

# US INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY AND THE NUCLEAR CRISIS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA: REALITY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the War with Iraq, the United States has been strengthening its status and role as an 'absolute' super power. To some extent, the US seems to be successful in justifying and making universal its major foreign policy directions against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, dictatorship, and regional hegemons. Currently, North Korea is not willing to give up its nuclear weapons development program, ROK and the US need to restore the relationship between the two countries to its past level, to the extent that both countries fully share such as common goal for protection of a free ROK and a common concept of "main enemy" regarding Pyongyang's totalitarian regime, and agreed policy directions toward North Korea's nuclear program. Especially these days, when active discussion about a role change for US troops on the Korean Peninsula is rising, increased efforts for ROK national security are urgent.

## I. Introduction

The war on Iraq concluded with a US victory within three weeks or so. There has risen a great deal of controversy around the world over the nature of the war, the cause for the US attack, and the role of the UN. In South Korea, particularly, anti-war and anti-American sentiments have greatly expanded just prior to and during the war. Korean people's view has been divided, especially over the issue of dispatching non-combat troops into Iraq and overall, and it has been discovered that large and serious divergence in views exists within South Korean society over America's international strategy and the ROK-US alliance.

It is an indisputable fact that the US has emerged as the one-pole world superpower in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European socialist countries. Since then, the US has been undergoing another rapid change in its international strategy, what could indeed be called 'a revolutionary change,' especially since September 11. The Iraq War could be a watershed solidifying this changed US strategy toward the world. While the September 11 terrorist attacks provided the United States with an opportunity to initiate a bolder and more offensive foreign policy line, it can be said that the Iraq war has rendered this US foreign policy line more confident and, as a consequence, has Washington seeking new relations with the United Nations. The long period of US efforts to obtain a UN resolution for the Iraq War has led to a diversity of controversy over the issue of 'world reordering' expressed in such phrases as 'restructuring of the UN' and 'post-UN era.' At any rate, it is certain that the Iraq war is becoming a significant moment of opportunity for the US to strengthen its status and role as a superpower, as well as to justify and make universal its major foreign policy directions against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, dictatorship, and regional hegemons.

President Bush, in his State of the Union address in January 2002,

conceptualized the “axis of evil” states that disregard “human dignity” and instead attempt to develop WMD.<sup>1</sup> Since then, preemptive attack upon such “evil” states was justified and clearly stipulated in the “National Security Strategy(NSS)” published in September 2002. The NSS report proclaims that the US will fulfill the duty of protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom against enemies in the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup>

It is beyond question that this change in America’s international strategy would also have a great impact on the US policy toward the Korean Peninsula. As we can see in the question, “what is next after Iraq,” North Korea’s nuclear issue has emerged as the most prominent security issue in Northeast Asia after the Iraq War. At the critical juncture where Pyongyang accepted the trilateral talks in Beijing, it is indeed a question whether or not the Kim Jong-il regime will be willing to comply with international demands to nullify its nuclear ambition without going beyond the “red line” to make the just incipient Three Party Talks, a moment of opportunity for a non-nuclear Korean peninsula.

In this situation, South Korea’s response is crucially important. South Korea needs to firmly stand in the position of a concerned party, not just a “mediator” in all issues related to the Korean peninsula. Among other things, it is important for South Korea to realize Pyongyang’s real intention, which was revealed in the fact that Pyongyang strongly demanded South Korea’s exclusion from the Trilateral Talks. This signifies that North Korea refuses to recognize Seoul as a dialogue partner with respect to the crucial security issues on the peninsula. In reality, the Kim Jong-il regime in Pyongyang appears

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1 Specifically, rule of law, limits on state power, respect of women, free speech, tolerance of religious and ethnic diversity, private property, and equal justice were listed as examples.

2 The preface of the NSS declares that “freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity: the birthright of every person in every civilization.”

interested only in drawing the South to its side against Washington using the National Unity and Cooperation ideologies. Therefore, the South Korean government must not allow itself to be held hostage to “dialogue for the sake of dialogue itself” and must not neglect its duty of vigilance over Pyongyang’s WMD development and human rights violations.

It is very unfortunate and non-principled for Seoul to have accepted Pyongyang’s demand that South Korea be excluded from the multilateral talks in Beijing. The government should also be criticized for failing to vote on the UN resolution regarding the North’s human rights situation. This paper attempts first to review and outline the United States’ international strategy, the drastic change that has been underway since the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Iraq war. Based on that, the US strategy toward the Korean Peninsula will also be examined. Pyongyang’s South Korea policy based on its nuclear development program needs to be examined, and in conclusion, the policy implications for the Seoul government in response to Pyongyang’s development of nuclear weapons will be explored.

## **II. US International Strategy**

### ***1. Characteristics of US Foreign Policy***

#### a) Morality and Power

It is a peculiar characteristic of the US foreign policy that it contains an element of strong morality. As an immigrant society established by freedom-seeking immigrants from all over the world, America is different from ‘historical societies.’ Specific policy objectives of this moral stand in American foreign policy can be listed as protection and preservation of freedom, expansion of democracy, and improvement of

human rights throughout the entire world. The US security strategy, under the Bush administration, is outlined as: (i) protection of peace from the threat of terrorists and dictators; (ii) preservation of peace through friendly relations with other powers; and (iii) expansion of peace through support for establishment of free and open societies over the world.<sup>3</sup> All of these foreign policy goals are understood to be inherited from the principle of priority for morality in American foreign policy making.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, another characteristic of US foreign policy is that it bases its consideration of aspects of power upon the reality of world politics. Power is considered to be an important policy-making element, no less than morality. Thus, US policy makers always appear to have examined in implementing foreign policy whether or not the country is militarily prepared to sustain its moral goals. Summed up, it can be seen that historically, the US foreign policy has been the result of compromise and balance between morality and power.

#### (b) Pursuit of Leadership not Hegemony

A hegemon, in general, is a strong state pursuing a narrow sense of selfish or imperial national interests. In contrast, a leadership state pursues a role of public good in world affairs with good will and a pattern of cooperation rather than exploitation or domination, yet possessing the strong power of a hegemon. The US appears to have committed itself to this role of leadership. In other words, it is willing to take

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3 The US security strategy during the Clinton administration was outlined as (i) promotion of security through diplomacy and military power (ii) economic prosperity (iii) expansion of democracy over the world.

4 This tradition of morality in American foreign policy can be also seen in the recent comment from the Bush administration: "Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities." Refer to President Bush's West Point address, June 1, 2002.

responsibility to lead the world with the great mission: protection of and expansion of the free world.<sup>5</sup>

Such US stance vis-à-vis the outside world was well revealed in statements or comments made by US leading figures, especially during the Iraq war for instance, President Bush's emphasis on the purpose of the war, which he stressed was to restore freedom and to re-establish a democratic system in Iraq. Also, US senator John McCain commented that the Iraq War was a fight for freedom and that the US must not be "imperial" in the sense of pursuing its self-interest.<sup>6</sup>

The US is thus positioning itself as a leadership state playing the role of policeman to serve the global public good, in order to secure the peace and stability in the international community and deter the rise of dangerous hegemonic states. Examples of the 'public good' would be to provide a nuclear umbrella, to ensure the free-market system, and to secure oil transport or other routes. To fulfill this leadership role, the US is making continuous efforts to maintain military superiority over other states in the world. The so-called hegemonic stability theory is a branch of international political theory that supports this leadership role on the part of the US. It promotes that a leadership role of a hegemonic state with both goodwill and power contributes to the stability and peace of international society.

## ***2. Change in the US Foreign Policy since the September 11 Terrorist Attacks***

### (a) Counter-Terrorism: A New Component of Morality

US international strategy has undergone a fundamental change

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5 For further details, see NSS: "The United States welcome our responsibility to lead in this great mission."

6 John McCain, U.S. Republican Senator from Arizona, "A fight for freedom," *Korea Herald*, March 26, 2003.

since September 11. As alluded to earlier, the Bush administration has gone forward with the MD (missile defense) against possible missile attack from the outside potential enemies, but it was soon realized that MD would not be sufficient to defend the nation from terrorism. A change in the security concept has taken place and counter-terror strategy has been added. For the US, September 11 became a moment of opportunity to establish a new foreign policy guideline with which to distinguish enemy states from friendly states, depending upon where a country stands in its response to terrorism. Since then, terrorism has been squarely labeled evil and anti-terror has been added as a new component of the morality question. In a word, it can be said that the September 11 terrorist attacks provided a crucial moment for transforming the US foreign policy from a kind of “reluctant sheriff” agonizing between isolation and intervention to a more realistic and “resolute” attitude for positive intervention.<sup>7</sup>

The NSS of September 2002 also made it clear that the US would intervene anywhere in the world for the improvement of freedom, democracy, and human rights. The report, under the cause of “non-negotiable human dignity,” officially proclaimed that the US would intervene aggressively in international affairs to assert the rule of law, limits upon state power, respect for women, free speech, tolerance of religion and ethnicity, private property, and equal justice.<sup>8</sup>

#### (b) Justifying Preemptive Action

Another important change in US foreign policy after September 11 is that the preemptive action, namely first-strike strategy, has been officially and expressly stipulated and justified as right and sometimes necessary.<sup>9</sup> Containment and deterrence had been the core strategy in

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7 Richard N. Haass, “From Reluctant to Resolute: American Foreign Policy after September 11,” Remarks to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (June 26, 2002).

8 NSS, *op.cit.*

the Cold-War era but this is no longer regarded as the most effective strategy for terrorists armed with WMD. The US has established a new doctrine of national security that permits itself a room for preemptive actions against terrorists or against new 'rogue' states armed with WMD, beyond the conventional strategy of containment or deterrence. According to the new doctrine, even the nuclear preemptive action is regarded to be a possible last resort.

NSS has made it clear in this regard that, given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the US can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as it did in the past, "We cannot let our enemies strike first."<sup>10</sup> The regime of a rogue state is willing to take risks and put itself and its population in harm's way at the whim of a dictator, whereas a democratically empowered population refuses its leadership to take such a risk. Against rogue regimes, deterrence based only upon the threat of retaliation is ineffective. It is thus predicted that the changed situation in world security compels the US to action and that preemption is inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

### (c) Security Cooperation with Other Powers

It has been a procedural guideline no less important than the principle and goals of US foreign policy to build cooperative relations with the Western powers in dealing with world security issues. For the Gulf War of 1991, the US successfully established a cooperative relationship with the other powerful states. Other examples include: the solid American alliance with the United Kingdom, cooperative relations within NATO, support for Japan and strengthening the US-Japan alliance, American cooperation with China and Russia on anti-terror

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9 Thomas E. Ricks and Vernon Loeb, "Bush Developing Military Policy of Striking First," *Washington Post* (June 10, 2002).

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*



issues, and ROK-US policy coordination in policy towards North Korea.

During the Iraq War as well, much diplomatic evidence could be discovered regarding US diplomatic efforts to obtain support from the UN Security Council for the US war initiative. It is well-known that the established US allies, France and Germany, opposed the US attack on Iraq. The central point in this division between the US and those allies has been over the right to attack (or “punish”) another sovereign state unilaterally. Yet, disconnection and punishment of the linkage between terrorists or rogue states and the weapons of mass destruction are being regarded as valid and necessary for the peace of the world, and they are increasingly obtaining support from the international community.

Furthermore, it is considered even inevitable by the international community to restrict and punish the sovereign rights of rogue states that infringe upon universal human rights. That was probably the major reason for UN Security Resolution 1441, which was clearly for the disarmament of Iraq, to be approved unanimously. After that, Iraq was temporarily successful in weakening the US stance by complying with UN demands for further WMD inspections several months before the outbreak of war.

Upon conclusion of the war, the US perception of the security cooperation with other powerful states seems to be changing. In other words, it seems that the US discovered that not only do other powers not feel the same degree of desperate necessity as do the US and Britain for war against rogue states such as Iraq, but also US military capability alone is sufficient to defeat them. At the same time, the US perception of the UN as a unique representative institution for peace and security in international society also seems to have undergone rapid change throughout the Iraq war.

### ***3. Iraq War and the US International Strategy***

Throughout the outbreak of the war on Iraq, there have risen severe internal divisions inside the UN Security Council as well as within NATO. This was primarily due to the difference in view on war. In other words, it is clear that the US justification for the preemptive action in the name of anti-terrorism and human rights improvement collided with the national interests of the other powerful states inside the UN, who obviously support the status quo on sovereign rights. This phenomenon is one that the UN has never before experienced and shows that, while the UN Security Council is being divided anew, the UN function is being paralyzed by vying interests among member nations. This phenomenon is also a slice of the fact that the UN hardly represents the new distribution of power, which is currently under formulation centering upon the US.

The global distribution of power continues to change. This is the change that has been progressed since the collapse of the East European socialist countries and the Soviet Union, especially after the Gulf war of 1991. The controversial debates over themes such as 're-ordering of the UN,' or 'post-UN era' are a consequence from this new distribution of power based on the uni-polar system centering upon absolute US power. South Korea should keep an eye on how this new power relation in the world after the Iraq war would exert impact on the international politics of Northeast Asia and further on its future national interests.

The US appears to be pursuing a re-structured international order in the Middle East in the wake of the Iraq victory. As mentioned, the direction of re-structuring would be clearly toward the establishment of liberal democratic institutions in Iraq and the expansion of those systems toward as many neighboring countries as possible in the region. With respect to the American post-Iraq War strategy, an analysis that the US exerts hegemonic influence depending only upon its military

capabilities would be biased. As alluded to earlier, the US foreign policy puts forward a moral stand on the basis of military power. Morality implies a guideline in life and value judgment in all kinds of human affairs from personal to world-scale. The US morality, epitomized as liberal democracy, free-market system and protection of human rights, is evaluated and recognized as one of the best relevant ideologies among the hitherto existents. It is the very international strategy of the US that proceeds forward for the world peace and stability, with liberal ideology in one hand and the strong military power in the other.

### **III. North Korea's Nuclear Development and the Strategy toward South Korea and the US**

#### ***1. North Korea's Strategy toward the South***

##### (a) Military Superiority over the South

North Korea's military buildup including its nuclear development program and short-ranged missile (so far, not as serious as long-range ones) and bio-chemical weapons, is a core element for DPRK's strategy toward the South. That is increasingly becoming a direct powerful threat to the national security of the ROK.<sup>12</sup>

Although the North's level of nuclear development is not sophisticated and far from practical use, a problem exists in Pyongyang's persistent and continuous ambition for producing and possessing nuclear weapons. Overall, it is judged that the principal objective of North Korea's nuclear development program is, not simply as a negotiation card but for the purpose of becoming a nuclear-possessing nation and

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12 David C. Wright, "Assessment of the North Korean Missile Threat," napsnet@nautilus.org, March 19, 2003.

thus belonging to the nuclear club that currently consists of 7-8 countries. In other words, North Korea's primary intention in its nuclear program, as revealed in abrupt actions such as the official proclamation that it already has nuclear arsenal, appears to be to make its possession of nuclear bombs an established fact.

The purpose for Pyongyang to produce and possess nuclear weapons is thought to be, among other things, in securing military superiority over the South. Put differently, the Kim Jong-il regime is attempting to exert military and strategic hegemony over the Korean Peninsula, and thus to control the overall situation of the Peninsula, thereby preparing for the possibility of unification by force.

For decades, there has continued on the Korean Peninsula a situation of military confrontation between the DPRK army and the Combined Forces Command of US and ROK across the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). Unless the North's fundamental strategy toward Seoul changes, there exists the possibility of military collision between the two camps, or Pyongyang's unilateral provocation, even if limited.<sup>13</sup>

At present, considering Kim Jong-il regime's persistent ambition for nuclear weapons, even some hard-line policy options are not excluded from the US policy options: economic-military sanctions or replacement of the Kim regime with new leadership through the US-led international pressure.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, some development of events underway in South Korea might be influencing Pyongyang's strategy-making toward the South. For instance, the controversial plan to relocate the US 2nd infantry division south of the Han River, if implemented, might be an attractive situation for Pyongyang to make limited provocation in the area north of the river. Overall, it is clear that a main aspect of Pyongyang's strategy toward the South is to secure military superiority

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13 *Washington Post*, March 8, 2003.

14 *New York Times*, April 21, 2003.

over the South, especially through WMD development in preparation for anything that might take place on the Korean Peninsula.

(b) Psychological War and Camouflage Tactics

It is true that the Pyongyang regime has not changed its basic direction of strategy toward South Korea even under the Sunshine Policy during the Kim Dae-jung administration. Rather, the Kim Jong-il regime has taken advantage of the opportunity for its own military buildup. It should be noted that, for the past several years, it has been hard to ascertain the North's real intention in terms of inter-Korean relations since it has been covered with camouflage, psychological and propaganda tactics.

At present, it seems clear that the North is still not willing to accept Seoul as a dialogue partner, especially on military and security issues including the nuclear problem. This fact was illustrated in the 10th inter-Korean ministerial talks, where North Korea refused to put the nuclear issue on the agenda, arguing that it is a matter only between the US and DPRK.

Instead, the Kim Jong-il regime continued its propaganda for the cause of National Unity and Cooperation, confusing the South Korean people's perception about North Korea. Pyongyang's basic intention seems a kind of international united front tactic with which it is taking the South as hostage with one hand, while checking the US hard-line policy toward the North with the other. At the same time, North Korea is attempting to separate the two allies, ROK and the US. Upon South Korea's acceptance of the ministerial talks when the Kim Jong-il regime unexpectedly proposed the 10th inter-Korean ministerial talks only a couple of days after Beijing Three Way Talks, it can be pointed out that if separate responses from the ROK and the US continue, then distrust between the ROK and the US could further deepen and thus damage South Korea's national interests.

Also, North Korea's request to the South for rice and fertilizer through the Red Cross does not correspond with its hostile behavior excluding Seoul from the three-way talks. It is regarded to be an arrogant act that Pyongyang demanded economic aid of the South without admitting Seoul as a dialogue partner. It is clear that North Korea is only interested in dialogue channel in economic sectors through which it can obtain economic benefits in hard currency and social-civilian sectors which could be used as a stage for Pyongyang's political propaganda and united front strategy.

Put simply, it is gradually becoming clear that North Korea is not sincerely interested in main themes such as the improvement of inter-Korean relations, the co-existence of both Koreas, and eventual peace settlement on the Korean Peninsula. An important lesson that we can learn from the experiment and failure of the Sunshine Policy during the past several years is that the Kim Jong-il regime, by nature, can be changed only through deterrence or sanctions based on military force, not through dialogue or persuasion.

### (c) Propaganda Warfare

The most powerful logical backbone for Pyongyang's political propaganda toward the South is the June 15 Communique made during the two Koreas' Summit Talks of June 2000. Provisions that are most frequently used for propaganda are the first article stipulating the Korean peninsula's own solution of the unification issue without the intervention of foreign powers, the second article implying acceptance of a unification formula based on low-level federation, and the fourth article pursuing "a balanced development of national economy," i.e., South-North economies through inter-Korean economic cooperation.

These provisions not only violate the fundamental identity of the Republic of Korea, but also have no practical relevance in the current military confrontation between the two Koreas. These articles can even

be dangerous in that they can mislead South Korean people's perception and understanding of the Kim Jong-il regime. Today, some leftist-inclined youth and NGOs in South Korea even demand that South Korea as a whole should put each provision of this June 15 Communique into practice.

Similarly, Pyongyang also attaches great importance to the July 4 Joint Statement which is regarded by the northern authority as one of the so-called Three Charters of Unification. The three principles of the July 4 Joint Statement are Independence, Peaceful Unification, and Great National Unity, and the North is using these as an effective tool to propagandize anti-American and anti-war sentiment, and national unity and cooperation. North Korea strongly insists that The Three Principles of the July 4 Joint Statement make up the basic guideline and permanent platform for national unification that the North and the South must adhere to in making and implementing their unification policy.<sup>15</sup>

However, we cannot ignore the fact that the July 4 Joint Statement came about through motivation for power solidification by both Koreas by taking advantage of mutual acknowledgement. The old Park Jung-hee regime attempted the October Reform without the consensus of the South Korean people, and the Northern Kim Il Sung regime also wanted to strengthen its dictatorship in 1972. It is also true that the contents of the Joint Statement excessively emphasized opposition to foreign influence, and this is being used as grounds by the North for pushing for a withdrawal of US troops.

At this critical juncture in which the nuclear crisis is escalating, North Korea is heightening its criticism of the ROK-US alliance and ROK-US joint measures for the security and peace of South Korea. For instance, the North's mass media argued that "our whole nation confirmed that not only the peace but also the unification of the nation can

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15 *Yonhapnews*, May 15, 2002.

be achieved only when the whole nation sticks to the June 15 Communique, and so it is obviously a betrayal of the June 15 Communique that the Southern authority is conducting a joint military exercise with the US.”<sup>16</sup>

## ***2. North Korea's Strategy toward the US***

North Korea has consistently demanded as a prerequisite for it to abandon its nuclear program that the US agree to the non-aggression treaty with the DPRK based on legal procedures such as US congressional ratification. That is Pyongyang's only persistent demand in its negotiation with the US, since North Korea has begun its nuclear program. This is also a slice of the fact that North Korea has pursued direct, bilateral talks and peace negotiation with the US without South Korea, probably with the purpose of the withdrawal of the US troops from the South.

Currently, the military balance between the two Koreas on the Korean Peninsula has been maintained with the existence of the US troops based on the military alliance between the ROK and the US, which possess ultra-modern weapons. If the US troops withdraw from the Peninsula, then, among other things, the psychological blow to the South Korean people would be tremendous. Also, in the case that the US second infantry division near the DMZ is moved south of the Han River as a first step of relocating the US troops, some unrest of public sentiments in the Metropolitan area is expected. The South Korean people's present ideological division and resulting anticipated difficulties in the country's united and effective response to Pyongyang's provocative stance are critical factors that might cause North Korea's misperception and miscalculation.

North Korea has been pursuing direct and bilateral peace negotia-

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16 North Korea's *Pyongyang Broadcasting*, April 1, 2003.



tion with the US. In Pyongyang's insistence on a non-aggression treaty with the US, there lies a long-standing strategy to eventually induce a change in the status of the US troops through establishing and intensifying the direct channel of dialogue with the US. Kim Jong-il authorities want to be treated by the US as the only legitimate and representative power on the Korean Peninsula that can solve the current security issues with the US. Thus, the North argues, on the basis of abandoning hostile attitudes and mutually acknowledging each other through diplomatic relations, the US could escape from its current agony on the Peninsula. North Korea's demand of a guarantee on the regime security and mutual abandonment of hostile policy is the very strategy to bring the current security structure of the Peninsula to the bilateral relations between the US and DPRK.

North Korea's strategy toward the US for a bilateral peace treaty has continued ever since the end of the Korean War and was especially salient in the wake of Vietnam's unification by the northern force. Therefore, Pyongyang's insistence upon a non-aggression treaty with the US has a very crucial strategic meaning in the current situation of the Korean Peninsula.

#### **IV. US Policy toward North Korea**

##### ***1. Improvements of Human Rights in North Korea***

As examined above, the fundamental American belief in universal human rights is reflected in the case of Washington's North Korea policy.<sup>17</sup> The principal background for the US hard-line policy toward Pyongyang comes from the US assessment of the human rights viola-

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17 The annual human rights report of 2003 states that human rights "are indigenous to every corner of the world, in every culture and in every religious tradition," March 31, 2003.

tions in North Korea. This is in the same line with the aforementioned traditional US emphasis on morality in foreign policy making. It is also in the same context as in the US's dealing with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. In other words, the miserable situation of the North Korean people is becoming an overall concern of the people in the international community, especially the US political leaders.

It is true that distrust and hard-line policy toward North Korea has been deeper since the inauguration of the Bush administration. It stems from the consistent perception of the Republican conservatives even before the Bush administration, an image of the Pyongyang regime that the totalitarian state "arms with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens."<sup>18</sup> This perception and image of North Korea has been further strengthened and solidified, especially since the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The US has long expressed a deep concern and warned against North Korea's human rights violations. An example is President Bush's mention of the North Korea's situation, where children are starving while large amounts of food are provided for the army, cannot be ignored for a long time and that no state should become a prison for its own people.<sup>19</sup> Also, the human rights situation of the defectors from North Korea has recently become a world-wide concern. Governments and NGOs in Europe have begun to reveal the miserable situations and to discuss some possible policy options to improve them. Finally, the US has begun to deal with the issue of defectors as an important human rights issue. It is significant that the US administration has

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18 President Bush's State of the Union address, January 29, 2002.

19 President Bush's address in Seoul during his visit to South Korea, February 2002. Bush also warned the North that he would not let the world's "most dangerous regimes" acquire its "most dangerous weapons." The president added, he believed in freedom and was "troubled" by a regime that tolerated starvation: "I worry about a regime that is closed and not transparent"; "I'm deeply concerned about the people of North Korea."

begun to look at the issue from the human rights dimension. It implies that the issue of defectors from North Korea has become an important agenda of an American foreign policy that regards human rights as a significant policy guideline.

The US ambassador in charge of human rights, who participated in the 58th UN Human Rights Commission stated that “North Korea is a real hell on the earth” and that the UN Human Rights Commission needs to actively respond to DPRK’s horrible records of human rights infringement and that international community should call North Korean leaders to account for it.<sup>20</sup> It was also by the US support that the 53-member UN Human Rights Commission passed the European Union-issued resolution condemning the DPRK’s human rights violations for the first time. All of these are examples that demonstrate the US concern over the human rights situations in North Korea.

## ***2. Deterrence of North Korea’s Development of WMD***

Another characteristic of the US policy shift toward the North since the September 11 is the US’s firm will to deter Pyongyang’s development of WMD, such as nuclear weapons, missile and bio-chemical weapons. According to current US leaders, some terrorist-supporting “rogue states” such as North Korea form an “axis of evil,” thereby threatening world peace by arming with WMD.<sup>21</sup>

Washington especially worries that there might be a link between North Korea and international terrorists through the North’s export of missiles. Pointing to the DPRK as a dangerous state opening threatening US security, the NSS report states that “in the past decade North Korea has become the world’s principal purveyor of ballistic missiles.”<sup>22</sup>

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20 *Yonhapnews*, April 2, 2003.

21 President Bush’s State of the Union address, January 29, 2002.

22 *NSS, op. cit.*

The nuclear issue of the DPRK has emerged as an important international concern since October 2002, when Pyongyang authority revealed that it had already begun to develop the nuclear weapons, and the stance of the Bush administration is becoming clearer and more briefly outlined. Put simply, the US will not, by any means, tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea, and thus complete nullification of nuclear program should be a prerequisite for any negotiations with Pyongyang. Especially in the wake of the Iraq war, Washington has made it clear that all the options are open, while starting that peaceful and diplomatic resolution of the nuclear problem in DPRK is a basic principle.

The never-softening US stance derives also from Pyongyang's uncompromising attitude on the nuclear agenda over the past several months. As a response to the North's demand that it needs to be guaranteed for regime survival and thus needs a non-aggression treaty between the US and the DPRK, Washington has repeatedly expressed that it has no intention to invade North Korea. On the other hand, Pyongyang has continuously taken bold steps for nuclear development, such as issuing some striking statements about reprocessing, possession of nuclear weapons and threats to sell these weapons. Particularly, during the Three Way Talks in Beijing, where many expected a prospect for peace through negotiation in the wake of a several-month absence of dialogue with North Korea, Pyongyang failed to demonstrate any changed attitude or to bring about a bright prospect with respect to the controversial nuclear issue.

### ***3. The US Stance towards Three Way Talks and ROK-US Summit Meeting***

The trilateral talks in Beijing abruptly broke down since North Korea's representative claimed to have the nuclear bomb and threatened to export or use it. After the collapse of the talks, Pyongyang pre-

sented “a new and bold” proposal to resolve the dispute. But in reality, it did not have anything new or advanced compared to the past ones. Rather, Pyongyang’s proposal included more demands and was unilateral without consideration of the US response. It was purely based on the North’s standpoint that was mainly centered on abandonment of the US ‘hostile policy’ and agreement of non-aggression treaty.

The North’s proposal was flatly ignored by Washington. Given that the US is seeking first the “verifiable and irreversible” elimination of the North’s nuclear weapons program and then dialogue, there is almost no possibility for Washington to take the proposal seriously.

Overall, it is true that the US stance toward Pyongyang has become somehow more hardline-directed after the war in Iraq. This, as mentioned, basically derives from the deep-rooted distrust and frustration of the Bush administration over the behavior of the Pyongyang leaders. For instance, Washington is reportedly planning to replace current Pyongyang leadership, albeit not official position. For the last several months including the war in Iraq, the US leaders and public sentiment have felt that North Korea is more dangerous and threatening than Iraq in light of development of nuclear weapons. One of the most influential political figures in the US, Senator John McCain, mentioned after the collapse of the three-way talks that North Korea’s nuclear weapons are considered to be more threatening to the US than pre-war Iraq, so the US is in a very serious situation. He added, “in a sense, the North’s problem is more serious than Iraq’s.”<sup>23</sup>

In this situation, a ROK-US summit meeting was held in mid-May 2003. Both countries pledged to work together for the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. Before the summit, it is true that the two countries revealed a somewhat different nuance with respect to an effective policy response to deter the North’s nuclear ambition. For instance, South

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23 Refer to his interview with *the Associated Press*, April 25, 2003.

Korea has insisted on “solution by peaceful means” which would imply total exclusion of coercive means such as sanction or military options, while the US proposes the possible use of coercive means in the case of failure of nuclear negotiations with Pyongyang.

This conflict seemed to have been delicately and implicitly solved when the joint statement was completed, emphasizing a strong commitment to work for the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program through peaceful means based on international cooperation. In the case of increased threats to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, both countries agreed that further steps would be necessary. This is a kind of “deliberately vague” solution to overcome the difference of view between the two countries. In the current situation, where North Korea is not likely to give up its nuclear ambition only by means of negotiations, the two principles of “no tolerance of the North’s nuclear weapons” and “solution by peaceful means” are not realistically compatible. Any kind of choice and decision in priority should be made between the two principles. Meanwhile, North Korea has been strongly resisting the joint efforts of the US, ROK and Japan for sanctions through an international institution such as the UN, arguing that the regime will regard such a move as “a declaration of war.”

To summarize, the US stance on the nuclear talks with DPRK seems clear after the three-way talks and ROK-US summit meeting. First, the Bush administration will not tolerate DPRK’s possession of nuclear weapons. This seems an unquestionable principle of the Bush administration’s policy toward North Korea’s nuclear issue. The second principle is that Washington will not yield to North Korea’s pressure and come to the negotiation by Pyongyang’s “blackmail.” That means that the US will stand firmly on the common rule of American foreign policy that threatening behavior will not be rewarded. Lastly, the US reiterates the policy direction that policy toward North Korea should be based on the allied countries’ close coordination and common

responses. This position is almost reaffirmed in the ROK-US Summit Meeting after which a joint statement of the two countries is issued. Finally, the US position should be added that Pyongyang's possible possession of nuclear weapons is an international problem, thereby justifying the US efforts to incorporate South Korea and Japan into the present three-way talks.

### **V. Concluding Remarks: Policy Implications for South Korea**

In the 5th Inter-Korean Talks on Economic Cooperation that opened on May 20, 2003 in Pyongyang, North Korea threatened to bring an "unspeakable disaster" to South Korea, condemning the May 15 summit agreement between the ROK and the US, which emphasized the necessity to take "further steps" if the North escalates its nuclear threat. This is the initial reaction of Pyongyang to the summit, but reveals its long-standing attitude or strategy toward Seoul: attempting blackmail using the South's fear of the North's military retaliation on one hand, and Pyongyang's style of engagement toward Seoul based on "national unity and cooperation" propaganda on the other. It also purports to separate ROK and the US.

The ROK-US relationship that had become fragile in recent months has been, to some extent, restored through "smile diplomacy" shown at the summit meeting, but the outcome remains to be seen in the follow-up measures to be taken by both countries. Although the US strongly indicated that Washington will not relocate its major combat unit in the DMZ area, high officials in Washington still do not deny the possibility.

Unless the relationship between the two countries is restored to its past level, to the extent that both countries fully share a common goal for protection of a free ROK and a common concept of "main enemy" regarding Pyongyang's totalitarian regime, and agreed policy direc-

tions toward North Korea's nuclear program, then ROK national security seems likely to remain continuously weakened and fragile by the lack of full support from the US.

Therefore, the importance of national security for South Korea is becoming a matter not of slogan but of reality, especially these days, when active discussion about a role change for US troops on the Korean Peninsula is rising. First and foremost, the task for self-reliant defense is that South Korean people should have resolute determination to boldly face North Korea's conventional-force as well as WMD military threat. For this, the followings are prerequisite: re-establishment of a proper viewpoint and perception on North Korea, an iron will to defend the free ROK while being ready to go to war if necessary, and a people's consensus that there is a state of emergency over national security and the identity of the Republic of Korea as a legitimate state on the Korean Peninsula.

Especially in the situation that Pyongyang regime strengthens such political propaganda as anti-war and anti-US sentiment, peace, unification, national self-reliance, etc., the assertion that the anti-war stance is the way towards peace is naive. It should be pointed out that humiliating peace is not a real peace but the road to slavery. Ironically, only when we inspire courage to fight and prepare for war with an evil enemy can peace and freedom be secured. Therefore, in this nuclear crisis situation, it would be regarded to be wrong if appeasement or humiliation is advised by the logic that "at any rate we must escape the war" for fear of Kim Jong-il regime's retaliation. Further, the anti-war campaign can, albeit unintentional, have consequences rather supporting the North's propaganda.

Korea, geo-politically surrounded by hegemonic powers, has always had a difficult international circumstance for survival and prosperity. Before long, South Korea will probably meet a certain critical juncture, eventually being forced to choose an alliance and a side with an outside power to reorder the power distribution. Northeast Asia is



becoming a stage for power struggle and a chaotic situation. Considering state ideologies and geo-political elements, among the four powers surrounding the Korean Peninsula, the United States is probably the one that could most favorably serve South Korea's national interests.

It is clear that the ROK-US alliance will be a powerful foundation on which South Korea can overcome international confusion and difficulties that can take place in the future and thus maintain the nation's survival and prosperity. On the other hand, the decline of the US power and influence in this region is also clear to bring about the growth and increase of influence of other selfish hegemonic powers around the Korean Peninsula such as China and Japan.

If South Korea's foreign policy deviates from the long-standing alliance with the US and moves to a somewhat neutrality-inclined direction, it is worried that South Korea will meet a crucially difficult fate in light of national interests. The recently expanded and diffused anti-war sentiments are dangerous, considering the existing North Korea's military threat and the fact that Pyongyang's political campaign such as anti-war, anti-US, peace, unification, independence, centering on the "National Unity and Cooperation" can be easily linked to anti-Americas sentiments.

The ROK-US alliance should be, among other things, based on ideologically common ground. When South Korea sticks to this moral and ideological goal, a solution for the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula will be found relatively easily on the basis of cooperation with the US. Opposition to dictatorship, human rights violations, terrorism, WMD, and regional hegemony should be common targets for both countries. From this common sharing of value and goals, common responses to Pyongyang's threat, policy coordination and cooperation between the two countries are possible. It is time for ROK and the US to take the opportunity at the summit meeting to restore and strengthen their traditional alliance.