in Focus Today*, CCTV, February 28, 2011.

<sup>57</sup>- It is reported that Kim Jong-un recently said that "Food is more important than bullets." *The New York Times*, December 27, 2010.

<sup>58</sup>- For the first time since Kim's anointment, CCTV mentioned his forthcoming visit to China, a rare occurrence in Sino-DPRK relations. Lu Jian in *News in Focus Today*, CCTV, April 26, 2011.

<sup>59</sup>- *Morning News at 7am*, Shanghai Satellite TV, April 29, 2011.

During the transfer of power Pyongyang's reaction to military challenges from the South and the U.S. will be pragmatic and avoid fatal confrontations. For instance, Pyongyang must put on a tough face over the U.S.-ROK war drills, but it will be very wary of taking counter actions. This is consistent to what Kim Jong-il promised to Hu Jintao in December 2010. Kim Jong-un is likely to continue this stance.<sup>60</sup>

The motivation behind Pyongyang's vocal pledge to reinstate the denuclearization process is highly dubious.<sup>61</sup> Yet it places the ROK in a difficult position: denuclearization through regime change is still a premature concept, but there is no other feasible mechanism for proceeding. If the South continues to resist the six-party talks, as mentioned earlier, it will be playing into Kim Jong-il's hands. Kim Jong-un will follow his father's preferences, drawing a balance that allows for retention of nuclear material, suspension of further production, and continued participation in the Talks. Now Beijing is seeking any workable formula to restart the denuclearization process, including informal bilateral or multilateral talks as a transitional step toward later resumption of the six-party talks, which serves Pyongyang's preference for direct dialogue with the U.S.<sup>62</sup> America seems to have shelved the idea of an apology. One key theme of Carter's visit to Pyongyang was denuclearization. This indicated a useful unofficial diplomatic strategy for denuclearization, which serves U.S. interests. It seems that the ball is in Seoul's court.

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<sup>60</sup> - Wu Dawei, Chinese special envoy on Korean affairs, told his ROK counterpart that Beijing hoped to see North/South dialogue and was not against DPRK-U.S. direct talks. These would help enable a resumption of the six-party talks. "North Korea may propose North/South nuclear talks," *Chosun Ilbo*, April 18, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> - Message from Kim Yong-nam to Carter at their meeting on April 27, 2011. *New China News Agency*, April 28, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> - In his news briefing on April 26, 2011 Chinese foreign spokesman Hong Lei stressed the urgent need to restart the denuclearization process but mentioned nothing about the six-party talks.

## Conclusion

The succession issue is an unresolved challenge for North Korea, whose vulnerability lies in the single fact that the whole nation's fate hinges on the fate of one person who is in poor health.<sup>63</sup> Heredity is a fragile mechanism for the orderly transfer of power, forcing the country to suffer periodic succession uncertainties. Each transition may deal a fatal blow to the whole system. Now the feudal dynastic cycle in North Korea has again reached a critical point of evolution. Whether the DPRK can survive this round of power transfer is anyone's guess. Yet clearly the surrounding countries are formulating contingency plans to hedge against any sudden crisis on the peninsula.

Beijing's plan is embedded in its support for Kim Jong-un's succession, although this support was adopted in a forced and passive way. This plan is structured into China's strategic calculus of maintaining the status quo on the peninsula, which automatically means aiding the Pyongyang regime's survival. In sharp contrast to its reluctance to back Kim Il-sung's power transfer arrangement for Kim Jong-il, Beijing's current response to Kim Jong-un is highly expedient. Put another way, since China's basic calculus is dominated by the need to preserve the DPRK; it could not care less about who is chosen as the heir-apparent as long as he can hold the regime together for a period of time, during which Beijing can gradually facilitate the emergence of a unified Korea that adopts a pro-China policy based on cooperation rather than balance of power. Support of Kim Jong-un is just a means to an end.

Beyond the peninsula, if Pyongyang's succession falters, political and social instability may lead the regime to falter. This would generate a

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<sup>63</sup>-At the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on September 9, Kim Yong-nam, chair of the Supreme People's Assembly, said "we will rely completely on the great leader Kim Jong-il for our fate..." *Chosun Ilbo*, September 13, 2008.

tremendous impact on all of Asia. The idea of the KPA under no effective civilian control and in possession of a crude nuclear capability is a security nightmare for all, not to mention the massive waves of refugees and enormous economic pressure that would accompany the crisis.<sup>64</sup> As every country surrounding the DPRK has a stake in its survival, it is overly simplistic to believe that an early collapse of the Kim dynasty would be a good thing.

North Korea's succession may not be entirely negative as is commonly believed; it induces tension. Tension rises whenever the Kim family feels that it is backed into a corner. There are advocates of pursuing a policy of cornering the DPRK as a way of inducing regime change. Trapping the North in a tense security environment may drive it to exhaust itself economically in struggling to uphold the military-first policy. Yet if the North did not feel cornered, the Kim family may have preferred to ease tensions on the peninsula for the sake of Kim Jong-un's power consolidation. Opportunities do exist for turning the page from 2010 through a resumption of North/South dialogue and the six-party talks for crisis prevention, although this can give the North breathing space to regroup politically and economically.<sup>65</sup>

Kim's succession process can significantly impact China's DPRK policy, which has been previously focused on the principle of crisis aversion even though Beijing realizes the high costs of this policy: massive

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<sup>64</sup>—One estimate by RAND held that South Korea would have to inject US\$700 billion to stabilize North Korea's economy, an amount Seoul does not have. On the consequences of North Korea's economic reforms and failure, see Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Marcus Noland, *Korea after Kim Jong-il* (Institute for International Economics, 2004), p. 64.

<sup>65</sup>—It has been reported that under joint Sino-U.S. sponsorship secret North/South meetings were held in May in Beijing in which the South proposed to the North to arrange an informal summit between Kim Jong-il and Lee Myung-bak. *7Am News*, Phoenix TV, June 2, 2011. If this is true, it is a positive move to ease tensions on the peninsula.

economic aid to an increasingly unpredictable neighbor. This status quo-based policy symbolizes not only Beijing's lingering "buffer zone" mentality but also its difficulty in finding any feasible alternative. Therefore, Beijing is not in a position to visibly alter its DPRK policy any time soon.<sup>66</sup> Yet China may have set a different policy bottom line vis-à-vis the North in the wake of its 2010 adventurism which dragged China into a confrontation with America and others against its will. The new policy would be a hedging strategy, the cornerstone of which would be a set of pre-determined plans to preempt a precarious situation on the peninsula. In a sign of heightened threat perception, the PLA has deployed regular units along the Sino-DPRK border and is getting ready to respond to any new crisis that may be brought about by the failed succession. One key element of this strategy is Beijing's joint effort with regional countries to deal with sudden developments in Pyongyang, while at the same time hedging against unwanted upheavals on the peninsula such as might be caused by a ground war for regime change. This strategy has been further complicated by the ongoing succession process in Pyongyang, but Beijing's general view about the prospects for the succession is relatively optimistic, since Kim Jong-il is making detailed plans for the transfer of power and he may still have a number of years to live - years which could be crucial for the heir's power consolidation.

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<sup>66</sup>- You Ji, "Understand China's North Korea Policy," *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, March 8, 2004.

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## *Rethinking the Six-Party Process on Korea\**

*Stephen Blank*

### **Abstract**

As of late 2010 the six-party process regarding North Korean proliferation is moribund if not dead. Moreover, multiple crises generated by provocative North Korean behavior could set in motion a chain of events leading to conflicts if not outright war. Furthermore, it should be clear that the U.S. policy of attempting to pressure China to pressure North Korea to behave in what Washington considers to be a more reasonable manner and negotiate seriously is a futile enterprise. Accordingly this essay examines the reasons for the failure of the six-party talks and does so not only with reference to North Korean behavior, but also with an eye to the larger strategic environment in which the talks occur. Bearing in mind the fundamental transformation of Northeast Asia's strategic landscape the essay then proceeds to suggest a way out of the impasse for the United States in order to regenerate a process that might actually bring North Korea back to a serious negotiation.

**Key Words:** North Korea, six-party talks, United States, China, Russia

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The six-party process is moribund and failing if not dead.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Niklas Swanstrom of Sweden's Institute for Development and Policy flatly says the process is dead.<sup>2</sup> This stagnation preceded the DPRK's announcement of a uranium enrichment plant much more sophisticated than anyone believed and its shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010. It also was visible before the Cheonan incident of March 2010 when North Korea torpedoed a South Korean ship. North Korea is also reportedly preparing a third nuclear test that will likely further delay if not kill the resumption of six-party talks.<sup>3</sup> This breakdown, attributable to many causes, has engendered the growing intransigence of the major parties. Absent a major change in their policies no change or relief is in sight. This may make the next crisis much more dangerous as South Korea has now publicly announced that it will retaliate in force against new attacks.<sup>4</sup> And the advent of this uranium enrichment plant creates opportunities for North Korea to begin building many more nuclear bombs.<sup>5</sup>

Thus there is good reason for mounting concern. North Korea now talks of the situation as being on the brink of war and South Korea has pledged retaliation for any future Northern provocations.<sup>6</sup> In September

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<sup>1</sup>- Balbina Hwang and Michael O'Hanlon, "Defense Issues and Asia's Security Architecture," in Michael J. Green and Bates Gill (eds.), *Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 281

<sup>2</sup>- Niklas Swanstrom, "Artillery Exchange on the Korean Peninsula," Institute for Security and Development, *Policy Brief*, No. 44, November 23, 2010, [www.isdp.eu](http://www.isdp.eu).

<sup>3</sup>- Kim Se-Jeong, "Japanese Media Allege North Korea Preparing Nuke Test," *Korea Times*, November 17, 2010, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/11/113\\_76532.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/11/113_76532.html).

<sup>4</sup>- "South Korea Vows Retaliation Against Any Further Attack," *Reuters*, November 29, 2010.

<sup>5</sup>- Siegfried S. Hecker, "A Return Trip to North Korea's Yongbyun Nuclear Complex," Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, November 24, 2010, <http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/23035/Yongbyonreport.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>- "South Korea Vows Retaliation Against Any Further Attack."

2010, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, Moscow's delegate to the talks, said that the Korean Peninsula was on the brink of war.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently although the succession of Kim Jong-un has so far progressed without incident, we cannot take the enduring stability of North Korea for granted. Many signs suggest a genuine possibility of internal ferment or revolutionary crisis within North Korea (even apart from a possible succession crisis) that could destabilize it and trigger very grave and unforeseen crises.<sup>8</sup> For example, succession to Kim Jong-un could easily trigger internal and/or external clashes in and around the DPRK that could easily drag the outside powers into conflict, and North Korean military risk taking is a highly possible contingency.<sup>9</sup> Defections, corruption, riots when the 2009 currency reform was introduced, jail-breaks, the breaking of the regime's information monopoly, a precarious food situation, etc. all signify a potential for eruption if there is a break in leadership or elite cohesion. Alternatively elites who lose out may defect or seek to overturn that result. All this occurs in the context of the apparent ascendancy of North Korean hard-liners and the military, which undermines prospects for a more accommodating foreign policy even if Pyongyang returns to the six-party talks. Meanwhile, the U.S. and ROK

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<sup>7</sup> - Andrew Osborn, "North and South Korea on the Brink of War, Russian Diplomat Warns," *Telegraph.co.uk*, September 24, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8020972/North-and-South-Korea-on-the-brink-of-war-Russian-diplomat-warns.html>.

<sup>8</sup> - "Not Waiving, Perhaps Drowning," *The Economist: Briefing: North Korea*, May 29, 2010, pp. 23-25; Rudiger Frank, "Currency Reform and Orthodox Socialism in North Korea," Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network (NAPSNET), *Policy Forum Online*, December 3, 2009; "N. Korea Backtracks as Currency Reform Spells Riots," *Chosun Ilbo* (English edition), December 15, 2009, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2009/12/15/2009121400361.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/12/15/2009121400361.html); Captain Jonathan Stafford, USA, "Finding America's Role in a Collapsed North Korean State," *Military Review*, January/February 2008, p. 98; "N. Korea's Currency Reform: A Bid to Cement Power," *Chosun Ilbo* (English edition), December 2, 2009, [http://english.chosun.com/site/daa/html\\_dir/2009/12/02/20091202200656.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/daa/html_dir/2009/12/02/20091202200656.html).

<sup>9</sup> - "CIA Chief Panetta Says North Korea's Kim Preparing Succession," Sanger and Shanker.

have already confidentially discussed unification scenarios.<sup>10</sup>

Second, foreign discussions concerning Pyongyang's motives for precipitating the crises of 2010 usually divide into the following explanations. Analyses focusing on domestic determinants of the DPRK's actions claim that the regime needs the military's support for Kim Jong-un in the succession by conducting aggressive moves against the U.S. and South Korea and demonstrating, e.g. through the enrichment facility, that North Korea will never renounce nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup> That denouement, in turn, vitiates prospects for resuming the six-party talks because from Washington's, if not Tokyo's and Seoul's viewpoints, this North Korean stance means there is nothing to talk about.

Assessments emphasizing foreign policy drivers claim that North Korea is employing its habitual tactics to force the U.S. to take it seriously and engage it in bilateral negotiations and possibly also is simultaneously trying to induce South Korea to restore elements of the Sunshine Policy and economic transfers to the North.<sup>12</sup> North Korea also continues to conduct a highly risk-acceptant policy seen in the crises of 2010 and its transfer of missiles and proliferation capabilities abroad. Indeed, by 2007 North Korea had established itself as "the Third World's greatest supplier of missiles, missile components and related technologies."<sup>13</sup>

This risk-acceptant behavior appears to derive from the belief that Moscow and Beijing will ultimately restrain Washington from imposing truly serious punishments upon North Korea, while the U.S. cannot or

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<sup>10</sup>- "South Korea Vows Retaliation Against Any Further Attack."

<sup>11</sup>- E. G. Sue Pleming, "Gates Says Kim Jong-il's Son Seeks Military 'Stripes,'" Reuters.com, August 13, 2010.

<sup>12</sup>- Sangsoo Lee and Christopher O'Hara, "Yeonpyeong on Fire and Enriched Uranium," Institute for Security and Development, *Policy Brief*, No. 45, November 26, 2010, www.isdp.eu.

<sup>13</sup>- Daniel A. Pinkston, *The North Korean Ballistic Missile Program* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2008), p. 57

will not use its full power to strike back at it for these risky moves. Neither will Russia or China then be able to exercise any restraining leverage upon North Korea. Therefore North Korea can behave provocatively at what appears to be a minimum or at least manageable risk. While this behavior has allowed North Korea to get nuclear weapons without paying what it considers to be an unbearable price, it also exposes its supposed “backers” to the consequences of these great risks taken in disregard of their interests and without their knowledge or acceptance of the risks.<sup>14</sup> But since Russian and Chinese behavior has allowed North Korea to keep behaving provocatively North Korea has repeatedly outmaneuvered the other five members of the process to the point where U.S. officials now publicly charge that China’s refusal to exercise decisive pressure upon the DPRK means that China has become North Korea’s enabler.<sup>15</sup> Yet nothing seems likely to alter Pyongyang’s calculation of the costs it incurs by acting this way. Indeed, at least some Russian experts believe that nobody can scare North Korea with sanctions.<sup>16</sup> Clearly this kind of behavior could easily ignite the conflagration that Moscow, if not other capitals, most fear.

The fact that the military seemingly is the strongest faction in North Korean politics and must be appeased by provocative international behavior to cement the succession or even may to some degree be acting on its own also raises many threats to regional security.<sup>17</sup> This may be especially true since Pyongyang has long acted on the belief that the only way to get Washington’s or Seoul’s attention is to create a major crisis and

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<sup>14</sup>- Yongho Kim and Myungchul Kim, “North Korea’s Risk-Taking vis-à-vis the U.S. Coercion,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XIX, No. 44, Winter 2007, pp. 81-82.

<sup>15</sup>- “North Korea, China in “Consensus” on Crisis,” *Global Security Newswire*, December 9, 2010, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org).

<sup>16</sup>- Moscow, *Ekho Moskvy News Agency* (in Russian), May 20, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, May 20, 2010.

<sup>17</sup>- Sangsoo Lee and Christopher O’Hara.

may believe it can take risks with impunity. Yet current U.S., South Korean, and probably Japanese domestic politics preclude any generosity to North Korea or quick return to the six-party talks absent guarantees of denuclearization and an end to provocations which are driven by North Korea's domestic politics. Consequently the intersection of the main players' domestic politics and regional threat perceptions combine to frustrate anything but a deepening cycle of provocations and resistance. Meanwhile apparently nobody can or is willing to control North Korea's behavior.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, there is no reason to believe that imposing new sanctions will stop Pyongyang's risk-acceptant and provocative behavior. The revenues it gains from proliferation are vital to its economic survival. Second, China will not bring to bear its full weight to truly implement the existing UN imposed sanctions. So, new sanctions cannot achieve much.<sup>19</sup> More sanctions, even if passed by the UN, can only obstruct a return to the six-party process; and this is not only because we cannot really count on their full implementation. Since North Korea demands an end to sanctions barring its arms trade as a precondition of returning to the talks, any new sanctions probably only strengthen its resolve not to rejoin the process.

Michael O'Hanlon has identified a series of other dangers that could easily grow out of the current situation. These are the dangers of proliferation either to terrorists or other states. Should the DPRK collapse control over nuclear materials could easily deteriorate enabling possessors of those materials to sell them abroad to the highest bidder. On the other hand should North Korea persist as a nuclear power its capabilities could

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<sup>18</sup>- Stephen Blank, "Russia and the Six-Party Process in Korea," Paper presented to the annual conference of the Korea Economic Institute of America, October 22, 2010.

<sup>19</sup>- Andrei Lankov, "The North Korean Issue: What Can Be Done?" in Nicole Finnemann and Korea Economic Institute (eds.), *Navigating Turbulence in Northeast Asia: The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, Washington, D.C., 2010, pp. 80-85.

either weaken deterrence among the members of the U.S. Asian alliance system, or even start a war entailing missile strikes on South Korea, Japan, or even possibly the United States. Lastly, a nuclear North Korea could engender a “nuclear domino effect” leading Japan, South Korea, and possibly other states to contemplate going nuclear or actually do so.<sup>20</sup>

### **Causes for the Breakdown of the Six-Party Process**

The primary causes for the present situation reside first in the fundamental incompatibility of the DPRK and U.S. positions; second, in the six-party mechanism’s inherent problems; third, in the evolving disparities in the parties’ positions; and fourth in the greatly transformed Asian strategic environment since the talks began. While North Korea claims it is prepared to return to the talks, it also states that it will not give up its nuclear weapons under any conditions.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that Washington’s demand for an irrevocable prior commitment to complete, verifiable, and irreversible disarmament (CVID) of its nuclear weapons is a non-starter. The Russian Korea expert, Georgy Toloraya, openly argued that if the talks are about denuclearization first and other issues subsequently they will be futile as North Korea will simply refuse to play a serious part.<sup>22</sup> He also claims that North Korea sees no purpose to the six-party talks as it gained little from them and did not get substantial security guarantees or real economic assistance.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>-O’Hanlon, p. 281.

<sup>21</sup>-Ralph A. Cossa, “The Sino-U.S. Relationship: Respecting Each Other’s Core Interests.” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, XXXII, No. 5, 2010, pp. 272-273.

<sup>22</sup>-Georgy Toloraya, “Russia and the North Korean Knot,” [www.japanfocus.org/georgy-toloraya-3345](http://www.japanfocus.org/georgy-toloraya-3345), 2010.

<sup>23</sup>-Georgy Toloraya, “The New Korean Cold War and the Possibility of Thaw,” [www.japanfocus.org/georgy-toloraya-3258](http://www.japanfocus.org/georgy-toloraya-3258).

Thus Pyongyang has announced that its agenda for resuming negotiations focuses on the following set of goals:

- Gaining recognition as a de facto nuclear weapon state or, failing that, preventing efforts to disarm its nuclear weapons;
- Convincing Washington and others that they have no choice but to normalize relations with North Korea as a nuclear state;
- Maximizing all available material benefits through negotiations while conceding nothing on its nuclear program;
- Convincing the international community and UNSC to lift existing sanctions and impose no new ones;
- Shifting discussion of the six-party talks from denuclearization to a “peace regime” based on ending or attenuating U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently its conditions for rejoining the process completely contradict the U.S. position that demands an advance commitment to the CVID package and shows no interest in a preceding peace settlement. Thus at best an impasse appears to be the foreseeable future of the six-party process even if it somehow resumed soon.

This impasse alone suffices to torpedo any early resumption of the six-party process. But in the context of the added crises of 2010, the domestic constraints on key actors in the wake of U.S. elections, the collapse of the Sunshine Policy, and North Korea’s succession it is difficult to see the point of resuming them let alone how this resumption might come about. But this impasse could generate renewed crises, especially as North Korea thinks it must provoke new crises to be heard. While the six-party process has hitherto functioned largely as a mechanism for

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<sup>24</sup>-Evans J. R. Revere, “The North Korea Nuclear Problem: Sailing into Uncharted Waters,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, No. 32, 2010, pp. 183-184.

crisis management, it is neither working nor managing crises, and it could break down. This is not surprising since the process has contained within it the seeds of such an outcome from its inception.

A second cause for the failure of the talks lies in the inherent difficulties in arranging any multilateral consensus, let alone a unity of views and actions on an issue affecting the parties' vital national interests.<sup>25</sup> Since all activity occurs within an environment of multiple triangular and bilateral relationships among the participants, mutual coordination is inherently very difficult.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore the record of multilateral security institutions in Asia is not encouraging. Multilateral Asian security institutions have poorly adapted their original function to changing power realities, notably rising powers' demands, while the six-party process is not yet an accepted multilateral security organization rather than a crisis management and thus somewhat ad hoc organization.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the six parties' competitive approaches to Northeast Asian security, particularly in the now dynamic evolution of this region with a rising China, a seemingly declining America and a threatening North Korea, underscore the difficulty in using the six-party process to generate multilateral harmony.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>- John Gerard Ruggie (ed.), *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup>- Gilbert Rozman, "U.S. Strategic Thinking on the Japanese-South Korean Historical Dispute," in Gilbert Rozman (ed.), *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 151.

<sup>27</sup>- Michael Wesley, "Asia-Pacific Institutions," in William T. Tow (ed.), *Security Relations in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus?* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 49-66.

<sup>28</sup>- Gilbert Rozman, *Northeast Asia's Stunted Regionalism: Bilateral Distrust in the Shadow of Globalization* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gilbert Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States (Strategic Thought in Northeast Asia)* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Michael J. Green and Bates Gill (eds.), *Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community* (New York: Columbia

Third, there is an added problem of different conceptions of what the six-party process should achieve. China is retreating from the idea that it should aim to denuclearize North Korea. Instead China argues it should serve as a means to reduce tensions. When Kim Jong-il visited China in August 2010, he and the Chinese press both stressed that this was the process' purpose, not to arrange for denuclearization or a peace treaty for the Korean War.<sup>29</sup> If this concept of the talks is allowed to prevail North Korea will become a nuclear state de facto and possibly de jure, while remaining in many ways an outlaw state and thus an obstacle to regional security because the U.S., ROK, and Japan will not accept it as a nuclear state. Nor will they accept upending the six-party talks to serve an agenda that only benefits Beijing and Pyongyang at their expense.

Even if Russia and China correctly argue that denuclearization can only ensue from a long-term process of confidence-building and mutual security guarantees, Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo are unwilling to hear this argument. Japan even publicly stated its belief that this is not an auspicious time to reconvene the talks. South Korea and Washington agree with this and demand an apology for the shelling of Yeonpyeong while Washington insists on a prior commitment to denuclearization as a precondition for resuming the six-party talks.<sup>30</sup>

## The Changed Strategic Environment

Finally the strategic environment within which the talks originated has completely changed. Any new talks must take the new environment

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University Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup>- "DPRK Top Leader Kim Jong-il Hopes for Early Resumption of Six-Party Talks," *Xinhua* (in Chinese), August 30, 2010, Open Source Center, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, China (Henceforth *FBIS CHI*), August 30, 2010.

<sup>30</sup>- "U.S., allies remain opposed to nuclear talks with North Korea."

into account and synchronize their activities with those major trends. Asia's strategic transformation necessarily entails reconfiguring the participants' ambitions and interests regarding the six-party process. But this change too makes it harder to visualize the process as successfully denuclearizing and reintegrating North Korea within a new regional order.

First, the talks are about more than denuclearizing North Korea. Indeed, they should facilitate the creation of a new, durable, and legitimate order in Northeast Asia wherein North Korea can make peace with its interlocutors and assume its rightful place. Ultimately if not immediately, this means formal resolution of the Korean War and mutual recognition by all the parties. Otherwise neither South nor North Korea would obtain security and denuclearization would be a sham. And those would be only the most immediate consequences of a failed resolution.

Second, while the possibility of the DPRK's collapse is real and Washington must constantly conduct coordinated contingency planning with Tokyo and Seoul if not the other members of the process, it must also act as if the DPRK will endure and be an independent, secure, denuclearized, and viable state. Otherwise no lasting or workable solution can be created nor can the U.S. then formulate a strategy rather than tactics, or gain leverage over North Korea. Third, we must grasp that North Korea's nuclearization aims to free itself not only from U.S. and ROK threats, but also from Chinese domination. For example, North Korea has consciously refused to follow China's course and reform its economy along Chinese lines. Indeed, there are compelling arguments suggesting that the DPRK has decided that reform along Chinese lines is too dangerous to its continued tenure and will not be launched.<sup>31</sup> Other analysts like Alexander Mansourov suggest that it may actually be

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<sup>31</sup>-Lankov, pp. 80-85.

dynamically stable.<sup>32</sup> There may well be debates in Pyongyang about choosing to emulate either China or Vietnam's reform trajectory, but even emulating China will not occur by kowtowing to it.<sup>33</sup>

Even if China is North Korea's main interlocutor there is much well-founded North Korean suspicion of Chinese aims and tensions. Beijing's clear hostility to the DPRK's free economic zone in Sinuiju launched in 2002 and anger about not being consulted suggest a lurking interest in converting North Korea into an economic satellite of China, hardly Seoul's or Pyongyang's objective.<sup>34</sup> Since then Chinese economic penetration of North Korea has greatly expanded.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile defectors from the North confirm its elite's antipathy to rising Chinese power even as the DPRK's dependence upon Chinese aid grows.<sup>36</sup> Given the not so hidden tension and mutual dislike that pervades Sino-DPRK relations, North Korea will not easily increase that dependence which clearly grates upon it. But the problem of DPRK-China relations is greater than that. Despite talk of the two states' closeness being like lips and teeth, there is no fraternal sentimentality between them.<sup>37</sup> Subsequent analyses suggest

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<sup>32</sup>–Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "Disaster Management and Institutional Change in the DPRK: Trends in the Songun Era," in James M. Lister and Korea Economic Institute (eds.), *On Korea*, Washington, D.C., 2007, pp. 67-68.

<sup>33</sup>–Peter Lee, "Dear Leader's Designs on Uncle Sam," *Asia Times Online*, December 3, 2010, [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com).

<sup>34</sup>–Liu Ming, "China's Role in the Course of North Korea's Transition," in Ahn Choong-yong, Nicholas Eberstadt, and Lee Young-sun (eds.), *A New International Engagement Framework for North Korea?: Contending Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2004), pp. 338-339.

<sup>35</sup>–Jaeho Hwang, "Measuring China's Influence Over North Korea," *Issues & Studies*, XLVII, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 208-210.

<sup>36</sup>–Selig Harrison, "North Korea From the Inside Out," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, p. C1, quoted in Samuel S. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy in the Era of Reform," in David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 403.

<sup>37</sup>–Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in Arms to Allies at Arm's Length* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004); Patrick

the validity of this approach.<sup>38</sup> Thus one of many clear motives for North Korea's nuclear quest is to emancipate itself from China's ability or desire to restrain North Korea from pursuing what it believes are its legitimate national interests. Attaining a nuclear capability always entails the nuclear power's freedom to conduct its defense policy as it sees fit. North Korea's desire to free itself from both U.S. and Chinese constraints confirms this pattern.

Recent reports that some officials within the PRC believe North Korea is already or soon will be in a state of collapse and perhaps should be reunited with the South can only aggravate North Korean elites' inherent suspicions of China notwithstanding protestations of unity and support for China and China's current policy of upholding North Korea's stability at virtually all costs.<sup>39</sup> The assertions of factional rivalries in North Korea between adherents of a Chinese or Vietnamese model of reform also suggest that not every North Korean official appreciates Chinese lectures on the viability of its reform and development model despite the evident need to stay on China's good side.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, China's growing economic presence in North Korea may not sit well with more nationalist-minded elites who may espouse reform to regain real economic sovereignty, especially if they prefer a Vietnamese or non-Chinese approach to reform.<sup>41</sup> Therefore we should not presume in advance that North Korea should or will become a Chinese "satellite." Indeed, preventing that is an important, if not vital, U.S., Japanese, and South Korean interest.

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M. Morgan, "U.S. Extended Deterrence in East Asia," in Tong Whan Park (ed.), *The U.S. and the Two Koreas: A New Triangle* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 55.

<sup>38</sup>-Liu Ming, p. 336.

<sup>39</sup>- "Leaked Memos Envision North Korea Collapse," [www.cbsnes.com/stories/2010/11/30/world/main710195](http://www.cbsnes.com/stories/2010/11/30/world/main710195), November 30, 2010.

<sup>40</sup>-Peter Lee.

<sup>41</sup>- *Ibid.*

Neither should the U.S. accept this presumption of North Korea's satellization as a policy guideline given the visible Sino-American rivalry in regard to Asia's future organization. Consequently pressuring China to carry the U.S. message to North Korea may not only be misguided but actually counterproductive.

Therefore we must recognize that North Korea's nuclearization represents both a serious challenge and an opportunity to rebalance Northeast Asia in a more secure fashion if we but take the initiative ourselves rather than farming it out to others or simply refusing to deal with Pyongyang. Consequently in devising a strategy for the six-party process' future we must first reckon with the transformation of the Northeast Asian state system which comprises the following developments:

- The clear decline of U.S. power to the point where the U.S. explicitly talks not of unilateralism but of multilateral coalitions even if it still seeks hegemony and an essentially instrumental approach designed to preserve that hegemony over those coalitions<sup>42</sup>;
- China's rise to the point where it now openly challenges the U.S. and Japan throughout Southeast and Northeast Asia and sees the U.S. as its main rival if not enemy;
- North Korea's continuing nuclearization has reached the point of rumors of an impending third nuclear weapon test.<sup>43</sup> Enrichment capability only facilitates this development as it offers oppor-

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<sup>42</sup>-Wesley, pp. 49-66; Michael Mastanduno, "The United States: Regional Interests and Global Opportunities," in William T. Tow (ed.), *Security Relations in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus?* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 83-84.

<sup>43</sup>-Kim Se-Jong, "Japanese Media Allege North Korea Preparing Nuke Test," *Korea Times*, November 17, 2010.

tunities for making more bombs using plutonium;

- Japan's continuing failure to formulate a strategic approach to Northeast Asia to deal with all the changes occurring there<sup>44</sup>;
- Russia's continuing failure to regenerate its economy and become a true Asian power that has forced it to attach its development plan for the Russian Far East to China's developmental plans for Heilongjiang.<sup>45</sup> Certainly Russia lacks leverage on North Korea or the other players and indeed one diplomat characterized its role as being "more nuisance than value"<sup>46</sup>;
- South Korea's reprioritization of its alliance relationships with Washington and Tokyo, newly proclaimed threats of retaliation, and diminishing willingness to provide large-scale economic transfers to North Korea that has undermined the previous Sunshine Policy;
- Despite the ROK's growing reluctance to invest in the North, we now see a vibrant competition among South Korea, China, the U.S., and to a lesser degree Japan and Russia to develop the means to influence the future economic and thus political development of North Korea. Thus China is North Korea's biggest foreign economic partner.<sup>47</sup> Russia, China, and South Korea, all of whom already have a sustained relationship with the DPRK,

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<sup>44</sup> -Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States (Strategic Thought in Northeast Asia)*, pp. 145-191.

<sup>45</sup> -Stephen Blank, "Towards a New Chinese Order in Asia: Russia's Failure," Forthcoming from the National Bureau of Research, Asia, Seattle, Washington, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> -Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), p. 240; Sico van der Meer, "Russia: Many Goals Little Activity," in Koen De Cuester and Jan Melissen (eds.), *Ending the North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Six Parties, Six Perspectives* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2008), pp. 86-87.

<sup>47</sup> -Jayshree Bajoria, "The China-North Korea Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations*, [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org), October 7, 2010.

and have long argued for security guarantees to it, have substantially increased their economic-political ties to North Korea, and compete to offer it energy alternatives to its nuclear program.<sup>48</sup> That rivalry can be seen as just another chapter in the unending efforts of major Asian powers and now the ROK to develop a durable relationship with North Korea to influence its direction and policies.<sup>49</sup> Each of these governments understands, in its own way, that engaging Pyongyang at least through economic and often indirect means is essential to the pursuit of its larger interests in the region.<sup>50</sup> Possibly Washington has also seen the necessity of this approach. Indeed, economic penetration may currently be the only possible way of gaining influence on North Korea, for nuclearization makes it more difficult for foreign states to influence its foreign and defense policies by means other than sustained economic and political engagement. But that is an inherently long-term process and China's efforts to use its economic power to leverage trends in both Koreas have not proven particularly effective.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>- Samuel S. Kim, *The Two Koreas and the Great Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Samuel S. Kim, *Demystifying North Korea: North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War World* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007); Vasily Mikheyev, "Russian Strategic Thinking toward North and South Korea" and Gilbert Rozman, "Russian Strategic Thinking on Asian Regionalism," in Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo and Joseph P. Ferguson (eds.), *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 187-204, and 229-251 respectively.

<sup>49</sup>- *Ibidem*; For historical and contemporary examples see Charles S. Armstrong, Gilbert Rozman, Samuel S. Kim and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2006).

<sup>50</sup>- *Ibid*; Kim, *ops cit.*; Mikheyev, pp. 187-204; Rozman, "Russian Strategic Thinking on Asian Regionalism," pp. 235-251.

<sup>51</sup>- Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

## Rethinking China's Role

The belief that China will rescue an incoherent American policy and pressure North Korea on Washington's behalf has proven to be utterly misguided and unfounded despite China's mounting exasperation with North Korea.<sup>52</sup> Yet U.S. officials still insist that pressuring China to pressure North Korea will somehow make Pyongyang more tractable and that Beijing will agree to carry the U.S.' water for it despite its mounting rivalry with the U.S. This author noted the dubiety of this policy already in 2006 and nothing since then has made it more effective.<sup>53</sup> Then the argument that Washington cannot produce sufficient pressure on Pyongyang to do supposedly what is in its best interest only drove South Korea closer to Beijing, since the refusal to engage the DPRK reduced the political dividends it would like to have received from the alliance with America. But if the U.S. alliance continues to fail to give South Korea what it most wants, it may wander away from it in the future. Second, this argument that we cannot deal with North Korea but must pressure China to act "responsibly" only fosters greatly enhanced Chinese leverage upon American policy, and not just regarding Korea.<sup>54</sup> Yet the Obama Administration and its supporters still invoke this argument in the wake of the North Korean tests and subsequent provocations, even though it failed to achieve lasting results under the Bush Administration, and China may be angling to exploit it for its benefit even as it registers its

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<sup>52</sup>-Antoaneta Bezlova, "North Korean Nukes have Their Uses for China," *Asia Times Online*, October 10, 2006, [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com); Blank, pp. 23-33.

<sup>53</sup>-Stephen Blank, "The End of the Six-Party Talks?" *Strategic Insights*, January 2007, [www.nps.navy.mil](http://www.nps.navy.mil); Stephen Blank, "Outsourcing Korea," *Pacific Focus*, XXXI, No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 7-57. The argument below is based on these two articles.

<sup>54</sup>-Christoph Bluth, "Between a Rock and an Incomprehensible Place: The United States and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVII, No. 2, Fall 2005, pp. 107-108.

own exasperation with North Korea. Worse, the increasingly visible danger in doing so is that any American position surrendered to China becomes irretrievable.<sup>55</sup> As Graham Allison wrote, America's failure or defeat is China's opportunity.<sup>56</sup>

China has never been willing nor able to move North Korea as far as Washington wants. Indeed, China is the main reason sanctions have neither worked in the past nor will work in the future.<sup>57</sup> It prizes North Korea's stability over Washington's demands and while it opposes North Korean nuclearization it will not support policies that represent an attempt to impose regime change on North Korea or that might destabilize it.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it values North Korea as a reason for tying down thousands of U.S. military forces that might otherwise be assigned to Taiwan.<sup>59</sup> A crisis over North Korea might possibly also upset China's domestic leadership balance. China will neither sacrifice North Korea to America nor insist on its total denuclearization despite Pyongyang's exasperation of China. China apparently decided by 2010 if not earlier that despite North Korean provocations its best interests are served by

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<sup>55</sup> Jaeho Hwang, "Measuring China's Influence over North Korea," *Issues & Studies*, XLVII, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 205-232 is only the most recent full exploration of this Sino-DPRK relationship and the question of China's influence over the DPRK but it reflects a scholarly consensus on the dubiety of expecting that China will push North Korea to the wall. See also Christopher P. Twomey, "China Policy toward North Korea and its Implications for the United States: Balancing Competing Concerns," *Strategic Insights*, V, No. 7, September 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Graham Allison, "North Korean Nuclear Challenge: Bush Administration Failure; China's Opportunity," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2006, pp. 7-34.

<sup>57</sup> Andrei Lankov, "North Korean Blackmail," *International Herald Tribune*, November 25, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/25/opinion/25iht-edlankov.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/25/opinion/25iht-edlankov.html?_r=1).

<sup>58</sup> This is the overwhelming consensus of expert opinion in the vast literature on China's policies to date. For recent examples see Hun Bong Park, "China's Position on Unification and U.S. Forces Korea," *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, XXIV, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2010, pp. 124-149.

<sup>59</sup> Shen Dingli, "PRC Scholar Analyzes Implications of a DPRK Nuclear Test," NAPSNET, October 3, 2006.

preserving the regime's stability, not unifying it or acceding to U.S. pressure.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, China's most recent posture displays its interest in using the Korean issue to ratify its rise in Asia at U.S. expense and to rearrange Asia's security order, thus tying Korean issues to the larger regional canvas.<sup>61</sup> China also advocates security guarantees for North Korea, and has been consistently skeptical of U.S. initiatives and claims, often blaming Washington for failures to make progress.<sup>62</sup>

Thus this approach greatly misreads China's objectives in regard to North Korea. Xiaoxiong Yi wrote even before the September 19-20, 2005 agreement that,

China has no intention to "help" the U.S. What Beijing wants is to draw a comprehensive "Korean Peninsula road map" and to play a prominent role in Northeast Asia. For Beijing, the building blocks with which it can assemble a road map are the following. The first is to press Washington and Pyongyang to agree on "face-saving" language that would provide a framework for future negotiations. Then what China wants is a U.S. nonaggression assurance provided for North Korea, co-sponsored by China. The third is a Chinese and Russian informal or formal security guarantee for North Korea, and fourth, new South Korean and Japanese economic aid for North Korea. The goals of a Beijing "road map" would be, in effect, twofold: first, to facilitate the transformation of North Korea into a large economic development zone for China's economic devel-

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<sup>60</sup>-Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States (Strategic Thought in Northeast Asia)*, pp. 237-261; Aidan Foster-Carter, "China Help With North Korea? Fuggedaboutit!" [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com), November 26, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/26/china\\_help\\_with\\_north\\_korea\\_fuggedaboutit](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/26/china_help_with_north_korea_fuggedaboutit).

<sup>61</sup>-Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States (Strategic Thought in Northeast Asia)*, pp. 237-261.

<sup>62</sup>-Joseph Kahn and Susan Chira, "China Challenges U.S. on Pyongyang's Arms," *International Herald Tribune*, June 10, 2004, p. 1; "China Omits Uranium Enrichment Row in Draft Report," *Kyodo News Service*, June 23, 2004, retrieved from Lexis-Nexis; Mike Nartker, "Bush, Koizumi Discuss North Korean Nuclear Program," *Global Security Newswire*, August 9, 2004, [www.nti.org/d\\_newswire/issues/2004\\_6\\_9.html](http://www.nti.org/d_newswire/issues/2004_6_9.html).

opment and a stable buffer state for China's national security, rather than an assembly line for weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and second, to reduce the American influence in South Korea and to create a strategically neutralized Korean Peninsula. From China's point of view, whether or not the six nations can agree on how to stop Pyongyang's nuclear program, the talks have produced at least one breakthrough: the emergence of China as a more confident power broker in the region.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly Bon-Hak Koo wrote that,

China seems to prefer to maximize its strategic interests in the process of nuclear negotiations rather than pursuing a complete resolution of the North's nuclear issue. China intends to use the North Korean card against a strengthening of the U.S.-Japanese security cooperation in the North-east Asian region. China's major concern is not to change the North Korean regime, but to manage North Korea and maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>64</sup>

Equally frustrating to Washington, if not Seoul, is the fact that China evidently has less leverage or will not deploy whatever leverage it does possess while Washington continues to insist that it does.<sup>65</sup> As one former Chinese official says, America's approach is characteristically legalistic whereas China's strategy is not to lecture the North Koreans on their obligations but rather to reassure them about their security.<sup>66</sup> China regards calls from senior U.S. policymakers as an attempt to pressure it to abandon a buffer state and ally to Washington's unipolar demands as a pretext for starting a crisis that could lead to war.<sup>67</sup> This was true in 2006

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<sup>63</sup>- Xiaoxiong Yi, "Chinese Foreign Policy In Transition: Understanding China's "Peaceful Development."” *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, XIX, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 89-90.

<sup>64</sup>- Bon-Hak Koo, "The Six-Party Talks: A Critical Assessment and Implications for South Korea's Policy toward North Korea," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVIII, No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 98-99.

<sup>65</sup>- Bezlova, Bluth, pp. 97-99.

<sup>66</sup>- Michael Wines and David E. Sanger, "Delay in Korea Talks Is Sign of U.S.-Chinese Tension," *The New York Times*, December 7, 2010, www.nytimes.com.

<sup>67</sup>- Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in Arms to Allies at Arm's Length*

and still remains true today under considerably altered circumstances. Naturally either outcome is unacceptable to China. And today it can enforce its view or so it believes because the U.S. position has weakened due to the global economic crisis while China's position has improved dramatically.

Therefore China feels it can challenge the U.S. in Asia as part of its broader global policy. Its recent policies not to denounce North Korean provocations exemplifies this trend.<sup>68</sup> Moreover U.S. officials believe that China's policy allows North Korea to behave provocatively in the belief that "China has its back." In their view China's "willful blindness" toward North Korea enables North Korea's provocations. Furthermore, China apparently has turned a blind eye toward North Korean efforts to export weapons technology for hard currency and may have allowed North Korean sales of long-range missiles or missile parts to transit to Iran via Beijing airport.<sup>69</sup> And when China made its most recent proposal to resume the six-party talks with no prior conditions, it did so in the context of attacking the U.S. for sending carriers to join with Japan and South Korea in exercises in the Yellow Sea which it claims constitute part of its exclusive economic zone.<sup>70</sup> So while the fear that U.S. policy might lead either to war or a collapse of the DPRK galvanized China to seize the diplomatic initiative in unprecedented ways since 2003 that have clearly strengthened its overall position in Asia, more recently it would appear that Chinese arrogance toward the U.S. and its allies

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(Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> - Wines and Sanger; Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States (Strategic Thought in Northeast Asia)*.

<sup>69</sup> - Wines and Sanger; John Pomfret, "U.S. Steps Up Pressure on China to Rein in N. Korea," *The Washington Post*, December 6, 2010, p. 1; Trudy Rubin, "China Runs Big Risks Coddling N. Korea," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 5, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> - Ian Johnson and Martin Fackler, "China Addresses Rising Korean Tensions, But with a Warning to the U.S.," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2010, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

manifests itself not only in manufactured crises with Japan but also in signs of a lack of seriousness toward the dangers of proliferation and the six-party talks.<sup>71</sup>

Meanwhile North Korea has often resisted China, continues to do so, and there are definite signs of a process of mutual estrangement.<sup>72</sup> The fact of North Korea giving China 20 minutes notice of its 2006 test suggests Pyongyang's distrust of Beijing's motives.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Pyongyang's anger with Beijing and sense of betrayal may have contributed to the decision to launch the test.<sup>74</sup> And China may have considered revising its nonaggression treaty with the DPRK in 2003-06 as it has dropped several hints over the past decade that the treaty no longer means what its original intent and language clearly state, i.e. a close alliance with North Korea.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Jasper Becker claims that China made contingency plans for a possible invasion of North Korea in 2003 when it worried about an American strike against the DPRK's nuclear facilities to instill a pro-Chinese regime that would forsake nuclearization. But he reported that China's military chiefs said this could not be done.<sup>76</sup> This estrangement still obstructs Chinese efforts to influence Pyongyang to shun nuclear weapons but is unlikely to produce a total rupture between it and Beijing. Still, this disregard for China's advice publicly exposes the limits of

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<sup>71</sup>-Pomfret; Rubin.

<sup>72</sup>-Melinda Liu, "China's Dilemma," *Newsweek* and MSNBC.com, October 9, 2006, [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15182514/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15182514/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/); Ian Johnson and Michael Wines, "North Korea Relies on China But Tends to Resist its Guidance," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2010, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>73</sup>-As seen by the author on CNN Television Network, October 9, 2006.

<sup>74</sup>-Melinda Liu, "China's Dilemma," *Newsweek* and MSNBC.com, October 9, 2006, [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15182514/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15182514/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/)

<sup>75</sup>-Jae Ho Chung, "China's Ascendancy and the Korean Peninsula: From Interest Re-evaluation to Strategic Realignment?" in David Shambaugh (ed.), *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 154.

<sup>76</sup>-"The Nightmare Comes to Pass," *The Economist*, October 14, 2006, p. 25.

China's supposed leverage upon North Korea, surely not Beijing's objective. So from China's standpoint it is arguably unlikely to make too many further demands upon Pyongyang lest it be rebuffed again and its weakness exposed or the U.S. position improved. Despite North Korea's obduracy, U.S. pressure upon Beijing incurs Chinese resistance and skepticism while fortifying North Korea's refusal to listen to Beijing. Finally North Korea also resists China because doing so obliges Beijing to pay it more blackmail in the form of economic and food aid just to have it come to the talks and/or to survive.<sup>77</sup>

Accordingly China cannot be happy with Washington for putting it in what could be a no-win and even major crisis situation. Neither is it pleased with North Korea for constantly blackmailing it and spurning its advice as noted above. Indeed, in response to North Korea's missile tests of 2006 China undertook several initiatives to show Pyongyang its displeasure.<sup>78</sup> These episodes lent force to the signs of a mutual estrangement between the two governments but hardly suggest that China will soon adopt the U.S. position or tactics. Although North Korea's non-nuclearization is a vital priority for China, preserving peace and stability on the peninsula outranks it. Indeed, China probably has a greater stake in preserving North Korea's stability than does any other player in the talks. China's stake in North Korean survival is demographic (refugees being a major fear), economic, and strategic. China will surely make

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<sup>77</sup>- Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in Arms to Allies at Arm's Length*, pp. 3-5. See also the remarks of Quan Jing at "A Regional Discussion of the Six-Party Process: Challenges and Opportunities in North Korea," Transcript of a meeting at the Brookings Institution, March 11, 2005, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu); Liu Ming, "China's Role in the Course of North Korea's Transition," Ahn Choong-yong, Nicholas Eberstadt, and Lee Young-sun (eds.), *A New International Engagement Framework for North Korea?: Contending Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2004), pp. 338-339.

<sup>78</sup>- Stephen Blank, "China's Displeasure with North Korea's Missile Tests," *China Brief*, VI, No. 19, September 20, 2006, pp. 9-10.

maximum efforts to prevent a war or pressure aiming toward a collapse of North Korea over preventing its nuclearization.<sup>79</sup>

China also resists U.S. pressures because they ultimately conflict with its most vital interests of preserving peace around its frontiers and retaining influence over North Korean developments. Should Beijing pressure Pyongyang to accede to American demands when the thrust of the DPRK's foreign policy is to compel Washington to engage it seriously and bilaterally, China will paradoxically have then reduced whatever leverage it might have over North Korea. It might seem bizarre but Chinese elites view this leverage as something that must be used sparingly lest it diminish. Certainly it should not be used primarily to advance American interests.<sup>80</sup> This will remain a determining factor in Chinese policy even though Chinese analysts and officials know all too well that the DPRK's nuclear gambit aims to free itself from Chinese pressure on its security affairs while maximizing its ability to extort aid from all the other parties. Consequently there is no rational basis for thinking that China will undermine its own security interests to please Washington who demands what Chinese officials perceive as North Korea's unilateral surrender.<sup>81</sup> China's grasp of the American position also explains why it argues that North Korea's denuclearization must be coupled with security guarantees, economic assistance, and the right to a peaceful nuclear program under the NPT.

Meanwhile in Beijing and elsewhere U.S. recalcitrance about direct

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<sup>79</sup>-Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in Arms to Allies at Arm's Length*.

<sup>80</sup>-*Ibid.*, pp. 13-26. See also the remarks of Quan Jing at "A Regional Discussion of the Six-Party Process: Challenges and Opportunities in North Korea," Transcript of a meeting at the Brookings Institution, March 11, 2005, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

<sup>81</sup>- "U.S.-North Korea Relations Worry China and South Korea," *SABC News*, May 6, 2005, [www.sabcnews.com/world/asia/pacific/02172103705.00html](http://www.sabcnews.com/world/asia/pacific/02172103705.00html); "ROK Chief Negotiator; China's Role Outstanding," *Xinhua*, September 19, 2005; Michael Hirsh and Melinda Liu, "North Korea Hold'em," *Newsweek*, October 3, 2005, pp. 42-43.

talks with Pyongyang also looked like an effort to shift the burden and cost of U.S. policy failures onto China and the other negotiators and make them bear those costs. Several analysts have charged that American policy in revealing North Korean proliferation in 2002 aimed at frustrating Japanese and ROK initiatives to improve ties with the DPRK.<sup>82</sup> And while that remains unproven, all the other parties have sought to enhance ties with North Korea in the belief that doing so improves their overall position in Northeast Asia. And it is at least possible that Washington's failure to engage North Korea directly after 2002 in a sustained way contributed to the decline in its relative power there. Therefore China, Russia, and South Korea are naturally unwilling either to bear these costs of American failure or unwillingness to engage with the DPRK, or submit to American demands that they desist from doing so. Consequently those demands upon China to pressure North Korea and the belief that China has this leverage and will use it to accommodate Washington's interests were and are seriously flawed and costly assumptions going into the talks.

### **Suggestions for the Future**

Those assumptions underlie America's efforts to "outsource" the resolution of this problem to a multilateral forum increasingly dominated by China, but they represent a flawed estimate of the situation and of other parties' willingness to rescue America from its mistakes. Accordingly if the United States is to move beyond a sterile, stagnant, and unproductive crisis management mode it must rethink and reshape its engagement with the issues connected to North Korea's proliferation. It

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<sup>82</sup>-Seung-Ho Joo, "South Korea-U.S. Relations in Turbulent Waters," *Pacific Focus*, XX, No. 1, Spring 2006, p. 80.

also should rethink the strategically unsound outsourcing of a fundamental U.S. responsibility to China. Russian observers, for example, believed that Washington aimed to induce China to subordinate its Asia policy to an American agenda and initiatives, not deal with North Korea. That is obviously a threat to Russia whose greatest fear is marginalization in East Asia.<sup>83</sup> Second, depending upon China to carry out a policy in America's interest that Washington could not or would not do entailed compensations for China that probably do not benefit America and led observers to believe that China "was eating our lunch" in East Asia.<sup>84</sup> As Christoph Bluth noted,

North Korea acquired a more convincing nuclear capability, while at the same time continuing to receive economic support from China and South Korea and the prospects of exerting any real pressure on the DPRK continued to diminish. **Moreover, the United States became dependent upon China for the success of its policy, to such an extent that spillover into other areas became noticeable.**<sup>85</sup> (Bold author)

Given the upsurge in Chinese aggressiveness toward the U.S. since 2006 such outsourcing to China is probably not in either the U.S. or North Korea's interests. Indeed, if the real purpose of the talks has been to devise a formula for a new durable, and legitimate Asian security order that includes North Korea as a legitimate actor, leaving it to China to persuade the DPRK of the merits of any possible solution means leaving North Korea exclusively in China's "sphere of influence." That outcome is in neither the American nor the North Korean interest.

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<sup>83</sup>-Tokyo, *Kyodo* (in English), January 27, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service Central Eurasia (Henceforth *FBIS SOV*), January 27, 2003.

<sup>84</sup>-David Shambaugh, "Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics," Brookings Institution, January 12, 2006, [www.brookings.edu/events/2006/0112asia.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2006/0112asia.aspx)

<sup>85</sup>-Bluth, pp. 107-108.

Therefore Washington must take upon itself the formulation and pronouncement of a new strategic initiative targeted at North Korea to achieve not just denuclearization but also a new Asian order where North Korea can play a genuine role, develop its capabilities peacefully and do so in conditions of real security.

Three possibilities present themselves to the U.S. government. They also must be closely coordinated with Japan and South Korea. One is simply to renounce, either in formal action or in practical form the effort to resolve these issues through the six-party talks and either engage North Korea directly or simply wait for a better time. While Chinese officials have long argued for directly engaging North Korea, the most recent provocations and the U.S.'s (if not the Korean and Japanese) domestic politics precludes this gambit for now. And leaving the six-party process would create uproar throughout Asia and undermine the close coordination that has been a positive trend of the Obama Administration's policies toward South Korea and Japan.

Alternatively and second the U.S. could undertake a more robust direct engagement with North Korea through the formal medium of bilateral talks under the auspices of a renewed six-party process. The difficulties here, however, are daunting. The U.S. and its allies would then have to reverse their previous policies and accept North Korean provocations in return for a mere promise to talk without any hope of denuclearization or better behavior by North Korea. Again it is unlikely that the allies' domestic politics let alone their strong stands on North Korea's recent activities would permit such action and the costs of doing so could be very large indeed.

Nonetheless U.S. policies have clearly failed leaving us at an impasse. The current failure to rethink the policy attests to the Bush Administration's incapacity to enforce unity of policy in regard to Korea and to the U.S.' continuing poverty of imagination regarding changing

trends in Asia.<sup>86</sup> Here we must realize that North Korea clearly desires to engage the U.S. albeit on its terms. So for both sides to be able to engage each other we need to change the environment within which they operate. Since a unilateral or even coordinated allied offer to North Korea is highly improbable if not ruled out for now we need to change North Korea's operating environment and calculus in a different way. The Administration's reset policy with Russia gives us the opening necessary to do so.

Although the Administration's national security strategy and policy emphasize collaboration with Russia in Europe, the Gulf, Afghanistan, and on arms control, it has been totally silent with regard to cooperation in East Asia.<sup>87</sup> Neither U.S. scholarship nor policy takes Russia seriously as an Asian actor. This obviously frustrates Moscow greatly especially as in 2009-10 it has taken determined steps to portray itself as an Asian player.<sup>88</sup> Hitherto it has virtually always identified itself with China's positions on Korea yet there are signs of a growing suspicion of Chinese military power as shown in difficulties over arms sales, Chinese interest in

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<sup>86</sup>-On the Bush Administration see Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Robert Carlin, "Talk to Me Later," in Phillip W. Yun and Gi-Wook Shin (eds.), *North Korea: 2005 and Beyond* (Palo Alto California: Walter Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, 2006), pp. 24-35; C. Kenneth Quinones, "Dualism in the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Asian Perspective*, XXVII, No. 1, 2003, pp. 197-224; Karin Lee and Adam Miles, "North Korea on Capitol Hill," *Asian Perspective*, XXVIII, No. 4, 2004, pp. 185-207; Robert M. Hathaway and Jordan Tama, "The U.S. Congress and North Korea During the Clinton Years," *Asian Survey*, XLIV, No. 5, September/October 2004, pp. 711-733; Opening Statement of Henry J. Hyde, Before the Full Committee Hearing of the House Committee on International Relations "Six-Party Talks and the North Korean Nuclear Issue," October 6, 2005; Max Boot, "This Deal is No Bargain," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2005 at [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com); Nicholas Eberstadt, "A Skeptical View," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2006, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup>-National Security Strategy; Nicholas Eberstadt, "Reflections on the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Korea and World Affairs*, XXXIII, No. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 45-63.

<sup>88</sup>-Stephen Blank, "The Paradoxes of Russia's Asian Policy," Forthcoming, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 2011.

the Arctic, and China's "Great Stride" exercises of 2009.<sup>89</sup> Simultaneously Russia faces the danger of dominant Chinese economic and thus political influence in its Far East, and more than anyone else is alarmed enough about Korea to claim that the peninsula was on the brink of war. Certainly its Vostok-2010 exercises of June-July 2010 represent an accurate barometer of its fears.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore there is good reason to suspect that a U.S. initiative treating it as a serious East Asian partner, engaging in a real dialogue on security threats there, and a strong public expression of U.S. willingness to invest in the Russian Far East in return for real guarantees of that investment would likely elicit a favorable Russian response. Certainly Russia benefits greatly by having an American option to use to counter China, and while it would not be an ally or even a full partner with us, that offer could move it some distance from its virtual lockstep with China regarding Korea. And such an initiative might also make Pyongyang sit up and take notice. While obviously such an initiative must be correlated with Japan and South Korea that is not an insuperable problem even though Russo-Japanese relations are bad now due to the Kurile Islands or Northern Territories issue. Historically America has supported Japan's claim since Theodore Roosevelt's strategy of separating Japan and Russia from each other. But Asia has changed and a resurgent Japan is quite unlikely unless the alliance breaks down which could happen over North Korean nuclearization. Instead the new issue is a rising China that upsets all previous strategic considerations. We would probably

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<sup>89</sup>- Stephen Blank, "The Arctic: A Future Source of Russo-Chinese Discord?" *Jamestown China Brief*, X, No. 24, December 3, 2010; Stephen Blank, *Shrinking Ground: Russia's Decline in Global Arms Sales*, Occasional paper, Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C., October 2010; Jacob Kipp, "Russia's Nuclear Posture and the Threat that Dare not Speak its Name," Forthcoming in Stephen Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons, Past, Present, and Future* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011).

<sup>90</sup>-Kipp.

be doing Japan a service if we made clear that it should accept the 1956 offer of two of the four Kurile Islands as the best it will get now and that the danger from a nuclear North Korea and a rising China that defends it outweighs the benefits of domestic posturing for islands that it will not otherwise get. Moscow could add its leverage to a U.S. plan to engage the North Korean government under the auspices of the six-party process, thus accepting China's recommendation. If Russia were to move along the lines initiated by the U.S. as suggested here, it might then be possible to get North Korea back to the table under conditions acceptable to the other parties and with the promise of an expanded direct U.S. engagement which ultimately is essential to any lasting peace process here.

Admittedly this initiative might not work. But we are facing an impasse that will only become more dangerous before it becomes less threatening. Second we must accept that our previous policy has failed and that the present six-party process cannot deliver what we and the other parties want. Yet we cannot simply renounce that process without incurring severe costs. Nor can we just simply engage Pyongyang without any concern for its recent actions. Likewise, any Korean policy that does not reckon with strategic changes now occurring in Asia is doomed to failure. Engaging Russia not only preserves the six-party process but with a different dynamic, it strengthens the equilibrium of power in Asia while opening the way to direct discussions with North Korea which are essential and in both our and North Korea's interest unless we wish to see it collapse or become a Chinese satellite. Previously this author has advocated direct engagement with proliferators, hard as it is, for there is no other viable road to nonproliferation.<sup>91</sup> But in this case there also

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<sup>91</sup>-Stephen Blank, "Prospects for Russo-American Cooperation in Halting Nuclear Proliferation," in Stephen J. Blank (ed.), *Prospects for U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2009), pp. 169-284.

appears to be no other viable road to incorporating a peaceful North Korea in a stable yet dynamic Asian order. If there are better alternatives available to achieve these goals then they should be offered now.

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## *Moscow Ponders Korea Unification*

*Richard Weitz*

### **Abstract**

Throughout the past decade, under both presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, the Russia's government policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has remained remarkably consistent. Russia has adhered to several integrated key goals, strategies, and tactics in both the security and economic realms. Russian policy makers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. They do not want yet another nuclear-armed state bordering Russia, especially one armed with inaccurate missiles and an erratic dynastic dictatorship. In addition, they fear that the DPRK's possession of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles could encourage still further nuclear proliferation in East Asia and beyond as well as the spread of missile defenses in response. Yet, Russia's fundamental goals regarding the Koreas do not include reunification or a new form of government in North Korea. Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, not its regime. Korean unification could result in humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction burdens, arms races, loose nukes, and military clashes. Russians favor a "soft landing" for the North Korean regime—a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including the renunciation of nuclear weapons.

**Key Words:** Russia, Moscow, Putin, Medvedev, nuclear

In an April 7, 2011 interview with Chinese Central Television before the BRIC summit in China, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed both alarm and frustration with the explosive situation in the neighboring Korean Peninsula, stating that: “We are also part of the region.” As in the past, Medvedev urged all parties to pursue moderate policies that reduced the danger of conflict. “The Korean Peninsula has seen enough of war. I believe that both Koreas can reach an agreement. Whipping up passions, rattling arms, maneuvering – they are just aggravating the situation.”<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the past decade, under current President Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, president from 1999-2007 and now Russia’s prime minister, Russian government policy toward the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has remained remarkably consistent. This policy has adhered to several integrated key goals, strategies, and tactics across the security and economic realms. Russian policy makers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, though not necessarily through unification, both for its own sake and to realize their economic ambitions there.

In the security realm, Russia’s objectives include averting another major war on the Korean Peninsula, preventing the DPRK’s proliferation of nuclear technology or ballistic missiles, maintaining Moscow as a major security actor in the region, and the eventual peaceful elimination of Pyongyang’s nuclear program. Russian officials stress their opposition to the DPRK’s continued possession of nuclear weapons. They do not want another nuclear-armed state bordering Russia, especially one with inaccurate missiles flying close to Russian territory, and with an unpredictable dynastic dictatorship. In addition, they fear that the

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<sup>1</sup>- “Interview by Dmitry Medvedev to China Central Television (CCTV),” April 12, 2011, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/2059>.

DPRK's possession of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles could encourage further nuclear weapons proliferation in East Asia and beyond, while simultaneously leading to the spread of ballistic missile defense systems that could degrade Russia's nuclear deterrent.

Yet, Russia's fundamental goals regarding the Koreas do not include reunification or a new form of government in North Korea. Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, not its regime. Korean unification could result in the deployment of U.S. military forces into the northern half of the newly unified Korean state. Many Koreans would want American soldiers warplanes, and naval forces to remain in their country to balance their militarily more powerful neighbors – China, Japan, and Russia. U.S. policy makers might accept such an invitation if the alternative looked to be a Korean decision to retain the North's stockpile of nuclear weapons. Russian policy makers would seek to avoid this scenario as well as the other possible calamities of precipitous regime change – humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction, arms races, loose nukes, and military clashes. Like many South Koreans and most Chinese, Russians favor a “soft landing” for the North Korean regime – a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including the renunciation of nuclear weapons. This perspective places Russia at odds with most policy makers in Washington and Tokyo, who would welcome Pyongyang's political transformation regardless of the likely economic and security problems that could arise in a transition.

### **Strategies and Tactics**

Common Russian strategies and tactics to achieve these security goals include inducing North Korea to end nuclear weapons testing, halt its provocative actions, and dismantle its nuclear weapons and ballistic

missile programs voluntarily. Moscow tries to accomplish these goals by providing economic assistance and security assurances, promoting dialogue among the parties, minimizing the use of coercive sanctions, encouraging all parties to fulfill their previous commitments, maintaining a prominent role for Russian diplomacy, and promoting the six-party talks and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – two bodies in which Russia is a privileged member – as the main institutions for Korean diplomacy.

One reason Russian policy makers have been eager to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula (short of regime change) is to achieve their economic objectives in East Asia. Russian officials want to expand their economic relations with both Koreas while integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous East Asian region. Russians hope that the closer ties would encourage Asian investment and technology transfers that would help modernize the Russian economy. In addition, the increased trade ties would benefit Russian consumers and Russian exporters. A major Russian goal is to promote the economic recovery of the Russian Far East, which lags behind western Russia economically and is becoming a security liability due to the demographic collapse of the ethnic Russian population along the Russia-China border regions. Furthermore, developing economic ties with South Korea is important to prevent Russia from becoming overly dependent on the People's Republic of China (PRC) for its energy exports and other commercial deals. Moscow's leverage with Beijing and other third parties is enhanced insofar as Chinese negotiators worry that, if they bargain too hard, then Russia can reach better deals with South Korea.

In terms of concrete projects, Russians place much hope on proposals to link the Russian railroad system with that of the two Koreas, creating a 10,000-kilometer-long Euro-Asian land transportation corridor that could move goods between Europe and the Pacific faster than

maritime shipping. Another major project involves collaborating with ROK companies to build energy pipelines to transport Russian oil and natural gas to South Korea and other East Asian markets, perhaps by transiting North Korea's territory. More generally, Russian policy makers want Russian businesses to sell additional goods and services to South Korea in return for high-tech trade and investment from the ROK.

These proposals' implementation awaits normalization of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. Until then, Moscow's economic ties and influence in Pyongyang will lag far behind that of South Korea and particularly China, which provides North Korea with foreign assistance in the form of energy, food, and other key commodities. The DPRK can survive even in the absence of economic ties with Russia. Moscow's influence in the Koreas is also diminished by its generally low diplomatic and economic weight in East Asia, which Russia's newly energetic regional diplomacy has yet to correct.

## **Tools**

Still, Russia disposes of several instruments of influence in East Asia. First, it is a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, which can apply sanctions and other enforcement members to uphold UN goals. Second, eastern Russia hosts some large military units, representing all branches of the Russian armed forces. For example, the headquarters of the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet is located at Vladivostok. Third, Russia exports large volumes of oil, natural gas, and other raw materials that are coveted by many East Asian countries. Russian energy companies are eager to diversify their exports beyond their traditional European markets. Since most existing oil and gas pipelines flow westward, however, Russian energy exports have been hobbled by limited

transportation networks, though these infrastructure bottlenecks will soon be overcome. Russian companies are also constructing a more advanced energy processing infrastructure in the Russian Far East (RFE), to include oil refineries, liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants, and facilities at sea ports optimized to export energy.

Russia has been a participant, along with North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, and the United States, in the six-party talks that, since 2003, have been seeking to secure an end to the DPRK's nuclear weapons program in return for various economic, diplomatic, and other incentives. The four interconnected objectives of the Talks are eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula, normalizing relations between the DPRK and all the other parties, securing the economic development and regional integration of North Korea, and achieving an enduring peace on the Korean Peninsula and the broader East Asian region.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately for Moscow and other participants, the Talks have been characterized by the old Leninist slogan, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," except it seems that nine steps back occur for every ten steps forward, with the walker frequently appearing ready to drop dead en route. The parties were able to secure a denuclearization agreement at the end of the fifth round of the Talks, which ended on February 13, 2007.<sup>3</sup> Under its terms, North Korea pledged to shut down and eventually dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear complex in return for food, economic aid, and the prospect of normalizing relations with the five other countries.

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<sup>2</sup>- Scott Snyder, "North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Tests and Six-Party Talks: Where Do We Go From Here?" June 17, 2009, Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, p. 3, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/196477/prepared\\_testimony\\_by\\_scott\\_a\\_snyder.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/196477/prepared_testimony_by_scott_a_snyder.html).

<sup>3</sup>- Edward Cody, "Tentative Nuclear Deal Struck with North Korea," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2007, <http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/nation/200702/kt2007021320383011990.htm>.

Despite some further progress in 2007 and early 2008, North Korea soon began to move in a retrograde direction, with DPRK provocations including resuming ballistic missile launches and a nuclear weapons detonation. The reasons for these reversals, though still unclear, appear related to the contested political succession process in Pyongyang, where North Korean leader Kim Jong-il appears determined to have his third and youngest known son, 26-year-old Kim Jong-un, as his heir.

## Goals

Russian officials do not want North Korea to possess nuclear weapons. They were clearly angered by Kim Jong-il's defiance of their warnings against testing a nuclear weapon in October 2006. On February 5, 2007, the Russian Ambassador to South Korea, Gleb Ivashentsov, complained that, "The site of the nuclear test by the DPRK on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006 is situated at the distance of just 177 Kms to our border. We do not like that. We do not need in the proximity of our borders neither nuclear and missile tests nor saber-rattling by anyone."<sup>4</sup> The Russian delegation to the six-party talks subsequently demanded that the DPRK dismantle its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon rather than simply suspend operations in order to promote North Korea's complete nuclear disarmament.<sup>5</sup> In late May 2007, Putin signed a decree banning Russian government and private institutions from transferring equipment, materials, or knowledge that the DPRK could use to develop weapons. It also forbade Russian citizens or institutions from engaging in financial operations with people

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<sup>4</sup>- Scarlett Lim, "Russian Amb. Ivashentsov Stresses Russia Will Assist Inter-Korean Business Ties," *Seoul Times*, February 5, 2007, [http://theseoultimes.com/ST?url=/ST/community/foreign\\_missions/foreign\\_missions.html](http://theseoultimes.com/ST?url=/ST/community/foreign_missions/foreign_missions.html).

<sup>5</sup>- "Six Nations to Wrap Up N. Korea Nuclear Talks," *RIA Novosti*, February 13, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20070213/60629950.html>.

or entities designated by the UN as supporting the DPRK's nuclear weapons program.<sup>6</sup> In an interview published in South Korea's *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper on the eve of his visit to Seoul in November 2010, Medvedev restated Russian worries about North Korean nuclear activities near Russia's borders. He described DPRK's nuclear program as "present[ing] a systemic challenge to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime."<sup>7</sup> Russian specialists joined with those of other leading nuclear powers in writing a UN report that asserts that the DPRK annually exports approximately \$100 million worth of missiles and other weapons in violation of international sanctions.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Russian strategists consider a nuclear-armed DPRK as posing only an indirect or inadvertent threat since they do not expect that the DPRK would have reason to attack Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Russian leaders have also sought to constrain North Korea's testing of long-range missiles. The DPRK's ballistic missile program, originally based on Soviet-era weapons technology, has presented a major security problem for Russia and other countries. North Korea's improving ballistic missile capabilities, as well as its seeming willingness to sell missiles and missile-related technologies to any foreign buyer, have alarmed much of the international community, particularly its neighbors. The ballistic missile issue assumed renewed importance in both 2006 and 2009, when

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<sup>6</sup>- "Путин подписал указ о санкциях против КНДР" ["Putin podpisal ukaz o sanktsiyax protiv KNDR"], *Gazeta.ru*, May 30, 2007, [http://www.gazeta.ru/news/business/2007/05/30/n\\_1075339.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/business/2007/05/30/n_1075339.shtml); "Russia Makes U-turn, Joins UN Sanctions against N. Korea - 1," *RIA Novosti*, May 30, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20070530/66347459.html>.

<sup>7</sup>- "Medvedev Alarmed at North Korean Nuclear Activity," *Reuters*, November 9, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6A84BW20101109>.

<sup>8</sup>- "North Korea Yearly Selling \$100M in Illicit Arms, Report Says," *Global Security Newswire*, November 11, 2010, [http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20101111\\_1352.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20101111_1352.php).

<sup>9</sup>- Andrei Lankov, "Changing North Korea: An Information Campaign Can Beat the Regime," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 6 (November/December 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/65619>.

Pyongyang's decision to resume testing its long-range ballistic missiles led the UNSC to impose sanctions on North Korea. In turn, the DPRK responded on each occasion with aggressive rhetoric and the testing of a nuclear weapon.

Many Russians consider the DPRK missiles as posing a possible inadvertent threat to Russian territory due to their proximity and inaccuracy. In July 2006, North Korea launched seven missiles that landed in the Sea of Japan within Russia's 200-nautical miles (370 km) exclusive economic zone.<sup>10</sup> One missile apparently veered off course and fell close to the Russian port of Nakhoda.<sup>11</sup> Russia's most important Pacific coast city and the main port of the Russia's Pacific Fleet, Vladivostok, is located only 140 kilometers from North Korean territory. In October 2006, the Russian delegation voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1718, which mandated a moratorium on the DPRK's testing of ballistic missiles. When the North made evident its preparation to resume missile testing in early 2009, the Russian military announced that it had deployed advanced missile defenses nearby to counter any DPRK missiles heading toward Russian territory. General Nikolai Makarov, chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, even claimed to have deployed a division of Russia's most advanced air defense system, the S-400, to the Russian Far East.<sup>12</sup> President Medvedev has cited North Korea's missile launches as well as its nuclear weapons tests as a "concern for us" given

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<sup>10</sup>- Vladimir Yevseev, "Реальна ли северокорейская ракетная угроза?" ["Real'na li severokoreyskaya raketnaya ugroza?"], *RIA Novosti*, April 28, 2009, <http://www.rian.ru/analytics/20090428/169433736.html>.

<sup>11</sup>- Marie Jégo, "Kim Jong-il, son aura, son goût du kaki" ["Kim Jong-il, his aura, his preference for khaki"], *Le Monde*, June 5, 2009, [http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type\\_item=ART\\_ARCH\\_30J&objet\\_id=1085399](http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=1085399).

<sup>12</sup>- "Russia Deploys Air Defence on N. Korea Missile Tests," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 26, 2009, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/russia-deploys-air-defence-on-nkorea-missile-tests-20090826-ezmi.html>.

that, “We are located in close proximity to this country.”<sup>13</sup>

The most recent missile crisis arose on April 5, 2009, when North Korea launched a rocket that closely resembled its Taepodong-2 missile, justifying its testing as a satellite launch. The United States and its allies argued that the launch would violate a UNSC ban on DPRK missile-related activities and threatened to impose new sanctions should the launch occur. Seeking to avoid another round of sanctions, Russian and PRC officials urged North Korean restraint. The DPRK ignored these and other international entreaties and warnings. Despite the relatively mild UN action that followed, which consisted in a denunciatory statement read by the rotating UNSC President, the DPRK responded to the presidential statement by announcing it would permanently withdraw from the six-party talks. It subsequently detonated another nuclear device.

A major Russian goal in East Asia is to prevent DPRK actions from encouraging other countries, either through emulation or for defensive reasons, to pursue their own offensive and defensive strategic weapons. As a matter of principle, Russian government representatives stress their support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which legitimizes Russia’s status of one of the few nuclear weapons states. More pragmatically, Russian policy makers have opposed North Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons for fear it might induce South Korea, Japan, and even Taiwan to pursue their own nuclear forces, which under some contingencies might be used against Russia.

Russian leaders also fear that the DPRK’s ostentatious displays of its improving missile and nuclear capacities will encourage the United States and other states to develop and proliferate ballistic missile defenses (BMD)

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<sup>13</sup>-Dmitry Medvedev, “Interview to RAI and Corriere della Sera,” Russian President’s website, July 5, 2009, [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/07/05/1000\\_type82914type82916\\_219023.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/07/05/1000_type82914type82916_219023.shtml).

that could be used to negate the effectiveness of Russia's own missiles. Concerns about U.S. and other Western BMD systems have been especially evident in Russian statements and policies regarding the European theater, but are not absent from Russian thinking regarding the Asia-Pacific region as well. Foreign Minister Lavrov made evident Russian unease about further strategic weapons proliferation when he visited Seoul in April 2009. Lavrov told the press that, "I hope that no one would ... use the situation around North Korea to set up alliances, build missile defense networks or announce an intention to possess nuclear weapons." Alluding to Japan, he added that, "Unfortunately, we hear these announcements from a neighboring country. We think that it is unacceptable."<sup>14</sup> When traveling to Japan a few weeks later, Prime Minister Putin likewise warned that, "I think it would be completely wrong if we heightened the emotional intensity of our response to the present events and used it to upset the situation in the region or to start an arms race. I think that would be the greatest possible mistake, which would lead us to a dead end."<sup>15</sup>

## Mediator

To avert regional proliferation, war on the Korean Peninsula, and other calamities, Russian policy makers have sought to mediate Korean security disputes. Russian diplomatic initiatives in Korea also aim to highlight Moscow's status as an important player in East Asia by em-

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<sup>14</sup>- "N. Korea Does Not Plan Yet to Return to Nuclear Talks - Russian FM," *RIA Novosti*, April 24, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090424/121300603.html>.

<sup>15</sup>- "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Interview to Japan's Kyodo Tsushin News Agency," The NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation, and the Nihon Keizai Shimbun Newspaper (The Nikkei), May 7, 2009, Interview published on May 10, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090510/121553018.html>.

phasizing Russia's ability to communicate with all parties. Russian diplomacy has pursued a similar strategy in the Middle East, where Russian officials justify their ties with Iran, Hamas, the Libyan government and its NATO-backed opposition, and other controversial actors by citing Moscow's value for preserving lines of communication and opportunities for mediation among the parties in conflict.

In some respects, Moscow is well-situated to serve as a key mediator in international efforts to resolve the disputes between North Korea and South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Most obviously, Russia borders the Korean Peninsula, sharing a 17-km-long common frontier along the Tumen-river with the DPRK. The proximity guarantees substantial Russian official interest in developments in the Koreas as well as a dual desire to have influence in any international negotiations regarding the Peninsula as well as ensure that Russian representatives participate, even indirectly, in any multilateral official dialogue. The geographic proximity has also contributed to the development of substantial historical and ethnic ties between Russians and Koreans. Yet, Russians have outgrown some obsolete historical proclivities, such as viewing North Korea as a fellow communist ally. Today, the Russian government is perhaps one of the most disinterested potential mediators in the Koreas, hoping to benefit from almost any development that relaxed regional tensions. Russian economic and security interests would be strongly served by an enduring period of peace and prosperity in the Koreas providing it was not accompanied by reunification or abrupt regime change or reunification, scenarios that could divert investment capital from Russia to North Korea, disrupt other regional economic flows, and present unwelcome security challenges to the RFE.

Unfortunately, Russia has not enjoyed sufficient influence in the Korean region to broker a settlement. After a decade of neglect during the 1990s under Yeltsin, Putin took it upon himself to significantly improve

relations with North Korea, making a personal visit to Pyongyang in July 2000. But Putin suffered an embarrassment a few days later when he announced at the G-8 summit that Kim Jong-il had told him that North Korea would abandon its ballistic missile programs in return for international assistance in creating a civilian space program. The DPRK government quickly disavowed Putin's statement, terming it a joke.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, Russian officials have continued to seek a mediator role in Korea, emphasizing their stance of benign neutrality regarding the conflict. On April 23, 2009, Lavrov became the first foreign minister from one of the six parties to visit Pyongyang since the DPRK had resumed testing ballistic missiles and withdrawn from the six-party talks. In an effort to restart the Talks, he delivered a private letter from Putin to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who declined to meet with Lavrov.<sup>17</sup> The Russian Foreign Minister then went to South Korea, where he told the press that Russia was prepared to launch DPRK satellites on Russian rockets, a service Russia was already providing for ROK satellites.<sup>18</sup> Russian diplomats subsequently stressed that they were in contact with all the other parties in their effort to resume the Talks. Telling the Russian media that "communication channels have not been cut off and it would be strange if this happened," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin said that Russian diplomats were holding consultations both through the DPRK embassy in Moscow and the Russian embassy in Pyongyang. Remarking that he had also talked with senior ROK, U.S., and Japanese officials, Borodavkin added that, "We are thinking of how to find

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<sup>16</sup>-Sergei Blagov, "Russia's Lost Korean Opportunity," *Asia Times Online*, January 26, 2003, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/EF26Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/EF26Ag01.html).

<sup>17</sup>- "Russia to Appeal to North Korea," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8013836.stm>.

<sup>18</sup>- "Russia Offers to Launch North Korea Satellites," *Daily Times*, April 25, 2009, [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C04%5C25%5Cstory\\_25-4-2009\\_pg4\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C04%5C25%5Cstory_25-4-2009_pg4_1).

the way out of this deadlock situation and hold consultations with partners and want to discover opportunities to resume the Talks.”<sup>19</sup>

Yet, Russia’s relative low status in the DPRK’s ruling circles was evidenced in the reception given to Lavrov and his colleagues in Pyongyang in 2009. That year, both Russia and China sent senior officials to the North Korean capital. DPRK leader Kim Jong-il chose to meet with both Premier Wen Jiabao in October and Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie in November, but he did not bother to even greet Lavrov in April, or the Chairman of the Upper Chamber of the Russian Parliament, Seergei Mironov, in December. Moscow’s problem is that its diplomatic and economic weight in East Asia is too limited. Russia’s relations with Japan are strained over the South Kuriles, while the PRC has much greater economic clout in both Koreas and Chinese immigration and investment is transforming the RFE into a natural resource appendage of the PRC’s economy. Although U.S. diplomats seek to engage their Russian counterparts regarding Korean issues, their main interlocutors are in Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing. To enhance their influence in the region, Moscow diplomacy needs to become more generous toward Japan, and less focused on China, whose representatives generally ignore Russians’ opinion on Korea.

### **Alarm and Activism**

Russian diplomacy became especially active in late 2010, following North Korea’s November 23 artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island, a South Korean possession in the disputed West Sea border region, which killed two ROK soldiers and two South Korean civilians. Unlike Russia’s

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<sup>19</sup>- “Russia Continues Efforts to Bring N. Korea to Six-Party Talks,” *RIA Novosti*, July 2, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090702/155417602.html>.

refusal to concur with most international experts that North Korea had in March torpedoed the Cheonan, a South Korean warship, on this occasion Russian diplomats explicitly condemned the DPRK for its artillery barrage. After he castigated North Korea in a press conference, Lavrov later explained that why he had rejected the DPRK claim that the South Koreans and Americans provoked their attack by conducting military maneuvers in the disputed border region. He stated that “firing drill is one thing and shelling a residential area is quite another ... people died and that is most important.”<sup>20</sup> Moscow’s position thus diverged from Beijing, which had refused to blame North Korea for either incident, and moved Russia closer to the views of South Korea and its allies, which wanted Pyongyang to accept responsibility for these aggressive acts and improve its behavior.<sup>21</sup>

Despite diverging from Beijing in publicly casting blame on Pyongyang for the artillery barrage, the Russian government’s initial response to the DPRK attack was to support the PRC’s November 28 proposal call to hold emergency six-party talks on the crisis.<sup>22</sup> Lavrov said his government considered it “indispensable to relaunch the process of six-party talks on the North Korea issue.”<sup>23</sup> But Japan, South Korea, and the United States objected to a move that they feared could reward the DPRK for its misbehavior as well as divert attention from North Korea’s need to fulfill its commitment to dismantle its nuclear weapons infrastructure.

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<sup>20</sup> - “Russia Slams N. Korea Over Island Attack,” *Chosun Ilbo*, December 15, 2010, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2010/12/15/2010121500790.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/12/15/2010121500790.html).

<sup>21</sup> - Shin Hae-in, “Russia ‘Coming Together’ with Partners on N.K.,” *Korea Herald*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20101216000969>.

<sup>22</sup> - Bill Varner, “Russia Backs China’s Call for Six-Party Talks on North Korea,” *Bloomberg*, November 30, 2010, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-30/russia-backs-china-s-call-for-six-party-talks-on-north-korea.html>.

<sup>23</sup> - “Russia Worried about North Korea’s Nuclear Activities,” *AFP*, December 13, 2010, [http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp\\_asiapacific/view/1099004/1.html](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/1099004/1.html).

Moscow's next move was to engage in some high-profile shuttle diplomacy, inviting DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun and Wi Sung-lac, the lead ROK nuclear envoy, to Moscow for separate meetings in mid-December. Russian diplomats also held emergency consultations with Japanese and American diplomats on the crisis. Still, Lavrov suggested that the U.S.-South Korean military exercise that occurred before the shelling had also increased regional tensions.

This last theme became more prominent after Seoul and Washington announced their intention to hold another joint exercise, again with live artillery firing, from December 18-21 in the West Sea near Yeonpyeong Island, with North Korea threatening to retaliate vigorously. The Russian foreign ministry summoned the South Korean and U.S. ambassadors to express "extreme concern" over a planned live-firing drill near a disputed maritime border with North Korea.<sup>24</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin met with the envoys and, according to a ministry statement, "insistently urged the Republic of Korea and the United States to refrain from conducting the planned firing." The statement noted that a similar exercise had precipitated the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island the previous month.<sup>25</sup> The Russian military raised the alert status of its units near the Koreas. When its strongly worded messages failed to avert the ROK-U.S. exercise, Russian diplomats called an emergency session of the UN Security Council, which met on December 19, to avert a possible military exchange and reenergize the diplomatic track. Russia's draft resolution wanted UN Secretary General Ban Ki moon to send a special envoy to Seoul and Pyongyang to "consult on urgent measures to settle peacefully

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<sup>24</sup> - Steve Guterman, "Russia Warns South Korea and U.S. over Live-Firing Drill," *Reuters*, December 17, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6BG2MR20101217>.

<sup>25</sup> - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs," December 17, 2010, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/ea9bc14169cf375cc32577fc005c87ab?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/ea9bc14169cf375cc32577fc005c87ab?OpenDocument).

the current crisis situation in the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>26</sup> Until now, the Council had been reluctant to involve Ban directly in the crisis due to his previous position as ROK foreign minister. Explaining Moscow’s unusually high-profile actions, Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly I. Churkin, said that situation “directly affects the national security interests of the Russian Federation.”<sup>27</sup>

Russia’s limited influence proved insufficient to secure support for its diplomatic initiative. Fortunately, the DPRK government decided not to respond with force to the drills, and even offered to allow IAEA inspectors to reenter their country, while the UNSC members could not agree on the wording of statement. The United States wanted language that explicitly blamed North Korea for provoking the recent crisis, while China objected to singling out Pyongyang for condemnation.<sup>28</sup> The crisis died down after the North Koreans decided to ignore the ROK-U.S. exercise and then began to cite the dangers of escalation as a reason why it was important to resume inter-Korean defense talks.

## Carrots and Minimal Sticks

Russian diplomats generally oppose using economic and other sanctions to punish countries whose governments misbehave. In the case of the DPRK, as with Iran, Russian policy makers argue that a non-coercive, incentive-based strategy offers the best means for persuading the DPRK

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<sup>26</sup>-Colum Lynch, “Russia Presses for UN role in Mediating Crisis in the Koreas,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, December 18, 2010, [http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/12/18/russia\\_pushes\\_deeper\\_un\\_role\\_in\\_mediating\\_crisis\\_in\\_the\\_koreas](http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/12/18/russia_pushes_deeper_un_role_in_mediating_crisis_in_the_koreas).

<sup>27</sup>-“Russia’s Draft UN Statement Proposes Sending Envoy to Korea,” *RIA Novosti*, November 19, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20101219/161845167.html>.

<sup>28</sup>-“Russia: Security Council Inclined to Send Envoy to Korea,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, December 20, 2010, <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/news/358920inclined-send-envoy-koreas.html>.

to moderate its behavior and fulfill its international obligations. In the case of North Korea, Russian officials worry that using sanctions risks antagonizing Pyongyang that the DPRK will lash back, unpredictably and destructively, in anger, and that Russian interests, and possible Russian territory, could be adversely affected in the process.

After the October 2006 DPRK nuclear test, Putin declared it was important not to back North Korea into a corner and leave it with no option but to lash back aggressively – the same argument he regularly makes regarding Iran.<sup>29</sup> Russian policy makers also strived to break the escalating tensions in early 2009 when the DPRK government was preparing to launch a rocket and threatened retaliation if the UN sanctioned it in response.<sup>30</sup> While seeking to dissuade the DPRK launch, they also argued against sanctioning Pyongyang further on the grounds that it would drive its government into deeper and aggressive alienation, scuttling hopes for early implementation of its denuclearization commitments. After the DPRK went ahead with the launches, Medvedev argued that, while Russia has supported international sanctions against Pyongyang for its nuclear tests and missile launches, “that does not mean that we must continually inflame passions. On the contrary, we must seek ways and approaches to convince our North Korean colleagues to talk to us, because I don’t want to be forced to imagine any other course of events,” adding that – in an allusion to the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities – “if something does happen, it will be the worst scenario, the most appalling one we can imagine.” For this reason, he concluded, “there is no alternative to a dialogue with North Korea. We need to use every possible means.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>- “Putin Optimistic on North Korea,” *St. Petersburg Times*, October 27, 2006, [http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=19283](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=19283).

<sup>30</sup>- “Russia Opposes Sanctions against N. Korea over Rocket Launch,” *RIA Novosti*, April 8, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090408/120980228.html>.

<sup>31</sup>- “Interview to RAI and Corriere della Sera.”

When North Korea detonated another nuclear weapon on May 25, 2009, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a sharp note of condemnation. The statement called the test a “violation” of previous UNSC resolutions and a “serious blow” to the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It also complained that, “The latest DPRK moves are provoking an escalation of tension in Northeast Asia.”<sup>32</sup> Foreign Minister Lavrov advocated the adoption of a strongly condemnatory UNSC resolution, but he opposed adopting further sanctions or other coercive measures, instead endorsing a resumption of the six-party talks. “We should not look to punish for the sake of punishment only... The problem can only be settled through talks.”<sup>33</sup> After the November 23 DPRK artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island and confirmation that North Korea had developed a uranium enrichment facility, Prime Minister Putin called on North Korea to “unconditionally abide by” its denuclearization commitments.<sup>34</sup> He stressed, however, the importance of resuming talks among the parties. During an interview with U.S. talk show host Larry King, he explained that, “It is impossible to come to an agreement without dialogue.”<sup>35</sup>

When pressure for sanctions by other parties becomes overwhelming, Russian officials generally endorse applying limited sanctions against the DPRK as a “lesser evil” between doing nothing and imposing more severe sanctions or using force. They have sought to keep them moderate to meet the demands from the other players to pressure North Korea while not

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<sup>32</sup>- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Information and Press Department, “Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” May 25, 2009, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/2663b05ad45f1561c32575c1005dcf07?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/2663b05ad45f1561c32575c1005dcf07?OpenDocument).

<sup>33</sup>- “UN Needs ‘Tough’ N. Korea Resolution: Russia,” *AFP*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.spacewar.com/2006/090527095511.ye29xj6w.html>.

<sup>34</sup>- Shin Hae-in, “Russia ‘Coming Together’ with Partners on N.K.,” *Korea Herald*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20101216000969>.

<sup>35</sup>- “Situation on Korean Peninsula Very Acute and Disturbing - Putin,” *RIA Novosti*, December 20, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101202/161585282.html>.

driving Pyongyang into belligerence. As one of the five permanent UNSC members, Russia can veto its decisions, thereby controlling the severity of international sanctions and other UN-approved coercive measures. Moscow has blocked proposed resolutions imposing severe sanctions on the North or authorizing the use of force to enforce Pyongyang's compliance with UNSC resolutions. But Russian policy makers have supported some penalties in order to keep the UN, and Russia, a central player in the international response to the Korean issue. Russian diplomats fear a repeat of the Kosovo (1998) and Iraq (2003) examples when Western governments decided to bypass the UN and employ force on their own initiative through coalitions of the willing after they could not work through the UNSC due to Moscow's veto. Russian diplomats must balance blocking harsh UN sanctions while sustaining Western interests and aspirations that working through the UN remains a useful tactic.

For instance, Russia joined with the other permanent UNSC members in enacting Resolution 1718 (2006) on October 14, after the DPRK tested its first nuclear explosive device on October 9, 2006. The text condemned North Korea's nuclear test and banned the transfer of items related to the DPRK's nuclear, ballistic missile and other unconventional weapons programs. UNSCR 1718 also freezes the foreign assets and prohibits international travel of those individuals involved in the DPRK's nuclear, ballistic missile, and other weapons of mass destruction programs, along with their family members. Additional provisions prohibit the transfer of major conventional weapons systems — such as attack helicopters, combat aircraft, tanks, and warships — as well as luxury goods to North Korea. UNSCR 1718 gave countries the right to inspect cargo moving to and from North Korea in order to enforce its provisions.

Despite the efforts of the United States and Japan to enact a more strongly worded resolution, opposition from Moscow and Beijing

excluded language that might authorize UN members to enforce its provisions with military action.<sup>36</sup> The Russian and PRC delegations successfully insisted that the resolution should aim less to punish North Korea retroactively than to modify its future policies. Russia also joined with China to moderate the sanctions imposed after the DPRK's April 2009 long-range ballistic missile test. After what the DPRK termed its "space rocket" apparently fell harmlessly into the sea, the Russian delegation to the UNSC engaged in tough negotiations with the other permanent UNSC members over how to respond. Eventually, they decided that the rotating president of the UNSC for that month, Mexican Ambassador Claude Heller, could issue a statement that termed the launch a "contravention" of Resolution 1718, which forbids the DPRK from engaging in missile-related activities.<sup>37</sup> The United States and Japan had initially sought another formal UNSC resolution that imposed immediate penalties on the DPRK, but Moscow opposed such a move. The Russian delegation also tried to delay measures to tighten existing sanctions in order to relax tensions and coax Pyongyang back to the negotiating table.<sup>38</sup>

While criticizing the DPRK for testing nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, Russian government representatives have also faulted Western countries for failing to meet their previous commitments to the DPRK, implying that this failure might have precipitated the subsequent North Korean behavior. In September 2008, Lavrov chastised Japan's government for failing to render its share of economic assistance

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<sup>36</sup>-Warren Hoge, "China and Russia Stall Sanctions on North Korea," *The New York Times*, October 13, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/world/asia/13nations.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>37</sup>- "TEXT-UN Security Council statement on N. Korea," *Reuters*, April 13, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idINN1333144920090413>.

<sup>38</sup>- "UN Progresses toward Additional North Korea Sanctions," *Global Security Newswire*, April 22, 2009, [http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw\\_20090422\\_9233.php](http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20090422_9233.php).

to the DPRK due to its bilateral dispute regarding the Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean intelligence agents between 1977 and 1983.<sup>39</sup> Russian officials have also criticized Washington when Moscow considered American negotiating tactics excessively inflexible.<sup>40</sup> Russian officials seemed to agree with DPRK complaints in 2008 that they were not receiving the pledged amounts of heavy-fuel oil or equivalents in return for closing their Reprocessing Plant and the Fuel Fabrication Facility at Yongbong. They also sympathized with DPRK's irritation at not being removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror and the demanding standards of verification insisted on by Washington. When in Pyongyang in April 2009, Lavrov called on all parties to fulfill the existing agreements, arguing that, "If everybody takes such a stand, we will be able to get through the crisis."<sup>41</sup> George Toloraya, program director of the Russian Academy of Science's Korean Institute of Economics, has extended his line of thought to cover the Obama administration when he wrote that, "The current cycle of tensions leading to the emergence of the DPRK as a de-facto nuclear weapons state started when ... North Koreans grew frustrated as their actual gains from the diplomatic process were marginal - they did not come much closer to obtaining substantial security guarantees." As a result, "Kim Jong-il probably considered that the incoming Obama administration would not take North Korea seriously enough" unless a "strategy of increasing tensions to raise the stakes was

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<sup>39</sup>- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Transcript of Remarks and Response to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference Following Talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea Yu Myung-hwan, Moscow, September 10, 2008," September 11, 2008, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/4a2a8860726c0b94c32574c10048e635?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/4a2a8860726c0b94c32574c10048e635?OpenDocument).

<sup>40</sup>- See for example "Russia Wants N. Korea Nuclear Talks to Resume Despite Setbacks," *RIA Novosti*, February 6, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080206/98528664.html>.

<sup>41</sup>- "Russia's Lavrov Says N. Korea Talks Unlikely to Restart Soon," *RIA Novosti*, April 23, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090423/121262691.html>.

adopted.”<sup>42</sup>

## Korea and Russian Modernization

If the DPRK can normalize its relations with other countries, Russian officials and businesses can use its territory as a means for achieving their regional integration objectives. Russian policy makers are eager to deepen their country's connections with the prosperous East Asian region, which will enhance the health of the Russian national economy in general and the RFE's economic recovery in particular. Medvedev and Putin have both stressed the need to promote eastern Russia's economic modernization by deepening Russia's integration into the Asia-Pacific region. One reason the Russian government lobbied to host the 2012 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok was to stimulate this process through an expected surge in foreign investment to prepare the local infrastructure to host the gathering. Russia's trade with the major East Asian countries of China, Japan, and South Korea lags far behind these three states' economic exchanges with one another. The RFE itself trails western Russia economically and is becoming a security liability due to its diminishing ethnic Russian population, which creates troublesome demographic imbalance along the Russia-China border. Securing greater Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean trade and investment would help stimulate the growth and modernization of Russia.

Even with the persistent security tensions, economic cooperation between Russia and South Korea has increased dramatically during the

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<sup>42</sup>-Georgy Toloraya, "Engaging the DPRK: A 'Deferred Delivery' Option?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, No. 47-3-09, November 23, 2009, <http://japanfocus.org/~Georgy-Toloraya/3258>.

past decade. The commerce involves primarily the exchange of Russian oil and gas in return for ROK machinery and equipment. The South Korean military also purchases some Russian defense equipment. The two governments are seeking to deepen their bilateral economic cooperation as well as extend it into other sectors. Russian officials are particularly eager to encourage high-tech ROK companies to increase their investment in Russia and thereby promote Russia's economic modernization.

Despite the low level of recent Russia-DPRK commerce, Russian policy makers and entrepreneurs have visions of transforming North Korea into a pivotal player in their vision of reviving the Russian Far East and integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Foreign Minister Lavrov and other Russians hope that the six-party talks could resolve the Korean nuclear dispute and establish peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, spurring "the development of Russia's Far East and Siberia regions."<sup>43</sup> For example, Russian planners want to construct energy pipelines between Russia and South Korea across North Korean territory.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Russian policy makers have sought to link the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railroads. The intent is to create the longest Euro-Asian land transportation corridor, with a length of more than 10,000 kilometers. The construction of such a link would allow Russia to become a transit country for South Korean trade with Europe, which now involves mostly by ocean shipping.<sup>45</sup> Experts believe that the

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<sup>43</sup> - *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> - "Seoul Proposes Peace, Economic Ties with Russia, N. Korea," *RIA Novosti*, January 21, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080121/97457751.html>; "Putin Reiterates Readiness to Assist Korean Projects - 1," *RIA Novosti*, October 9, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20071009/83115826.html>.

<sup>45</sup> - "Russia, China Could Open Rail Link."

corridor will reduce the time needed for containers to move from the Asia-Pacific region to Europe from six weeks by sea to less than two weeks by rail.<sup>46</sup>

Russia has made some progress in establishing these rail links. In March 2006, the railway ministers of Russia and both Koreas decided at a meeting in Vladivostok to rebuild 54 kilometers of the Trans-Korean railway running from the Russian border station of Khasan to the DPRK port of Rajin and to construct a major container terminal there. The PRC might also join this transit network. In November 1998, Russia, China, and North Korea signed a treaty to demarcate their territorial waters on the Tumen River, which borders the three countries.<sup>47</sup> Both Russia and the PRC have aggressively developed transportation routes to the free economic trade zone in the port city of Rason.<sup>48</sup> In 2009, Russia went further and pledged to spend \$201.8 million to restore the railroad and renovate the city's largest port.<sup>49</sup> China is constructing a new highway to complement its existing rail networks to the zone.<sup>50</sup> In early January 2010, Kim Jong-il visited the zone and designated Rason a "special city."<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, in April 2009, a Russian and a Chinese company signed an agreement building a line between Russia's Khasan, the North Korean border town of Tumangang, and China's Tumen. Before the onset of the latest crisis, they had hoped a North Korea company would join them in

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<sup>46</sup> - "Russia Reconstructs Four Railway Stations in North Korea," *APN News*, January 28, 2011, <http://apnnews.com/2011/01/28/russia-reconstructs-4-railway-stations-in-nkorea/>

<sup>47</sup> - "China, Russia, N. Korea Sign Border Demarcation Deal," *Kyodo News*, November 9, 1998, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0WDQ/is\\_1998\\_Nov\\_9/ai\\_53217636/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_1998_Nov_9/ai_53217636/)

<sup>48</sup> - Kim Sue-young, "Kim Jong-il Inspects Free Economic Zone," *Korea Times*, December 17, 2009, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/12/120\\_57504.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/12/120_57504.html).

<sup>49</sup> - "North Names Rason as 'Special City,'" *JoongAng Daily*, January 6, 2010, <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2914895>.

<sup>50</sup> - Leonid Petrov, "Future of ROK-Russian Ties," *Korea Times*, February 26, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2009/12/198\\_19633.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2009/12/198_19633.html).

<sup>51</sup> - "North Names Rason as 'Special City.'"

May 2009.<sup>52</sup> In January 2010, Russian and DPRK specialists finished reconstructing the railway stations at Tumangang, Chokchi, Kurenphen, and Wonsan that connect Khasan to Rajin. They are now rebuilding the tunnels and electric supply networks for the railway extension.<sup>53</sup>

Russian policy makers describe their involvement in these regional economic projects as contributing to East Asia's peace and security as well as regional prosperity. As Ambassador Ivashentsov asserted in January of 2009 with reference to these ventures, "There is no better way than long-term economic projects to rebuild trust between North and South Korea."<sup>54</sup> Even so, these proposals' implementation awaits normalization of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK's continuing frictions with the international community have blocked the potentially lucrative projects under Russian consideration. Until then, Moscow's economic ties and influence in Pyongyang will lag far behind that of South Korea and China, which provides North Korea with most of its foreign assistance in the form of energy, food, and other key commodities. While the DPRK can survive the absence of economic ties with Russia; China's economic assistance is indispensable.

## Conclusion

Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, but not its regime. They oppose North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programs, but they fear even more actions that might engender

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<sup>52</sup>- "Russia, China Could Open Rail Link via N. Korea This Year," *RIA Novosti*, April 22, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20090422/121246937.html>.

<sup>53</sup>- "Russia Reconstructs Four Railway Stations."

<sup>54</sup>- Kim Se-jeong, "North Korea's Military Action Is Intolerable, Russian Amb. Says," *Korea Times*, January 21, 2009, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/01/178\\_38277.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/01/178_38277.html) 27.

chaos on the Korean Peninsula. They remain more concerned about the potential for the DPRK's immediate collapse than about its government's intransigence regarding its nuclear or missile development programs. North Korea's disintegration could induce widespread economic disruptions in East Asia, generate large refugee flows across their borders, weaken their influence in the Koreas by ending their mediating status as interlocutors with Pyongyang, and potentially remove a buffer zone separating their frontiers from American ground forces based in South Korea. At worst, North Korea's demise could precipitate a military conflict on the peninsula — which could spill across into their territory. Almost any conceivable armed clash on the Korean Peninsula would worsen Russia's relations with the parties to the conflict. Of course, war on the Korean Peninsula, especially one that saw the use of nuclear weapons, would inflict incalculable economic, security, and other costs on Russia and its people.

Like South Koreans, Russians favor a “soft landing” for the DPRK — a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including its renunciation of nuclear weapons. Such a benign outcome would avoid the feared consequences of precipitous regime change — humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction, arms races, and military conflicts. Yet, Russian policy makers do not favor Korea's near-term reunification. In such a case, the substantial ROK investment flowing into Russia would be redirected toward North Korea's rehabilitation. Considerable PRC investment capital would also likely be diverted. Russian policy makers would strongly oppose the redeployment northward of U.S. military forces in the newly unified Korean state. Many Koreans would want them to remain to balance the country's militarily more powerful neighbors — China, Japan, and Russia. Although many of these countries' leaders might prefer that American forces remain to discourage the new Korean government to pursue nuclear weapons — an

otherwise logical move in such circumstances – certain Russians would undoubtedly object to having U.S. forces deployed in a country that borders the Russian Federation.

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## *The Peace-keeping Role of the American Troops in South Korea*

*Gabriel Jonsson*

### **Abstract**

The American troops in South Korea are a contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While the opinion of South Korea and the United States is that they are essential for the South's defense, North Korea's view is that they hinder reunification. The South Korea-United States alliance, which was formed during the Korean War (1950-1953), is analyzed here on the basis of alliance theory. The alliance was strengthened by the signing of a Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953 which is the legal basis for the American troops' presence. The United States prevented South Korea from retaliating against North Korea following assassination attempts against South Korean presidents in 1968 and 1983. Troop reductions in 1970-1971, 1990-1992 and 2004-2008 caused U.S.-ROK tensions. These tensions peaked due to President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) troop withdrawal policy, until the policy was reversed due to strong opposition and an underestimation of North Korea's armed forces. American troops have contributed to maintaining peace by building a joint South Korean-American fighting force, providing quality intelligence, and serving as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense.

**Key Words:** American troops, South Korea-United States alliance, peace-keeping, inter-Korean relations, Korean War

## **Introduction**

The American military presence in South Korea is a long-contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While North Korea has consistently urged a withdrawal, South Korea and the United States have regarded the troops as essential for the defense of the South. Nonetheless, the American forces constitute a key factor in any analysis of how peace has been maintained on the Korean Peninsula since the end of the Korean War.

The purpose of this study is to investigate, based on alliance theory and qualitative methodology, how the American troops have contributed to maintaining peace, partly in relation to a few other factors such as rearmaments. This study differs from available studies by assessing the troops' concrete contributions to securing peace and the significance of those contributions. It first briefly presents alliance theory. Since the peace-keeping role of the American forces cannot be properly illuminated without first reviewing the background of their deployment, the origins of the South Korea-United States alliance are also analyzed.

The following section gives an account of major developments of the alliance since 1953. Rearmaments, incidents involving American troops, and contested issues such as troop reductions in the 1970s, 1990s and 2000s are included. Special attention is devoted to the controversies caused by President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) troop withdrawal policy. Opinions in the literature on the troops' peace-keeping role are assessed, including the role they played during some crises in inter-Korean relations. Finally, specific contributions by the American troops to preserving peace that are more difficult to analyze chronologically are investigated, assessed and compared. The section includes data on military exercises, which are less frequently recorded than other criteria of evaluation such as rearmaments.

## Alliance Theory

The South Korean scholar Kim Woosang<sup>1</sup> (2009) quotes the American scholar Stephen Walt, according to whom “an alliance is a formal or an informal agreement between two independent countries for security cooperation. This means a formal alliance by signing an alliance treaty and an informal alliance relation through tacit agreement between the parties or military exercises etc.” Military alliances are, depending on their purpose, classified as a) capability aggregations or b) autonomy-security trade-offs. In the former case, alliance partners combine their strength to jointly cope with an enemy threat or amass power to deter war. Support from an allied nation is very important in boosting national power. Such alliances are formed between parties of equal strength and are therefore also referred to as “symmetric alliances.”

In contrast, in the latter case alliance partners’ strengths tend to be unequal. The purpose in forming an alliance between a weak and a strong country, also called an “asymmetric alliance,” is for the former to gain military support from the latter to increase national power. Such an alliance is normally disadvantageous for the strong power since it does not receive military support from the weak partner and may become involved in a conflict against its will. On the other hand, it is possible to exert influence on the weaker nation’s policies. The weak nation can strengthen its defense, but it also loses some of its autonomy by having to adjust to the stronger nation’s wishes and may also have to provide military bases. Since such alliances are formed when both parties assess them to be necessary, they tend to last for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>-Korean names are written according to the author’s own preferences when known. Otherwise, the McCune-Reischauer system is followed. Names of presidents follow standard spelling.

<sup>2</sup>-Kim Woosang, “Hanmi tongmaeng-tŭi ironjök chaego,” in Yi, Su-hun (ed.), *Chojŏnggi-tŭi*

Regarding the impact of alliances on national security, Stephen Walt (1997) writes: “The formation and cohesion of international alliances can have profound effects on the security of individual states and help determine both the probability and likely outcome of war.” On the persistence of some alliances, he writes: “An alliance may persist despite drastic external changes because its members are still better off in the alliance than they would be outside it.” Another opinion is: “An obvious source of alliance durability is the exercise of hegemonic power by a strong alliance leader.” He also points out the symbolic significance of alliances: “Alliances are more likely to persist if they have become symbols of credibility or resolve.”

Finally, concerning alliance formation, the American scholar Glenn H. Snyder writes (1984) that it is one method for states to accumulate power in addition to armaments and territorial aggrandizement. He analyzes another important issue in alliance politics: the security dilemma. According to the theory, even when no state has any wish to attack others, none can be sure that the others’ intentions are peaceful, or will remain so. Consequently, each must accumulate power for defense. Since no state can know whether the power accumulation of others is only due to defense motivations or not, each must assume that it might be intended for an attack. Consequently, each party’s power increments are matched by the other. Ultimately, security is no greater than it was when the vicious circle began.<sup>3</sup>

The following sections examine central concepts such as capability aggregations, autonomy-security trade-offs, and the security dilemma.

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*Hanmi tongmaeng: 2003~2008* (Seoul: Kyōngnam taehakkyo kūkdong munje yōn’guso, 2009), pp. 67-68. Author’s translation.

<sup>3</sup>- Glenn H. Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984), p. 461; Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 156-157, 164, 165.

The impact of alliances on national security in relation to rearmaments is also assessed.

### **Formation of the South Korea-United States Alliance**

In 1953, South Korea opposed the signing of the Armistice Agreement. However, since President Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) regarded its conclusion as inevitable, in a letter to President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) he requested a Mutual Defense Treaty to be signed immediately after the armistice had been enforced. The treaty would be similar to the treaties signed between the United States and the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.

President Rhee, who had advocated reunification by advancing northwards, continued to oppose the signing of the Armistice Agreement until the United States had promised to sign a Mutual Defense Treaty and provide military assistance. Following South Korea's release of 27,388 'anti-Communist prisoners' from prisoner-of-war camps on June 18, 1953, the U.S. believed that it would be impossible to sign and implement the Armistice Agreement without the consent of the South Korean government, so it dispatched an envoy from the State Department to negotiate. At the time, President Rhee aimed for the signing of a Mutual Defense Treaty, long-term economic assistance for reconstruction, reinforcement of the Korean armed forces, and separate American-Korean talks on plans for unification, unless political talks with the Communists showed progress within 90 days. The United States accepted the demands. Immediately prior to the signing of the Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953, South Korea and the United States agreed that the size of the Army would not exceed 655,000 men. The Navy and the Air Force would be limited to 24,000 men altogether. The quality of the latter forces

would be somewhat raised.<sup>4</sup>

Although South Korea refused to sign the Armistice Agreement, arguing that it would perpetuate national division, following strong pressure from the United States the country declared that it would consent to the agreement and observe it on condition of signing a Mutual Defense Treaty and receiving economic and military assistance. Eventually, the Mutual Defense Treaty was signed on October 1, 1953. The parties agreed to a) resolve international conflicts they may be involved in peacefully, b) consult each other in the case of an external attack, c) recognize military attacks on their territories as threats to peace and security and respond to joint threats on the basis of the Constitution, d) station American military forces in the Republic of Korea, e) ratify the agreement on the basis of the Constitution, and finally, f) permit either party the right to cancel the treaty, which has no time limit, within one year after issuing notification. The first, third, fifth and sixth articles are similar to Articles 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8 of the 1951 United States-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. These articles are also similar to Articles 1, 4, 9 and 10 of the 1951 Australia-New Zealand-U.S. Security Treaty (ratified in 1952).

The Mutual Defense Treaty became effective on November 17, 1954, following ratification by both countries' parliaments in January. It has since remained unaltered, demonstrating that alliances formed through necessity by both parties tend to last for a long time. Ratification had been delayed by the United States, which wanted to restrain President Rhee from ordering a march to the North. The Mutual Defense Treaty marked the beginning of the South Korea-United States alliance and is the

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<sup>4</sup>-Kim Il-Young, "Hanmi tongmaeng-ŭi samwi ilch'e kujo-ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwajŏng," in Kim Il-Young and Cho Seong-Ryoul (eds.), *Chuhan migun: Yŏksa, chaengchŏm, chŏnmang* (Seoul: Hanul, 2003(a)), pp. 66-67, 69-70; Kukpangbu, *Hanmi tongmaeng-gwa chuhanmigun* (Seoul: Kukpangbu, 2002), pp. 36-37; Park Pong-hyŏn, *Chuhan migun-ŭn ōnje ch'ŏlsuhae-yana hana* (P'aju: Hanul, 2004(a)), p. 11. Original quotation marks.

legal framework for the stationing of American troops in the country as well as a pillar of the South's national defense policy. Weapons and equipment were brought in afterwards.<sup>5</sup> In order to prevent attacks from North Korea, the troops have always been concentrated on the western front, north of Seoul. Meanwhile, in March 1954 the withdrawal of troops who had remained in South Korea after the end of the war commenced (equipment was handed over to the South Korean military). In 1955, there were 85,500 American soldiers in the country, compared to 325,000 in 1953 and 223,000 in 1954.<sup>6</sup>

## Development of the South Korea-United States Alliance

American military assistance had begun already during the Korean War, when the South Korean army had expanded from 100,000 men to almost 600,000. On July 24, 1950, the United Nations Command (UNC)

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<sup>5</sup>- The South Korean scholar Park Myōng-nim argues that from a legal point of view the treaty is an armistice violation since Paragraph 13(c) of the Armistice Agreement prohibits troop enforcements and Paragraph 13(d) prohibits rearmaments, colliding with Paragraph 2 of the Mutual Defense Treaty which states "The parties will continuously undertake and strengthen appropriate measures to prevent military attack independently, jointly or on the basis of self-reliance and mutual assistance." Author's translation. From Park, "Nambuk p'yōnghwa hyōpchōng-gwa Hanbando p'yōnghwa," in Han'guk inkwōn chaedan (ed.), *Hanbando p'yōnghwa-nūn kanūnghan-ga?: Hanbando anbo chilsō-ūi chōnhwan-gwa p'yōnghwa ch'eje-ūi mosaek* (Seoul: Tosō ch'ulp'an arūk'e, 2004(b)), pp. 244-245: fn. 32.

<sup>6</sup>- Gabriel Jonsson, *Peace-keeping in the Korean Peninsula: The Role of Commissions* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009), pp. 17, 18-19, 66-67; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(a), pp. 35, 71, 72-73: "Ingye ch'ōlsōn-ūro-sō-ūi chuhanmigun: kyumo, p'yōnje, unyong pangsig-ūi pyōnhwa-rūl chungsim-ūro," in Kim and Cho, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 75, 76-77, 90; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39; *Mutual Defense Treaty (U.S.-Philippines)*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual\\_Defense\\_Treaty\\_\(U.S.-Philippines\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Defense_Treaty_(U.S.-Philippines)); Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), pp. 11, 149; *Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America*, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1952/2.html>. The text of the South Korea-United States Mutual Defense Treaty appears in Kukpangbu, *ibid.*, p. 39. For English see *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea*, October 1, 1953, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp).

was founded on the basis of the July 7 Security Council resolution to integrate the combat units into one organization. The UNC established its headquarters in Tokyo on July 24, but it was moved to Seoul on July 1, 1957 in order to be able to implement its tasks more efficiently. The UNC is represented in the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) which is responsible for implementing the Armistice Agreement and settling armistice violations. As an indisputable sign of the huge weight the United States attached to its support for South Korea, from 1950-1988 military assistance reached almost \$15 billion altogether. From the beginning the United States actively supported education and training of military officers by, for instance, establishing training institutes.

On June 21, 1957, at the 75<sup>th</sup> MAC plenary meeting, the UNC declared Paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice Agreement prohibiting the import of weapons from abroad to the Korean Peninsula to be invalid, since the North had previously ignored the paragraph by rearming. However, the South Korean scholar Choi Cheol-Young (2004) points out that both sides had thoroughly neglected Paragraph 13(d).<sup>7</sup> The perceived level of security could have been raised through capability aggregation. On the other hand, in accordance with the security dilemma, there was possibly no greater security than when the vicious circle began, but rearmaments could have reduced the risk for war. Subsequently, the American troops began modernizing. In 1957, atomic weapons were for the first time brought into South Korea as a key aspect of the modernization project. Also, new jet planes capable of carrying nuclear weapons were brought in from Okinawa. On January 28, 1958, the UNC confirmed that 280 mm atomic cannons and air-to-air Honest John missiles had been introduced. In 1959 nuclear weapons for the Air Force were also

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<sup>7</sup>-Choi Cheol-Young, "Nambuk kunsajôk habûi-wa Han'guk chôngjôn hyôpchông-ûi hyoryôk," *Sônggyungwan pôphak*, 16, No. 2 (2004), p. 495.

deployed in South Korea. Matador missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons 1,100 kilometers, i.e. into North Korea, China and the Soviet Union, were also brought in.

In 1961 Mace missiles with a range of 1,800 kilometers were introduced. In order to prevent an attack from North Korea, from 1964-66 atomic demolition munitions (“atomic mines”) were brought in. The infantry unit “Nike Hercules,” equipped with nuclear warheads, was also stationed at this time to suggest that, if war broke out, nuclear weapons would immediately be used. In 1973-74, large-scale field artillery pieces were placed in the front areas south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to be ready for an attack against North Korea. Although this forward defense strategy put less emphasis on nuclear weapons than previous operational plans did, the nuclear weapons that were moved to the rear areas in 1975 remained stored just 55-80 kilometers from the DMZ. In case of war, those weapons would play the role of a tripwire, along with the American troops north of Seoul, in guaranteeing automatic intervention.<sup>8</sup>

While these rearmaments took place, following the withdrawal of Chinese troops from North Korea in 1958 the main issue within the MAC became the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea. Already at the 77<sup>th</sup> MAC meeting, convened on July 28, 1957, the Korean People’s Army/Chinese People’s Army (KPA/CPV) had requested a withdrawal.<sup>9</sup> The KPA/CPV regarded those troops as the major obstacle to

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<sup>8</sup> - Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 19-20, 21; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 79-80, 91: “Chuhan migun-gwa haekchölllyôg-tû pyônhwa,” in Kim and Cho, (eds.), *Chuhan migun: Yôksa, chaengchôm, chônman* (2003(c)), pp. 106, 108, 110, 111-112; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> - The KPA/CPV had originally three North Korean and two Chinese officers but since late 1954 there were four North Korean officers and one Chinese officer. From Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 21. Considering that China and the United States were opponents during the Korean War, it is likely that the opinion to an equal extent reflected the opinions of North Korea and China.

reunification.

Troop withdrawals were requested six times in 1958, seven times in 1959 and five times in 1960-1961. At the 93<sup>rd</sup> MAC meeting, held on January 3, 1959, the North asserted that the American troops obstructed reunification. This argument was repeated at three meetings held in 1960 and one convened in 1968. The South rejected a troop withdrawal at the 81<sup>st</sup> MAC meeting, held on February 25, 1958, by claiming that it was not an issue for discussion in the Commission. This argument was repeated at two meetings held in 1960 and two convened in 1961. At the 88<sup>th</sup> meeting, held on October 27, 1958, the South argued that a troop withdrawal should be discussed at a high-level political conference. When the 103<sup>rd</sup> meeting was held on June 10, 1959, the South repeated its claim and argued that the MAC did not have the authority to discuss the issue. It was clarified that the troops were stationed to defend South Korea and would remain as long as there was an invasion threat. The former argument was repeated once in 1961 and once again in 1969, while the latter was repeated once each in 1962 and 1969.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1960s, the number of armistice violations rose. The UNC recorded 88 provocations from the North against the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) in 1965 and 80 in 1966, but 784 in 1967 and 985 in 1968. Most of these incidents occurred along the part of the MDL controlled by the United States Army. Altogether 81 American soldiers were killed during the 1960s. However, North Korea's policy to force a withdrawal of the American troops failed. Instead, it strengthened South Korea's and the United States' will to defend the South. Notably, the former advisor to the UNC/MAC, James Munhang Lee (2004) argues that the main reason for North Korea's failure to achieve national reunification by taking over South Korea, either militarily or politically, was the

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<sup>10</sup>-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 95, 103, 104, 105-106, 130-131, 583, 584, 585, 586, 598, 602.

presence of the American forces. It is virtually impossible to determine whether Lee's opinion is correct or not, but the American forces were a very important factor in capability aggregation.

While most incidents did not spawn fears of war, a few did - particularly North Korea's seizure of the intelligence vessel USS Pueblo on January 23, 1968. The United States government chose to handle the Pueblo incident through negotiations rather than military retaliation, not least since the country was involved in a war in Vietnam which it could not expect to win. Also the assassination attempt of South Korean President Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) on January 21 caused great tension. The American scholar Mitchell B. Lerner (2002) quotes an anonymous general who, in an article in the August 16, 1968 *New York Times* regarding the assassination attempt, claimed "An infuriated ROK [Republic of Korea] population demanded retaliation, and only extreme American pressure prevented North Korean President Kim Il-sung from sparking a second Korean War." "Few people," recalled an American general, "realize how close we came to war on January 21."

The above-mentioned autonomy-security trade-off derived from the asymmetrical alliance became apparent in this case, but the fact that American pressure successfully prevented South Korea from retaliating after the Blue House raid must in retrospect be regarded as very fortunate, since retaliation would inevitably have raised tension. Additionally, as James Munhang Lee (1971) points out, war was prevented because the signatory powers of the 1953 Armistice Agreement wanted to maintain the status quo, not start a new war.<sup>11</sup> Considering the great risks that

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<sup>11</sup>-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 10, 135, 145, 198, 204, 199, 233-234, 529; James Munhang Lee, *Han'guk t'ongil munje-e issō-sō kunsā chôngiôn wiwônhoē-ga kajinūn yōk'har-e kwānhan yōn'gu* (Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo taehakwōn, 1971), p. 15; *Panmunjom, Korea* (Baltimore: American Literary Press, Inc., 2004), pp. 60, 257; Mitchell B. Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 60, 249: fn. 46. Second quotation has original quotation marks. Kim

renewed warfare inevitably would have caused, the wish to maintain the status quo can be regarded as more vital to maintaining peace than the presence of the American forces in this case. There can be no doubt that the rearmaments had given rise to mutual fears and thus encouraged restraint, but it is plausible that security was no greater than it had been when the vicious circle began, as was the case during the first post-war years and as is predicted by the security dilemma theory.

In the late 1960s, the United States was struggling with the growing problem of opposition to the Vietnam War, inflation caused by its huge war expenditures, and the weakening of the American dollar. In order to overcome these difficulties, on July 25, 1969 President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) launched the Nixon doctrine, which sought to make Asian countries more responsible for their own defense. Henceforth, American support would be selective and limited. For South Korea, the autonomy-security trade-off reappeared. In 1970-1971, the Seventh Infantry Division and three Air Force airplane battalions, totalling 20,000 men, were withdrawn in spite of passionate opposition from South Korea. The number of troops fell from 63,000 men in 1969 to 43,000 in 1971. One reason for the South's opposition was that the Mutual Defense Treaty does not guarantee automatic American commitment but merely prescribes that the United States government "would act to meet the danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." The average number of troops during the period 1956-1968 had been around 60,000 men.

In 1971, President Park claimed in his New Year's address that the reduction of American troops made it necessary to emphasize self-reliance in national defense. Consequently, whereas previously economic reconstruction was prioritized ahead of national defense, the two targets now began to be pursued simultaneously. Since President Nixon already in

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Il-sung was not president but premier in 1968.

1969 at a meeting with President Park had emphasized the need for South Korean self-reliance, the announcement was probably carefully considered in advance. It was followed by the establishment of a defense tax in 1975. While rearmaments also took place outside the South Korea-United States alliance, from 1971-77 the U.S. provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to modernize the South Korean armed forces.

The American troops issue strongly affected the first inter-Korean dialogue, held from 1971-73. Following the announcement of the July 4 Joint Communiqué in 1972, which expressed the belief that national reunification should take place without external interference and peacefully, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems, North Korea argued that since the two Koreas had agreed to reunify peacefully without foreign intervention, there was no excuse for the American troops to remain. Instead, they should withdraw immediately. However, South Korea rejected the demand to withdraw the American forces, which in the South was a taboo issue, and thus North Korea broke up the plenary session of the South-North Coordinating Committee that had begun in October 1972 at the sixth meeting on August 28, 1973, using the Korean Central Intelligence Agency's abduction of opposition leader Kim Dae-jung in Tokyo as an excuse.<sup>12</sup>

The KPA/CPV continued to raise the American troops issue at MAC meetings. Once each year in 1970, 1971 and 1972, the North requested troop withdrawals. In 1973 the demand was made three times and then once each year in 1981, 1982 and 1983. At the 305<sup>th</sup> MAC meeting on September 8, 1970 the North again claimed that the presence of American

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<sup>12</sup>-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 253, 254, 257-258; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 85-86, 87: table 2.1, 89, 90, 97: *op. cit.*, 2003(c), p. 111; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, p. 42; William J., Taylor Jr., Jennifer A. Smith and Michael J. Mazarr, "U.S. Troop Reductions from Korea, 1970-1990," *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 1990), pp. 260-261. Original quotation marks.

forces was the reason reunification had not been accomplished. If the troops had been withdrawn, they claimed, Korea would already have reunified. At the 332<sup>nd</sup> MAC meeting held on September 7, 1972 and the 340<sup>th</sup> meeting convened on June 28, 1973 the South again argued that troop withdrawal was not an issue to be raised by the Commission.

The greatest cause of concern since the formation of the South Korea-United States alliance was the troop withdrawal policy pursued by President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981). According to American scholars William J. Taylor Jr., Jennifer A. Smith and Michael J. Mazarr (1990), the troop reduction plan was “the result of his desire to avoid a loss of control over the extent of U.S. [United States] involvement in another Asian conflict and to reflect public opinion about U.S. troops in Korea, even to the detriment of prudent defense planning in Northeast Asia.” Previously, on August 21, 1976, the UNC had made a massive demonstration of military strength by bringing more than 100 soldiers and engineers in 23 American and South Korean vehicles into Panmunjom to simply cut a disputed tree in the area, leaving only a three meter stump. Air support was provided by 27 helicopters. The operation took place following the North’s killing of two American soldiers on August 18 (“axe-murder”) but did not face any North Korean reaction, indicating that the American forces had prevented a dangerous situation from escalating further.

On March 9, 1977, President Carter promised a complete withdrawal of troops in 1978-1982. At this time, the American withdrawal from Vietnam and the communization of Vietnam in 1975 had already caused security concerns for the South Korean government. A plan to withdraw the troops within the period 1978-1982 was proclaimed on May 5. The Korean government was officially informed on July 26 at the tenth Security Consultative Meeting but had not been consulted in advance. Taylor, Smith and Mazarr (1990) claim that the Carter administration publicly gave two main reasons for the troop withdrawal. First, admin-

istration officials thought that it was not in the interest of China or the Soviet Union to “encourage or support actions which would raise the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula.” Second, South Korea was both economically and militarily capable of assuming more responsibility for its own defense.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, due to the South Korean government’s strong opposition as well as fierce domestic resistance from many in the United States, including high-ranking officials, the plan was not implemented. However, the main reason for the cancellation was a report by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) claiming that North Korea’s military force was much stronger than expected. In July 1978, President Carter announced that the withdrawal would be held in abeyance after it had become known from intelligence work that North Korea had many more tanks and pieces of artillery than was previously known and its ground forces had reached 680,000 men, up from 485,000. North Korea had a two-to-one advantage in the former case and for the first time had more men under arms than South Korea.

On February 9, 1979, President Carter stated that the withdrawal would be temporarily deferred. Later, on July 20, he officially declared that the withdrawal plan had been suspended until 1981. Referencing the CIA report, the president claimed that tensions on the Korean Peninsula would have to be reduced before stability could be sufficiently assured to allow for a reduction of American troops and pointed to the expansion of Soviet military power in Asia and the need to reassure allies of the United States regarding its commitment to the region as a whole. In 1978, only 3,000 soldiers had left. The number of nuclear weapons had fallen from

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<sup>13</sup>–Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 263-264, 293-294, 296, 301-302, 332, 333, 604, 607, 608, 610, 624, 626, 628; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 85, 93-94; *ibid.*, 2003(c), p. 112; Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), p. 12; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 264, 266, 270, 272. Second quotation has original quotation marks.

more than 700 to around 250. The average number of troops was 42,200 men in the 1970s and 41,600 men in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup>

As was the case after the 1968 assassination attempt on President Park, the autonomy-security trade-off became apparent when the United States again restrained South Korea from retaliatory actions following the Rangoon bombing on October 9, 1983, an attack that aimed to assassinate President Chun Doo-hwan (1981-88) but instead killed four South Korean cabinet ministers and 13 other high-ranking dignitaries. At the 422<sup>nd</sup> MAC meeting held on October 31, the North Koreans complained that South Korean forces were put on alert and the South Koreans openly talked about retaliation. According to the American scholar C. Kenneth Quinones (2001), many South Koreans, including President Chun, were ready to risk war to get revenge. The United States restrained the president from taking action by reminding him that it controlled the ammunition, bombs and fuel needed for such an action and saying that the United States-Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty would not apply, since it only obligated support in the case of an external attack. Again, it must be regarded as very fortunate that no retaliation took place, since tensions would inevitably have risen as a result.

Troop reductions reemerged as a contested issue in the 1990s, causing the autonomy-security trade-off to reappear. In the late 1980s, at a time when the Cold War had just ended, the U.S. Congress attempted to readjust military power and curtail military expenditures by adopting the July 1989 Nunn-Warner Amendment which altered the budget to reduce the number of troops in East Asia. In accordance with the Nunn-Warner Amendment, in April 1990 the Department of Defense established the "East Asia Strategic Initiative," a program aimed at re-

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<sup>14</sup>-Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 291; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 90, 94-95; *ibid.*, 2003(c), pp. 112, 113; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 270, 271-272.

ducing the number of American troops in South Korea over ten years while maintaining regional stability (Japan and the Philippines were also included). Within one to three years, 7,000 troops would be withdrawn. Depending on the outcome, the second stage would be implemented within three to five years. The final stage would be implemented within five to ten years on the condition that regional stability was not disturbed. The American troops' role would be transformed from leading to supportive. Subsequently, in March 1991 a South Korean general was appointed senior member in the MAC. In 1994, the operational command over the armed forces in peace-time was transferred to South Korea.

The East Asia Strategic Initiative faced strong opposition from the South Korean government, which was uncertain of North Korea's defense capabilities. However, in contrast to when President Carter announced his troop withdrawal plan, this time South Korean officials had been consulted from the beginning. Subsequently, from 1990-1992 7,000 troops were withdrawn as a measure allowing the United States to cut its budget deficit, but rising tensions over North Korea's nuclear program delayed any further reduction. Already in November 1991, in a clear sign of a more symmetrical relationship, the Korean and American ministers of defense had agreed to "delay the second phase of the Nunn-Warner USFK [United States Forces in Korea] troop withdrawals until the uncertainty and threat of North Korea's nuclear development disappears, and our national security is absolutely safeguarded." In July 1992, the American Department of Defense decided to postpone the second phase of troop reductions. In 1992, the number of troops was 36,450. During the 1990s, the average number of troops was 37,700.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>-Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 347; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 91: table 2-2, 102-104; Kukpangbu, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43; C. Kenneth Quinones, "South Korea's Approaches to North Korea," in Park,

In February 1995, the United States released its “East Asia Strategic Report,” which suggested a freeze of the number of troops stationed in Asia at 100,000 due to the North Korean nuclear threat. In this report, the American wish to remain in the region was more clearly expressed than it had been in the preceding East Asia Strategic Initiative.

Later, on October 6, 2004, South Korea and the United States simultaneously announced that the original plan from July of the same year, which called for reducing the 37,500 American troops by 12,500 soldiers by late 2005, was to be extended to September 2008 in accordance with the wishes of the South. However, the Tayōnjang Rocket forces and equipment of the Second Army Division would remain to protect the capital region. At this time the United States was working to relocate troops abroad, but again, in a clear sign of a more symmetric alliance than previously, the plan was established in cooperation with South Korea, which had been informed in June 2004. Of the troops in South Korea, 3,600 soldiers had in August 2004 been dispatched to Iraq in line with President George Bush’s (2001-2009) “strategic flexibility” concept of dispatching forces in Korea elsewhere, but altogether the plan called for 5,000 troops to be withdrawn during 2004. This concept caused serious disagreement since the Koreans feared that it might lead them to get involved in other regional conflicts, such as a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. Eventually, it was agreed that South Korea would respect the necessity for strategic flexibility of the American forces, while the United States would respect the South Korean position that it would not get involved in any regional conflict against the will of the Korean

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Kyung-Ae and Kim, Dalchoong (eds.), *Korean Security Dynamics In Transition* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 31; Scott Snyder, *Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2009), p. 4; Suh, Jae-Jung, “Transforming the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Changes in Strategy, Military and Bases,” *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (April 2009), pp. 62-63; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 279, 281. Original quotation marks.

people.

Another 3,000 soldiers would be withdrawn in 2005 and 2,000 in 2006, followed by 2,500 in the third stage from 2007-2008. Ultimately, the number of troops was to be cut down to 25,000 by 2009. However, in April 2008 at the summit meeting between Presidents George Bush and Lee Myung-bak the two countries decided to freeze the planned troop reductions at 3,500 shy of this goal, so the number of soldiers remained at 28,500.<sup>16</sup> Considering that the plan in 2004 was to strengthen the remaining troops' fighting power by reorganizing the Second Army Division and investing \$11 billion by the end of 2006 to elevate fighting power, it is hard to believe that this reduction in any way affected the ability to deter an attack from North Korea. Unsurprisingly, North Korea still regarded the American troops as the main obstacle to unification on its own terms and wanted to sign a bilateral peace treaty with the United States to force a troop withdrawal. Meanwhile, in 2007, 77 percent of South Koreans supported the stationing of American forces.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, the general opinion was that the troops actively contributed to maintaining peace.

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<sup>16</sup>- The author has found no explicit explanation of why the two countries decided to freeze the reduction of troops. However, in the April 19, 2008 joint press conference with President George W. Bush, President Lee Myung-bak referred to a "twenty-first century strategic alliance." At Camp David, the two presidents announced the establishment of a "strategic alliance for the twenty-first century" (original quotation marks). From Snyder, *ibid.*, 2009, pp. 2, 7.

<sup>17</sup>- Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 400, 414, 467; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 91: table 2-2, 104: "Hanbando-üi 'kin p'yöngghwa'-wa Hanmi tongmaeng: [Samwiilch'e+1] kujo-üi hyöngsöng-gwa pyön-hwa küriigo chönmang." *Kukpang chöngch'aek yön'gu* 24, No. 3 (Fall 2008), p. 34; *Kukpang Chönl.*, "Chuhanmigun 3tan'gye kamch'ük 2008nyön kkaji yönjang: tayönjang rok'et pudae challyu, 2sadan changbi-do tugi-ro" (November 2004), pp. 28-29; "Hyömnnyök-chök chaju kukpang kyehoeok-tüng Mich'ük sölttük chuhyo" (November 2004), pp. 28-29; Suh, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 72, 78.

## **The Peace-keeping Role of the American Forces**

The above account lends credibility to the view expressed by the Ministry of Defense (2002) that the American troops have contributed to preventing war by establishing a joint South Korean-American fighting force and playing the role of a strategic “stabilizer” and “balancing power” in Northeast Asia. This opinion is in accordance with both capability aggregation and the significance of alliances as symbols of credibility or resolve. In addition, in terms of the intelligence power necessary to detect a North Korean attack in advance, the troops have played a decisive role in increasing national security. Reconnaissance satellites and U-2 reconnaissance planes supervise the skies around the Korean Peninsula 24 hours a day. In 2003, intelligence gathering on North Korea by the local CIA section and a supportive agency under the South Korean Ministry of Defense used intelligence satellites to monitor the North’s military movements and take photos of them. The American troops investigate intelligence through their ground bases. An Air Force reconnaissance unit operates using U-2 planes. The joint Combined Intelligence Operations Center operated by the Joint Intelligence Staff Unit is the core of American-South Korean intelligence work that analyzed the moves by the North Korean armed forces. The mere awareness in North Korea of the American intelligence capacity has helped to prevent war.

On the other hand, the South Korean scholar Cho Seung-Ryoul (2003) argues that the Korean military has been too dependent upon the American forces’ early warning functions and intelligence assets. In 2003, in terms of Human Intelligence and Public Intelligence the military was self-reliant, but in the case of such scientific areas as Signal Intelligence and Imagery Intelligence it was highly dependent on the American forces. All strategic intelligence, 99 percent of signal intelligence, 98 percent of imagery intelligence and 70 percent of tactical intelligence from North

Korea was provided by the American forces. Especially intelligence satellites, U-2 reconnaissance planes and equipment for investigating intelligence were valuable strengths that could not be purchased. In the case of imagery intelligence, the South Korean Air Force's reconnaissance plane RF-4C was only capable of photographing and monitoring rear areas located a certain distance from the Military Demarcation Line. In 2006, the situation had not changed at all. The South Korean journalist Kim P'il-chae then wrote that the Korean military relied upon the American forces for all strategic intelligence, more than 70 percent of tactical intelligence, 99 percent of signal intelligence and 98 percent of imagery intelligence.

According to the South Korean journalist Park Pong-hyôn (2004), as long as the 37,500 American troops remain they fill the loopholes of the Korean Air Force and Navy through the superior intelligence and reconnaissance capacities enabled by their U-2 reconnaissance planes and satellites. Consequently, their contributions to stability on the Korean Peninsula through enhanced intelligence capacity should not be underestimated. The American forces have a plan enabling them to confirm, on the basis of intelligence, signs of war four to 48 hours in advance, helping to prevent war. Finally, in accordance with the above account, the South Korean scholar Kim Woosang (2009) writes that while military support from the United States has been strengthened, self-determination in national security has to a certain extent been sacrificed in the asymmetric relationship.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of military equipment, Cho (2003) records that in

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<sup>18</sup>- Cho, Seong-Ryoul, "Chuhan migun-tû anbojök yök'hal-gwa yônhap pangwi t'aese," in Kim and Cho, *Chuhan migun: Yöksa, chaengchôm, chônman* (Seoul: Hanul, 2003), pp. 183-184, 191; Kim, "Chuhanmigun ch'ölsu-nûn imi sijaktoego itta: ch'ömdan changbi, pyôngnyök sarajigo chaejông pudam-gwa Pukhan wihyôm-man nûrô ganûn de," *Han'guk nondan* (December 2006), pp. 65, 68; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2009, pp. 68, 78; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 54; Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), pp. 17, 19, 133. Original quotation marks.

2003 the American Eighth Army was equipped with more than 140 brand-new M1 tanks and 170 Bradley armoured vehicles as well as over 70 AH-64 helicopters equipped with 30 independent 155 mm howitzers and 30 rockets and guided missiles, etc. Consequently, it was able to successfully implement its tasks regardless of the circumstances. The American Air Force possessed more than 100 planes, including 70 brand-new fighters such as F-16s and more than 20 A-10 anti-tank planes and U-2s, enabling operations regardless of weather conditions. In 2003, the Ministry of Defense estimated the total American troops' combat equipment and maintenance costs at \$14 billion. The total price of the ground troops' equipment was around \$17.5 billion.

Although Park (2004) emphasizes the great importance of the American forces, he also argues that South Korea has the capacity to fill the gap in terms of national defense if the U.S. troops leave. Since South Korea is superior to North Korea militarily and has an economy about 30 times larger, Park argues the American troops are not needed as a tripwire. Their role as a deterrent against the North Korean threat no longer exists. In contrast, the American scholars Catherine Boye, Mike Bosack and Russ Gottwald argue (2010) that "...it would be prohibitively expensive for Korea on its own to maintain a military capable of deterring North Korea."<sup>19</sup> In brief, the American troops have contributed to maintaining peace through capability aggregation by establishing a joint South Korean-American fighting force, providing superior intelligence capabilities to augment that fighting force, and serving as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense.

Finally, it should be noted that the Ministry of Defense (2002) writes that exercises such as Ŭlchi Focus Lens (UFL) and Reception,

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<sup>19</sup>- Catherine Boye, Mike Bosack, and Russ Gottwald, "Assumptions Underlying the U.S.-ROK Alliance," *Pacific Forum CSIS, Issues & Insights*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Honolulu: February 2010), p. 3; Cho, *ibid.*, pp. 167-168, 192; Park, *ibid.*, 2004(a), p. 48.

Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) have given the South Korean military opportunities to learn to use advanced technologies that would have been difficult to acquire by themselves. The purpose of UFL, which has been implemented annually since 1976, is to improve the ability to lead and pursue war and to master wartime procedures. The purpose of RSOI, held annually since 1994, is to improve the coordination of American and South Korean troops through training in a war-case scenario. In 2006 the exercise involved more than 100,000 troops. Another exercise, Fowl Eagle, has been conducted annually since 1961 and is designed to display determination and complete preparedness for joint action in order to prevent war. Other exercises include "Team Spirit," which in 1980 involved 160,000 soldiers altogether. In 1981, the exercise involved more than 61,500 American and 170,000 South Korean troops. In 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1986 respectively, the figures exceeded 160,000, 188,000 and, on the last two occasions, 200,000 troops. In 1987, the figure was 200,000. The figures indicate that a significant portion of the South Korean armed forces should have acquired new military skills through the RSOI and Team Spirit.

An opinion similar to that of the Ministry of Defense was expressed in 2001 by General Thomas A. Schwartz, then Commander-in-Chief of the UNC and the United States Forces Korea, who wrote: "Each of these annual exercises is critical to achieve war-fighting readiness." He regards the exercises as "world-class exercises." The exercises integrated active and reserve forces deployed on the Korean Peninsula. A major objective of each exercise was to incorporate logistics at the strategic and operational levels. The exercises maximized simulation technology along with air, sea and ground maneuvers to allow for optimal evaluation of war plans.<sup>20</sup> Since peace has been maintained, the opinions expressed by

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<sup>20</sup>-Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 330, 331, 332, 334, 335, 486; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 60-61;

Schwartz are reasonable.

## Conclusions

The American troops in South Korea have actively contributed to maintaining peace in three mutually reinforcing ways: the establishment of a joint South Korean-American fighting force, the provision of superior intelligence capabilities, and their role as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense. Firstly, the legal basis for the American troops in South Korea is the Mutual Defense Treaty from 1953. The troops have contributed to capability aggregation which has made troop reductions a contested issue. The American troop presence itself is also a long-contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While the opinion of South Korea and the United States is that the troops are essential for the South's defense, North Korea's view is that they hinder reunification.

Troop reductions implemented in 1970-1971, 1990-1992 and 2004-2008 created tensions, but on the two latter occasions the reductions reflected a more symmetrical relationship, indicating that South Korea's bargaining power against the United States had become stronger. President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) policy to withdraw the troops caused the most concern, and it was cancelled due to strong opposition in both countries and an underestimation of North Korea's armed forces. Regarding the autonomy-security trade-off, the United States prevented South Korea from retaliating against North Korea following assassination attempts on South Korean presidents in 1968 and 1983. U.S. military

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Thomas Schwartz, "United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/United States Forces Korea Strength through Friendship," *Han'guk kunsu*, No. 13 (July 2001), pp. 18, 22.

power was mobilized when a disputed tree was cut in Panmunjom in 1976, again preventing a dangerous situation from escalating.

Secondly, although South Korea's dependence on U.S. intelligence power has been excessive, its contribution to maintaining peace cannot be overestimated.

Thirdly, while rearmaments violated the Paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice Agreement, they nevertheless strengthened South Korea's defense and spawned mutual fears of the consequences of renewed warfare. The power of symbols of credibility and resolve should not be underestimated. On the other hand, given the security dilemma, it is not clear whether security actually has been enhanced, even though the perceived level of security has apparently risen.

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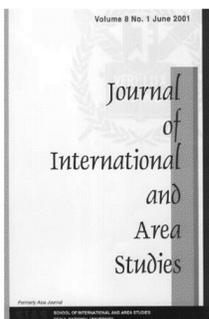
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