

# **NORTH KOREA'S DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS**

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There is a Chinese saying that weak countries have no diplomacy at all. Realists in the West, particularly neo-realists, also believe that international environment is largely shaped by major powers. Minor and middle powers have no choice but to follow the rules of game as constructed by major powers. Most of the time this is true, but not without exception. North Korea's diplomacy in the post-Cold War era is the best example of a minor power making a difference in world politics. What makes a minor power like North Korea dare challenge a superpower like the U.S.? Why has North Korea's crisis diplomacy succeeded the majority of the time? What are North Korea's goals? What are North Korea's available means and tactics to achieve these goals? How effectively are means? These are the central questions that this paper attempts to answer. In conclusion, taking advantage of its geostrategic location, strategic advantage vis-a-vis South Korea and Japan, as well as Kim Jong Il's adroit diplomatic skills, North Korea, dissimilar to other minor powers, has been able to make a remarkable achievement in foreign relations. Nevertheless, North Korea has only succeeded in achieving its immediate

foreign policy goal, economic gains but fails to reach its mid- and long-term goals, to establish diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan and to reshape a triangular relationship favorable to Pyongyang to extract steady benefit from two competing major powers. What is more, the success of its diplomacy inevitably depends on big countries' positive response.

### **Introduction**

There is a Chinese saying that weak countries have no diplomacy at all. Realists in the West, particularly neo-realists, also believe that the international environment is largely shaped by major powers. Minor and middle powers have no choice but to follow the rules of game as constructed by the major powers. Most of the time this is true, but not without exception. North Korea's diplomacy in the post-Cold War era is the best example of a minor power making a difference in world politics.

Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea has been in a desperate situation without historical precedent. Its socialist allies in Eastern Europe, which used to be a traditional diplomatic stronghold of North Korea, all established diplomatic relations with South Korea in less than a year in spite of Pyongyang's strong opposition. Worst of all, its socialist mentors, the Soviet Union and China, normalized their relations with Seoul in September of 1990 and in August of 1992, respectively. Nevertheless, North Korea was able to show some diplomatic successes, signing the Geneva Agreement with the United States in October of 1994. Since early 2000, North Korea has made a great leap forward in foreign relations, opening diplomatic relations with more than a dozen countries.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Pyongyang summit between North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il and South Korean Presi-

dent Kim Dae-jung in June of 2000 not only briefly made North Korea the center of world politics, but also brought Pyongyang huge economic benefits from Seoul. This was followed by a breakthrough in U.S.-North Korea relations culminated by U.S. Secretary of States Madeleine Albright's historic trip to Pyongyang in October of the same year. These events clearly demonstrate that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has successfully survived in adverse circumstances.

In term of size, population, and the scale of its economy,<sup>2</sup> without a doubt North Korea belongs to the category of minor powers. The DPRK has a territory of 1,222,370 square kilometers. Moreover, according to the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population 2001 Report, North Korea's population stood at 22.4 million as of December 2000.<sup>3</sup> With regard to its economy, North Korea's economic growth was negative throughout the 1990s. Based on sources at the Korea Institute for National Unification, North Korea's GNP was estimated around US\$23.3 billion with a trade deficit of US\$500 million in 1995 and foreign debt totaling US\$11.6 billion as of December 1995.<sup>4</sup> The DPRK's total trade volume was US\$183 million in 1994, a 30 percent drop from that of the previous year.<sup>5</sup> Because of its extremely

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1 Those countries included Italy (January 2000), Australia (May 2000), the Philippines (July 2000), the United Kingdom (December 2000), Spain (December 2000), Holland (January 2001), Belgium (January 2001), Canada (February 2001), Germany (March 2001), Luxembourg (March 2001), Greece (March 2001), Brazil (March 2001), New Zealand (March 2001), Kuwait (April 2001), European Union (May 2001), Bahrain (May 2001), and Turkey (June 2001), <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabtb/dprk/index.html>.

2 Rosenau points out that size, population, and the level of economic development are three variables to categorize countries. James N. Rosenau, "Comparing Foreign Policies: Why, What, How," in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Comparing Foreign Policies: Theories, Findings, and Methods* (New York: Sage Publications), 1974, pp. 3-22.

3 <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/times/200111/t2001110716582640110.htm>.

4 *China Post*, July 13, 1996, p. 5.

5 *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, March 16, 1995.

limited economic capacity, North Korea has no choice but to focus on strengthening its military capabilities in an attempt to negotiate from strength.

Surprisingly enough, North Korea, despite being a minor power mired in economic difficulties, has a history of threatening its powerful rivals with military action, and as a matter of fact has deliberately and repeatedly resorted to brinkmanship in an attempt to benefit from the crises it creates. In most cases, Pyongyang escapes with large economic benefits.<sup>6</sup> For example, during the 1993-94 North Korean nuclear crisis, North Korea overtly threatened to wage an all-out war with South Korea if the U.S. dared to initiate any military actions against the North. In the end, Pyongyang obtained two light water nuclear reactors (to replace the DPRK's old graphite reactors which can produce nuclear weapons-grade plutonium) worth US\$4.6 billion plus 500,000 tons (worth US\$60 million) of heavy oil supplied annually from the U.S. until 2003, by merely freezing its nuclear weapons program. What makes a minor power like North Korea dare challenge a superpower like the U.S.? Why has North Korea's crisis diplomacy succeeded the majority of the time? What are North Korea's goals? What are North Korea's available means and tactics to achieve these goals? How effectively are they able to use these means? These are the central questions that this paper attempts to answer.

## Goals

By and large, North Korea's post-Cold War foreign policy goals can be classified into two categories: short-term goals and mid- to long-term goals. The short-term goal is to gain as much economic assistance

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6 Alvin Magid, "Contemplating Survivalist North Korea," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2000, pp. 108-109, <http://ifes.kyungnam.ac.kr/ifes-kor/publish/publish1/Ap24-1/article/240104-Magid.pdf>.

as possible. North Koreans never hesitate to ask for economic assistance. And almost every diplomatic move by North Korea is aimed at obtaining economic benefits. Moreover, North Korea has succeeded in extracting huge economic benefits from major powers and South Korea. For example, the DPRK received aid worth US\$950.98 million from the Republic of Korea (ROK), foreign countries, and international organizations from 1995 to September 1998. The ROK alone provided US\$307.97 million—US\$273.42 million from the government and US\$34.55 million from non-governmental organizations.<sup>7</sup> In 2000, South Korea sent 500,000 tons of rice and corn, worth \$90 million, as well as 300,000 tons of fertilizer to Pyongyang. On the other hand, the U.S. has been the largest contributor to the Rome-based World Food Program (WFP) support for North Korea.<sup>8</sup> North Korea obtained half a million tons of food from the U.S. in 1998 and 1999.<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that a large part of the donations made by the U.S. and South Korea was requested by Pyongyang with the promise that it would participate in the four-party talks and would allow inspection of a suspect underground construction site in the DPRK in 1999. In the latter half of 1998, there were several new underground sites under construction in Kumchang-ri discovered by Washington's satellites. The U.S. asked the DPRK to open the sites for inspection. Initially North Korea refused to do so, claiming it was a matter of sovereignty. Later, Pyongyang implicitly demanded compensation (US\$300 million or one million tons of food) in exchange for access to its suspected underground construction site.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. rejected North Korean demands for food aid in return for allowing the inspections.<sup>11</sup> However,

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7 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9810/OCT06.html#item8>.

8 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9902/FEB10.html#item2>.

9 *Korea Times*, February 9, 1999; *NAPSNet Daily Report*, February 9, 1999, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/latest.html>.

10 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9811/NOV19.html#item1>.

11 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9811/NOV27.html#item1>.

in early March 1999, the US pledged 500,000 tons of additional food-stuffs in response to an appeal by the UN World Food Program. This donation is widely regarded as an attempt to obtain North Korea's permission to inspect the underground construction site in Kumchang-ri.<sup>12</sup> In the end, the site was found to be nothing more than a large hole in the ground. Obviously, North Korea successfully took advantage of American suspicion and political differences between the Clinton Administration and Republicans who took issue with Clinton over his engagement policy toward North Korea.<sup>13</sup> Despite Republican opposition, the Clinton Administration was forced to give incentives to elicit Pyongyang's cooperation (on participation in the four-parties talks and compliance with the 1994 Geneva Agreement) in the name of humanitarian aid.

In addition to South Korea and the U.S., China has been a generous and regular donor to Pyongyang since the 1950s to maintain its influence in North Korea. In 1998, China donated 80,000 tons of crude oil, 20,000 tons of fertilizer and 100,000 tons of food to North Korea.<sup>14</sup> While visiting Pyongyang in September of 2001, Chinese President Jiang Zemin promised to provide the DPRK with a grant-in-aid of 200,000 tons of food and 30,000 tons of diesel oil.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, since 1995, Japan has emerged as another major food provider to North Korea, giving half a million tons of food to North Korea through the UN World Food Program in October of 2000.<sup>16</sup> It is reported that North Korea again asked Japan to provide more food as a precondition for resuming normalization talks when their officials met in Beijing to discuss ways of restarting negotiations, which have remained dead-

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12 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9903/MAR17.html#item11>.

13 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9908/AUG25.html#item1>.

14 *Renmin Ribao*, January 21, 1999, p. 6.

15 President Jiang Zemin Revisits the DPRK in 11 Years; Traditional Ties Revived to Match New Century, <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>.

16 "Food Aid to North Korea: No More Unconditional Donation," an editorial, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/08/20011105ig90.htm>.

locked since October of 2000.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly enough, if North Korea is not satisfied with the size of its counterpart's offer, it will decline and press for more until it is satisfied. For example, North Korea's normalization talks were stalled partly because Pyongyang asked Japan to provide US\$6 billion in war compensation, which Japan refused to pay.

Regarding its mid- and long-term goals, there are two. North Korea's first goal is to restore the balance of power on the Korean peninsula, that is, to establish diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan with a priority on the former. North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Il Sung made an abortive attempt to set up diplomatic relations with Japan in September of 1990, when the Soviet Union was about to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea. He surprised his Japanese guests, who were led by Shin Kanemaru, the king maker of the Liberal Democratic Party at the time, by straightforwardly proposing to initiate DPRK-Japan normalization talks immediately. The talks started in early 1991 and completed eight rounds without reaching any agreement mainly because of a diplomatic coalition of Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo, requesting North Korea to open its suspected nuclear facilities for international inspection before offering any tangible political and economic carrots.<sup>18</sup> Kim Il Sung then shifted his primary target from Japan to the U.S. by initiating a nuclear crisis in March of 1993.

Second is to promote a bipolar system surrounding the Korean peninsula, namely to have the U.S. and China compete for influence in North Korea and on the Korean peninsula as a whole; thereby allowing North Korea to fish in the troubled waters that it has created. A salient example is North Korea's launching of its Taepodong I missile in August of 1998. This event is the most important independent variable to reshape the international environment in Northeast Asia since

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17 <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/times/200111/t2001112516424140110.htm>.

18 To-hai Liou, "North Korea-Japanese Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," *Asian Studies* (Hong Kong), No. 19, September 1996, pp. 86-89.

the 1994 Geneva Agreement. The launch intensified competition and confrontation among surrounding major powers over missile defense as well as South Korea's conflict with its allies over how to deal with North Korea and the arms race in Northeast Asia.

### **Means and Tactics**

What means does North Korea have? First, North Korea's geostrategic importance encourages the major powers to involve themselves in Korean affairs. As a bridge between sea and land, the Korean peninsula has been a strategic post where surrounding major powers have competed for influence ever since the 7th Century when China and Japan involved themselves in a power struggle among the three kingdoms on the peninsula (Shilla, Paikche, and Koguryo). The Korean War in the 1950s caused a head-on collision between China and the U.S. During the Cold War, taking advantage of the Sino-Soviet confrontation, North Korea was able to extort a large amount of economic assistance from the two Communist giants. In the post-Cold War era, China continues to regard North Korea as its natural shield for Manchuria while the U.S. sees North Korea as a potential strategic partner to contain China and even a sometimes rebellious South Korea.

Secondly, North Korea enjoys strategic advantages vis-a-vis South Korea. In terms of geography, the Northern part of the Korean peninsula is mountainous while the Southern part is flatter, exposing South Korea to a possible blitzkrieg by North Korea. This North Korean strategic advantage has been greatly reinforced by Pyongyang's more than 1.1 million man armed forces (the 5th largest army in the world),<sup>19</sup> biochemical weapons,<sup>20</sup> Pyongyang's concealment of its major military

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19 *China News*, March 4, 1999, p. 5.

20 North Korea is the third greatest producer of chemical weapons in the world, <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200112/200112050388.html>;



facilities underground, and its deployment of 75 percent of its combat capabilities in areas adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). In addition, North Korea's annual military expenditure has hovered between 25 percent and 30 percent of GNP. According to the Royal Institute of International Strategic Studies, the DPRK's total military expenditure in 1997 was estimated at around US\$5.4 billion, or 27 percent of its annual GDP.<sup>21</sup> Owing to diplomatic setbacks, the DPRK has pursued the development of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles since the late 1980s. As a result, South Korea is vulnerable to North Korea's attack and is a hostage to Pyongyang's brinkmanship and attempts to get the U.S. to the negotiation table. What is more, North Korea's successful test-firing of its Rodong-1 missile, with a range of 1,000 to 1,300 kilometers, in May of 1993 followed by the launching of its Taepodong I missile, with an estimated range of 2,000 kilometers, which passed over Japan in August of 1998, has extended Pyongyang's strategic advantage to Japan,<sup>22</sup> making that country another hostage of North Korea. In January of 1999, the *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the nation's ruling Workers' Party, said that recent militant speeches delivered by Japanese reactionaries since the New Year and the escalation of hostile anti-North Korea behavior in Japan were tantamount to a declaration of war against North Korea. The newspaper wrapped up the article with a warning that Japan was in range of the DPRK's attack.<sup>23</sup>

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South Korean Defense Minister Kim Dong-shin indicated that "North Korea stockpiles between 2,500 and 5,000 tons of biochemical weapons in six different facilities and has the capability to wage germ warfare." He also said that the DPRK is believed to have stores of anthrax, smallpox and eight other types of diseases, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0111/NOV20.html#item1>.

21 *Central Daily News*, February 27, 1999, p. 9.

22 Lim Eul-chul, "North Korea's Missile Program: Assessment and Future Outlook," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=76&title=VOL0705&category=ess](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=76&title=VOL0705&category=ess).

23 *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, January 23, 1999, p.6; <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/>

With the aforementioned strategic advantages, North Korea has from time to time boldly resorted to brinkmanship.<sup>24</sup> Every time that a conflict occurred, North Korea tends to intentionally push the conflict to the brink of war. The maneuver is designed to force its counterpart to back down (to sit down and negotiate with Pyongyang), as the high cost of war is strategically favorable to North Korea. Once negotiations resume, North Korea will press its counterpart to make economic concessions in exchange for political reconciliation. Scott Snyder, a Korea analyst at the US Institute of Peace, argues that the North Korea regime needs to rely on crises to carry out its diplomatic strategy.<sup>25</sup> In addition, crises also have the function of consolidating domestic solidarity and of increasing revolutionary spirit.

When the U.S. and the DPRK were approaching a confrontation that might jeopardize the 1994 Agreed Framework in November of 1998, William Taylor Jr., a specialist in international security affairs at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argued, "The North Korean pattern of diplomacy is pure brinkmanship. If we push, the North Koreans will threaten to pull out of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) or to launch another missile over Japan."<sup>26</sup> The representative example is the 1993-94 North Korea's nuclear crisis. The U.S., South Korea and Japan insisted that North Korea opened its suspected nuclear facilities for inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Washington and Tokyo would not give Pyongyang economic assistance, nor establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang until it was confirmed that North Korea had no nuclear weapons. In response, North Korea announced its withdrawal

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9809/SEP18.html#item2.

24 Scott Snyder, "Negotiating on the Edge: Patterns in North Korea's Diplomatic Style," a paper presented at American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, September 3, 1999.

25 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9908/AUG17.html#item1>.

26 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9811/NOV23.html#item3>.

from the NPT in March of 1993. Initially, Washington took a hard line, employing international pressure and economic sanctions to force North Korea to comply with their requests. The U.S. even suggested the possibility of launching a surgical strike against North Korea's suspected nuclear facilities. On the other hand, believing that international pressure and sanctions would only make things worse, China urged Washington to hold direct talks with Pyongyang and to solve the problem through negotiation.<sup>27</sup> Partly because South Korea, Japan and China did not support U.S. military actions against North Korea and partly because economic sanctions against Pyongyang could not succeed without China and Japan's cooperation, Washington had no alternative but to negotiate directly with Pyongyang. The crisis concluded with the Geneva Agreement from which North Korea gained more than US\$5 billion. Moreover, the talks themselves were a diplomatic advance for North Korea. Pyongyang had long requested one-on-one talks with Washington since the early 1970s, but these talks did not materialize because of South Korea's opposition. Obviously, this was a triumph for North Korea. Again in 1999, the DPRK attempted to use threats to squeeze concessions out of the US and its allies. North Korea made people believe that it was about to test its Taepodong II missile, a new long-range missile with a range of 4,000 to 6,000 kilometers.<sup>28</sup> At the last moment, Washington and Pyongyang reached the Berlin agreement in September of 1999 in which North Korea agreed with the U.S. to suspend missile tests in return for the U.S. lifting of decades-old economic sanctions, i.e., removing the DPRK

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27 *The People's Daily*, May 29, 1993.

28 Bruce Bennett of the Rand Corporation in Washington stated at an international seminar in Seoul that North Korea would be able to deploy its Taepodong-2, capable of reaching Alaska and the western region of the U.S. mainland by 2002. Some experts say that Pyongyang may also be developing a Taepodong-3 missile, whose estimated range of 8,000 kilometers could reach the west coast of the United States, [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=76&title=VOL0705&category=ess](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=76&title=VOL0705&category=ess).

from the provisions of the Trading With the Enemy Act.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, North Korean National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong Il is particularly good at taking advantage of psychological conflicts and clashes of national interests among surrounding powers, as well as South Korea's differences with her allies over approaches to North Korea. Since Kim Jong Il came to power after his father's death in July of 1994, he has made normalizing relations with the U.S. as the first priority of his foreign policy. One of his objectives is to establish a U.S.-North Korea-China triangular relationship, much like the China-North Korea-Soviet Union relationship in the days of Sino-Soviet rivalry, so that he can maximize his gains from Sino-American competition for influence in his country and the Korean peninsula as a whole. He has successfully driven a wedge between Beijing and Washington since 1998. The warm atmosphere of Sino-American relations fostered during U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit to China in June of 1998 suddenly evaporated when Pyongyang launched a Taepodong I missile less than two months later. Since then, China and the US have fought over missile defense systems.<sup>30</sup> The U.S.-China confrontation intensified with the inauguration of the Bush administration last January. President Bush views China as a strategic competitor and North Korea as a rogue state. His decision to develop National Missile Defense (NMD) served as a driving force pushing Beijing, Pyongyang and Moscow together. Taking advantage of the Korea Summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Beijing and Pyongyang right before the Group of Eight Summit in Okinawa in July of 2000 to consolidate their opposition to NMD. Chinese President Jiang Zemin's trip to

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29 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9909/SEP27.html#item11>.

30 *China Daily* indicated that the success of NMD missile test, a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, "will not only trigger a new arms race, but will also stimulate a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This eventually will undermine world peace and security in the 21st century," <http://www1.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2001-12-06/46867.html>.

Pyongyang in early September of 2001 also served this function. What is particularly worth noting is that Jiang's trip followed his summit with Russian President Putin in July and Kim Jong Il's meetings with Putin in Moscow in August, of the same year, when Kim and Putin made a joint statement opposing the U.S. missile defense shield plan by calling the 1972 Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty a "cornerstone of strategic stability and a basis for a further reduction in strategic offensive weapons."<sup>31</sup> This signified the forging of a Beijing-Pyongyang-Moscow axis against Washington.<sup>32</sup> The alliance was in fact engineered by Kim Jong Il to increase his bargaining position in missile negotiations with the U.S.

On the other hand, in order to push the U.S. taking the initiative toward normalization, Kim Jong Il has employed all possible means and tactics. The most innovative move was to shift his strategy from isolating South Korea by engaging the U.S.<sup>33</sup> and from isolating the U.S. by engaging South Korea and U.S. allies in the West. Since Kim Jong Il took power in 1994, he has made every possible effort to isolate South Korea by courting the U.S. and by intentionally stoking conflicts between Seoul and Washington. One notable instance was in September of 1996 when a North Korean submarine was found in South Korean waters. The U.S. was convinced that it was an accident while South Korea regarded it as an abortive North Korean spy mission against the South. Hence, the Kim Young Sam Government insisted that North Korea made a formal apology and promised not to intrude into ROK waters again, or South Korea would terminate the construction of two light water nuclear reactors agreed to under the 1994

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31 DPRK, Russia Reconfirm Revitalized Traditional Ties; Kim Jong Il Meets V. Putin Again in Moscow, <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>.

32 Rhee Sang-woo, "China-North Korea-Russia coalition versus the U.S.," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=439&title=VOL0904&category=com](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=439&title=VOL0904&category=com).

33 Paik Jin-hyun, "Pyongyang's Maneuvering against Seoul and Washington," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=20&title=VOL0704&category=com](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=20&title=VOL0704&category=com).

Geneva Agreement. Notwithstanding the fact that Washington acknowledged the necessity of an apology from North Korea and Pyongyang's promise not to commit the same mistake, the U.S. could not agree with Seoul's approach linking the incident to the construction of the nuclear reactors. The Clinton Administration did not want to see the hard-won Geneva framework damaged by South Korea's tough stance toward Pyongyang.<sup>34</sup> As a result, North Korea was persuaded to apologize for the incident. Pyongyang apologized to show Washington that North Korea was conciliatory in contrast with South Korea's intransigence. It was the first time that North Korea had ever made a public apology for its actions. This event also made evident differences between Washington and Seoul over how to approach Pyongyang. The Clinton Administration, in response to the changing post-Cold War international environment, tended to view Korean affairs as a perspective of its national interests as well as global peace and security. Washington favored engagement with Pyongyang so as to attain the goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, whereas the Kim Young Sam government remained in the Cold War mindset, focusing on the North Korean threat and North-South diplomatic competition. An article in *New York Times* in September of that year stated that South Korea, rather than North Korea, was viewed by some members of the Clinton Administration as a troublemaker.<sup>35</sup>

However, unsatisfied with actions by the U.S.,<sup>36</sup> and the Perry

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34 *Joongang Ilbo*, September 30, 1996, p. 16.

35 *Joongang Ilbo*, September 30, 1996, p. 16.

36 The U.S. did not fulfill its promise to provide North Korea with heavy oil on time. After the North's missile test and suspicion over its underground facilities at Kumchang-ri, the U.S. Congress applied a brake on the disbursement of funds to finance the delivery of heavy oil to North Korea through the KEDO, requesting periodical review of North Korea's behavior. The funds can be ceased at any time if there is no any noticeable improvement of North Korea's behavior, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9810/OCT01.html#item10>;

Report in October of 1999,<sup>37</sup> Kim Jong Il embarrassed the Clinton Administration by striking a secret deal with South Koreans in China to hold the first-ever inter-Korean Summit in June of 2000. Though President Clinton himself favored engagement with North Korea, he did not fully support South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy, believing it to be too soft and somewhat naive. In his eyes, Sunshine Policy's unilateral economic concessions to Pyongyang without regard to the North-South political situation would not elicit any tangible and positive response from the North, let alone an inter-Korean Summit. Therefore, President Kim Dae-jung turned to China for help. The Korea Summit not only brought North Korea millions of dollars from South Korea, but also greatly raised North Korea's international profile as well as increasing its leverage in dealing with the U.S. and Japan. The historic exchange visits between North Korea's second most powerful man, Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok (first Vice Chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission) and U.S. Secretary of State Albright, later the same year obviously were a function of the Korea Summit. When Kim Jong Il met Albright in Pyongyang in October of 2000, Kim said his country was ready to open diplomatic ties with the United States immediately if Washington removed Pyongyang from the list of nations that sponsor terrorism.<sup>38</sup> At present,

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Lee Hun-kyung, "Inter-Korean Relations in Aftermath of Perry Report," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=8&title=VOL0704&category=ess](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=8&title=VOL0704&category=ess).

At the time, the U.S. suspected that North Korea was building a new underground nuclear facility and asked North Korea to open it for inspection. Pyongyang requested US\$300 million or one million tons of food in exchange for inspection. In the same time, North Korea asked the U.S. to provide US\$1 billion annually in compensation for terminating its missile exports requested by the U.S.

37 Perry Report asked North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program and to stop the development, sale, and proliferation of medium- and long-range missiles in exchange for improving US-DPRK relations and for receiving large scale economic assistance from the U.S. Otherwise, Washington will cut all the relations with Pyongyang. Kim Jong Il hates to follow others' order but rather do his own way in order to control the negotiation agenda.

North Korea is linking Kim Jong-il's return visit to Seoul to the Bush administration's hawkish policy.<sup>39</sup> North Korea stated that it would not deal with Seoul until the Americans resumed serious dialogue.<sup>40</sup> The EU delegation visiting Pyongyang in May of 2001 reported that Pyongyang believed the U.S. to be the biggest obstacle to reconciliation with Seoul, and that Washington exercised excessive influence over Seoul.<sup>41</sup> North Korea's maneuver was designed to make those who favored the engagement policy with Pyongyang blaming the Bush Administration for hindering the North-South Korea rapprochement, thus complicating the existing disagreement between Presidents Kim and Bush.<sup>42</sup> Kim Jong Il also hoped to see the Kim Dae-jung government lobbying the U.S. to soften its attitude toward North Korea.

There is another example of North Korea's actions causing friction between Washington and Seoul. North Korean chief delegate Kim Ryong Song requested that his South Korean counterpart should supply the North with electricity as part of South-North economic cooperation at the 5th inter-Korean ministerial talks in September of 2000. The North raised the issue again in early February of 2001.<sup>43</sup> North Korea was attempting to take advantage of South Korea's eagerness to bring about Kim Jong Il's promised return visit to Seoul. As South Korea was seriously considering the DPRK's proposal, the U.S. protested to Seoul. Washington opposed Seoul's energy assistance to

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38 The North has been on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism since it was involved in the terrorist bombing of a Korean Air passenger jet that killed hundreds of people in 1987. "N.K. leader deeply concerned about U.S. stance," *Korea Herald*, May 7, 2001.

39 Editorial, "Now, Ball Is In US Court," *Korea Times*, May 4, 2001.

40 Morton Abramowitz and James T. Laney, "U.S. must regain initiative in N.K. ties," *Japan Times*, cited by *Korea Herald*, September 10, 2001.

41 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0105/MAY08.html#item10>.

42 Moon Chung-in, "Gap in South Korea-U.S. Perceptions of North Korea," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=370&title=VOL0902&category=com](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=370&title=VOL0902&category=com).

43 "Energy Assistance to North Depends on U.S.," President Kim Faces Pressures from Conservatives and Bush, <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>.



North Korea because the assistance might help improve its energy situation and undermine U.S. calls for early nuclear inspections. President Bush's June 6, 2001 statement stressed that improved implementation of the Agreed Geneva Framework through early nuclear inspections should be a "precondition" to improved Washington-Pyongyang relations.

Apart from the South Korean card, Kim Jong Il has also played other cards to stimulate the U.S. to take a softer approach towards Pyongyang. The China card is another trump played by Kim. In order to make the U.S. feel uncomfortable and jealous, Kim Jong Il deliberately paid a visit to Beijing immediately before the Korea Summit in May of 2000 and again in January of 2001, prior to George Bush's inauguration. During his second trip, Kim Jong Il sent a message to the incoming American President that he was reform-minded by visiting Shanghai, a symbol of the success of China's economic reforms, and by touring the modern factories of General Motors and NEC.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, Kim Jong Il took the initiative in improving relations with Western countries, including Italy, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the European Union. As a result, France and Ireland are the only countries who have yet to recognize North Korea among the 15 member states of the European Union.<sup>45</sup> In addition to gaining economic benefits from those countries, Kim also wants to have U.S. allies persuade Washington to improve relations with Pyongyang, thereby putting pressure on the U.S. to normalize relations with North Korea. For instance, Kim Jong Il repeatedly emphasized during his talks with EU leaders that the North does not regard the United States as an enemy.

Without exception, North Korea's moves have been an attempt to create conflicts between the U.S. and its allies over their approach to North Korea. It was reported that Kim Yong Nam, in a speech honor-

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44 <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/7842.html>.

45 *Korea Herald*, September 21, 2001.

ing the EU delegation, hailed the EU's decision to normalize and improve relations with North Korea as being a wise and good decision by the European Union. Additionally, *Rodong Sinmun*, in a May 2nd editorial, cited independence as one of the things in common between the DPRK and the EU member states. The editorial also emphasized that, "The DPRK has pursued an independent foreign policy and the European Union has strongly asserted its independence in view of the historical background and life experience." The article also went on to state that, "Now the EU is increasing the validity of its existence and role as a dynamic and viable regional organization."<sup>46</sup> Conceivably, the editorial was insinuating that the EU should make decisions independently from Washington's influence. Since the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989, the European Union has tried to establish some sort of independent role in international affairs against the wishes of the U.S., which has insisted on exercising leadership over the EU. A European delegation's visit to Pyongyang in May of 2001, led by Swedish Prime Minister and European Council President Goran Persson, made Washington uneasy not only because Persson was the first Western leader to visit Pyongyang but because his trip came at a time when inter-Korean dialogue had bogged down. The relations between North Korea and the United States were confrontational. The EU's active involvement in Korean affairs could undermine U.S. role on the Korean peninsula as well as Washington's tough stance toward Pyongyang, and could be used by North Korea as a counterweight to the U.S., an alternative source of aid, trade and political leverage.<sup>47</sup>

Surprisingly, when a severe flood hit North Korea in the late 1990s,

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46 Top EU Delegation Visits DPRK First Summit with West Marks New Departure from Cold War Legacy, <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>.

47 For alleviating the U.S. concerns, Persson and other EU officials were reported to signal no bid to upstage the United States while saying their visit to the North aims to promote reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula and help the Pyongyang regime out of its isolation, *Korea Herald*, May 3, 2001.

Kim Jong Il used food aid as a tool to drive a wedge between South Korea and its allies. The famine-stricken country deliberately shunned South Korea and asked for food donations from the U.S. and Japan. South Korea requested the U.S. and Japan not to give any food aid to North Korea, claiming that North Korea's food shortage was not that serious. However, the U.S. and Japan believed that North Korea's famine was true and they should give Pyongyang food aid for humanitarian reasons.<sup>48</sup> Under both external and domestic pressure, the Kim Young Sam regime finally decided to follow suit, giving aid to the North.

However, he was not happy with Japan because it overshadowed South Korea. He complained that Japan gave more food to North Korea than South Korea did and that Tokyo managed to send food to Pyongyang earlier than the arrival of South Korean food aid. Hence, Kim Young Sam warned Tokyo that Japan's eagerness to improve relations with North Korea in spite of stalled North-South Korean relations made people think that Japan was hindering Korean unification.<sup>49</sup> Immediately after North Korea's launching of a Taepodong missile in August of 1998, Japan retaliated by freezing a promised donation of US\$1 billion to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). However, Japan was soon forced to honor its promise because the U.S. and South Korea did not want Tokyo to undermine the framework of the Geneva Agreement.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the missile crisis also caused a friction between South Korea and its allies as well as China's conflicts with the U.S. and Japan over missile defense. The U.S. and Japan have accelerated the development of the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) program, while South Korea refused to join the TMD because the program might provoke an arms race in

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48 *Joongang Ilbo*, January 23, 1996; *China News*, February 5, 1996.

49 *Korea and World Affairs*, Winter 1995, p. 749.

50 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9809/SEP16.html#item2>; <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9809/SEP25.html#item6>.

Northeast Asia. South Korea also opposed the U.S. and Japan's plans to launch a preemptive strike on the DPRK if there are imminent signs of an attack because it would trigger an all-out war. ROK Minister of National Defense Chun Yong-taek said in March of 1999 that, "such preemptive attacks are feared to develop into an all-out war on the Korean Peninsula, so we determinedly oppose preemptive attacks without prior consultation."<sup>51</sup> In addition, Japan's armed forces<sup>52</sup> buildup and expanding military role in the international arena since late 1998 have brought to the fore China and South Korea's concerns about possible Japanese militarism.<sup>53</sup> It was reported that sharing resources and research for the TMD system were viewed by the Chinese as a start of a revival of Japan's military ambitions.<sup>54</sup> China also expressed concerns that a US-Japan agreement to conduct research on an anti-missile defense system could set off an arms race in Northeast Asia.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, China and Japan have debated whether Taiwan should be included in the US-Japan security cooperation and TMD program. Zhang Wannian, Vice Chairman of the PRC Central Military Commission, told Director-General of the Japanese Defense Agency Fukushima Nukaga a clear declaration that Taiwan should not be included in the new Japan-US defense cooperation guidelines, which would be conducive to the elimination of the PRC's suspicions over Japan-US security cooperation and would further the development of Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>56</sup> A PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman said in

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51 *NAPSNet Daily Report*, March 5, 1999, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/latest.html> & <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9903/MAR11.html#item17>.

52 Japan decided to develop its own multi-purpose reconnaissance satellite, to involve in TMD, and to purchase aircrafts with air-fueling capacity, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9810/OCT02.html#item8> & <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9810/OCT09.html#item16>.

53 Yun Duk-min, "Seoul and Tokyo need Channel for Security Talk," [http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus\\_detail.asp?no=59&title=VOL0703&category=com](http://www.kf.or.kr/koreafocus/focus_detail.asp?no=59&title=VOL0703&category=com).

54 "Japan's Military Ambition Fueled by Cohen's Visit," *China Daily*, January 18, 1999, A4, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9901/JAN21.html#item23>.

55 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9809/SEP22.html#item1>.

the January 1999 press briefing in Beijing that - whether directly or indirectly - including Taiwan in a Japan-US Defense Cooperation Guideline would be an infringement of China's sovereignty.<sup>57</sup> Beijing wanted Tokyo to specify Taiwan would not be included in the US-Japan military operations but Tokyo refused to spell it out. A People's Liberation Army Daily commentary specifically indicated that "the US and Japan have other reasons for enhancing the development of a TMD system rather than their excuse of the DPRK's rocket launch. The US is trying to include Taiwan into the scope of the TMD system. That is a severe interference in China's internal affairs and is unacceptable."<sup>58</sup> Referring to the success of a U.S. NMD test in December of 2001, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue Zhang stated, "Our position on missile defense is very clear and consistent: We are opposed to the United States building a missile defense system." She added, "We believe that relevant sides should, through sincere and serious dialogue, seek a solution that does not compromise any side's security interests, nor harm international arms control and disarmament efforts."<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Unquestionably, North Korea is a minor power. Nonetheless, dissimilar to other minor powers, North Korea in the post-Cold War period has taken a unique approach mixed with military means and diplomatic maneuvers to attain its foreign policy goals. By taking advantage of its geostrategic location, strategic advantage vis-à-vis

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56 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9809/SEP30.html#item22>.

57 "Inclusion of Taiwan in Japan-US Pact Opposed," *China Daily*, January 20, 1999, A1, <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9901/JAN21.html#item23>.

58 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9810/OCT22.html#item17>.

59 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0112/DEC04.html#item3>.

South Korea and Japan, as well as Kim Jong Il's adroit diplomatic skills, North Korea has been able to make a remarkable achievement in foreign relations. What worth noting is that North Korea's totalitarian regime is also another factor contributing to its diplomatic advances because it enables Kim Jong Il to have a free hand in diplomatic maneuvers. On the other hand, without South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's insistence on implementing his Sunshine policy, North Korea might not have made diplomatic breakthroughs so easily, particularly in its relations with Western Europe. This research proves a previous study done by Michael D. Ward and Lewis S. House, who evaluated activities of countries on the world stage between 1948 and 1978, finding that North and South Korea were the most powerful countries in terms of behavioral power, because they were most able to get other countries to engage and interact with them.<sup>60</sup>

Though North Korea is a tough bargainer and has succeeded in its foreign policy behavior to maximizing its economic gains, the country has not been able to attain its mid- and long-term goal of redressing the unfavorable balance of power on the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, North Korea's extortion of aid from other countries may yield aid fatigue and cause a backlash against North Korea as well. For example, Japanese public opinion has become reluctant to respond toward appeals by the WFP. Both *Sankei Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* called for the Japanese government not to provide food to North Korea.<sup>61</sup> As a result, in November 2001 the Japanese government decided to postpone its promised 200,000 tons of rice aid to the DPRK.<sup>62</sup>

North Korea is a minor power whose foreign policy is inevitably conditioned by the international environment shaped by the major

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60 Michael D. Ward and Lewis S. House, "A Theory of Behavioral Power of Nations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, March 1988, pp. 19-20.

61 Editorial, "Abduction issue has to be solved first," *Sankei Shimbun*, November 2, 2001, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/08/20011105ig90.htm>.

62 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0111/NOV07.html#item9>.

powers. Hence, the success of its diplomacy depends on the response of powerful countries. Without China's support, North Korea's brinkmanship would have not succeeded in getting the U.S. to the negotiating table during the 1993-94 nuclear crisis let alone the signing of the Geneva Agreement. Likewise, North Korea can do nothing if it fails to attract America's attention or if the U.S. is indifferent to its threats. For the majority of past five decades, North Korea has not been important enough to be on the U.S. diplomatic agenda.<sup>63</sup> In order for the U.S. to be interested in Pyongyang in the post-Cold War period, North Korea deliberately picked issues that Washington is most concerned about in the post-Cold War era. Since the inauguration of the Clinton administration in 1993, Washington spelled out the prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear arsenals as its foreign policy priority. North Korea's timing showed that it was a well-planned maneuver to get Washington's attention. At that time, both President Clinton and Kim Young Sam had been in office less than a month and were busy accommodating themselves to the new task. However, since President George Bush came to office in March 2001, the DPRK has run into the old problem, which has failed to get the Bush Administration's attention. Since September, this problem has been exacerbated by Bush's preoccupation with the war on terrorism. However, as the war on terrorism is approaching an end, Washington has targeted some other countries for its anti-terrorism campaign. North Korea has been targeted by the U.S. Defense Department as the third greatest threat to security after Iran and Iraq.<sup>64</sup> The U.S. President Bush's warning, linking missile proliferation and weapons of mass destruction to the war on terror, raised a speculation that North Korea was on the short list of targets in the post-Afghanistan anti-terrorist

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63 Mitchell B. Reiss, "Avoiding De javu All Over Again: Lessons from U.S.-DPRK Engagement," <http://english.joins.com/nk/article.asp?aid=20010730175231&sid=F00>.

64 <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200112/200112050388.html>.

campaign.<sup>65</sup> It remains to be seen whether Bush's warning is merely rhetoric or a serious threat that will result in a concrete action.

Based on the characteristics of North Korea's negotiation behavior, Kim Jong Il will not sit down with the Bush Administration for negotiation until he feels satisfied with the U.S. attitude and becomes familiar with his counterpart.<sup>66</sup> That is why the process of negotiations with North Korea is usually extremely time-consuming. *Rodong Sinmun's* article in October of 2001 said that North Korea does not oppose dialogue with the US. However, the Bush administration has to drop its demand to widen discussions on DPRK's conventional arms in addition to its missile program.<sup>67</sup> Ri Hyong-chol, North Korea's ambassador to the UN, also reiterated in his keynote speech at the UN General Assembly in November of 2001 that the DPRK would only resume dialogue with the US when the incumbent US administration adopts policies.<sup>68</sup> Even if North Korea and the Bush Administration did come to the negotiation table, it would probably come only after Washington drops its demand to discuss conventional weapons, which would be a start signal of a protracted bargaining. It is conceivable that North Korea will request U.S. compensation for delays in the provision of two nuclear reactors and include other non-starters.

As a rule, Kim Jong Il will not negotiate with his counterparts until he is able to control the agenda. He is sure that the other negotiating party is willing to make concessions. Moreover, his past behavior

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65 N. Korea's Old Tactics May Backfire Post-Sept. 11, December 7, 2001, <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/0112072100.htm>.

66 A good example is that Kim Jong Il spent more than two years to have a summit with Kim Dae-jung. He did not agree with the summit till he believed that Kim Dae-jung did have sincerity. During the period, President D. J. Kim went through a variety of tests and challenges (notably the submarine incident in September 1996, missile tests in August 1998 and the military conflict between North-South Korean naval ships in June 1999) set by Kim Jong Il.

67 <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0110/OCT29.html#item2>.

68 <http://english.joins.com/article.asp?aid=20011114201641&sid=E00>.



shows that he has enormous patience, and will wait for his counterparts to give in or comply with his rules. He also has a strong sense of dignity, and wishes to make his counterparts come to negotiations even though he needs them more than the other side does. Perhaps, this is also a part of his strategy to outmaneuver his counterparts psychologically.