

## *Engaging North Korea: Issues and Challenges*

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### **Abstract**

The six-party agreement of February 13, 2007 opens the way to a sustained multilateral engagement of North Korea by the other five interlocutors, most notably America and Japan, while also obliging North Korea to take steps towards denuclearization and reciprocal engagement with those states. This new framework strongly suggests that the six-party talks have all along been about more than denuclearizing North Korea. Rather they have to a great extent been about engaging it or trying to find a framework for doing so. As a result it has become obvious that engaging the DPRK is essential to any government who wishes to continue to play a meaningful role in the Northeast Asian security agenda. Thus, by refusing to undertake this engagement, the United States has paid a serious price which it only is beginning to rectify since the February agreement. This essay analyzes the extent of that price paid by Washington in this context and also cites the developing international competition among the other parties to the talks to gain access to and influence upon North Korean policy. At the same time though, North Korea must undertake its own long-term engagement with all the parties and especially with the United States as it has long sought to do. Such an engagement cannot but exert substantial impact upon the domestic structures of North Korean politics. Evidence from North Korea points to its becoming a state governed by the rivalry among bureaucratic factions largely split between emphasizing economic reform or military-first policies, among

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them nuclearization. Compliance with the February agreements and the opening of its relations with all the parties, up to and possibly including even normalization with Washington, imposes upon the DPRK the necessity of opening up its politics. In tandem with sustained engagement by the parties, again particularly America, this agreement also creates possibilities for influencing a long-term reorientation of North Korean policy to emphasize economic reform over the military-first program. Thus North Korea too will find that this new multilateral engagement will force it to transform its policies too.

**Keywords:** North Korea, Asian security, United States, reform (in the DPRK), February 13 agreement

### Introduction

The six-party February 13, 2007 agreement on North Korea's denuclearization appears to be holding and even making progress. The parties are complying with its terms despite several technical delays, the working groups that the treaty established are meeting, and final goals for the process, if not a timetable and modalities of reaching them have apparently been agreed upon. Indeed, since then, "North Korea has signed on to an agreement calling for it by the end of this year (i.e., 2007-author) to detail its full nuclear holdings and to shutter facilities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex."<sup>1</sup> North Korea has apparently begun this process of disablement in November 2007 (the time of this writing) and in return the Bush administration is reportedly drawing up a plan for normalizing relations with North Korea, Pyongyang's coveted strategic objective. This would also include removing North Korea from the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile from August 28-30, 2007 a second inter-Korean summit was to take place in Pyongyang. Due to floods in North Korea

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<sup>1</sup>"North Korea Promises Nuclear Disablement," *Global Security Network*, October 3, 2007, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org).

<sup>2</sup>Elaine M. Grossman, "Bush Administration Eyes 'Normalizing' Relations With North Korea," *Global Security Network*, November 29, 2007, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org).

it was rescheduled for October 2-4 and has since led to greater inter-Korean economic ties. Probably more importantly, both sides called for negotiation of a peace treaty among 3-4 nations to end the Korean War, realizing the ROK's pre-summit agenda.<sup>3</sup> So while Seoul advances its engagement of the DPRK, reports suggest that Pyongyang too has as a key motive for participating in the summit, the goals of locking in South Korea's engagement with it no matter who wins the forthcoming ROK elections, and second, using the summit as a platform from which to advance ties to Washington and Tokyo, if not also Moscow and Beijing.<sup>4</sup> These developments, taken together, could generate a new impetus for addressing if not conclusively resolving the issues raised by North Korea's nuclearization and the February accords.

Thus the denuclearization process, if it continues to its full realization, will both rearrange the existing Northeast Asian security order and facilitate progress towards a formal peace treaty ending the Korean war. But obviously progress towards a peace treaty and full inter-Korean reconciliation, not to mention normalization of DPRK-American relations, depends on implementation of the denuclearization agreements.

But for that to happen the six parties themselves must accept and implement the underlying realities of the six-party process by building on what has already been achieved. Similarly for the DPRK's complete denuclearization to occur, North Korea to receive its energy compensation for that denuclearization, and for a peace treaty plus normalization of Pyongyang's foreign relations to take place, it also is arguably necessary

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<sup>3</sup> Open Source Center (OSC), *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Central Eurasia*, (Henceforth *FBIS SOV*); Open Source Analysis, "Analysis: Roh Indicates Economic Cooperation, Not Nuclear Issue Focus of Summit," *FBIS SOV*, August 14, 2007; Sandip Kumar Mishra, "Peace Treaty & Denuclearization," *The Korea Times*, October 31, 2007, [www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/new/opinion/2007/11/197\\_12865](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/new/opinion/2007/11/197_12865).

<sup>4</sup> OSC Analysis, "Analysis: North Korea looking to Bolster South Korean Engagement Policy," *FBIS SOV*, August 8, 2007; Kim Hyun, "N. Korea Eyes Better Relations with US Through Inter-Korean Summit: Experts," Seoul, *Yonhap* in English, August 8, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, August 8, 2007.

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that the five other parties to the six-party accords remain unified or at least in harmony. It does appear that South Korea is more eager, perhaps for reasons connected with gaining an advantage in the 2007 elections, than Washington for moving forward on the peace treaty whereas the Bush administration wants to ensure denuclearization first.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless the Administration supports a four-party peace treaty to end the Korean War including China, South Korea, North Korea, and the United States based on progress towards denuclearization. It also is thinking seriously about converting the six-party working groups into a more enduring structure of multilateral security in Northeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> In other words there should be no insuperable obstacle to continuing harmony among the other five parties to the existing agreements.

### **Engaging North Korea**

There are many ways to view these processes and realities. At its most basic level this six-party process is an attempt to terminate, or at least reverse the DPRK's nuclear weapons program. Thus Pyongyang must renounce its nuclear program, open the country up to a verification regime, and rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and IAEA inspection regime. But for that to happen or while it happens the February and October accords stipulate that North Korea must obtain alternative forms of energy in the form of 1,000,000 tons of heavy oil of which 50,000 tons have already been sent. However, most importantly, the other five parties to the talks must give it a binding security guarantee.

In other words, they must engage North Korea substantively and integrate that engagement into their larger designs for Northeast Asia's

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<sup>5</sup> Mishra.

<sup>6</sup> "Two Koreas, China Should Sign Korean Peace Treaty: US," [www.korea.net](http://www.korea.net), October 24, 2007.

security order. As noted above, signs of this engagement towards a reformed regional security order have already begun to appear. But North Korea must also enter into a genuine engagement with all of them as well. In other words, for these accords to work a reciprocal and mutual process of sustained engagement must take place beyond the meetings of six diplomats over the issues involved in the February accords.<sup>7</sup> Only then can these agreements truly open the door to a potential peace regime as stipulated in the February accords. Failing that accomplishment the renovated six-party process could at least begin constructing a new regional order in Northeast Asia based on sustained multilateral engagement among the parties.

Therefore these talks are ultimately not just about denuclearization but also about crafting that new and hopefully more pacific regional order. Many observers share the view that, “regardless of the outcome, the near continuous consultations that arose from the six-party process lead to the natural conclusion that the time is right for formal regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.”<sup>8</sup> In building this order North Korea insists, as it has essentially done all along, that this engagement, guarantee, and even energy supplies, are crucial because they signify America’s willingness to renounce its “hostile” policy and engage with it. According to its spokesmen this has been and remains its main goal.<sup>9</sup> Energy shipments, though important, necessary, and welcome, are only valuable insofar as they display that willingness to engage the DPRK and reverse previous policies.<sup>10</sup>

Russia, China, and South Korea, all of whom already have a sustained relationship with the DPRK, and have long argued for security

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<sup>7</sup>Grossman.

<sup>8</sup>Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), p. x.

<sup>9</sup>“Kim on Six-Party Talks,” *Northeast Asian Peace and Security Network (NAPSNET)*, July 23, 2007.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

guarantees to the DPRK, have substantially increased their economic and political ties to North Korea, and are competing to offer it energy alternatives to its nuclear program.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, their individual engagements actually comprise a competition for influence and access in North Korea. That larger economic and political rivalry can be seen as just another chapter in the unending efforts of major Asian powers and now the ROK to develop a durable relationship with North Korea to influence its direction and policies.<sup>12</sup> Each of these governments has come to understand, each in its own way that engaging Pyongyang is essential to the pursuit of its larger interests in the region.<sup>13</sup> Possibly Washington has also now seen the necessity of this approach. Hence once again the maneuverings of the key Northeast Asian actors center on Korea.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the record of the six-party talks clearly shows not just the necessity of such engagement but also that North Korea can compel such engagement. Consequently a state's failure to take that step leads to serious setbacks for its policies. China has known this for years even as it moved to recognize South Korea so it has transformed its stake in North Korea from an ideological one to one based on comprehensive security, i.e., military, political and economic factors. South Korea's sunshine policy is based on a similar assessment. Similarly Russia already understood in 2000 as President Putin began to shape his

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel S. Kim, *The Two Koreas and the Great Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Samuel S. Kim, *Demystifying North Korea: North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post Cold-War World* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2007); Vasily Mikheyev, "Russian Strategic Thinking toward North and South Korea"; Gilbert Rozman, "Russian Strategic Thinking on Asian Regionalism," Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo and Joseph P. Ferguson (eds.), *Russian Strategic Thought Toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 187-204 and 229-251 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*; For historical and contemporary examples, see Charles S. Armstrong, Gilbert Rozman, Samuel S. Kim, and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2006).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*; Kim, *ops citis*; Mikheyev, pp. 187-204; Rozman, pp. 235-251.

<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, Rozman, Kim, and Kotkin (eds.).

foreign policies, that it could only get somewhere in Northeast Asia by engaging North Korea. Only because Russia took this step in 2000 can it even take part in the talks since only North Korea insisted on its presence there.<sup>15</sup> In analogous fashion, Japan, which has been the least willing and able of the parties to engage North Korea effectively, now faces isolation within the six-party structure.<sup>16</sup> It is in this context that we must view recent events in these talks.

## US Miscalculations

In this context we can see that until the February 13 agreement that Washington was paying a severe price for its refusal to engage North Korea seriously.<sup>17</sup> Washington pays because its refusal to engage Pyongyang has led it to become a nuclear power with more weapons than when the talks started. Meanwhile Washington has incurred many different and significant kinds of costs. Indeed, the record of the six-party talks confirms that Washington's coercive policy could not form a coalition to bring pressure on the DPRK. Rarely, if ever, did it achieve a situation where the parties could reach a consensus that "the failure of enhanced diplomacy should be demonstrably attributable to Pyongyang" as a condition for forming that coalition.<sup>18</sup>

North Korea's nuclear test of October 9, 2006 thus represented

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick, "Russia in Inter-Korean Relations," Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *Inter-Korean Relations: Problems and Prospects* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 117-138; Seung Ham-Yang, Woonsang Kim, and Yongho Kim, "Russo-North Korean Relations in the 2000s," *Asian Survey*, XLIX, No. 6 (November-December 2004), pp. 794-814.

<sup>16</sup> OSC Report, "Japan Fears Six-Party Talks Isolation Following Summit Announcement," *FBIS SOV*, August 9, 2007; "Abductions Issue Threatens to Marginalize Japan," *Jane's Foreign Report*, August 23, 2007, [www.4janes.com/subscribe/frp/doc](http://www.4janes.com/subscribe/frp/doc).

<sup>17</sup> Pritchard, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Sung-han, "(Global Outlook) North Korean Nukes and Counterfeiting," Seoul, *The Korea Herald Internet Version*, in English, February 3, 2006, *FBIS SOV*, February 3, 2006.

a major defeat for US foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> First, Pyongyang called Washington's bluff, i.e., that America can put enough pressure on North Korea - by imposing sanctions on the DPRK's foreign banking after the six-parties' preliminary agreement in September, 2005 and by placing human rights on the negotiating agenda - so that it will collapse, obviating the need for detailed engagement with Pyongyang over proliferation. Even though the sanctions hurt North Korea very much "and got its attention"; the test showed Pyongyang's continuing self-confidence about the future.<sup>20</sup> Analyses based on Pyongyang's desperation or imminent collapse are unlikely to be based on a sound foundation or to achieve any tangible or positive results, especially as so many of its partners have a growing interest in its stability.<sup>21</sup>

Second, this test virtually removed imposed regime change from consideration. As we shall see below, not only Washington entertained thought of North Korea's collapse. At times, Russia and China did so too, mainly because of their fear over what Washington might do or drive North Korea to do with unpredictable consequences. The test also underscored North Korea's significant distrust of Chinese policy and desire to emancipate itself from Chinese tutelage.<sup>22</sup> The February 13

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<sup>19</sup> Thus Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill stated that it was North Korea that had failed to see its future, when it would be more accurate to say that it failed to see its future as does Washington and as Washington wanted it to see that future and reacted accordingly, *National Public Radio*, All Things Considered, October 9, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> "White House Considers Broader North Korea Approach," *NTI Global Newswire*, www.nti.org, May 18, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Scobell, "North Korea's Strategic Intentions," *Challenges Posed by the DPRK for the Alliance and the Region* (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute, 2005), p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Liu Ming, "China's Role in the Course of North Korea's Transition," Ahn Choong-yong, Nicholas Eberstadt, and Lee Young-sun (eds.), *A New International Engagement Framework for North Korea?: Contending Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2004), pp. 338-398; Jaeho Hwang, "Measuring China's Influence Over North Korea," *Issues & Studies*, XLVII, No. 2 (June 2006), pp. 208-210; Selig Harrison, "North Korea From the Inside Out," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, p. C1, quoted in Samuel S. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy in the Era of Reform," David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese*



accord confirmed this removal of regime change from the negotiations by requiring the parties to engage with Pyongyang on a comprehensive and detailed agenda.

Third, by testing nuclear weapons North Korea declared its independence from the Nonproliferation Treaty regime and from all the other parties to the talks. It will now be much more difficult for any foreign states to influence its foreign and defense policies by means other than sustained economic and political engagement although North Korea may feel more secure in its approach to negotiation. Even if Pyongyang renounces plutonium completely, it probably has, as US officials have long believed, a uranium program, and it has both the stock and know-how to weaponize its nuclear energy and deliver missiles with nuclear warheads.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the DPRK's proliferation, like preceding other cases, proclaims that it alone will control its destiny. Chinese and/or Russian leverage upon it, which was never as great as Washington imagined, has evidently declined still further. And there are abundant signs that Pyongyang's ties to both Beijing and Moscow have cooled considerably.<sup>24</sup> That trend would also explain these states' heightened interest in supplying it with energy since February 2007 in order to regain some influence there.

Fourth, by testing North Korea has evidently ensured its survival, not just against military threats, but also against internal regime failure.

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*Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 403; Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in Arms to Allies at Arm's Length* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004), *passim*; Patrick M. Morgan, "US Extended Deterrence in East Asia," Tong Whan Park (ed.), *The US and the Two Koreas: A New Triangle* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Pritchard, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> OSC Analysis, "DPRK Media Portray Signs of Cooling Relations with Moscow," *FBIS SOV*, July 11, 2007; OSC Feature, "Analysis: China-DPRK: Media Diverge on Foreign Minister Yang's Visit," *FBIS SOV*, July 9, 2007; OSC Feature, "Analysis: DPRK Signals Continued Irritation with China," *FBIS SOV*, August 1, 2007.

This is not just because of the internal public and elite acclaim that might have accrued to Kim Jong Il for making the DPRK a nuclear power. For it also is now the case that the greatest potential threat to regional security on the Korean peninsula may no longer be inter-Korean war, but the possibility of a failed North Korean state with inadequately controlled nuclear weapons. Every one of Pyongyang's interlocutors now has a vested interest in preventing that state failure and in helping it to survive and gain solid control over those weapons. And this interest in North Korea's survival is above and beyond the fact that invasion is all but ruled out due to this test.

In this sense the test also marks a major step away as well from foreigners' concern that the regime might collapse and bring about a situation forcing them to take action. Thus,

in conversations with JIR (Janes's Intelligence Review) in 2003, Russian officials were candid about the scope for a "Ceausescu scenario" if conditions worsened in North Korea and Kim Jong-Il lost control over some of the security forces.<sup>25</sup>

Russian officials also showed their concern about a North Korean collapse by holding maneuvers with Japan and South Korea on a refugee scenario in 2003, and with China under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2005 for a scenario that probably was connected to the possibility of either an invasion of the North in response to US threats or the DPRK's state failure.<sup>26</sup> But they also made veiled statements in 2004 indicating their concern for the future of the DPRK's regime.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Jasper Becker claims that China made

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Moscow Reforms Its Links With Pyongyang," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February, 2004, <http://www.4janes.com/subscribe/jir/doc>.

<sup>26</sup> Sergei Blagov, "War Games Or Word Games?" *Asia Times Online*, August 26, 2005, [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com).

<sup>27</sup> See the warnings uttered by Russia's chief negotiator in early 2004 Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr' Losyukov, Moscow, *Interfax*, in English, February 29, 2004, *FBIS SOV*, February 29, 2004; Moscow, *ITAR-TASS*, in Russian, February 29, 2004, *FBIS SOV*, February 29, 2004.

contingency plans for a possible invasion of North Korea in 2003 when it worried about a US strike against the DPRK's nuclear facilities with the aim of installing a pro-Chinese regime that would forsake nuclearization. But he reported that China's military chiefs said this could not be done.<sup>28</sup> At the same time China's leaders made it clear that they would not accept a unilateral American solution to North Korea's issues. At least three American experts on China also told the author during the 2001-06 period that they strongly felt, based on their contacts with Chinese analysts and officials, that China would not let an American unilateral military operation against North Korea take place with impunity.

Fifth, these tests clearly forced Washington to reverse its course and engage Pyongyang seriously, evidently the DPRK's main goal. Before this test, America did not show the urgency it displayed towards Iraq even though the DPRK was widely believed to have actual nuclear weapons, missiles with which to weaponize them, and has sold missiles to rogue states, behavior and policy that far outstrips even the most pessimistic Iraqi scenarios in 2002-03.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Washington would not give Pyongyang any "favors to restart the negotiations, thus condemning the talks to stalemate."<sup>30</sup>

America's Korean policy looked to its interlocutors except Japan like an attempt to use nonproliferation negotiations to impose externally directed regime change upon the DPRK.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising that the other parties, e.g., Russia publicly worried about an American unilateral

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<sup>28</sup> "The Nightmare Comes to Pass," *The Economist*, October 14, 2006, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Graham Allison, "North Korean Nuclear Challenge: Bush Administration Failure; China's Opportunity," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVIII, No. 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 7-10.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Eckert, US Envoy Rules out "Favors to Get North Korea Talking," *Reuters*, May 3, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "The Time of Reckoning: US Vital Interests on the Korean Peninsula and the Escalation of the North Korean Nuclear Test," *NAPSNET*, October 11, 2006.

effort to undertake actions against North Korea that could push it into war or that would actually be an invasion.<sup>32</sup> America's disinclination to engage North Korea seriously persisted well into 2006. And due to that disinclination America lost ground in Asia among the other five parties and other Asian states who lost confidence in the soundness of American policy approaches to Asia.<sup>33</sup>

For example, in mid-2006 Washington's frustration with the stalemate at the six-party format led it to propose a different multilateral negotiating forum excluding but pressuring North Korea to cease its nuclear program. Not surprisingly, this proposal failed as Moscow and Beijing promptly rebuffed it.<sup>34</sup> Such actions and Washington's refusal to engage North Korea bilaterally within the six-party format despite Russian, Chinese, and South Korean urgings probably reinforced those states' widespread and longheld suspicion as well as the DPRK's apprehensions that America really wanted coerced regime change in the guise of nonproliferation talks and would not negotiate seriously about ending the nuclear threat.<sup>35</sup> This point leads to the sixth cost incurred by Washington as a result of its unwillingness to engage Pyongyang directly. As observers have noted in 2006,

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<sup>32</sup> *Interfax*, in English, February 29, 2004, *FBIS SOV*, February 29, 2004; Moscow, *ITAR-TASS*, in Russian, February 29, 2004, *FBIS SOV*, February 29, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Carlin, "Talk to Me Later," Phillip W. Yun and Gi-Wook Shin (eds.), *North Korea: 2005 and Beyond* (Palo Alto, California: Walter Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, 2006), pp. 24-35.

<sup>34</sup> Glenn Kessler, "With N. Korea Talks Stalled, US Tries New Approach," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2006, p. A13; Sue Fleming, "China and Russia Sun Asia Security Talks," *Reuters*, September 21, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Pyongyang, *KCNA* in English, February 10, 2005, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service East Asia* (Henceforth *FBIS EAS*), February 10, 2005; "Seoul Tells US of Concern over Envoy's Remarks," *Chosun Ilbo*, December 15, 2005; Andrew Salmon, "Tougher US Line With Pyongyang Worries South," *Washington Times*, December 10, 2005, p. 6; "US, N.K. Must Solve Issues Bilaterally: Seoul," *Digital Chosun Ilbo*, December 11, 2005, <http://english.chosun.com/W21data/html/news/200512/200512050004.html>.

to date, the six-party process has been seen primarily as a vehicle for enhanced negotiation, or, alternatively, for enhanced coercion (in those rare instances when the US has been able to put together a five versus one stand on a particular issue, such as the warning to Pyongyang not to conduct a nuclear test). But despite its limitations and despite the Bush administration's judgment that North Korea is unlikely to negotiate away its nuclear weapons, the six-party framework may still have an important role to play as a mechanism for crisis management, in addition to being (or until such time as circumstances permit it to be) a vehicle for multi-party negotiations.<sup>36</sup>

North Korea's missile and nuclear talks prevented further American use of the six-party talks as a mechanism to avoid bilateral dialogue with North Korea or to coerce it in a five to one confrontation. Instead it has been forced to accept the conversion of this forum into a genuine negotiation process that includes the bilateral dialogue with the DPRK and opens the way to what could be interpreted as a weakening of its alliance structure in Asia, namely a move toward genuinely multilateral security regulation in Northeast Asia. This is because direct bilateralism, Pyongyang's preference and the Bush administration's anathema, is now only possible within the larger multilateral framework. Because Washington outsourced leadership of that framework to China and drove Seoul to carry on its own "Nordpolitik," Washington can no longer control the pace or agenda of a Korean peace process even though both Korean states want its troops to remain there as guard against Chinese hegemonism in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond that failure the United States paid a heavy regional price for its failure to engage North Korea seriously. By 2006, South Korean newspapers were charging that the US-ROK relationship hung by a thread and South Korean public opinion had become increasingly anti-American, as is much of elite opinion in the government.<sup>38</sup> Washington

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<sup>36</sup> Scott Snyder, Ralph A. Cossa, and Brad Glosserman, "Whither the Six-Party Talks?" *PACNET Newsletter*, No. 22, May 18, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Carlin, pp. 24-35.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Sutter, "The Rise of China and South Korea," *Joint US-Korea Academic*

seemed unwilling or unable to grasp that its continuing refusal to engage with Pyongyang directly only drove Seoul closer to Beijing (much against its will) and strengthened its search for a purely bilateral channel to Pyongyang both as a form of resistance of American policy and in a search for some kind of leverage upon the DPRK.<sup>39</sup> A US policy threatening imposed regime change cannot generate support in South Korea whose main concern is regional stability on the peninsula.<sup>40</sup> Clearly this is also true for Russia and China.

Similarly America's position in the talks only reinforced the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership in Northeast Asia that is founded upon shared resistance to US policy.<sup>41</sup> Whereas China first opposed Russia's inclusion in the six-party talks, today both states share an identical position advocating an end to sanctions, US and multilateral security guarantees to North Korea, and compensation in the form of energy deliveries to it, in return for non-proliferation and a return to the NPT and its accompanying inspection regime. One South Korean columnist, Kim Yo'ng Hu'i, wrote in 2005 that,

China and Russia are reviving their past strategic partnership to face their strongest rival, the United States. A structure of strategic competition and confrontation between the United States and India on the one side,

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*Studies: The Newly Emerging Asian Order and the Korean Peninsula*, symposium sponsored by the College of William and Mary, Korea Economic Institute, and Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, August 25-27, 2004, XV (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute, 2005); see also the Essays in *The Changing Korean Peninsula and the Future of East Asia*, Panel 1, Brookings Institution Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Seoul, December 1, 2005, Part II, The Future of the ROK-US Alliance.

<sup>39</sup> Jung Sung-ki, "Weakening South Korea-US Alliance Can Benefit China," *The Korea Times*, May 10, 2006, <http://times.hankooki.com/1page/nation/200605>; *Yonhap* in English, February 6, 2006, *FBIS EAS*, February 6, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea Proposes Meeting With North Korea," *New York Times*, May 11, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Scobell, p. 88; David Kerr, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and US Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia," *International Studies Quarterly*, XXXIX, No. 3 (September 2005), pp. 411-437.

and Russia and China on the other is unfolding in the eastern half of the Eurasian continent including the Korean peninsula. Such a situation will definitely bring a huge wave of shock to the Korean peninsula, directly dealing with the strategic flexibility of US forces in Korea. If China and Russia train their military forces together in the sea off the coast of China's Liaodong Peninsula, it will also have an effect on the 21<sup>st</sup> century strategic plan of Korea.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly Russo-Chinese collaboration at the UN Security Council demonstrates an identity of policies and goals here.<sup>43</sup> This partnership clearly owes much to US policy which both states regard as high-handed and overly unilateral and belligerent and seriously obstructs Washington's efforts to impose its preferences upon North Korea.<sup>44</sup> Yet, given the earlier and continuing divisions between Russia and China and their historic rivalry for influence in Pyongyang, this partnership was hardly a foreordained outcome. Rather it was the result of American policy but it also represents what several eminent experts regard as the greatest geopolitical threat that America could face.<sup>45</sup>

A third cost to Washington is that such an alliance strikes at the heart of Seoul's ambition to play a hub role in Northeast Asia, a role that it can only play if Washington engages North Korea. Any sign of return to something resembling the Cold War's bipolarity is a major setback to South Korean policy and to regional stability in general.<sup>46</sup>

American persistence in this misconceived approach to circumvent the need to negotiate with North Korea continued up to these tests. An

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<sup>42</sup> Kim Yo'ng Hu'i, "The Relevance of Central Asia," *JoongAng Ilbo Internet Version* in English, July 11, 2005, *FBIS SOV*, July 11, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Moscow, *Interfax* in English, May 25, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, May 25, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Kerr, pp. 411-437; Constantine C. Menges, *China: The Gathering Threat* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Current Publishers), 2005.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*; Robert Jervis, "US Grand Strategy: Mission Impossible," *Naval War College Review* (Summer 1998), pp. 22-36; Richard K. Betts, "Power, Prospects, and Priorities: Choices for Strategic Change," *Naval War College Review* (Winter 1997), pp. 9-22; John C. Gannon, "Intelligence Challenges Through 2015," [http://odci.gov/cia/publicaffairs/speeches/gannon\\_speech\\_05022000.html](http://odci.gov/cia/publicaffairs/speeches/gannon_speech_05022000.html).

<sup>46</sup> Pritchard, pp. 79-80.

effort inspired by hawkish elements of the administration to reinterpret the earlier agreement of September 19, 2005 concerning the provision at an appropriate time of a light water reactor to North Korea as meaning that the DPRK would have to first surrender and stop its nuclear programs before Washington would even *consider* discussing provision of such a reactor similarly misfired.<sup>47</sup> This seemed to return to the position perceived by North Korea since the start of the negotiations in 2003.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly America's negotiating posture for the six-party non-proliferation talks also then added to the agenda human rights and North Korean economic crimes as well as the previous sessions' non-proliferation agenda.<sup>49</sup> This posture ensured stalemate and certainly contributed to the DPRK's nuclear test and refusal to rejoin the negotiations.

This reformulation of the US negotiating posture led to Sino-Russo-ROK agreement concerning the points at issue in the non-proliferation agenda, a Sino-ROK proposal that became the basis for the 2005 agreement, and ultimately a subsequent Sino-ROK proposal to restart the talks.<sup>50</sup> These actions suggest that Washington's demand of total surrender to its agenda before considering the DPRK's issues and its addition of extraneous, if not irrelevant, issues to the negotiating agenda undermined the other parties' confidence in American policy and contributed to their irritation with and obstruction of it. Not only does this apply to Russia and China but the gaps between Washington and Seoul are also quite instructive in this regard.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pritchard, pp. 10-15; Sigal.

<sup>48</sup> "DPRK Foreign Ministry on Six-Way Talks," *KCNA*, August 30, 2003, cited in Scobell, p. 88.

<sup>49</sup> Seoul, *Ohmynews Website* in English, February 15, 2006, *FBIS EAS*, February 15, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> "US-North Korea Relations Worry China, South Korea," *SABC News*, May 6, 2005, [www.sabcnews.com/world/asia/pacific/0,2172,103705,00.html](http://www.sabcnews.com/world/asia/pacific/0,2172,103705,00.html).

<sup>51</sup> Brendan Howe, "Rationality and Intervention in an Anarchic Society," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVII, No. 1 (Spring 2006), pp. 183-184; Seung-Ho



They see Washington as ignoring their vital regional aims and tempting fate. America's apparently self-centered pursuit of its own global interests at the expense of their vital regional interests gave rise to stalemate, if not failure because it gave other states no incentive to build a consensus on those points of non-proliferation with which they agree with Washington. Hence this strategy disregarded elementary lessons of the earlier successful negotiations a decade ago.<sup>52</sup> Thus, as we have seen above, American unilateralism also forced these regimes to consider acting unilaterally or even preemptively to defend their own interests. The ROK's sunshine policy is a case in point. But so too are the aforementioned but less well known Russian and Chinese policy deliberations.

When allies, like South Korea, have choices (due to its growing economic and political ties to Beijing and Moscow), and those other choices seem to provide better alternatives to resolving those allies' interests, they will then gravitate to those other alternatives. Then the US-ROK alliance, notwithstanding official proclamations to the contrary, will surely erode absent corrective action soon.

An alliance in which one partner treats his own strategic interests as the sole practical issue confers no additional security on its members. For it provides no obligation beyond what considerations of national interest would have impelled in any event.<sup>53</sup>

Finally Washington's efforts to outsource the problem of persuading North Korea to negotiate seriously to China had serious policy consequences. Russian observers, for example, believed that Washington's

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Joo, "South Korea-US Relations in Turbulent Waters," *Pacific Focus*, XX, No. 1 (Spring 2006), pp. 59-103.

<sup>52</sup> Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Galluci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), pp. 398-408.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 89.

objective was to induce China to subordinate its Asia policy to an American agenda and initiatives, not deal with North Korea. That outcome of Sino-American cooperation is obviously a threat to Russia whose greatest fear is marginalization in East Asia.<sup>54</sup> Second, depending upon China to carry out a policy in the American interest while Washington could not or would not do so itself entailed compensations for China that probably are not in America's interest and led observers to believe that China "was eating our lunch" in East Asia.<sup>55</sup> As Christoph Bluth noted,

rather than adapt to the circumstances, the Bush administration stuck to its position and thus let the situation drift. In other words, compellence failed quite spectacularly simply because the United States lacked effective means to implement it. The result was the worst of all possible worlds because North Korea acquired a more convincing nuclear capability, while at the same time continuing to receive economic support from China and South Korea and the prospects of exerting any real pressure on the DPRK continued to diminish. Moreover, the United States became dependent upon China for the success of its policy, to such an extent that spillover into other areas became noticeable.<sup>56</sup>

Thus Pyongyang's missile and nuclear tests struck directly and successfully at America's failed policies. Washington achieved neither non-proliferation nor regime change. Consequently Washington, like the other four parties, is now committed to engaging Pyongyang, indeed it is discussing selling energy and removing it from the State Department's list of terrorist sponsoring states.<sup>57</sup> But this new-found engagement

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<sup>54</sup> Tokyo, *Kyodo*, in English, January 27, 2003, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Central Eurasia* (Henceforth *FBIS SOV*), January 27, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> David Shambaugh, "Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamism," Brookings Institution, January 12, 2006, [www.brooking.edu/comm/events/20060112.htm](http://www.brooking.edu/comm/events/20060112.htm).

<sup>56</sup> Christoph Bluth, "Between a Rock and an Incomprehensible Place: The United States and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, XVII, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 107-108.

<sup>57</sup> "US on Removal of DPRK from Terror List," *NAPSNET*, August 21, 2007; "US, North Korea Move Denuclearization Forward," *NTI Global Newswire*, August

now opens up the possibility of a new phase in the international rivalry of the concerned parties to influence both North and South Korea and for both Koreas to influence each other as all six states begin to define a new international order on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. This phase revolves around two questions, whether or not North Korea can truly engage with any or all of these states and how that engagement will affect it; and second, the future course of the rivalry among the other five parties to influence North Korea and what that rivalry will mean for the future of a regional order.

### **North Korea's Dilemmas of Engagement**

Just as the February 13 accords commit everyone to sustained engagement with Pyongyang, they commit North Korea to the same process. Indeed, some observers argue that the October agreements based on the February accord suggest that North Korea is hinting to America that it can be useful to it in a balance of power game vis-à-vis China, a relationship that would require much greater bilateral engagement, trust, intimacy, and collaboration than has ever been the case.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the recent accelerating trend of positive steps, the success of that engagement cannot now be reckoned a foregone conclusion even if North Korea professes to want it. This is not just because Washington and Pyongyang may have opposing definitions of what successful engagement entails or even if they have converging definitions. More important is the fact that following through on this process will impose considerable and quite unforeseeable changes upon the North Korean regime that it may not be able or willing to sustain or accept. Some of this may simply be a question of its capacity to conduct multiple

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14, 2007, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org); "Latest North Korea Talks conclude in Moscow," *NTI Global Newswire*, August 21, 2007, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org).

<sup>58</sup>Grossman.

parallel, complex, multilateral negotiations at the same time. At least some analysts have doubts about its capacity to do so.<sup>59</sup>

For example, if it wants to receive large amounts of Russian energy, which makes considerable sense since Russia is the only net exporter of energy among the six, it must devise a mechanism for paying Russia, especially once the other parties' subsidies disappear. This also entails negotiating an end to the DPRK's debts to Russia. Moscow wants to terminate those debts but it insists on fulfillment of all the February accords as a precondition for doing so.<sup>60</sup> As yet no agreement on these debts has been reached, but any substantial long-term economic engagement with Russia and with any or all of the other partners to the talks will force North Korea to undergo economic if not political reform. Moscow, Beijing, and Seoul, not to mention Tokyo, and Washington, all want liberalizing and marketizing reforms, but can North Korea go that route. Even if one argues that reforms since 2002 are irreversible and are making a difference in the nature of the regime and society, it also seems that those reforms have yet to reach the threshold of China's early reforms in 1978, let alone Russian reforms.<sup>61</sup>

The nature of any domestic reform process (or of its absence) in the DPRK will have a profound influence as well on the nature of the other five parties' interaction with North Korea. Pyongyang may well be facing the same dilemma of Lampedusa's prince in his novel *The Leopard*, namely "in order for everything to remain the same everything has to change." Foreign, and particularly American engagement with North Korea, though, may be necessary to jumpstart or at least galvanize the process of the DPRK's reciprocal engagement with other powers and to prevent it from falling into what Samuel Kim calls a bunker

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<sup>59</sup> Carlin, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> *NAPSNET*, November 30, 2006; Moscow, *RIA Novosti*, in Russian, May 14, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, May 14, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Andrei Lankov, "The Natural Death of North Korean Stalinism," *Asia Policy*, National Bureau of Research Asia, No. 1, 2007, pp. 95-122.

mentality.<sup>62</sup> Steps under consideration like removing North Korea from the US State Department terror list, progress on disabling the North Korean nuclear weapons program, and serious discussion on normalization of relations could give a substantial boost to those factions inside North Korea who wish to emphasize economic reform over tough confrontation.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these potential reservations there is much evidence that North Korea seeks a wider engagement with the world and in particular with Washington. For example, North Korea, for the first time, has published a defense report or statement that it has disseminated to the members of the ASEAN regional forum. Chinese expert Lu Dunqiu interprets this as an attempt to display greater transparency and elicit more international cooperation than previously was the case.<sup>64</sup>

At the same time, much evidence suggests that North Korea has been seeking to engage America since the end of the Cold War. The problem has been that it does not know how to do so other than by trying to intimidate and browbeat Washington into engagement through its nuclear weapons while the nature of its political process has precluded an easy engagement. Then the vagaries of American politics, its difficulties in dealing with North Korea, Congressional pressure from conservative Republicans, and the antipathy of key elements of the G. W. Bush administration have all contributed to the impasse that may now slowly be lifting.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, as recent North Korean statements

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<sup>62</sup> Kim, *Demystifying North Korea*, p. 62.

<sup>63</sup> "US on Removal of DPRK from Terror List"; "US, North Korea Move Denuclearization Forward"; "Latest North Korea Talks conclude in Moscow."

<sup>64</sup> Lu Dunqiu, "North Korea Has Gained Clear Understanding of Situation," Beijing, *Qingnian Cankao Internet Version*, in Chinese, May 25, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, May 26, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Pritchard; Carlin, pp. 22-35; C. Kenneth Quinones, "Dualism in the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Asian Perspective*, XXVII, No. 1, 2003, pp. 197-224; Karin Lee and Adam Miles, "North Korea on Capitol Hill," *Asian Perspective*, XXVIII, No. 4, 2004, pp. 185-207; Robert M. Hathaway and Jordan Tama, "The US Congress and North Korea During the Clinton Years," *Asian Survey*, XLIV, No. 5

indicate, the DPRK places a priority on normalization of relations with Washington and an ensuing and continuing engagement with it.<sup>66</sup>

As part of this attempt to engage one can discern, albeit admittedly within a torrent of invective and missed opportunities, some quite astonishing indicators of North Korea's consistent intentions. Kim Jong Il and more recently unidentified North Korean personalities have told both the ROK and eminent Americans like Henry Kissinger that it wants US forces to stay in Korea after a peace treaty, clearly to prevent Chinese suzerainty and hegemony.<sup>67</sup> Second, Kim Jong Il told Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 2000 that,

in the 1970s, Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, was able to conclude that China faced no external security threat and could accordingly refocus its resources on economic development. With the appropriate security assurances, Mr. Kim said, he would be able to convince his military that the US was no longer a threat and then be in a similar position to refocus his country's resources.<sup>68</sup>

This statement suggests that North Korea's decision to build the bomb, though one rooted in the 1950s and 1960s, owes much to an abiding perception of threat that was clearly reinforced by the Soviet collapse, the subsequent Russian abandonment of North Korea, and then China's recognition of South Korea in the 1990s. And if taken in the context of North Korea's politics, especially recent efforts at

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(September-October 2004), pp. 711-733; opening statement of Henry J. Hyde before the full committee hearing of the House Committee on International Relations, "Six-Party Talks and the North Korean Nuclear Issue," October 6, 2005; Max Boot, "This Deal is No Bargain," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2005 at [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com); Nicholas Eberstadt, "A Skeptical View," *Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2006, p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> "Kim on Six-Party Talks."

<sup>67</sup> Kim Jong Il said this to South Korean President Kim Dae Jung at the 2000 summit, on the opening to Kissinger, see Charles K. Armstrong, "North Korea Takes on the World," *Current History*, September, 2007, p. 267.

<sup>68</sup> Kim, *Demystifying North Korea*, p. 62, citing Charles Pritchard, "A Guarantee to Bring Kim Into Line," *Financial Times*, October 10, 2003.

economic reform, it also suggests a conflict in North Korea between factions wishing to prioritize defense and those wishing to prioritize economic reform. It also may well be the case that in the conditions of the 1990s when South Korea's economic superiority became plainly visible and North Korea was driven to its knees by economic crisis amidst a succession struggle that the nuclear weapons program appeared attractive not just because it compelled the Clinton administration to engage Pyongyang but also because it may have seemed like a cheaper expedient to retain superior local military capability while allowing Kim Jong Il to secure the support of the crucial military constituency and promote his "military-first" program. Since then as his power stabilized and Pyongyang's condition eased somewhat economic reform became both feasible and necessary, indeed many viewed the 2002 reforms as an adaptation to necessity imposed from below not a free policy choice from above.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless there is a grudging quality to the acceptance of those reforms as the military-first program was formally announced only a year later, no doubt in part due to the downturn in relations with Washington.<sup>70</sup>

## Pyongyang's Choices

Today it seems clear that the broad options facing Pyongyang as it has now formally committed to complex multilateral engagement with the parties and to states beyond as in the ARF, boil down to two fundamental policy choices, *relative* economic liberalization or continuing quasi-military diplomatic confrontation based on the military-first policy.<sup>71</sup> Adding to the significance of the choice are the many rumors

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<sup>69</sup> William B. Brown, "North Korea: How to Reform a Broken Economy," in Yun and Shin (eds.), pp. 55-78.

<sup>70</sup> Armstrong, p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> Carlin, pp. 22-35; Brown, pp. 55-79; Haksoon Paik, "North Korea Today: Politics

about a succession to Kim Jong Il and the alleged precariousness of his health. Russian experts, at least, believe that should he die this would be a negative and destabilizing factor in the new process as Kim is a force for stability.<sup>72</sup> They have also pointed to signs of changes in the DPRK's military command structure that concentrate power in the national defense committee that Kim Jong Il heads and that preparations are underway for a time when he no longer will be able to lead this organization and insure a smooth transfer of power to his as yet unnamed successor.<sup>73</sup>

In this context foreign analysts have identified the existence of factions or stakeholders in the missile development program as juxtaposed to those who benefit from and advocate the relative economic liberalization program. Furthermore, it is clear that if one side prevails in policy making, the "societal position and influence" of the other will be reduced.<sup>74</sup> This research also shows rather conclusively that North Korean politics are no longer driven as much by ideology as by bureaucratic politics and that ideology is an ebbing if not spent force.<sup>75</sup>

Under the circumstances North Korea's politics are moving away from the "black box" model towards something more recognizable to political scientists and foreign policy analysts and thus more comparable to other systems. If we consider the *Juche* ideology that has governed North Korea for much of its life as a kind of civil religion we can see coming into being, if not already existing, a disparity if not a cleavage

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Overloaded and Secularized," Yun and Shin (eds.), pp. 37-55.

<sup>72</sup> Moscow, *Interfax*, in English, May 28, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, May 28, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Moscow, *Kommersant.com* in English, May 23, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, May 23, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel A. Pinkston, "Domestic Politics and Stakeholders in the North Korean Missile Development Program," *The Nonproliferation Review*, IX, No. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 1-15; Patrick McEachern, "Interest Groups in North Korean Politics," paper presented to the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 30-September 2, 2007.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*; see also the review of A. Z. Zhebin, *The Evolution of the Political System of the DPRK in the Conditions of Global Changes* (Moscow: Panorama Publishers, 2006); *Far Eastern Affairs*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 145-150.



between what might be called a more liberalizing internationalist coalition versus a statist, nationalist, confessional, and military coalition emerging in North Korean politics. This is a way of conceptualizing domestic and foreign policy cleavages across the spectrum of many states.<sup>76</sup> This line of analysis, based on the existence of these competing North Korean factions, and under conditions of enhanced engagement suggest the following possibilities. Under conditions of enhanced engagement from without North Korea's foreign partners, using the instruments of statecraft available in the international economic order to provide surrogates for nuclear energy normalization to reduce Pyongyang's security dilemma, and trade and investment to accelerate its economic development, could exert a significant, perhaps a decisive, influence upon its domestic "correlation of forces" in favor of liberalization and an overall reduction of regional tensions.<sup>77</sup>

### **External Stimuli for North Korean Engagement**

The substantial increase in South Korean economic engagement, added to prospects for normalization and assistance from Washington, plus Sino-Russian assistance can provide a basis for helping economic liberalizers in North Korea to reorient the country's politics towards an emphasis on economic liberalization and greater regional cooperation.<sup>78</sup> This does not mean the end of security issues in or due to North Korean policies, far from it as this process must take a long time and the issues

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<sup>76</sup> Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's End: Global and Domestic Influence on Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), especially pp. 1-117.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* especially pp. 54-61; Wohnyuk Kim, "North Korea's Economic Futures: Internal and External Dimensions," Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Brookings Institution, 2005, [www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/events/lim\\_20051102.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/events/lim_20051102.pdf).

<sup>78</sup> For examples of South Korea's quite large and growing investment in this engagement, see *Ibid.*; "S. Korea's Aid to N. Korea Reaches New Record," *NAPSNET*, December 3, 2006; Aidan Foster-Carter, "North Korea-South Korea Relations, on Track?" *Comparative Connections*, July 2007.

at stake are very complex. But such external stimulation could then enable the reformers to move forward with grater security as the main argument of the military-first faction, that the DPRK is at risk, would have been negated.

Hitherto opportunities for an economic reform to break free of the priority of supporting the military-first program have been quite limited. Thus external stimuli are needed to provide both an impetus and an opening for domestic reform.<sup>79</sup> Thus this engagement creates the only conditions that will suffice for North Korea itself to undergo a wrenching change, but to do so with some real sense of security and of prospective economic and political gains to offset demilitarization of its policies and foreign relations.

Moreover, such a series of openings to Pyongyang also fulfill conditions laid out by international analysts as being necessary for the building towards a peace regime on the Korean peninsula. Specifically,

the most important task for the negotiating parties will be to achieve basic commonality of purpose on the value of a genuine, viable peace and security regime, with the broadest possible network of constructive relationship to overcome the deep-seated mutual suspicions, concerns, and fears of the past. Particularly important is to overcome the suspicion that any such system will be one-sided, coercive, or posited on ‘regime change’ (as implied by the undertones in some US statements). This could be reaffirmed either in a formal peace treaty, or more realistically in a series of summit political declarations laying down the basic principles to guide relations among the actors. Positive evolution of the DPRK system should be encouraged and rewarded politically and diplomatically, rather than by methods of blackmail or subversion—although clearly the basic conditionality inherent in the February 13 agreement (or any successor) must be respected and enforced. Participation in goodwill by all the six parties is a prerequisite for legitimating the process.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Brown, pp. 55-79; Haksoon Paik, pp. 37-54; Lee-Dong-Hwi, “The Feb. 13 Agreement and the Prospects for Reforming and Opening the North Korean Economy,” *IFANS Policy Brief*, No. 2007-2 (June 2007).

<sup>80</sup> “Tools for Building Confidence on the Korean Peninsula,” a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, 2007, pp. 32-33.

The February 13 agreement opens the way for a renewed multilateral discussion about denuclearizing North Korea, normalizing ties with Washington and Tokyo, providing it with energy and assistance, building peace on the peninsula, and forging a new approach to Asian regionalism. But for that to happen it is not enough that the other five parties engage North Korea though this is necessary. They must go beyond that to provide the basis under which North Korea can safely engage them without undergoing an upheaval in its domestic politics or relapsing back into militarism. As North Korea is perhaps the most militarized country on the globe, the possibility of such a relapse is fraught with negative consequences especially as it now has a nuclear capability and may soon undergo a succession scenario which is always and inherently destabilizing in such systems. Yet paradoxically, and thanks to its nuclear tests, North Korea is now more secure than ever before, or should be according to its own calculations.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, those nuclear weapons cannot defend against internal threats to security and a climate of continuing militarization ironically promotes the conditions that give rise to those threats while not achieving the diplomatic breakthrough Pyongyang seems to want. Having leveraged nuclear weapons to gain a greater engagement with the world and especially the United States, it now must contemplate giving up those weapons to consolidate and extend that engagement which alone can give North Korea and its interlocutors the greater security it craves. Only by renouncing those weapons can it obtain what it has long sought, otherwise those weapons will actually be of diminishing value over time as they will not be usable in addressing the regime's crises. Foreign engagement on the basis of compliance with the February 13 accords provides a way out of this irony and trap. But this foreign engagement can only succeed in giving North Korea what it wants. Yet it too must engage with those governments to convert

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<sup>81</sup> Kim, *Demystifying North Korea*, p. 3.

those gains into a durable and legitimate status quo. Lampedusa's Prince, if not Machiavelli's undoubtedly are smiling when they consider the deeper implications of the new situation on the Korean peninsula.