

## South Korea and the United States: Confronting the North Korean Nuclear Issue

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Today, relations between South and North Korea have become quite intractable. To read the statements from the authorities involved in the South-North negotiation process as reported in the media alone, one would think the Korean peninsula is in crisis, just a step away from war.

The North Korean delegation, for example, at the eighth round of South-North contacts between the working-level negotiators for the exchange of special envoys which opened at Panmunjom on 19 March 1994 made the extreme comment: "The South Korean side has been bursting the beehive of war. Since that was so, neither will we refuse war. First, if war does come, Seoul will become a sea of fire." In response, voices are now being raised within the Republic of Korea asserting that rather than a "policy of appeasement" toward North Korea, a "policy of strong force" must be adopted. This is evident by the lead article on 21 March 1994 in the *Kookmin Ilbo*, a Christian evening newspaper, which has called for "strong and firm measures," and on 22 March an article in the *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative morning newspaper,

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demanded "strong action" while sharply criticizing the ROK government policy toward North Korea. Aware of such criticism, the ROK Minister of Defense stated that "In the event of a North Korean assault, we will strongly retaliate either as a united joint Korea–United States force or even independently, with the ROK Army to inflict punishment" and went one step farther to explain:

If North Korea were to invade the South, the joint forces of South Korea and the United States would advance all the way to the Chongchun River in North Korea to bring about the fall of Pyongyang, annihilate the North Korean regime, and unify the peninsula under the leadership of the Republic of Korea.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, relations between South and North Korea are becoming tense. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the world entered the new post–Cold War era, but the Korea peninsula remains an exception to the international trend. The wall of ideology, as it did before, still stands between the South and North and military confrontation is intensifying. As the bitter winter winds continue to blow, the spring thaw has not yet come to the Korean peninsula. Why is it, then, that it remains in a state of Cold War? What is it that is pushing South–North Korea relations into a state of crisis?

To answer, we must delve into the North Korean nuclear development policy, an unrelenting effort to make nuclear weapons and become a nuclear power. It has seriously disturbed the Republic of Korea, which has no nuclear weapons at all. In particular, rather than taking measures to assuage apprehensions in the Republic of Korea, North Korea further shocked the South by declaring on 12 March 1993 that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

The announcement also alarmed the United States, the leader of the NPT regime. From then on, direct political negotiations

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1 On this point see *Korea Times*, 20 and 24 March 1994.

between North Korea and the United States became a routine process. Meanwhile, in hopes of solving the North Korean nuclear issue, the Republic of Korea entrusted the first session of negotiations to those between North Korea and the US, and attempted to carry out separate negotiations with Pyongyang but could not even move toward achieving any fundamental, meaningful nor favorable results. The ROK had but one alternative—acquiesce to and follow the United States.

A year has already passed since North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT. However, the situation on the Korean peninsula has not improved and has even come to the point where there is widespread talk of a crisis of war.

Now this paper focuses on South–North Korea relations within the context of Korea-US relations. More specifically, it intends to analyze how the Republic of Korea and the United States has handled the North Korean nuclear issue.

### **The Appearance of the North Korean Nuclear Issue**

First, how the West observes North Korea nuclear issue will be examined in reference to an article written by Professor Paul Bracken of Yale University.<sup>2</sup> The concern of the international community for North Korea's nuclear development program was alleviated somewhat when North Korea initialed the NPT in 1985, placing its gas-cooled 30-megawatt research reactor located at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, under the international inspection process. In 1989, however, the situation changed when United States surveillance satellite photographs revealed that North Korea was constructing a plutonium-reprocessing plant at the same location.

It was then verified that the output of the nuclear research reactor at Yongbyon contained plutonium that could be chemi-

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2 The content that follows is primarily reliant upon Paul Bracken, "Nuclear Weapons and State Survival in North Korea," *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 138–48.

cally extracted. Plutonium can be used to make an atomic weapon, so the US determined that North Korea was step by step adopting the necessary measures that coincide with a plan to make a nuclear weapon. Pyongyang acknowledged that it had extracted plutonium, but that it had no more than a small-lab reprocessing capability and claimed it was used to separate only "test quantities" of the element.

That did not relieve US suspicions. The reasoning went like this:

The Yongbyon reactor's fuel comes from natural uranium mined and milled in North Korea. The nuclear cycle relied on indigenous natural uranium and graphite and eschewed more advanced approaches (such as laser isotope separation) that would have increased North Korea's dependency on outside suppliers and experts. Kim Il Sung's *juche* philosophy of extreme self-reliance clearly argued for making a nuclear weapon in this manner. With internal uranium graphite and a meager technological base, this was the politically correct nuclear fuel cycle for North Korea to develop.

This was the general conclusion made by experts in the United States, and other countries in the West agreed.

How then have they come to the point of tangibly making nuclear weapons? When thinking of the worst scenario regarding intentions, North Korea will be able to produce approximately fifteen pounds of plutonium per year from its 30-megawatt (Mw) reactor at Yongbyon. From that, enough material can be extracted to produce one 15–20 kiloton bomb per year. That is the approximate scale of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945.

The problem is, as argued by Western specialists, that it does not stop there. The nuclear development plan is not being blocked by the international community and North Korea is going forward with its original plan. As an example, specialists reason that the operation of a new and larger reactor (estimated to be as big as 200 Mw) in tandem with a large plutonium-

reprocessing facility now under construction (estimated to be operational in 1993 or 1994) could boost the production of Hiroshima-size weapons to several per year. Such production potential prompted US Director of Central Intelligence Agency Robert Gates pessimistically to forecast to the House of Representatives on 25 February 1992 that North Korea could acquire a bomb in "a few months to a few years."

An opposite hypothesis can also be presented, of course. Again referring to Professor Bracken's article, the basis of refuting the above hypothesis is the question of the efficiency of science and industry in North Korea. For example, North Korea initiated a massive program to grow food on mountain terraces during the 1970s. However, measures to prevent soil erosion were ignored and rock and soil slippage ruined the agriculture, resulting in a calamitous decline in food production from which the country even today have not been able to recover. It has not only adversely affected food production; the resulting run-off from erosion has clogged transportation by blocking rivers and streams of North Korean waterways, and even the capability to generate electricity at hydroelectric facilities has deteriorated.

Other cases of such ineptness can be cited. Electric machinery has frequently been damaged by fluctuations from power generating plants. This damage results from excessive fluctuation in the electricity due to impurities, mainly peat, that are left in the coal burned to produce power as persons responsible act to meet their production goals. In the end, North Koreans who rely on electricity to run machines are unable to fulfill their production orders. Such ineptness could well take place in the nuclear development plan, as well, hindering administration and technological progress.

On the other hand, as Professor Bracken points out, since the nuclear development plan is of such great importance in North Korea, those in charge may be exerting maximum effort in all necessary areas and proceeding as planned. Furthermore, if the North has been successful in concealing many of the significant

parts of the nuclear facilities, the US may have grossly underestimated its capability to produce a nuclear weapon.

In the past, intelligence agencies in the West—especially in the United States—were not so successful in uncovering the truth about the nuclear weapons development plans of Iraq and South Africa. In the case of these two countries, there were massive programs involving thousands of people, and these in countries far more open to intelligence penetration than North Korea.

North Korea is also now developing a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to a target. This missile, which is a modified version of the Soviet Scud missile, has been dubbed the Rodong-1 and was test fired on 29 May 1993. Its range is estimated at 1,000 kilometers, which takes in all of South Korea and part of western Japan. Directly thereafter, they successfully test fired the Rodong-2 and recently is purported to be developing a second type of new missile with a range of 3,500 kilometers.<sup>3</sup>

In this vein, North Korea has recently been making a desperate effort to hide its nuclear development program.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1990s, North Korea will actually have become a nuclear power in some way or another by establishing a number of nuclear warhead bases and the means to deliver the warheads on target. It also appears that North Korea will pose the ordeal of proliferating a foreign policy of nuclear threat not only to the Republic of Korea but to the surrounding nations as well.

Of course, North Korea has totally denied the criticism of the West that the large reprocessing plant is for manufacturing nuclear weapons. Sometime afterwards, North Korea declared that it was willing to abide by the NPT nuclear safeguard measures and announced in January 1992 that it would accept

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3 *Korea Times*, 10 March 1994, citing the fact published in *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 9 March 1994.

4 Bracken especially emphasizes this point. "Nuclear Weapons and State Survival in North Korea," p. 140.

the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspection plan. In April of that year, permission was given for the IAEA to make five inspections of nuclear facilities located in the Yongbyon region that posed problems, and the IAEA discovered some important new facts. Reporter R. Jeffrey Smith of the Washington Post wrote on 27 April 1992 that the samples collected revealed inconcealable discrepancies in the plutonium isotope proportions.

North Korea retorted that it was only a small amount of plutonium that had been reprocessed in 1990 for "experimental purposes." However, the different isotopes in the samples clearly indicated that at least two batches of plutonium had been separated, not one. Furthermore, samples recovered from the same refuse containers contained americium in various states of radioactive decay, evidence that plutonium had been produced each year during the period from 1989 to 1992.

US satellites took new photographs of North Korea. Another of Smith's articles said that they revealed buried nuclear waste, believed to have come from the illegal reprocessing.

### **Nuclear Development and the Characteristics of North Korea's Domestic System**

Why has North Korea been unable to hide completely what it is doing? Professor Bracken offers two explanations.<sup>5</sup>

First, there is the conjecture that North Korea was unaware of the physics of nuclear half-life detection, and that buried radioactive waste would kill the nearby trees and be seen by satellite. Second, it is likewise assumed that they were incapable of administering a deception program. Bracken believes the latter is more likely.

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5 Ibid., p. 141.

What is the significance of North Korea's failure to conceal its nuclear program? According to Bracken, two important conclusions can be drawn.<sup>6</sup>

First, North Korea has something to hide, but after being exposed it declared it would withdraw from the NPT to buy time. It is the first country to so declare. In compliance with the treaty the withdrawal would have become effective on 12 June, three months after the declaration was made.

Second, during this nearly one-year process it was again demonstrated that the effectiveness of North Korea's system is limited. They attempted to deceive the West and awkwardly failed because they lack the review staff, technical expertise and management needed. In addition, within that considerable ineptness, the futility that characterizes the political system with all of its limitations in that the political decisions of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are unconditionally carried out without the restraint of competent advice can be a real danger that spills over to the nuclear weapons program.

The authority of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il is all-powerful in North Korea. Their manuscripts just as written are almighty and their authority is valid everywhere in North Korea. No one else regardless of power or association has control. There are times when, in compliance with their words, the dogmatic expressions or impromptu instructions of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il result in on the spot changes to economic measures, basic strategic framework and even the curriculum of the university.

Any country will have objective assessments on the part of the bureaucratic institutions that set policy, examination of issues when matters are not going well and even restraint placed on policy makers of the ruling class. However, as Bracken points out, it is difficult to find this in North Korea.

All the problems now enveloping North Korea—the crisis of collapse brought on from the overall deterioration of the econ-

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6 Ibid., pp. 141–45.



omy due to the agriculture calamity and industrial failure, dogmatic foreign policy, terrorist attacks, and others—stem from the omnipotent authority of Kim Il Sung and his son having gone so completely unchecked by any of the bureaucratic institutions. Paradoxically, this means that their authority actually has significant limitations; despite their theocratic authority, they have not been able to restore agriculture from its state of catastrophe nor to revise industry from its state of failure, and they have failed to break Pyongyang out of its condition of international isolation.

Look also at the military organization upon which Kim Il Sung and his son so heavily rely. Among the overall army strength, which totals some 900,000 troops, some 100,000 are rangers and special forces trained in special operations and sabotage. They come under the direct command of Kim Il Sung and son, outside the military chain of command, and are organized into small units, which are further broken down into separate jurisdictions. Even the remaining 800,000 regular forces are also connected to Kim Il Sung and son as separate units. Assessments indicate, therefore, that it will be difficult to coordinate and command these units when they are in lateral positions during critical periods of combat.

Such national distinctions manifest an even more gloomy aspect of North Korea's nuclear development program. It is difficult to ignore the possibility that when confronting a crisis situation—in light of its doctrine on national authority and organization management, in light of its abnormal and special political system and especially in light of the military leadership of Kim Il Sung and son's development of nuclear weapons, nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them—North Korea would resort to disastrous and irrational measures.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Ibid., pp. 143–45.

## Nuclear Development and the Survival Strategy of North Korea

Too pessimistic an outlook, however, is not entirely called for; the situation described by some Western observers has led to intense speculation over the last few years and the argument that North Korea is on the verge of collapse.

The situation in North Korea today is well summarized by the words "campaign to eat twice a day." As if to reflect this sort of reality, the Western press occasionally reports on the food shortage issue and resulting agitation among the people in certain regions of North Korea.

For example, a *Washington Post* correspondent in Tokyo referred to testimonies of Japanese tourists who returned from visiting North Korea, saying, "Because of disturbances in the spring of 1993 due to insufficient quantities of food as a result of poor crops in North Korea, North Korean authorities stopped the passenger ship *Mankyongbong* from making its periodic ten-day port call two months in advance."<sup>8</sup> Pyongyang quickly denied the report and the ROK Ministry of Unification likewise said, "No such signs could be found." However, four returning travelers from North Korea whom this author met in March 1993 at Beijing insisted that the food situation was really bad, the state of health among the North Korea people was overall everywhere, the number of people stealing food was rapidly increasing, and the overall morale was deteriorating. One Korean businessman holding US citizenship said that when he traveled around North Korea for some two weeks in the spring of 1993, he found many envious of South Korea and there were even people who criticized Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

Various economic indicators in North Korea certainly point to the inadequacy of the economy. Another *Post* article described the internal situation in North Korea in great detail, saying that

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8 *Washington Post*, 19 September 1993.

analyses by specialists on North Korea within US government agencies conclude, "The output of North Korea's economy fell from about 15% to 30% during the years 1990–1993." The article expressed the view of then Deputy Secretary of Defense William Perry, now Secretary of Defense, that considering the economic difficulties the Pyongyang regime is likely to collapse in the next few years.<sup>9</sup>

At this point discussion needs to start anew. Will the North Korean regime, the system itself, actually collapse in the next few years? What form would such a breakdown take? Would a peaceful unification between South and North follow, or the momentous occasion of war? Jeffrey Smith's article quotes US Defense Department officials: "Within three years the Korean peninsula will be unified or at war." How should such words be assessed? Between the possibilities for nuclear development in North Korea and the collapse of North Korea, what kind of relationship exists? Such questions must be examined to diagnose clearly the future of North Korea's nuclear development and South-North relations.

The first response to this series of related questions is the view that the regime will collapse within four to five years. Professor Bracken goes one step further expressing the view that about the time that the twentieth century ends the nation now known as North Korea, that is all of its government institutions and social structure will no longer be visible from the aspect of national leadership.<sup>10</sup>

Those who subscribe to predictions of collapse worry that it cannot be ruled out that upon facing the collapse of either authority or of the nation itself North Korea might resort to the use of nuclear weapons in a crisis. Secretary of Defense William Perry's statement, mentioned above, makes such concern evi-

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9 Jeffrey Smith, *Washington Post*, 26 September 1993.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

dent. Some South Korean specialists who are extremely skeptical of North Korea assert that North Korea is expediting its nuclear weapon development program as a desperate "I must die, but you must die too" method of duel suicide ranting, while looking forward to the danger of collapse of the Kim Il Sung and son family deity system.

Neither is the argument against the imminent collapse of North Korea at all insignificant. Specialists who adhere to this position hold that the current crisis, rather than being one of overall government institution and social structure in North Korea, is a crisis of authority and, altogether, the Kim Il Sung system will be able to manage the crisis in a way that prevents a sudden surge to the end of the regime. For example, Professor James Cotton of Australian National University, a long-time observer of North Korea who has frequently visited there, shares that point of view. He concludes that so long as Kim Il Sung is alive the possibility is remote that the people will rise up against him. They have been thoroughly brainwashed and have experienced life under adverse conditions for more than forty years.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese specialists on North Korea have a similar view. They assert that the current poverty in North Korea can be endured as before and that there is no unrest among the North Korean populace, whose loyalty to Kim Il Sung is as strong as ever. They say a Romanian type of uprising among the people is not likely to occur, at least as long as Kim Il Sung is alive. They view that there is unity among those around Kim Jong Il under the psychology of "wait and see." After the coming death of Kim Il Sung the consciousness of the people of North Korea will be in a state of crisis, so they expect Kim Jong Il to continue autonomous control for about two years. However, they also view that the Kim Jong Il regime will eventually face difficulties stemming from deterioration later on in the awareness of unity and a

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11 Interview with Dr. James Cotton on 22 November 1993 at the Australian National University, Canberra.

swelling of factional discord and social ills that will lead to a military-led system in North Korea. Whether North Korea does not adapt a rigid dogmatic policy to continue its system and whether it will be able to come to terms with the Republic of Korea and its call for substantial change in North Korea: these are matters that they prefer to address according to the conditions when that time arrives.<sup>12</sup>

Those scholars who view negatively the argument of an imminent collapse of the North hold that in the end, China will play an important role. Those who favor the collapse theory believe that China does not want Korea to unify under the Republic of Korea: there is the assertion that for China, a Korean peninsula under the strong economic capitalist system of South Korea would mean the end of any foundation for China to become the naval power in Asia. China, they believe, will prevent the collapse of North Korea.<sup>13</sup>

An important common point to both of the arguments regarding North Korea's collapse is that Pyongyang is at a minimum developing nuclear weapons as a means of survival. The regime has already witnessed the collapse of the communist systems of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as the total disappearance of the Soviet Union itself. It already knows its enormous nightmare would be the collapse of communism within North Korea itself, which is close at hand. Furthermore, North Korea is in continuous economic decline and has become totally isolated internationally. In contrast, the Republic of Korea is continuously developing its economy and as its position rises even higher, western observers predict the South will absorb the North within the next ten years at the latest—its worst nightmare. Under these circumstances, Pyongyang has determined to

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12 Conference of Korean Peninsula Specialists of China, 8 October 1993, Center for Korean Studies, China Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.

13 For example, see summary of a report by Chinese scholars, June 1993, published in *Shin Dong'a*, April 1994, pp. 486–501.

develop nuclear weapons as its latest means to ensure survival and is directing all its energies toward their development.

In addition to the unknown answer of whether North Korea has or will have nuclear weapons so it can overcome the crisis of its imminent collapse, there is yet another matter of contention. Even if they succeed, there are not a few specialists on North Korea who hold the view that in the end, the country will collapse even if it does manage to acquire a nuclear weapons production capability. Whatever, the ruling elite in North Korea equates acquiring nuclear weapons with their survival. From that angle there is a common view among scholars that North Korea will do its utmost to obtain them.

### **Negotiations between the United States and North Korea**

As the above analysis contends, North Korea surprised the world when it declared on 12 March 1993 its intention to withdraw from the NPT, after endless IAEA requests for permission to inspect its nuclear facilities to determine if it was developing nuclear weapons. Looking back, the period North Korea chose was miraculously timed. They made the announcement less than two months after the Clinton administration took office in the US and less than one month after the Kim Young Sam administration took charge in South Korea.

The United States was first to be alarmed over Pyongyang's withdrawal announcement. The US has since the end of World War II presided as the leader of the NPT regime, which is an international element of the world community. Should any measure of perception about its role as leader be broken, the authority of the US as a world leader will be partially damaged. Not only would it be a problem of authority: if North Korea were to have carried out its withdrawal unchecked its nuclear development efforts would eventually become accepted, which would deal a severe blow to the NPT regime. Furthermore, the NPT assessment conference that is scheduled to meet in 1995 would

likely be totally non-productive. Beyond that, the emphasis that the Clinton administration put on protecting the NPT regime and accompanying Missile Technology Control Regime at the outset of taking office would earn him the reputation of paper tiger, and the development of nuclear weapons by nations such as Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran would spread unchecked. It would not end there: Japan would probably develop its own independent plan for nuclear weapons and the ROK too very likely would consider seriously the nuclear option.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the US consented to North Korean demands for bilateral high-level talks to exclude South Korea, and they were held in New York in June 1993. Since 1974, Pyongyang has consistently called for government-to-government dialogue between itself and the US to negotiate the political and military issues of the Korean peninsula and to convert the armistice currently in effect into a peace agreement. Naturally, both the US and the ROK have asserted that the ROK, undoubtedly, needs to participate too. In this light the American response not only provided a foreign policy victory for Pyongyang but also indicated an important change in US policy towards North Korea.

At the end of the first round of talks there was a joint North Korea-US statement said: (1) both sides will neither threaten the use of military force nor use military force, (2) both side respect each other's authority, and (3) both sides assured each other they would not interfere in each other's internal political affairs. While the statement was worded in equal terms, of course such an expression has special meaning for North Korea.<sup>15</sup> By implying the gist that the US would safeguard the existence of the Pyongyang regime, those terms considerably ease the atmo-

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14 Lee Chung Min, "Bukhan Haekchongchaek, idaelonun andwenda [North Korea's Desperate Nuclear Policy]" *Shin Dong'a*, April 1994, pp. 164-65.

15 Park Bong-shik, "Bukhanui haek munchaewa Han-Mikwankyae [The North Korea Issue and ROK-US Relations]," *Oekyo [Diplomacy]*, No. 26 (September 1993), p. 40.

sphere in North Korea of crisis and of being surrounded, that are a result of the US-ROK relationship.

In a word, the United States dramatically capitulated to North Korea, but for all of its effort has received very little in return. Pyongyang did not promise to return to the NPT, saying only that it would, unilaterally, suspend its decision to withdraw.

Furthermore, the US received no commitment from the North regarding inspection of its nuclear development program, so IAEA efforts to make the program transparent have continued to fail.

The NPT treaty allows a withdrawal to become effective three months after its announcement; North Korea's declaration would have become effective on 12 June 1993. One month after the United States put the issue at rest by receiving assurance that the decision would not take effect before the scheduled declaration's actual withdrawal date and took a breath of relief, the second round of US-North Korea talks commenced in Geneva. That was the beginning of July 1993, when the US agreed to help Pyongyang convert its graphite nuclear reactor to water-cooling and to commence discussion again within two months. Simply put, the US promised to cooperate financially and improve relations with North Korea.

An important point here that needs to be stressed is that the overall US attitude towards North Korea changed markedly. While the US gave assurances that it would not pursue economic exchange or improve relations with North Korea without a solution to the nuclear issue, it appears that there was an attempt at economic exchange and at improving relations even though a solution to the nuclear issue came no closer during the discussions in New York.<sup>16</sup>

In exchange for the concessions made by the United States, Pyongyang promised to allow follow-on IAEA inspections of the nuclear facilities in question, but as of March of 1994 that promise

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16 Ibid., pp. 42-43.



too has not been kept. North Korea has refused to allow the IAEA to inspect certain facilities based on the justification that the conditions are unreasonable with respect to its sovereignty. Although compelled to permit inspection at the beginning of March 1994, Pyongyang rendered no response at all to the IAEA demand and the inspections finished under an incomplete setting.

How was it then that the US on two occasions in talks with North Korea virtually gave in to North Korea? To answer this question, look first at the observation of Professor Park Bongshik: "Just before the talks in New York, the North adapted a policy of intimidation in that if the UN decided to impose any kind of sanctions on the North, it would cause a second Korean War. This is tantamount to the mouse threatening the cat and the result is that the rat's threat caused the cat to eat the mouse."<sup>17</sup> He related the analogy and offers this explanation:

It can be said that the international community today still has not settled upon any form of new international order since the end of the Cold War. A prominent feature of this period is that some of the small countries under dictatorial political systems, those of *Saddam Hussein* in the Middle East, *Milosovich* of Serbia and *Kim Il Sung* in East Asia, brandish the use of force and appear to be leading the international community to this situation. The international community cannot demand the most effective method to counter them, and instead calls for compromise first before punishing them as outlaws. Later, at the stage where it is nearly impossible to recover the honor already lost, it calls marginally for the use of military force. In the process of bringing the use of force to reality, however, as unity of opinion is lost, the situation falls into such a state that it becomes impossible to recover all the sacrifices made.

A fine example of this is Bosnia. Another is when the US mobilized the entire world to attack Iraq and the war ended as if it

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

were a game of a 100-day war while the objective of the war was never achieved. Europe for a long time has not experienced war under dictatorship. Neither can the US muster domestic political support to engage in war and cannot use military power anywhere a decisive victory cannot occur with the minimum sacrifices in the shortest period of time. North Korea is well aware of this.<sup>18</sup>

In brief, it appears that whether or not North Korea actually possesses a nuclear weapon, its intimidation diplomacy has been successful—especially its policy of nuclear threat, which accurately takes into account the international and US domestic situations after the Cold War. Therefore, within the US too there is strong criticism of the Clinton administration's policy towards North Korea. Especially since the "package deal" Pyongyang offered the US in November 1993, the "Washington love song" has been a topic of heated debate over the desired approach to North Korea. The package deal in simple terms was that North Korea would accept complete inspection of its nuclear facilities by the IAEA in return for American diplomatic recognition and while the US would grant economic assistance, it would guarantee that South Korea would not acquire nuclear weapons and that the existence of North Korea would be physically safeguarded.

Various agencies of the US government do not oppose the line of thinking in finalizing negotiations and the positive coupling of the nuclear issue with political, economic and military concessions. For example, the deputy secretary for political and military affairs at the US Department of Defense, Robert Gallucci, who was the chief representative at the US–North Korea high-level talks, shares this view. He expresses the notion that a firm commitment that the US will not position nuclear weapons within South Korea for use can be discussed in negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Ibid., pp. 39–40, translated by this author.

19 Selig Harrison, "Mikookui Daebukhanchongchaek Kaldungjuchoui naemak

However, for the hard-liners in the Clinton administration, throughout the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency, the North Korean demand that the US remove the nuclear umbrella over South Korea cannot be entertained. The hard-liners in the US Congress also are of the position that they vehemently oppose any request that would limit the US from freely adapting military action on the Korean peninsula. For example, Senator Richard Lugar, formerly the chairman of the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and still very influential in foreign affairs, has consistently called for the immediate redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea.<sup>20</sup>

The hard-liners also oppose the thinking that links the nuclear issue to economic concessions. For example, Ashton Carter, defense department deputy secretary for nuclear nonproliferation asserts:

In order to get North Korea to acquiesce, recognition of their system is diplomatically possible. That will not set a dangerous precedence because the US has already done so in the case of other countries embracing nuclear proliferation issues. However, the effect of any plan which systematically gives them guarantees other than that would be very doubtful.

Continuing, he also said:

Should North Korea truly be in a desperate situation and find that their finances are insufficient, it would be possible to negotiate with them on economic support issues; however, if they have other foolish thoughts in mind, economic support will absolutely not be there. Perhaps Iran knows as a precedent what the results are?<sup>21</sup>

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[U.S. Policy towards North Korea: Confusion and Facts],” *Shin Dong’a*, March 1994, p. 198.

20 Ibid., p. 199.

21 Ibid.

Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor for former US President Bush, also supports the hard line. He has urged that the US needs to seek a strong plan through economic sanctions that will pressure North Korea into accepting nuclear facilities inspection and must prepare for the possibility that North Korea will militarily retaliate. Arnold Kantor, former under secretary of defense for political affairs in the Bush administration, also expressed a similar view. He has called for the United States, Japan and South Korea to demonstrate a strong resolve for military sanctions by conducting a joint naval exercise just off the coast of North Korea.<sup>22</sup>

As Kantor's assertion indicates, the hard-liners attach importance to the necessary inclusion of a naval blockade to the recommendation for economic sanctions measures. Conservatively inclined columnists, as does Charles Krauthammer, warn that if naval blockade measures are not imposed on North Korea, it will be strengthened by naval supply operations from such crude oil suppliers as Iran.<sup>23</sup>

Economic sanctions must also include measures that cut off the transfer of capital to North Korea by pro-North Koreans inside Japan. The total amount of cash they currently send to North Korea is estimated to be from \$.6 to \$1 billion annually. With regard to this problem, Karen E. House, deputy chairman for international affairs of the Dow Jones Corporation, has proposed that the US threaten to revoke the US-Japan Defense Treaty if the government of Japan does not substantially act in concert when the US decides to impose tougher economic sanctions on North Korea, while asserting that it is not acceptable for Japan to grant any further approval for the transfer of funds to North Korea.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Ibid., p. 200.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Part of the assertions on the part of the hard-liners is the widely spread hypothesis that the current North Korean regime is destined to collapse in the not-too-distant future. The US Defense Intelligence Agency has put forth such a prospective. Therefore, rather than for the US and the Republic of Korea to help North Korea through diplomatic recognition and economic support to sustain the regime there, they are warranting the promotion of North Korea's collapse by weakening and isolating the regime.

The hard-liners avow that even if the US grants diplomatic recognition and economic support to North Korea, they are convinced that the hostility between North Korea and the US cannot be dispelled and North Korea cannot be constrained. At hearings held in the US Senate, CIA Director James Woolsey said, "We have slain the great dragon called the Soviet Union. However, we are now living in a jungle where there are an enormous number of poisonous snakes." He then went on to distinguish North Korea as an enemy of the United States with whom, in the end, no amicable settlement could be reached, saying that Kim Il Sung is the most dangerous of the poisonous snakes in the international jungle.<sup>25</sup> A now retired US ambassador to two important countries and former under secretary of state has proposed that increasing pressure on North Korea should continue, saying that "I do not want to influence North Korea through diplomatic recognition and economic cooperation. I want to destroy North Korea."<sup>26</sup>

Moderates, on the other hand, do not foresee the collapse of North Korea to come about so easily. The US Department of State Intelligence Bureau, pointing out that North Korea is attempting a cautious economic reform program by making the *Rajin-Sonbong* region a free-trade zone, stresses that in the future

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25 Ibid., p. 201.

26 Ibid.

sufficient stability can be maintained if there is favorable progress in the reform process. It holds the view that the US, South Korea and Japan should formulate flexible policy toward North Korea, and if economic cooperation is extended then North Korea will indeed become stable.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Position of the Republic of Korea**

What is the position of the Republic of Korea? Let us consider the positions of the government, the ruling party (Democratic Liberal Party), the opposition party (Democratic Party), the media and academia.

The government position can be summarized as one of fundamental cooperation and moderation towards North Korea. The rationale is that if North Korea is provoked through such actions as economic sanctions, it would be like when a rat, facing a dilemma, attacks the cat. It could risk military confrontation turning the peninsula to the ashes of war, so it is important not to provoke North Korea. This line of thinking is precisely the "carrot approach" to coaxing North Korea. It argues that if given carrots such as US diplomatic recognition, guarantees of economic assistance, and cancellation of the annual joint ROK-US military exercise Team Spirit, North Korea will agree to abandon its nuclear development program.

That being the case, the ROK government has not simply put cooperation first. If North Korea does not exhibit a rational response to the offers, the government position is that Team Spirit must continue and economic sanctions must be imposed. In other words, when the carrot gets no clear cooperation, "the stick" has to be used.

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27 Ibid. Also, see Selig Harrison, "Breaking the Nuclear Impasse: Path to Cooperative Security in Korea," a paper presented at the Conference on Northeast Asian Security, co-sponsored by the Brookings Institution and the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seoul, 1-2 November 1993, Washington, DC, pp. 1-22.

The basis for the ROK's carrot and stick approach is the homogeneous people, or one-nation, ideal. Since both South and North are of the same nationality, putting the stick first is not desired; furthermore, because Pyongyang could well choose the path to war, such an alternative needs to be avoided since it could lead to suicide of the entire nation.

The foundation of the government's cooperative approach includes other elements that can be used to induce North Korea to become compliant. They include the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan, the US and other Western nations and the provision of economic support. Should various kinds of cooperation and exchange increase between North Korea and those countries, North Korea will eventually change its adventurous and belligerent practices and adapt to the Western world. Those making this argument stress that if such a transformation does take place, it will be good for the people of North Korea and good for people in the South because a desirable foundation for peaceful unification would be in place.<sup>28</sup>

It is true that within the government there is opposition to this argument. Some of the members of the National Security Planning Agency, long responsible for the South Korea's dialogue with the North, assert that approaching North Korea on a nationality basis is not only naive, it is also dangerous. They

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28 The official position of the Republic of Korea Government is well summarized in the following articles: Hwang Ui-bong, "South-South Talks are more Difficult than South-North Talks," *Shin Dong'a*, January 1994, pp. 211-27; for the position of Foreign Minister Han Soong Joo, see the following: Park Wui-Joong, "Han Soong Joo Waemubu changkwanui uikyonae daehaesoun daumul bora [Foreign Minister Han Soong Joo's Optimistic Outlook on the North Korea Nuclear Negotiations]" *Wolgan Joong'ang*, February 1994, pp. 306-13; for criticism of Foreign Minister Han's view, see Kim Yeon-kwak, "Minister Han's low posture toward North Korea," *Wolgan Choson*, April 1994, pp. 132-50; for the differing opinions among policy makers within the government, see *Dong'a Ilbo*, 23 March 1994; *Choson Ilbo*, 24 February 1994. Professor Shin Kyong-hyun offers an assessment of the lack of continuity in the government's North Korea policy; a summary is published in *Kookmin Ilbo*, 21 February 1994; also see discussion offered by Professors Lee Seo-Hwang and Kim Gye-Dong in *Choson Ilbo*, 22 March 1994.

believe that diplomatic recognition of North Korea and economic cooperation between South and North Korea will neither sway nor constrain North Korea because they consider the North Korean regime to be the devil, fond of deception and subterfuge. Veterans of the South-North talks put forth the brinkmanship option. They believe that all means of pressure including military and economic must be summoned, and that it must be so strong that even if there is war, only then will North Korea surrender. According to their view, the US should have resorted to brinkmanship at the New York talks in June and again in July 1993.<sup>29</sup>

The same argument also appeared inside the ranks of the Democratic Liberal Party—the government party. Several members of the party's foreign policy committee, under Chairman Lee Sae-ki, criticize the government policy of emphasizing nationhood and moderation, believing that only when Seoul responds strongly will North Korea comply with any requests from the Republic of Korea.<sup>30</sup>

Both the hard-line and moderate positions are also espoused within the Democratic Party (an opposition party). Formally, the party holds the position that: "North Korea does not have the ability to wage war; therefore, rather than imposing any military or economic sanctions, resolution to the North Korea nuclear issue must be brought about through a policy of compromise that will advance the dialogue as far to the end as possible."<sup>31</sup>

The media likewise divides opinion into hard-line and moderate. However, even though understanding the government's "carrot and stick" policy, it puts the need for a strong response toward North Korea out in front. The morning edition of the

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29 Reference is made to the following article written by former National Security and Planning Agency Special Adviser Lee Dong-Bok, who is a veteran of the South-North Talks, "South-North Dialogue: What is the Problem?," *Wolgan Joong'ang*, February 1994, pp. 254-61.

30 *Hankyore Shinmun*, 22 March 1994; also, *Kookmin Ilbo*, 15 March 1994.

31 *Hankook Ilbo*, 23 March 1994.



Republic of Korea's most powerful newspaper, *Chosun Ilbo*, is quite clear on this point. A paper inclined toward conservatism and founded by an industrialist from North Korea, it has early on strongly promoted the critical view that since the center of the North Korean regime does not comprehend the nationalistic approach, it is a naive policy, and any future approach that is sentimentalist, hopeful or optimistic without any basis needs to be abandoned.<sup>32</sup> In another powerful leading newspaper, *Dong'a Ilbo*, there is the similar view. Even if the government met with some degree of success in its moderate policy, it repeatedly asserts that it will someday have to confront resolutely even the threat of war with North Korea.<sup>33</sup>

Among political scientists also, the two views are prominent. Young Dr. Lee Sam Sung supports the policy of moderation, asserting that it is desirable to first proceed with measures that will alleviate the crisis mentality and atmosphere of anxiety now enveloping the North Korea.<sup>34</sup> Then there is the view of Professor Lee Ki Tak, a military strategist, who since the early 1970s has warned that North Korea would embark on a nuclear weapons development program and has called for a strong policy response, while openly criticizing the government's policy as "naive nationalistic sentimentalism."<sup>35</sup>

The disparity of opinion within South Korea is subject to no small amount of influence from the ROK-US relationship over the nuclear problem in North Korea. At times, the US pulls one ear calling for moderation, and at other times the other ear, calling for a strong stance. A widely read conservative American

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32 *Chosun Ilbo*, 22 March 1994, 14 and 18 February 1994; and *Choong'ang Ilbo*, 21 March 1994.

33 *Dong'a Ilbo*, 19 March 1994.

34 Dr. Lee's view is addressed in, Hwang UI-bong, "South-South Talks are more Difficult than South-North Talks," p. 219.

35 Dr. Lee's view was published in *Segye Times*, 20 March 1994; Dr. Lee Chung-min also has also severely criticized the government's North Korea policy.

paper even reported that "policy toward North Korea is in trouble by influencing anti-American sentiment inside of South Korea which is critical of the moderate policy of the US and out of step with the response of the Korean government."<sup>36</sup>

Amidst this, the two countries have been able to agree through close coordination on what policy should be adapted for discussions between the US and North Korea in order to solve the North Korea nuclear problem. In particular, a "thorough and broad approach" was agreed upon at the summit meeting held in Washington on 23 November 1993 between Presidents Kim Young Sam and Bill Clinton. In establishing the objective of solving the nuclear problem, it was necessary to be willing to pursue a thorough and complete solution and take all action possible to solve the problem. This approach came in response to North Korea's offer of an "overall compromise process."

As North Korea responded favorably to the US-ROK proposal, actual working level contact between the US and North Korea commenced on 10 December 1993 in New York and continued through several rounds. As a result, the Foreign Ministry of North Korea announced that North Korea had agreed to "nuclear facility inspections by the IAEA and the cancellation of the Team Spirit military exercise."<sup>37</sup> Following that, North Korea went on to negotiate the inspections with the IAEA on 7 January 1994. As a result of those negotiations, IAEA inspections again took place, but ended in a state of non-completion.

## Conclusion

For North Korea, nuclear development is not merely a diplomatic card; it is a strategy of survival. For the US, it is a problem that challenges American authority as leader of the nuclear control regime by threatening support for and even the continu-

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<sup>36</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 9 March 1994.

<sup>37</sup> *Korea Times*, 31 December 1994.

ance of the NPT. However, for the Republic of Korea, it is directly a problem of security. For the Republic of Korea, North Korea simply cannot be granted permission to develop nuclear weapons. In other words, the Republic of Korea, at all costs, must block North Korea's nuclear weapon development program.

According to specialists who intensely study the North Korean nuclear issue, beginning at the end of 1995, North Korea will certainly enter into a quantity production system of nuclear weapons if its program is not stopped.<sup>38</sup> Even though South Korea intends to avoid this, it is likely to become a reality that cannot be avoided and under such reality, the expression "Regardless, North Koreans are the same brothers" will come to be criticized as irresponsible nationalistic sentimentalism, just as the words plainly indicate, very naive.

The most important thing today is that inside the ROK government a policy response must be formulated and executed that has unity and continuity. The base of support for government policy must also be expanded among the citizenry through furthering the efforts to increase understanding and persuasion among the opposition party and the media. Furthermore, the support for an intimate cooperative relationship with the US must be erected on that basis. From this perspective, the work of solidifying the common object of controlling North Korea's nuclear development program in cooperation with the US is very painfully needed.<sup>39</sup>

This means that the US government too must take a firm unvarying stand towards the North Korean nuclear issue. The American government attitude too has wavered at times and has sparked alarm inside the government of the ROK.

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38 Yoon Dok-moon, "Bukhanui Haeknunglyok, Muki chaechosuchoona watda [North Korea's Nuclear Capability: Weapons Manufacture Begins], *Shin Dong'a*, April 1994, pp. 172-84.

39 On this point, see Professor Ahn Byung-Joon, *Choong'ang Ilbo*, 21 March 1994 and *Shin Dong'a*, September 1993, pp. 130-39.

Looking back, the Clinton administration has been reactive in its overall foreign policy. Instead of taking the initiative to solve a problem when one surfaces, for the first time, it has adapted a responsive method. Because of that, it has exhibited the tendency to accept problems which have already surfaced as established fact. The Clinton administration's style of response appears to have encouraged North Korea. The government of the Republic of Korea must continuously warn the Clinton administration of the danger that lies in that manner of practice.

Another outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula must absolutely be prevented. That being the case, should the Republic of Korea reveal an image of atrophy, North Korea is likely to take the Republic of Korea hostage and demand that the nuclear inspection issues be detached from direct linkage to US stability, including the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea. Furthermore, it could even demand the disarmament of the Republic of Korea.

The Republic of Korea, therefore, must definitely adapt such a resolute posture that it shows absolutely it will respond militarily to any North Korean war provocation through military sanction in cooperation with the United States. Towards that end, a plan needs to be developed to prepare for managing such a crisis situation should it arise.

The security situation on the Korean peninsula has fallen into a state of disarray. In this disarray, the path to avoiding the onslaught of war is the same as it was in past decisive confrontations with North Korea, in which the solution came through the firm mutual union between the ROK and the USA. North Korea must always be able to remember that the truth is known by action and not just words.