

A Critical Analysis of the ROK-US Coalition Regarding North Korea's Nuclear Issue

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North Korea's nuclear problem first drew international attention when the French commercial satellite SPOT picked up the huge-scale North Korean nuclear site at Yongbyon and publicly released the pictures in September 1989. However, the seriousness of the nuclear development program was not well received even by the United States, and South Korea relying mostly upon US intelligence did not pay keen attention.

It has been since March 1993 that South Korea, the US and the international community began discussing the nuclear problem rather seriously as Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) pushed North Korea to accept the special inspection over its two undeclared facilities, presumably nuclear waste dump sites.

Why over three years could Pyongyang's nuclear program continue without serious international surveillance? The inter-Korean dialogue that started with prime-ministerial meetings in September 1990 had been progressing smoothly, and this contributed to the feeling that South Korea might be relieved of the threat from the North. In addition, North and South Korea signed two historic documents consisting of the Basic Agreement

on Non-aggression, Reconciliation and Cooperation, and the Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in December 1991. North Korea, furthermore, signed the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA in January 1992 and ratified it in April, which made possible ad hoc and routine IAEA inspections starting in May the same year. As long as the North Korean nuclear materials and facilities would remain under regular IAEA inspection, suspicion was not mounted over the program and no one was concerned.¹

The Pyongyang authorities claimed that it was unfair for the IAEA to urge the North to accept the special inspection and argued that the nuclear problem on the peninsula came originally from the US nuclear weapons known to be deployed in South Korea; thus they should be dealt with between the North and the US who are the legitimate parties concerned. As far as the nuclear issue is concerned, Pyongyang's claim is not unwarranted, but the US should not be the sole party for dialogue with Pyongyang on the issue.

The nuclear problem on the peninsula was from the beginning initiated in the context of the "Korean Triangle," formed by the relationship between and among two Koreas and the US; it is being discussed within this context and the clue to resolve the problem will also be found in the same setting. The South Korean government's official line of policy in the process of discussing North Korea's nuclear problem has been to put emphasis on the ROK-US coalition, and major proposals from the North have mostly been linked to ROK-US security relations. And to the strong commitment of the North to keep bilateral contacts with the U.S., the US has even with some reservations to accommodate Pyongyang's request in making agreements between it and

1 Between May 1992 and January 1993 North Korea cooperated with the IAEA's ad hoc and routine inspections on declared nuclear sites and materials. After six rounds of inspections the IAEA noted major discrepancies between the North's initial report and some of its findings, which led the IAEA Board of Governors to decide to ask for special inspections on two undeclared sites in Yongbyon.

Washington. The Korean Triangle will remain a major framework for three parties to decide the path of their relations with the other two, and the ROK-US coalition also will and should be maintained in this context.

This paper is, first of all, to examine chronologically the fluctuation of ROK-US cooperation regarding North Korea's nuclear issue since Pyongyang's announcement that it would pull out of the NPT in March 1993. Secondly, the paper will highlight the structural causes of limitation in the ROK-US coalition vis-à-vis North Korea. And finally an optimal mechanism of responsibility sharing between Seoul and Washington is to be proposed in the course of their mutual efforts to resolve North Korea's nuclear stalemate.

Historical Reexamination of the ROK-US Coalition Regarding North Korea's Nuclear Issue

First Stage:

North Korea's Announcement to Withdraw from the NPT

Since North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT, the US has put her emphasis on inducing Pyongyang to come back to the nonproliferation regime, and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and maintenance of a strong NPT regime remain the major objectives of US policy regarding North Korea's nuclear problem. This focal point of US policy just after the North's declaration that it would pull out of the NPT was put over the full-scope inspection of the IAEA Safeguards Agreement including special inspections on two undeclared sites in Yongbyon.

North Korea has claimed that her decision to withdraw from the NPT was made because IAEA inspections on North Korea's military sites are not acceptable, and because the IAEA's request of special inspections depending on the intelligence provided by

a third country was unfair.² Turning down the North's claim, the US pressured Pyongyang by mobilizing the IAEA and the UN Security Council (UNSC), which made possible the IAEA Board of Governors' resolution on 1 April regarding the North's non-compliance with the IAEA Safeguards Agreement, the statement by the UNSC president on 8 April, and the UNSC resolution on 11 May 1993.

On the other hand, the US did not shut down the channel of dialogue with North Korea, and based on the UNSC resolution recommending member states's efforts to resolve the nuclear issue quickly started a series of working level meetings with Pyongyang May 17 through 21 in preparation for high-level talks. As the deadline of June 12 approached for North Korea's announced withdrawal to become effective, the US seemed badly in need of an inducement for Pyongyang to return to the regime and gave credit to its acceptance of IAEA inspectors in May to check and replace some surveillance equipment already placed on at the nuclear facilities.

This nuclear problem astonished the South Korean government, which had been inaugurated only three weeks before the North pulled out of the NPT and had showed its good will towards Pyongyang by allowing former North Korean war correspondent Lee In-mo to return home. The newly launched Kim Young Sam government in Korea tried to launch some rather progressive policies toward the North, which were promoted by Deputy Prime Minister Han Wan-Sang, a former human rights activist and college professor who had often been ousted from campus by the previous authoritarian government.

2 After a significant failure on the part of the IAEA to discover the nuclear capability in Iraq, the IAEA strengthened its inspection regime—the IAEA can now use information supplied by its member countries, and the IAEA can ask member countries to accept inspections on any nuclear related sites and materials that the IAEA assumes necessary. North Korea was the first case to which was applied this strengthened mechanism.

The Clinton administration showed suspicion towards certain parts of President Kim's inaugural speech, i.e. stress upon the Korean nation ahead the international alliance when unification of divided Korea was mentioned. Such US suspicion remained for a while with mixed appreciation over the first civilian government in Seoul.³ North Korea's nuclear problem flushed out such potential misunderstanding between Seoul and Washington and created the environment in which the ROK-US security coalition came under stress. In the process of facing the nuclear challenge, the Kim government realized that there was little room for South Korea to maneuver in the nuclear game and that it could only follow the American decisions on the issue. As the high-level talks between Washington and Pyongyang became a *fait accompli*, the South Korean government proposed to the North on 20 May 1993 a meeting between two representatives of the inter-Korean prime-ministerial talks to discuss means to resume dialogue. In response to this, the North proposed on 25 May a special envoy exchange at the level of Deputy Prime Minister to discuss the inter-Korean summit meeting and to resolve several pending issues on the peninsula including the nuclear problem.⁴

The South Korean government was initially reluctant to accept the Northern proposal in the sense that setting a new channel of inter-Korean dialogue would nullify the Basic Agreement signed between Seoul and Pyongyang in December 1991 because it

3 The Clinton administration had legitimate concerns over the policy direction of the Kim Young Sam government. Some progressives joined the cabinet and the Blue House staff and initial policies projected especially regarding inter-Korean relations raised skepticism in the US. The return of Lee In-mo to the North with no reciprocity, emphasis on the Korean nation in the inaugural speech, and the foreign minister's remarks on a comprehensive deal with the North just after North Korea's NPT withdrawal announcement, etc.

4 There was internal debate in the Kim Young Sam government why the North would have designated Han Wan-Sang as representative for the South. Minister Han represented the progressive camp and confronted much criticism from the conservative circle. Minister Han mentioned that the North's designation was a sort of "kiss of death."

would be a significant reference to define the relations between North and South, and that the special envoys would render the prime-ministerial talks meaningless. The Seoul government concluded that the North's special envoy proposal was intended merely to show to the US Pyongyang's good will to continue dialogue with the South, which would contribute to making a positive climate for the upcoming US-DPRK high-level talks.

However, Seoul's reluctance to receive Pyongyang's proposal was over-turned at the last moment at the request of the Clinton Administration, which was eager to find an excuse for initiating the high-level talks with North Korea while demonstrating a deep interest in the inter-Korean dialogue. Or, the US might have hoped to be relieved from the burden that could come in case the North-South dialogue faced deadlock while the US became eager to develop relations with the North.

At this stage, as some of the progressive cabinet ministers of the Kim government experienced frustration in dealing with the North's tough position on the nuclear issue, the conservative circle in Seoul have been stressing the security coalition with the US.⁵ And the US was playing a free hand in its dealing with the North, successfully persuading South Korea to accept the high-level talks between the US and North Korea by emphasizing that it would be urgent for the North's remaining in the NPT regime.

Second Stage:

First and Second Rounds of the US-DPRK High-Level Talks

High-level talks between the US and DPRK were very historic occasions considering that the two countries have confronted each other as enemy states since the Korean War in the 1950s. There have been US-DPRK bilateral contacts of political counsel-

5 Quite interestingly the group of people who is favorable to stress the ROK-US alliance relationship is often categorized as conservative. And the circle supportive of an appeasement policy toward the North is named progressive. This grouping is, of course, not appropriate, and each circle wishes simply to be named moderate realists.

lors through Beijing embassies since late 1988 corresponding to South Korea's special declaration in July same year which promulgated Seoul's determination to end confrontation with North Korea in its external relations.⁶ In addition, amid constructive discussions on nuclear problems on the Korean peninsula after former US President George Bush's announcement to withdraw all ground-based tactical nuclear weapons which had the implication of pulling out the US nuclear weapons known to be deployed in South Korea, North and South Korea were able to reach an agreement on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in December 1991. The US and South Korea also pushed North Korea to sign the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA by providing some inducement of a first-time-ever political-level meeting between Washington and Pyongyang in January 1992. Deputy Secretary of the US State Department Arnold Kanter and Kim Yong Sun, chief of the International Bureau of the North Korean Workers Party met each other in New York.⁷

Quite differently from previous meetings, the two rounds of US-DPRK bilateral talks in June and July 1993 were quite businesslike. In the first round, the US in compensation for Pyongyang's temporary suspension of the effectiveness of its

6 In support of South Korea's President Roh Tae Woo's unification initiatives the US government, in late 1988, took the following four steps toward North Korea: authorized US diplomats to hold discussions with DPRK officials in neutral settings; decided to encourage unofficial, non-governmental visits from North Korea in academics and other areas; began permitting American citizens to travel to North Korea on a case-by-case basis; and, by amending the Foreign Assets Control Regulations, permitted certain humanitarian exports for meeting human needs. Daniel Russel, "US-North Korean Relations," in *Current Issues in Korean-U.S. Relations: Korean-American Dialogue* (Seoul: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, 1993), p. 49.

7 The meeting was called by the US to discuss candidly and authoritatively important issues of mutual concern, unquestionably focused on the North's nuclear weapons development program. For an official statement of the US policy toward North Korea, see Arnold Kanter, "North Korea, Nuclear Proliferation, and U.S. Policy: Collective Engagement in a New Era," statement before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 6 February 1992, p. 16.

decision to withdraw from the NPT proposed to the North that any military threat against the North including nuclear attack would be waived. In addition, the US has clarified that normalization of relations including economic ones between the US and North Korea would be possible commensurate upon the progress made in resolving the nuclear problem. On the other hand, the US made it clear that the bilateral talks would not be possible if the North withdraw definitely from the NPT, went further in reprocessing nuclear materials, or conducted any activities that would harm the continuity of the IAEA Safeguards.

The South Korean government did not oppose the high-level talks between the US and the DPRK because it considered every channel of dialogue should be open to resolve the nuclear problem by peaceful means. But some reservation has been expressed that the bilateral talks should be limited to discussing the nuclear issue and should be undertaken linked to inter-Korean relations. This South Korean decision placed the Kim administration in a more awkward situation as the North withdrew its previous proposal of the inter-Korean exchange of special envoys after the US guaranteed the *raison d'être* of the North Korean regime, no-first-strike against the North, and fixed opening of the next round of bilateral talks.

Special inspection over the undeclared sites was one of the most significant issues to the US when she met with the North, and emphatically raised it at the second round of meeting in Geneva. However, after realizing the North was very firm on the issue the US shifted her emphasis to securing the continuity of the IAEA Safeguards through implementing ad hoc and routine inspections. South Korea positively assessed the outcome of the meeting in the sense that North Korea accepted negotiations with the IAEA and inter-Korean dialogue as preconditions for the further talks between the US and Pyongyang.

In the second stage, the US was successful in getting the North to remain in the NPT, and especially at the second round of meeting the US gave positive response to the North's proposal

of switching their nuclear reactors to the light-water type, which implied that the US was prepared to dialogue with the North on a broad range of issues.⁸ The second round of bilateral talks can be understood as an actual starting point of the US application of a comprehensive deal in the course of discussing North Korea's nuclear problem.

Third Stage: US Adopting the Comprehensive Solution

Since the second round of talks in Geneva, North Korea did not show any conciliatory gestures in its dealing with the IAEA and South Korea. The US also delivered a message from Assistant Secretary Robert Gallucci, a US representative of the bilateral talks with the North on 20 September, to urge a relaunch of negotiations with the IAEA for inspection as well as the North-South talks; the IAEA adopted a resolution about the North Korean nuclear issue on 1 October; and finally the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on 1 November to demand that Pyongyang cooperate immediately with the IAEA.

North Korea after figuring out that the US would not come to a meeting conveyed a memorandum on 12 October to Ken Quinones, a US State Department North Korean desk officer who accompanied US Congressman Gary Ackerman, which delivered Pyongyang's idea of a package deal on the nuclear issue. This Northern gesture on a package deal was made public when DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Suk Ju stated on 12 November that the US should accept the North's package deal.

8 The LWR issue has political implications in that when the US decides to support North Korea's transformation to the LWR, the US would have to ease domestic regulations in addition to lifting the North from the terrorist list. To complete a project of making a couple of LWRs it would take seven to ten years and cost around four billion dollars. Therefore, in the course of US participation in the project, a broad range of political, legal and economic issues would need to be arranged.

The Clinton administration started seriously to discuss the proposal, and in mid-November tentatively decided to apply such a new methodology to resolve nuclear issue.⁹

South Korea expressed concern over the US shift of her position in that such a package deal would rule out South Korea's room for leverage in the nuclear game on the peninsula. Such worry of the part of the Kim Young Sam administration was made known to President Clinton when the two Presidents met each other in Washington DC on 23 November and the two heads agreed to a new concept, the so-called thorough and broad approach. This approach, however, was interpreted differently by Seoul and Washington. South Korea understood the concept as to try to resolve the problem thoroughly and completely, but in the process of resolution every possible means would be applied; on the other hand the US interpreted the concept as to keep a firm position in objective and principle in resolving the problem, but tactically to take a flexible position, and for a thorough solution of the matter a broad array of issues could be discussed.¹⁰ Regardless of such delicate differences two governments took such an approach as an official position regarding North Korea's nuclear problem.¹¹

A significant agreement between the US and North Korea was made after a series of working-level meetings in New York 24 November through 29 December—North Korea's acceptance of

9 After rounds of debates among high-level officials from several different agencies, the US National Security Council made a decision around mid-November 1993 to shift its previous approach to the problem to a comprehensive solution. *Washington Post*, 17 November 1993.

10 South Korea's interpretation of the concept as applying broad "means" to resolve the nuclear problem and the US reading of broad "array of issues" have different connotations. For the US interpretations of the concept, see the statement of Deputy Secretary of State Lynn Davis before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific Affairs, 3 March 1994.

11 The suddenness of South Korea's move at the summit meeting astonished US officials, who complained about the ambiguity of the policy and the lack of strategic thinking to see the situation. *New York Times*, 24 November 1993.

the IAEA inspection on seven declared sites, reopening of the discussion on special envoys between North and South, suspension of '94 Team Spirit military exercise, and rescheduling the third round US-DPRK talks. Such agreement was made possible as the US focused on the continuity of the IAEA Safeguards from among a great range of issues, and the special inspection issue came to be struck from the major agenda. Such US change of position implied that focal point of inspections to guarantee transparency of the North nuclear program was moderated from special inspections to one of securing the continuity of safeguards by way of ad hoc and routine inspections.

South Korea which took a rather tough position on the issue a month previous by creating the new concept of a "thorough and broad" approach, accommodated the change of US position by stating that so long as the North allowed full-scope inspections on the seven declared sites including the radiochemical laboratory (actually reprocessing facilities) and showed signs of sincere cooperation in discussing the exchange of special envoys with the South, then the US and South Korea would suspend the '94 Team Spirit military exercise and go ahead with the third round high-level talks between the US and North Korea.

Since that time whether or not the realization of the special envoy exchange would be a precondition for the third round of US-DPRK talks became a potential point of conflict between the US and South Korea. Since the two reached an agreement on the approach of a thorough and broad solution, the US seemed to have no strong commitment to push through with the special envoys between North and South, but rather put her diplomatic efforts to secure continuity of the IAEA Safeguards.

Fourth Stage:

Four-Point Agreement and Entering the Sanctions Debate, and Finally Back to the Dialogue

When the US and North Korea showed differences in interpretation of the scope of inspections on seven declared sites, and

negotiations between the IAEA and Pyongyang became delayed, a debate was ignited in the UNSC over sanctions against Pyongyang. North Korea and the US were able to reconfirm a four-point agreement on 25 February 1994, which was the first accomplishment between the two since the US officially took to the comprehensive solution on the nuclear problem around November 1993.

North Korea, however, was not cooperative in the IAEA inspection of the seven declared sites by opposing any pick-up of samples from the radiochemical laboratory and refusing gamma mapping, and furthermore stopped the working-level preparation meeting on 19 March between the North and South for the exchange of special envoys.¹² The US reported to North Korea that the third round talks would not occur and the UNSC set a deadline for the IAEA inspection to press Pyongyang to return to the negotiation table. Instead North Korea proposed to the IAEA on 20 April to witness her scheduled replacement of the 5MW reactor fuel rods, which ultimately reopened the working-level contacts between the US and DPRK.

North Korea in a letter to the US from Deputy Foreign Minister Kang on 19 April made clear her position such as prompt opening of the third round talks between the two, the US lifting its economic embargo against the North, suspension of the Team Spirit military exercise, replacing armistice with a peace treaty, and withdrawal of nuclear weapons deployed around the Korean peninsula. In response to that the US asked to the North on 28 April for immediate implementation of the four-point agreement, suspension of the Team Spirit exercise after serious

12 After rounds of working level talks between North and South, North Korean representative Park Young-Soo bluntly stated at the meeting that any kind of international sanctions against the North would create a "sea of fire in Seoul." This was very an unusual remark for the negotiation table, but it can be understood that Pyongyang seemed to figure out the US would not meet with the North as planned so the inter-Korean meeting for exchange of special envoys would be meaningless.

progress in the inter-Korean dialogue, and simultaneous resumption of the third round US-DPRK talks and North-South dialogue.

Overall, the US seems to have made a mistake by failing to put the agreement on clear terms that the exchange of special envoys between the two Koreas would be a precondition for the US-DPRK talks, which left room for the North to drive wedges in the ROK-US relations. South Korea finally on 15 April withdrew its previous position regarding the exchange of special envoys in considering that such an unyielding position would hamper serious attempts to resolve the nuclear issue as soon as possible.

In this stage South Korea experienced a sour feeling to see the American mishandling of the North, which inevitably made Seoul reluctant to ease her stance on the inter-Korean dialogue through being persuaded to accept the US logic that the US-DPRK talks would be the meaningful forum to find a breakthrough in the nuclear stalemate. Seoul's uneasiness at the development of the situation was aggravated when the North started to replace spent fuel rods on its 5MW reactor on 13 May against the US warning that no further bilateral talks would be possible unless the North allowed the IAEA inspectors on the site to witness the process.

Meanwhile new South Korean Deputy Prime Minister of Unification Lee Hong-Koo mentioned at the National Assembly on 23 May that if the North were to maintain its reprocessing facilities until the decision on the extension of the NPT April 1995, then the South Korean government would have no choice but to reexamine the Denuclearization Agreement between North and South. His statement raised prompt criticism from the US even though Unification Minister Lee's remarks did not reflect the government's prepared view on the future of the nuclear problem on the peninsula. It might be a balanced observation to interpret Minister Lee's remarks as a reflection of the South Korean government's concern over the potential dismissal of Seoul in the course of bilateral talks between Washington and Pyongyang without making a case out of

Pyongyang's violation of the inter-Korean agreement which does not allow possession of reprocessing facilities.¹³

While negotiation with the US and the IAEA went on, North Korea unexpectedly announced that the replacement of spent fuel rod had been completed early June. And as the debate on international sanctions against the North resumed, Pyongyang announced on 13 June that it would withdraw from the IAEA. Such a bold North Korean step ignited serious discussion on sanctions and the US has played the leading role in mobilizing UNSC permanent member countries to support her move.

At the latter part of this stage, especially late May through mid-June, the sanctions debate has been prevailing in the context that the North was not cooperative with the US nor the IAEA, which have attempted to draw Pyongyang into dialogue. When the US has led this drive toward sanctions, South Korea could only join the US side trying to induce the PRC and Russia to accept favorably the international move. Even though Seoul's principal policy guideline has always been to resolve the nuclear problem by peaceful means, South Korea in such tense situation had no practical options to choose but to lean toward sanctions—even confronting Pyongyang's warning that regarded any kind of sanctions as an act of war against North Korea.

This international move toward sanctions promptly shifted to the phase of dialogue upon former US President Jimmy Carter's visit and meeting with Kim Il Sung in his trip 15 through 18 June. The meeting drew a clear commitment from the Great Leader Kim regarding the nuclear issue, such as that the North was

13 Unification Minister Lee Hong-Koo's statement was a repeat of his earlier remarks on 12 May at a meeting with the Newspaper Editors' Forum. His intention was to project the firm position of the Kim Young Sam government that the South should not be dismissed in the nuclear debate on the peninsula, and try to calm the voice from the conservative camp that the government had no leverage regarding the issue that was threatening the security of the South. However, Minister Lee did seem to be worried about the possibility that his remarks would be manipulated by the group arguing for so-called nuclear sovereignty.

prepared to deal with the US in freezing its nuclear activities as compensation for US-DPRK political negotiations. The South Korean government, which initially showed reluctance to Carter's visit to Pyongyang, but had to follow the US shift of positions, and the government came to be in the awkward situation of having to persuade its own public to support the government's reaction to Carter's visit. President Kim Young Sam's prompt acceptance of North Korean President Kim Il Sung's proposal for an inter-Korean summit simply reflected the South Korean government's attempt to demonstrate to the domestic public and international community its willingness to deal with the North by peaceful means, while wiping out suspicion that the South has been disregarded in the play.

Since then no further serious debate has been made on sanctions against the North and the US and South Korea entered into the dialogue phase with the North in preparation for the third round high-level talks and the inter-Korean summit respectively. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's sudden death on 8 July halted further progress on both fronts of negotiations with Washington and Seoul, but it is expected the new leadership in North Korea will not easily derail from Kim Il Sung's commitment regarding dialogue with the US and possibly with Seoul.¹⁴

Effectiveness and Limit of the ROK-US Coalition

Two major US goals in resolving North Korea's nuclear problem consist of sustaining peace and stability by way of securing denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and of maintaining a strong international nuclear nonproliferation regime, and these objectives have unceasingly been stressed. The Clinton adminis-

14 North Korea immediately after Kim Il Sung's death conveyed official messages to the US and South Korea that Pyongyang's position regarding her relationship with Washington and Seoul would be unchanged, continuing the third round high-level talks in Geneva and the inter-Korean summit based on the previous agreement.

tration has firmly maintained the position that dialogue with North Korea would continue as far as it was constructive to resolve the nuclear problem. And it clearly expressed certain conditions that interrupted the bilateral talks such as when the North tried to withdraw from the NPT, to hamper the continuity of IAEA safeguards, and further to reprocess nuclear materials.

Through using both carrots and sticks in approaching North Korea's nuclear issue, the US has been adhering to the position that it will not rule out any option of sanctions if all diplomatic efforts to deal with the issue are exhausted. On the other hand, South Korea's strategy to face the nuclear dilemma has been to resolve the issue by peaceful means and to mobilize an international cooperative mechanism. The nuclear problem has duality in the sense that it is an inter-Korean issue meaning it is a grave threat to the survival of the whole Korean nation and should ultimately be resolved by mutual agreement between North and South Korea; but it is an international issue as well implying that nuclear weapons are easy to proliferate, and they are mass-destructive, rendering the borders between states meaningless.

Such duality in this nuclear issue has limited South Korea's leverage from the beginning, and driven her to count on cooperation with international society, especially the US. As long as the US and South Korea share the same objectives of denuclearization of the peninsula and preventing the problem from proliferating to other countries in Northeast Asia, the two countries could harmonize their positions in dealing with the North.

However, Seoul and Washington have some differences in approach to the issue and in points of emphasis in undertaking policies toward North Korea. Confronting an immediate threat from the North and assessing the unpredictability of North Korean leadership, South Korea cannot risk calling any bluffs from Pyongyang, which would regard sanctions against it as an act of war and which feels vulnerable to a security threat. Therefore, Seoul cannot underestimate North Korea's nuclear capability even though the US and other Western sources seem

to believe the North, lacking detonator and delivery system, does not yet have a usable nuclear bomb.

The US assessment of the North's capability focused on the North's lack of an inter-continental missile delivery system and second-strike capacity. The US as a global watchdog of proliferation of mass-destructive weapons should pay more serious attention to a Northern attempt to proliferate indigenously developed nuclear technology and materials to other trouble-spot countries. That is why the Clinton administration is putting an emphasis on freezing the North's nuclear program at its current state in preparation for the upcoming negotiations.

Such inevitable discrepancies in position between the US and South Korea were reflected in previous strategies toward the North and raised criticism in both Washington and Seoul on fluctuation of policies in the course of policy debate regarding this nuclear problem. That is why Seoul could not easily support the US when she drove the situation into punitive sanctions against the North. That is also why Seoul showed a tougher position than the US when the US tried appeasement policies toward Pyongyang setting aside the South Korean positions. That is why South Korea's occasionally uncertain positions facing the U.S. tougher policy that might cause military confrontation were often criticized by hawkish US opinion leaders. However, such ambivalence of South Korean government policies were inevitable when considering the duality of North Korea's nuclear problem and the concern over any possibility of ruining Seoul's forty-year economic accomplishment since the Korean War.¹⁵

The coalition between South Korea and the US has been relatively working well in the sense that the two countries share

15 A US major paper analyzed that the US administration faced difficulties due to the ROK government's lack of policy continuity and a certain anti-American sentiment in Korea criticizing the American pro-appeasement policy. *Wall Street Journal*, 9 March 1994.

a basic policy guideline to try every diplomatic effort before invoking punitive sanctions against the North. However, there have been many signs that Seoul might have some suspicion or worry over the Clinton administration's handling of the issue.

Since high-level talks between Washington and Pyongyang were set in Spring 1993, the US had many precious opportunities to know and understand the North about its intention, mind-set, strategy and negotiation tactics as the two parties had frequent contacts between working level and high-level officials as well. Based on this experience the US was able to create its own strategy of handling the North, which means the US began attempting to see Pyongyang directly instead of understanding it through the prism of South Korea. The US decision to apply a comprehensive solution approach to the issue was quite sensational when we consider the previous US attitude in negotiating with other countries in the Cold-War era. As the one and only military superpower, the US could enjoy a comfortable position to deal high-handedly with the North, and there has been no reason to take such a passive version of negotiation tactics as this comprehensive approach. It was quite natural that there was serious debate within the policy-making circle in Washington last November when they decided to pick up such a new methodology even tentatively.

As far as the inspections are concerned, the scope of the US concern regarding the IAEA inspection became narrowed and the method eased. After a couple of rounds of the bilateral talks with Pyongyang, the US shifted its all-or-nothing approach to a measured one by putting off the special inspection issue to the agenda of the next round of meetings, rather focusing on the continuity of safeguards. And the major objects of inspection turned from the two undeclared sites to the declared ones and further narrowed to seven declared facilities.

Since the North announced that she replaced the 5MW reactor fuel rods, the US moderated its position from requesting sampling from the spent fuel to the IAEA standard of a new pattern

of sampling and analysis at the appropriate time after separating some spent fuel rods and staying under marked storage.

When North Korea's nuclear program was exposed, the US position was very clear that production and possession of plutonium by the North would not be allowed. But such position has changed from prevention to containment of any further export of nuclear technology and materials.¹⁶ At this time there is no clear sign that the Clinton administration has changed its global strategy of nonproliferation to counter-proliferation, but the US negotiation with North Korea will be a significant start for the US to shift even gradually its strategy regarding mass-destructive weapons.

The US policy change can be seen in its setting of preconditions for the third round of bilateral talks. Resuming the inter-Korean dialogue, accepting the full-scope IAEA inspections, and no further reprocessing of nuclear materials were major conditions for the US to resume high-level talks, but these have been narrowly modified to acceptance of IAEA inspections to secure continuity of the safeguards on seven declared sites and reopening the North-South dialogue in preparation for the exchange of special envoys. When we review the period since early this year, the terms to resume bilateral talks have also become moderated concerning the scope of inspections, from ad hoc and routine inspection on seven declared sites in January to further inspection on the aborted inspections over the radiochemical laboratory in March, and to a witness inspection at replacing spent fuel of the 5MW reactor in April.

In addition, President Clinton gave a significant meaning to Jimmy Carter's trip and meeting with North Korea's Kim Il Sung and based on Carter's accomplishment quickly shifted its previous policy direction of driving for sanctions into a phase of dialogue. This sudden move was shocking enough for the Kim

16 Jim Hoagland, "Containing North Korea is the Better Way," *International Herald Tribune*, 10 March 1994.

Young Sam government to be embarrassed or even experience a sentiment of betrayal, especially since Seoul had been in the midst of actively selling the sanction option to the neighboring countries.

In a nutshell, when we reexamine the last eighteen months of the ROK-US coalition regarding North Korea's nuclear issue, we can draw some findings. First of all, the US and South Korea have taken a stick and carrot approach based on the guiding principle of trying to resolve the nuclear problem by peaceful means. Secondly, when the US would take the stick approach, South Korea from time to time had reservations about supporting the US position fully, but ultimately always did join the US endeavor. Third, when the US took an appeasement policy toward the North, South Korea showed reservations due to its consideration of the possibility that Seoul would be eliminated in the bilateral deal between Washington and Pyongyang. Fourth, both the Clinton administration and South Korea's Kim Young Sam government have suffered in making a consensus in each policy making process regarding North Korea's nuclear problem. Debate between the nonproliferationists and the regionalist in the US and the struggle between the rather progressive group in the government, and the National Assembly as well as the media in Seoul forced both administrations to face difficulties in drawing an agreement for a harmonized voice.

The Following cases can serve as examples that reflect the implicit or explicit disaccord between Washington and Seoul in their dealing with North Korea's nuclear problem.

Exchange of Special Envoys

When the North proposed the exchange of special envoy between Seoul and Pyongyang on 25 May 1993, the US in emphasizing every dialogue channel to be open strongly urged the South to accept the North's proposal regardless of the South's initial reluctance. However, as the South wanted the exchange of

special envoys to be a precondition for the third round US-DPRK high-level talks, the US took an ambiguous position by not fully supporting the South, which ultimately led Seoul to withdraw its previous position on 15 April 1994. One interesting point regarding the South's decision is that the US expressed reservations at the sudden decision and announcement with no advanced notice to nor consultation with the US regarding the implications of the decision.

Thorough and Broad Approach

When the North's package deal and the US comprehensive solution were left as the two major approaches to the nuclear problem, the US official acceptance of such approach raised Seoul's concern over the potential dismissal of South Korea in the ongoing negotiation on the nuclear issue. President Kim Young Sam's unexpected move at the summit meeting in Washington on 23 November 1993 pushing the new term of "thorough and broad" approach and drawing agreement from President Clinton was a good example reflecting the potential conflict in the psychological game between Washington and Seoul in dealing with this issue. But as mentioned above, two administrations had from the beginning different interpretations on the concept.

The Deployment of Patriot Missiles in South Korea

As North Korea and the IAEA have been discussing modalities of the inspection of seven declared sites under the framework of the agreement between the US and North Korea in December 1993, North Korea's lack of cooperation ignited a debate on the deployment of defensive Patriot Missiles in South Korea to strengthen the deterrence on the part of US troops. South Korea's Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo in his trip to Washington in February 1994 denied a report on this issue by mentioning that such a debate would hamper inducing the North to cooperate with the IAEA. However, North Korea's continuous bogging

attitude forced the deployment into reality, and South Korea merely accepted the US decision by clarifying that these defensive weapons would be deployed at the US Commander's request to his President Clinton, and by stating that South Korea had no plan to purchase them.

Debate on Reconsidering the Inter-Korean Denuclearization Agreement

South Korea's Deputy Prime Minister of Unification Lee Hong-Koo mentioned on 12 May 1994 at a meeting with the Newspaper Editors' Forum that the Denuclearization Agreement between North and South would be nullified if it were to be confirmed that North Korea possessed any number of nuclear bombs. His statement was certainly to send a warning to the North not to go on completing nuclear weapons development, but the quick US response with its worried message to Seoul raised an internal debate among South Korean intellectuals including some policy makers in the government regarding the real state of coalition between Seoul and Washington.

It was understood that the US seemed to pay serious attention to the rising sentiment in Korea to secure its own sovereignty in nuclear issues even though such move represented only a minority sentiment and came out of concern over the potential dismissal of the South in US negotiations with the North.

Clarifying North Korea's Previous Record of Nuclear Development

In the course of coaxing the North to the negotiation table with the IAEA and the US, the Clinton administration moved its point of emphasis from clarifying the past record of Pyongyang's nuclear program to freezing the development, which would be conducive to nonproliferation of nuclear materials and technology to third countries. It can be understood such approach is the inevitable and rational choice to the US, but considering South

Korea's sensitivity to any level of nuclear capacity in the North, Seoul cannot underestimate the necessity to clear out the North's previous accomplishment in its nuclear program.

The South Korean government's release of a North Korean defector's report about the North's nuclear capability on 25 July 1994 ignited serious concern on the part of the US and the IAEA as well. Kang Myung-do, who argues he is son-in-law of the DPRK Premier, stated that the North has already completed five nuclear bombs and at the end of this year will be able to add around five more nuclear warheads. The Clinton administration raised suspicion over why the Kim Young Sam government released his report at this critical time when the US is preparing the third round high-level talks in Geneva resuming August 5, and seemed to interpret South Korean attempt to convey a message to the US not to overlook deciphering Pyongyang's previous record on nuclear development.¹⁷ The debate on clarifying the past of North Korea's nuclear program will be a potential area of disaccord between Washington and Seoul in the process of resolving the issue.

Supporting the North's Transfer to Light Water Reactors

Since North Korean negotiators raised the light water reactors (LWR) issue at the second round of the US-DPRK talks in Geneva in July 1993, the issue has come to be included as major agenda in the nuclear discussion. Regardless of why the North regards the issue seriously in resolving the nuclear problem, the US positively interpreted the North's proposal in the sense that the LWR would secure transparency and increase safety.

17 The US administration seemed skeptical of the Kim Young Sam government's commitment to continue the North-South dialogue. Even though the Kim administration has stressed that the inter-Korean dialogue should be undertaken in parallel with the US-DPRK talks, some incidents in Seoul after North Korea's Kim Il Sung's death did raise some reservations about the South's real intention in this regard.

North Korea has arduously asked the US for a clear and detailed blueprint of how it will support a transfer of its nuclear program to the LWR. And the current state of the matter is that the North prefers to introduce Russian technology together with any package of financial support from the US including any type of international consortium with participation of Japan and South Korea or international financial bodies. The US, facing many domestic constraints regarding legal barriers to technological and financial support on the issue, seemed to be leaning toward accepting the North's proposal. This US attitude ignited concern in the South, which would take only the role of paying the bill without participating in technology, construction, or education of personnel in the North.

South Korea prefers to export the Korean Standard nuclear reactor with around 90% domestic technology support and promotes an active participation in the sense that the project would contribute to making precedents in reconciliation and cooperation between North and South. The issue will be one of the key agenda items in the third round US-DPRK talks in Geneva, and if the US inevitably accepts the North's preferred package without modification, the issue will raise potential disaccord between the US and South Korea.

In Search of the Optimal ROK-US Coalition Mechanism in Resolving North Korea's Nuclear Problem

In wrestling with North Korea's nuclear problem the US and South Korea could confirm that the coalition between the two governments had solid ground to launch a harmonized approach to the issue, but some potential disaccord is inevitable coming out of basic differences in security perception regarding the threat from the North. How can two allies set the optimal

mechanism in the course of resolving the nuclear stalemate, probably a most serious challenge in the post-Cold War era?¹⁸

First of all, North Korea's nuclear problem was raised in the context of the Korean Triangle consisting of the US and North and South Korea, and the potential solution can be found in this framework. Considering the North's clear intention to improve relations with the US by ruling out the South, the US and South Korea based on solid coalition should try to persuade the North Korean leadership that such an attempt is an illusion.

On the other hand, we should shrewdly reexamine the effectiveness and limits of the US-ROK coalition. There is a clear starting point for this coalition in that the two governments share the common goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and of hindering proliferation to other regions. However, the positions of the two governments from time to time have been different on some issues regarding the nuclear problem—South Korea has legitimate concerns that she cannot easily join the US drive to sanctions against the North nor easily forsake diplomatic solutions to resolve the nuclear issue by peaceful means.

In order to find a breakthrough in inter-Korean dialogue in the course of discussing the nuclear problem, the US should be perceived by the North as a "bad guy" playing the role of emphasizing the principle and norms by which the international community is abiding, and South Korea can take the role of "good guy" to stress to the US flexibility in its dealing with the North by providing some concrete inducement package to improve relations between North and South Korea. But unfortunately, such role sharing has been working in reverse.

Secondly, the nuclear issue is surely on the international agenda. Any South Korean unilateral role or attempt can only be from the outset very limited, and South Korea should not

18 Jeong Woo Kil, "The US-DPRK Relations and South Korea: Past, Present and Future," (in Korean) presented to the conference hosted by the Research Institute for National Unification, 1 April 1994, pp. 27-31.

overlook this solemn reality. However, the US government also has its limit to resolve the problem by itself.

South Korea should pay close attention to the role of neighboring countries including the PRC, Japan and Russia in resolving this nuclear problem. In addition to relying on the US attempt to persuade the regional countries to play positive roles in the game, South Korea should perform its own responsibility in this regard. Among other things, such attempt should start with Seoul's serious understanding of the PRC's perception of the North's nuclear issue and the Chinese goal for the Korean peninsula regarding the future of North Korea and inter-Korean relations.

The so-called international cooperative mechanism should be provided with some sense of direction in its operation. One shared goal in dealing with North Korea is how to lead the Pyongyang regime to soft ground by inducing it to head towards opening and reform, even gradually and slightly, and to lead to the change of its system.

Thirdly, when we consider the duality of the nuclear issue, of the inter-Korean issue and the international one as well, Koreanization of the Korean question might be possible only when we seriously understand the international aspect of the issue. In this regard, strict linkage of the inter-Korean dialogue to the process of the US-DPRK talks might backfire and negatively affect peaceful resolution of the issue. In the current situation that there cannot be found any breakthrough in the nuclear deadlock, the US-DPRK talks will undoubtedly be a most important forum to seek a breakthrough. South Korea had better start discussions with the US about the major agenda to be raised in the US-DPRK dialogue that might directly or indirectly affect the US-ROK coalition, such as the LWR, a peace treaty, Team Spirit military exercise, cooperation on energy support for the North, and arms reduction issues, etc.

Fourth, instead of worrying about the speed of improving relations between Washington and Pyongyang, South Korea

should seek means to intervene actively and constructively as the US makes its blueprint for normalization of relations with the North. Both US and ROK administrations lost precious opportunities to coordinate policies when they were inaugurated early last year and the North Korean nuclear problem suddenly came up. Kim Il Sung's death currently provides a new opportunity again for Washington and Seoul to launch serious discussions about the framework and mid- and long-term plan how to coax North Korea to follow the optimal path to stabilize the peninsula and secure peace in the region, and ultimately to search for peaceful unification on South Korean terms.

Domestic configurations in Washington and Seoul have led the two administrations to seek a harmonized path in making policies toward the North. And both new governments became vulnerable to domestic criticism from vested-interest political camps and the media. Especially South Korea should pay more keen attention to balance some of the extreme views of opinion leaders in the US by conveying clear and reasonable messages to them that will relieve the Clinton administration from the burden and to initiate a more comprehensive and concrete solution in the course of resolving North Korea's nuclear problem.

Finally, North Korea's nuclear problem will not be easily or quickly be resolved considering the North's clear intention to go nuclear for the sake of safeguarding its regime and system survival. Therefore, South Korea should find ways within the broader context of long-term policy regarding inter-Korean relations. The combined approach of sticks and carrots might be the inevitable option to South Korea; neither the stick-only policy nor the appeasement policy without sense of direction will be desirable.

Some items of Pyongyang's request as compensation to be cooperative with the international community are ultimately induce the North to join the civilized society and to gradually open up its self-imposed isolationist regime even though it might

think it could handle smartly to escape from complexity of its problems. And if South Korea has a clear understanding that without change of North Korea's system any meaningful dialogue between North and South will not be possible, then the South has no reason to oppose any attempt of the neighboring countries to seek measures to affect the North to follow the positive path for opening and reform. When South Korea sets the blueprint for the future of the Korean peninsula and gradually implements concrete steps within this legitimate plan, the entire international community will surely support the South's endeavor in approaching peaceful unification.