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The Impact of Domestic Politics on North Korea's Foreign Policy*

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One of the most promising theoretical perspectives in the study of foreign policy is that it is heavily influenced by domestic politics. In this study, we will examine North Korea's foreign policy with respect to its domestic political situation. In particular, we will attempt to uncover the influence that domestic politics has in North Korea's foreign policy behavior, specifically in regard to weapons of mass destruction. Whether or not and to what extent domestic politics influence the nuclear issues are the primary questions that we will attempt to address in this paper. In answering these questions, we will analyze three of the most recent nuclear crises: the first nuclear crisis of 1993-1994, the missile crisis of 1998 and the second nuclear crisis of 2002-2003. The diversionary theory will be utilized as the primary theoretical framework to analyze the cases. Based on suggestions from the diversionary theory, we will test the hypothesis that North Korea conducts its foreign policy in a risky manner as a means to divert the people's attention outward when the regime is (or perceives that it is) facing difficulties in domestic politics. For that purpose, we will examine the domestic political situation in North Korea during these periods and analyze the perceptions of the Pyongyang regime in such circumstances.

Key Words: North Korea, foreign policy, domestic politics, diversionary theory, weapons of mass destruction

Introduction

While there are many different explanations to foreign policy, one of the most promising theoretical perspectives is in relation to its domestic politics. In this study, we will examine North Korea's foreign policy

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agenda with respect to its domestic political situation. In particular, we will attempt to uncover the influence that the domestic social and economic situation has on its foreign policy behavior with regard to its weapons of mass destruction and the diversionary theory. Whether or not and to what extent the domestic situation influences North Korea's foreign policy behavior are the primary questions that we will attempt to address in this paper.

North Korea's recent foreign policy behavior concerning weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has been typically characterized by brinkmanship. In 1993, North Korea stunned the world by threatening to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for the first time since the beginning of the Kim Jong-il regime. In 1998, North Korea shocked the world once more by test-firing a *Taepodong I* missile, which flew over Japan, and further threatened to launch *Taepodong II*, a missile that is believed to have the capacity to reach the West Coast of the U.S. When the Bush administration decided to stop supplying heavy oil, Pyongyang responded by expelling IAEA inspectors from the *Yongbyon* nuclear complex in December 2002 and completely withdrew from the NPT in January 2003, restarting the 5MW reactor and the reprocessing of spent fuel rods. Afterwards, the crisis intensified following two additional North Korean nuclear tests. Furthermore, the Six-Party Talks, in which the U.S., China, Russia, Japan and the two Koreas participate, have yet to produce any significant results.

In this study, we will examine a series of North Korea's aforementioned foreign policy behavior and use its domestic political situation as reference. The diversionary theory will be utilized as the primary theoretical framework to analyze the cases. Based on suggestions from this theory, we will test the hypotheses that if the Pyongyang regime is (or perceives that it is) facing difficulties domestically, then it will use aggressive force in foreign policy as a means to divert the people's attention outward. For that purpose, we will investigate the domestic political situation in North Korea during these periods and analyze the perceptions of the Pyongyang regime in these circumstances.

The rest of the paper will be organized as follows. In the next section, previous studies on North Korea's foreign policy will be examined

in detail. Then, a new theoretical framework that utilizes the diversionary theory of war will be presented, which will be followed by a discussion of methodology and actual analyses. Finally, we will summarize the key findings and discuss their implications. Our analyses will suggest that the domestic situation has little influence in shaping and implementing brinkmanship in North Korea's foreign policy.

Literature Review

By and large, two distinct lines of research have been conducted to link the domestic political situation with the foreign policy behavior of North Korea. One line of research mainly focuses on the North Korean government's decision-making process and its influence on foreign policy. The other line of studies investigates the impact of its political culture, which is represented by the *Juche* ideology, on foreign policy.

When it comes to the unique decision-making process, the monolithic model assumes that the North Korean foreign policy is implemented in a systematic top-down method due to its tightly controlled ideological structure.[1] This "peculiar domestic structure that governs its foreign policy making" can be characterized as "one-man dictatorship, concentration of decision-making power and lack of a dynamic process of policymaking."[2] In this model, public opinions and diverse bureaucratic organizations are not likely to have significant influence on the foreign policy formation because the top elites maintain tight control. On an interesting note, a counter model is also considered in the same context. A few scholars, such as Mansourov[3] and Harrison,[4]

1. Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2000).
2. Chung-in Moon, "North Korean Foreign Policy in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective," in Byung Chul Koh (ed.), *North Korea and the World: Explaining Pyongyang's Foreign Policy* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 2000), p. 330.
3. Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "North Korean Decision-Making Processes Regarding the Nuclear Issues," in Young Whan Khil and Peter Hayes (eds.), *Peace and*

present a "conflict" model of the North Korean decision-making process. This model assumes that there are policy conflicts among organizations and policymakers. Mansourov[5] argues that the DPRK has a "highly compartmentalized institutional structure" and "its bureaucracy has a clear chain of command and a concentrated leadership structure," but "decisions do not come quickly and easily or in the most efficient form because of lack of consultations across the bureaucratic lines." Indeed there are many cases that would indicate conflict between organizations in North Korea. For example, *Rodong Sinmun*, the North Korean government's official newspaper, carried a number of articles in 1995 that opposed seeking foreign aid, even though North Korean delegations requested help from the United Nations and its related agencies.

Another explanation of the North Korean decision-making process is the "competition" model, which claims that differences among North Korean policymaking groups are nothing but "a loyalty competition for winning recognition from its top leader."[6] This model is similar to the monolithic model in that the two acknowledge the notion that North Korea is a monolithic society and reject the notion of fragmentation between hard-liners and soft-liners. This model is based on the argument that even Kim Jong-il, the North Korea's former leader, could not control all details in the decision-making process. For example, this model suggests that the military authorities waged a combat against the South Korean Navy in June 1999 that resulted in dozens of death, while officials from the United Front Department of (North) Korean Workers' Party and even Kim Jong-il sought for reconciliation with its Southern counterpart.

Another line of theory in explaining North Korean foreign policy

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Security in East Asia (New York: The M.E. Sharpe, 1997).

4. Selig S. Harrison, *Korea End Game: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
5. Mansourov, "North Korean Decision-Making Processes," p. 223.
6. Yinhay Ahn, *North Korea's Monolithic System and Policy Competition* (Seoul: Research Institute for National Unification, 1996), p. 96.

with reference to its domestic politics is the cultural perspective. In other words, this perspective attributes the North Korean foreign policy to the unique characteristics of its culture represented by the "*Juche*" (self-determination) ideology.[7] According to this perspective, the ideology is so pervasive in society that it must have implications even in its foreign policy behavior. Saccone[8] argues that North Korean cultural underpinnings, including the *Juche* ideology, shape North Korea's negotiating strategies. Scalapino and Lee claim, the "(*Juche*) ideology inhibits any rapid change adjustment to changing realities."[9] Since culture and ideologies are developed over long period of history, those who adopt a cultural approach, such as Oh and Hassig, also pay attention to its historical idiosyncrasy. They argue, "North Korea's foreign policy is crafted against the backdrop of Korean history, especially the memory of recurring invasions from neighboring powers and years of political subjugation."[10] Given this history, it is unreasonable to characterize North Korean attitudes toward the international community as "paranoid." The cultural approaches appear to have some advantages in understanding North Korean idiosyncrasy of brinkmanship diplomacy, since it examines how North Koreans perceive themselves and the political environment surrounding the Korean peninsula and the national interests.[11]

While the previous studies provide useful frameworks to understand North Korean foreign policy, they do not link the current social and political situations with foreign policy behavior. In other words, there has been little effort to explain North Korean foreign policy in the

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7. Scott Snyder, "North Korea's Challenge of Regime Survival: Internal Problems and Implications for the Future," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4, pp. 517-533; Richard Saccone, *To the Brink and Back: Negotiating with North Korea* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Press, 2003).
8. Saccone, *ibid*.
9. Robert A. Scalapion and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part II: The Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 869.
10. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, p. 148.
11. Han S. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

political, economic, and social domain. Indeed, some perspectives exist, claiming that domestic factors, such as public opinion and economic hardship, are influential in the formation of foreign policy. In the following, we will attempt to fill this hole by examining the impact of political, social, and economic situations on the North Korean foreign policy formation.

Theoretical Framework

The diversionary theory is one of the most representative theories that link domestic conditions with foreign policy behavior. The core argument is that leaders are likely to employ aggressive foreign policy when faced with domestic political and economic problems as a means to divert the public's attention. Leaders anticipate that the public will rally around the flag in opposition to an external threat, which is believed to weaken the prevailing domestic political, economic and social discontent. In this manner, the leader, who lost domestic support, will restore his/her leadership position.

The so-called "rally-around-the-flag" effect (hereafter, the rally effect) refers to the phenomenon in which the public tend to rally in support of the national leaders when the state is involved in international conflict or faces an external threat. While initial interest in the rally effect originated from the early studies that link international crisis with the president's popularity,[12] it has now expanded to refer to a general pattern that in times of international crisis, such as war, the public will offer its full support to the current government in order to overcome the external crisis by setting aside disagreements on the incumbent president's policies or performances. Indeed, many historical incidents support the rally effect. During the Cuban Missile

12. Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: Wiley, 1996); Kenneth N. Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Analysis," in J.N. Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1967); Nelson Polsby, *Congress and the Presidency* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

Crisis, John F. Kennedy's approval ratings approximately increased up to 75% in 1963. The approval rating for George H. W. Bush increased from nearly 60% to 90% during the First Gulf War in 1991. Following 9/11 terrorist attacks, George W. Bush's approval rating skyrocketed up to 90% from a low 50%.[13] Similar effects were also observed outside of the U.S. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Thatcher's popularity significantly increased in the early 1980s during the Falkland War, which helped her win the 1983 election. Furthermore, military actions often heighten during the elections in Israel, which uphold the expectation of the rally effect. Ariel Sharon, a virtually unthinkable candidate for the Israeli prime minister's office prior to the onset of Intifada II and suicide bombings, easily defeated the less bellicose candidate, Ehud Barak. Although these are small samples, research suggests that the rally effect has been a well-known and often-used political maneuver.[14]

The rally effect is based on the in-group/out-group hypothesis, which suggests that conflict with an out-group enhances the cohesion and centralization of the in-group.[15] According to this hypothesis, war with the outside is sometimes the last chance for a state to overcome internal conflict. Beginning with the simple in-group/out-group hypothesis, a few characteristics of the rally effect have been elaborated on. One explanation of the rally effect is that it is purely driven by patriotism and a widespread desire to support the national leader; this is known as the patriotism explanation.[16] According to this perspective, when important interests of the nation are at stake, the public tends

13. Marc J. Hetherington and Michael Nelson, "Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism," *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2003), pp. 37-42.
14. Manus I. Midlarsky, "The Impact of External Threat on States and Domestic Societies," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2003), pp. 13-18.
15. Geog Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations* (New York: The Free Press, 1955); Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956).
16. John E. Mueller, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (1970), pp. 18-34.

to unite uncritically behind the national leadership to show patriotic support. The public response is also influenced by fear that apparent opposition may endanger the nation's chance of success. Therefore, this interpretation of the public response in the face of national crisis is a reflection of the general in-group/out-group hypothesis. Another explanation is that during a crisis, external political opposition mutes internal public critiques of the administration; this is often called the opinion leadership explanation.[17] According to this perspective, as the leadership's arguments and stated positions grow unopposed, society's favorable opinions become more strongly tilted toward the leadership. This explanation presumes that in times of crisis, the public is unable to access appropriate sources of information, which are typically available in normal periods to make political judgment. Under this circumstance, the public is more likely to trust their leaders such as the president, who are reasonably believed to enjoy access to strategic, political and military information that the public is denied. Furthermore, for similar reasons, the media also acts in favor of national leadership rather than presenting criticisms.

Based on the rally effect, diversionary theory of war suggests that leaders who are in trouble in domestic affairs, such as economic downturn or declining popularity, may turn to international armed conflict in order to increase their domestic support. Its theoretical mechanisms can be summarized in four ways: 1) successful military actions abroad may be effective in gaining support domestically; 2) the conflict abroad and the support it creates at home can overshadow domestic political discontent; 3) international conflict may divert the public's attention away from the issues that cause discontent; and 4) conflict with another state may rally support to the regime through an in-group/out-group effect.[18]

Unsurprisingly, diversionary theory has attracted a great deal of

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17. Richard Brody, *Assessing the President* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

18. David Sobek, "Rallying around the Podesta: Testing Diversionary Theory across Time," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No.1 (2007), pp. 29-45.

interest from international relations scholars. However, despite its apparent theoretical robustness, empirical studies on whether diversionary use of force is real or not have thus far generated inconclusive findings. While some studies find the uses of force abroad are positively associated with domestic economic decline,[19] others find no support for this proposition.[20] Lack of consensus on this issue among empirical investigations may be partly due to the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches that each study adopts.

Furthermore, there is controversy whether autocratic regimes are more or less likely to use force abroad. Popular perspective is that diversion plays a more significant role in democratic regimes because public perception in democratic regimes makes leaders more sensitive to declining approval ratings. Gelpi demonstrates that democracies are more likely to pursue diversionary foreign policies when faced with domestic discontent because they are less likely to resort to violence to repress the public.[21] In a similar vein, Andreski claims that autocratic regimes are less likely to use force abroad in response to domestic trouble because their military forces are more prepared to deal with internal control.[22] There is also an opposing view that diversion is more likely in autocratic regimes, although it is a less common perspective.

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19. Charles W. Ostrom Jr. and Brian L. Job, "The President and the Use of Force," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (1986), pp. 541-566; Christopher Gelpi, "Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (1997), pp. 255-282; James Patrick and John R. Oneal, "The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President's Use of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1991), pp. 307-322.
20. Brett A. Leeds and David Davis, "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (1997), pp. 814-834; Ross Miller, "Domestic Structures and the Diversionary Use of Force," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1995), pp. 760-785; Clifton T. Morgan and Christopher Anderson, "Domestic Support and Diversionary External Conflict in Great Britain, 1950-1992," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (1999), pp. 799-814.
21. Gelpi, *ibid*.
22. Stanislav Andreski, "On the Peaceful Dispositions of Military Dictatorships," *Journal of Strategic Issues*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1980), pp. 3-10.

Miller argues that autocratic regimes are more likely to use military force abroad to divert attention when faced with domestic trouble than democratic regimes because they do not possess enough policy resources to address domestic problems.[23]

This study is expected to contribute to the resolution of the theoretical controversy of whether or not and to what extent leaders employ the use of force abroad for diversionary purposes. Furthermore, by examining North Korea's foreign policy, this study is also expected to shed light on the controversy of whether autocratic regimes are more or less likely to resort to military forces. North Korea's foreign policy regarding weapons of mass destruction is highly threatening to neighboring countries even if it does not accompany direct use of military force against them.

Methodology

Three cases related to Pyongyang's nuclear and missile diplomacy with the United States from 1992 to 2002 are selected for analysis. The first case is about North Korea's decision to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the so-called first nuclear crisis of North Korea, when it faced Washington's demand to accept "special inspections" over suspected nuclear facilities in *Yongbyon*, North Korea. The second case is related to the test-fire of a long-range missile in 1998 despite Washington's and other states' objections. The third and final case is related to Pyongyang's decision in early 2003 to walk out of the NPT when faced with the Bush administration to address concerns regarding its nuclear and missile program while stepping up political and military pressure, the so-called second nuclear crisis of North Korea.

This study will examine the domestic situation of North Korea during this period and analyze whether or not and to what extent the domestic situation influenced North Korea's foreign policy. In particular, this study will focus on the political stability of the

23. Ross, "Domestic Structures and the Diversionary Use of Force," pp. 760-785.

Pyongyang regime regarding political elite's disturbance, power struggle and political culture. Pyongyang's control over North Korean society will be examined with respect to internal migration, the number of defectors, political commotion and outside information. Economic indexes such as gross national product, growth rate, the food situation and the number of deaths related to famine will also be examined.

Along with the examination of objective conditions, this study will also investigate the perception of the North Korean regime through content analysis.[24] Particularly, word count technology will be utilized in which the frequency of keywords is counted. *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the North Korean regime will be the subject for analysis. The word "self-help" (*jaryeokgaengsaeng*) is selected as an indicator of the Pyongyang regime's perception of domestic security settings. All mass media in North Korea, including *Rodong Sinmun*, do not carry negative words such as "political conflict" and "famine" with respect to its domestic situation. Metaphoric words such as "temporal obstacle," "ordeal" and "economic hardship" could be used, but these words are more often mentioned after the end of difficulties than during adverse circumstances.[25] Therefore, it is believed that "self-help" might reflect the Pyongyang regime's perception of its domestic setting more accurately than any other words. "Self-help" can be used at any time, good or bad, because North Korean official ideology, "*Juche Sasang*," emphasizes the importance of self-help or self-reliance in every aspect of life. Even when the state has nothing to do for its people facing a severe famine, Pyongyang might take advantage of the word "self-help" in order to encourage people and avoid responsibility of the famine. This study hypothesizes the regime would use the word more often in an adversarial domestic

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24. For detailed information about content analysis, refer to Kaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004).

25. For example, looking back on economic hardship in the late 1990s, the North Korean newspaper used the word "ordeal (*siryeon*)" more often in 2000 when economic crisis was almost over than in 1998 when hundreds of thousand of North Korean citizens were dead of famine.

situation than in a beneficial one. The word "*jaryeokgaengsaeng*" is counted among all the articles in *Rodong Sinmun* during the periods of each case. The count will be made on a monthly basis.

The First Nuclear Crisis of 1993-1994

During this period, North Korean domestic politics was stable. In order to understand the stability of the Pyongyang regime, it is necessary to look into North Korean political culture. "The tightly controlled system that Kim Il Sung founded has lasted longer than any other twentieth-century dictatorship because he carried over tradition of centralized authority inherited from the Confucian-influenced Korean dynasties of the past."[26] Kim Il Sung succeeded in manipulating North Korean people to unquestionably obey him.[27] He was deified as the "Great Leader." Even after his death, Kim Il Sung is still regarded as the eternal leader for North Koreans. He maintained almost perfect control over the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) and in turn, exercised complete control over the military.

Domestic stability can also be proved by the fact that Kim Il Sung's son succeeded his father as chairman of the key National Defense Commission, the highest DPRK organ for military guidance, despite his lack of military experience. The armed forces of North Korea were dominated by a clique of Kim Il Sung's old cronies from the Manchuria guerrilla days, who paid absolute loyalty to their leader. Therefore, as long as the Great Leader Kim Il Sung was alive, political instability such as elites' disturbance in the KWP or power conflict was out of the question.

It is clear that the North Korean economic circumstances were deteriorating in the early 1990s. For example, the country's GNI shrank by 3.7% in 1990, 5.2% in 1991 and 7.6% in 1992. In early December 1993,

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26. Harrison, *Korea End Game*, p. 21.
27. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, p. 145.

the Workers' Party Central Committee made a surprising admission that the major goals of its seven-year economic plan had not been achieved and North Korea was in a grave situation.[28] Instead of adopting a new seven-year plan with the usual emphasis on heavy industry, Kim Il Sung set a three-year plan of adjustment, with the top priority given to agriculture, light industry and foreign trade. Kim Il Sung even conceded in his New Year message that "we came up against considerable difficulty and obstacles in the economic construction, owing to the unexpected international events and the acute situation created in the country."[29] However, it does not appear that the economic situation in North Korea deteriorated up to the degree in which the Pyongyang regime felt its domestic security threatened. The number of North Korean defectors remained meager during the early 1990s, and there were few people who starved to death. The so-called Public Distribution System (PDS) through which food rations were distributed still functioned as a powerful tool for social control, although the rate of rations began to fall as the decline in food production persisted. Therefore, there was little suspicion that the Pyongyang regime's political stability was firmly maintained in spite of the deteriorating economic situation of the early 1990s.

The Pyongyang regime has developed formidable tools to control society, ranging from security organizations to ideological control. The two principal domestic security organizations are the Ministry of People's Security (MPS) and the State Security Department (SSD). Permission from the MPS was required to change one's residence or job and to travel within the country. Furthermore, the MPS controlled the distribution system, which remained the primary source of food for the population until the famine years of the mid-1990s. In other words, North Korea was characterized by a complete absence of any sign of political deviance, at least until the mid-1990s famine. The North Korean government maintained an almost perfect control over

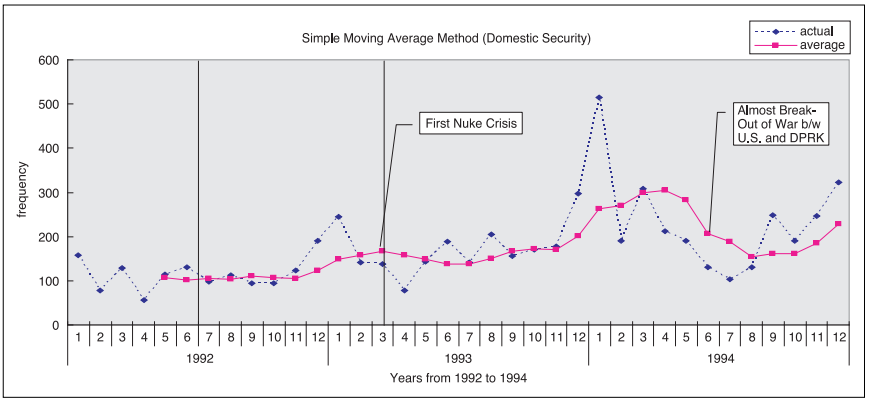
28. Oh and Hassig, *ibid*., p. 53.

29. *Rodong Sinmun*, January 1, 1994.

the population. As Park indicates, the ordinary people in North Korea voluntarily submit themselves to the elite because of "a consistent and carefully engineered process of lifelong political socialization."[30]

As suggested earlier, a content analysis, particularly a word-count method, is utilized as a way to examine the North Korean government's perception of domestic security. Figure 1 shows the number of times the word "self-help (*jaryeokgaengsaeng*)" was used in *Rodong Sinmun* from 1992 through 1994. The solid line (average) remained low in 1992 and increased slightly in 1993, in comparison to the previous year. The solid line indicates that the Pyongyang regime perceived its domestic conditions to be stable in at least the first half of 1993. The slight rise of the solid line lasted only four months from December 1992 to February 1993, before Pyongyang declared the withdrawal from the NPT in March 1993. This declaration can be interpreted as an influence from other factors rather than the short-term domestic insecurity.

Figure 1. Domestic Security 1992-1994



30. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*, pp. 177-178.

The Missile Crisis of 1998

From 1995 to 1998, the North Korean economy was on the brink of collapse due to repeated natural disasters as well as the inefficiency of the socialist command over the economy. With respect to the North Korean economic situation, the most frequently cited economic statistic is the shrinking GDP, which is estimated to have declined by 55% from an already low $23.1 billion in 1990.

The most significant indicator of North Korea's poverty is the hunger and starvation that have swept throughout the country since 1995. Estimates of the number of premature deaths range from as low as 220,000 (by the North Korean government) to as many as 3.5 million at the higher end.[31] The great famine was of severe concern for the Pyongyang regime because the famine not only killed ordinary people but also members of the elites. Against this backdrop and following

Table 1. North Korea's GNI (Gross National Income)

Year	Nominal GNI ($billions)	GNI per capita ($)	Growth Rate (%)
1990	23.1	1,064	-3.7
1991	22.9	1,038	-5.2
1992	21.1	943	-7.6
1993	20.5	904	-4.3
1994	21.2	923	-1.8
1995	22.3	957	-3.7
1996	21.4	910	-3.7
1997	17.7	741	-6.8
1998	12.6	573	-1.1
1999	15.8	714	6.2
2000	16.8	757	1.3

Source: Institute for Unification Education *[Tongilkyoyookwon]*, Ministry of Unification, p. 139, 2004.

31. Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 11.

the death of its Great Leader, North Korea was forced to divert its attention and energy on sheer survival and little else, which resulted in asking for assistance from the outside world. A variety of other nations and charitable organizations contributed food or funds to purchase food. Despite the considerable amount of aid, the devastating circumstances persisted. This was compounded by a severe drought in the summer of 1997, which was followed by tidal waves along the western coast that destroyed up to 70 percent of the summer corn harvest.[32]

The deteriorating economy has led to a weakened social control by the government. At the beginning of 1996, there was an official announcement that "the public distribution system would cease provision of food ration until May and those stealing food and animals would be immediately executed."[33] Furthermore, "the breakdown of the official food procurement and distribution system resulting from the famine left the government with no alternative but to acquiesce both in private markets and in widespread illegal private cultivation."[34] After the great famine of 1995, "a growing number of food refugees traveled domestically without official permission and even fled into China, raising great security concerns" for the North Korean government.[35] In other words, the economic hardship began to create cracks in the previously tightly controlled North Korean society.

Kim Jong-il, the former North Korean leader, revealed his deepening fear of a potential economic collapse from time to time, and many North Korea experts believed that the North would collapse due to the increasing economic problems.[36] According to a poll conducted by a South Korean newspaper on 50 North Korea experts, almost half

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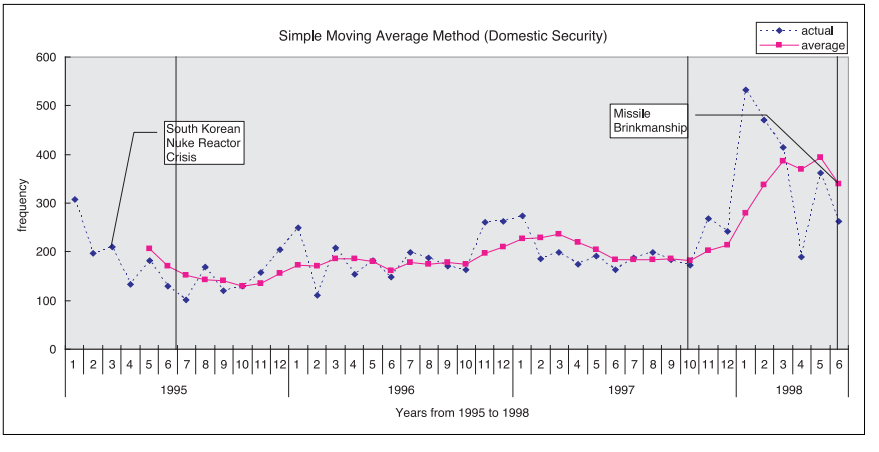
32. David H. Satterwhite, "North Korea in 1997: New Opportunities in a Time of Crisis," *Asian Survey*, Vo. 38, No. 1, 1998, p. 16.
33. Suk Lee, *The DPRK Famine of 1994: Existence and Impact* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2005), p. 10.
34. Harrison, *Korea End Game*, p. 40.
35. Lee, *ibid*., p. 11.
36. Harrison, *ibid*., pp. 3-7.

predicted that the North would collapse within 10 years.[37] Alarmed by the surprising information on North Korea's economic situation, the South Korean government began to form a contingency plan to cope with a possible implosion. However, these predictions were completely wrong. Despite the economic hardships and weakening social control, there was little sign that they were the cause of the political instability in North Korea during this period, mainly due to its unique political culture. Park states, "to challenge Kim Jong-il amounts to discrediting and challenging Kim Il Sung himself, which is unthinkable in the context of North Korean political culture."[38]

Figure 2 illustrates the number of times the word "self-help" is used during the period from the second half of 1995, when the great famine started in North Korea, to June 1998, when North Korea began to rely on the brinkmanship strategy by causing nuclear issues. The frequency of the word "self-help" is examined to demonstrate Pyongyang's perception of domestic security. The solid line in figure 2 soars sharply from October 1997 to June 1998, when North Korea began to prepare for a long-range missile test. The dotted line peaks

Figure 2. Domestic Security 1995-1998



37. *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 22, 1996.

38. Park, *ibid*., p. 164.

in January 1998. This is mainly because North Korea held nationwide campaigns for self-help (*jaryeokgaengsaeng*) from January to March 1998 in order to overcome the dire economic situation instead of seeking foreign assistance. Therefore, figure 2 can be interpreted as such that the Pyongyang regime perceived its domestic security to be threatened from October 1997 to June 1998.

The Second Nuclear Crisis of 2002-2003

North Korea has generally been stable in managing its political system since 1999. The Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) was held annually since 1998. This has political significance in that North Korea failed to hold the SPA meetings for three years in a row when it was in dire economic straits. In addition, "the shift to military rule in the late 1990s" under the Songun (Military-first) Policy allowed Kim Jong-il to further consolidate his power and suppress any dissent against the regime. There is little doubt that Kim Jong-il was in control and North Korea enjoyed political stability. The party, the government and the military were loyal to Kim Jong-il and his policy lines.

In economic terms, North Korea experienced an uninterrupted modest economic growth for four consecutive years from 1999 to 2002. Its economic performance improved and the famine of the late 1990s was abated by the billions of dollars worth of foreign aid. North Korea declared the end of the "Arduous March" and the "Forced March" in October 2000.[39] Although moderate, the economic success led North Korea to adopt "the July 1 economic management improvement measures" in 2002 under which the state-managed distribution system was abolished, foreign exchange rate was adjusted to realistic levels, and the currency exchange was alleviated to strengthen the peoples' consumption capacity.

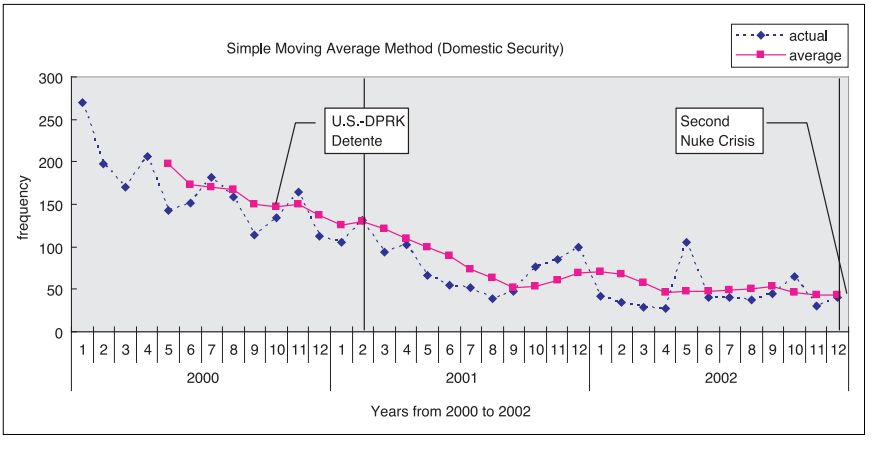
North Korea appears to have recovered self-confidence in domestic issues. The 2002 New Year's Joint Editorial declared that 2001 was a

39. *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, October 10, 2000.

historic year when "breakthrough was made in the building of a socialist powerful nation in the 21st century."[40] It was also reported that "Kim Jong-il has successfully overcome the difficult situation of the country with a strong will to defend socialism and accomplish the revolutionary cause of *Juche* with arms and to turn Korea into a powerful socialist country."[41] North Korea did not hesitate to call it "a miracle of the 20th century" that they tided over the economic difficulties.

Following the North-South Summit in 2000, the increased exchange in people and merchandise between the two Koreas and the economic assistance from the outside world, including South Korea, has the danger of spreading information on the outside world. This may be one of the reasons for the increase in the number of North Korean defectors. However, the Pyongyang regime has been vigilant about this trend and appears to have managed to cope with the outside influences by increasing ideological control and oppressive rule through domestic security organizations. The Pyongyang regime appears to have been stable enough to "initiate and accelerate vital economic

Figure 3. Domestic Security 2000-2002



40. *Rodong Sinmun*, January 1, 2002.

41. *KCNA*, March 25, 2003.

reforms while skillfully preserving social peace and stability."[42] It is obvious that from the Pyongyang regime's perspective, "the economy seems to be improving, Kim Jong-il's grip on power appears rock-solid and the regime's future looks unchallenged."

Figure 3 illustrates the number of times the word "self-help" (jaryeolgaengsaeng) was used from February 2001, when George W. Bush administration was inaugurated, to January 2001, when North Korea withdrew from the NPT. The frequency of the word "self-help" is examined to determine Pyongyang's perception of its domestic security situation. The solid line (moving average) has been on a steady decline since May 2000 and remains low until the end of 2002. The dotted line portrays a similar trend. Figure 3 indicates that Pyongyang perceived its domestic security to be improving.

Conclusion

This paper studies the relations between domestic politics and the foreign policy behavior of North Korea. In particular, this paper attempts to explain North Korea's foreign policy behavior in regard to its weapons of mass destruction and its domestic economic, social and political situations. For that purpose, this paper analyzes the domestic conditions of North Korea during the first nuclear crisis of 1993-1994, the missile crisis of 1997-1998 and the second nuclear crisis of 2002-2003. This study also examines *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the North Korean regime, by using content analysis method to investigate the North Korean government's perception of its own domestic situations. As a theoretical framework to link the dependent and independent variables, this study relies on the diversionary theory of international conflict.

By and large, this study reveals that there is no or little indication that North Korea's foreign policy of brinkmanship was driven by

42. Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "North Korea Stressed: Life on the Hamster Wheel," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2005, pp. 85-114.

domestic factors, such as economic hardship, loss of social control and political instability. During the first nuclear crisis of 1993-1994, North Korean politics was quite stable and its society was under tight control despite the deteriorating economy. The investigation into the North Korean government's perception of itself during this period also indicated that the government felt little threat to its domestic security. This study does not have sufficient evidence to suggest that these domestic situations caused the nuclear crisis. During the missile crisis of 1997-1998, North Korea experienced an unprecedented economic hardship and its weakening social control was visible. However, similar to the period of the first nuclear crisis, there was little sign that the economic difficulties and apparently weakened social control led to political instability in North Korea. During the second nuclear crisis, North Korea seemed to have recovered its confidence in the economy and social control. The analysis on the government's perception of itself also supported this observation. In other words, during this period there was little indication that the North Korean government's foreign policy engaged in brinkmanship due to the need to divert its people's attention from domestic difficulties.

The findings in this study provide significant implications to both theoretical refinement and foreign policies. In terms of theoretical implications, this study contributes to resolving the debates on the diversionary theory of international conflict. As discussed earlier, there are conflicting perspectives and contrasting empirical evidence to the validity of diversionary theory of international conflict. The findings of this study suggest that the theory is not empirically supported, at least for non-democratic countries like North Korea. Even with severe economic hardships, this study reveals that North Korea did not demonstrate any sign of political instability and therefore, did not necessitate diversion. Instead, the findings of this study provide evidence to support the perspective that in non-democratic countries, the government can control politics closely enough to prevent any instability caused by social and economic disturbances. Then what caused brinkmanship in North Korea's foreign policy? While the direct answers to that question are beyond the scope this paper, this

study implies that the answers may be found in its external relations, such as inter-Korean relations or its relations with the U.S., rather than from its internal conditions. On a related note, this study also offers significant policy implications on how to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue. Given the findings that domestic factors had little impact on North Korea's foreign policy behavior of brinkmanship, this study suggests that any measure that attempts to influence its domestic situation, such as economic sanctions, will fail to change its foreign policy behavior. Rather, policies intended to change its perception on external relations are more likely to succeed in achieving that purpose.

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