

North Korea's South Korea Policy: An Evaluation of Determining Variables and Prospects for 2012

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The focus of this article is twofold. First, it will review the variables that have critically impacted North Korea and its policies toward South Korea during the terms in office of several former South Korean presidents. Second, it will make some predictions about North Korean policy for 2012 based on an analysis of the characteristics and background of North Korea's stance toward South Korea during the Lee Myung-bak government. Simply put, the two Koreas both tend to take relatively hard-line policies when North Korean regime is unstable, whereas soft-line policies emerge when the regime stabilizes. North Korea's policy toward South Korea is largely determined by U.S.-related variables; it is also affected, however, by whether South Korea takes a soft or hard stance toward North Korea. The North tends to approach the South at times when Seoul seeks to engage Pyongyang and Washington takes a tough stance. When Washington shows flexibility, Pyongyang does not take the initiative in the inter-Korean relationship but focuses on its relationship with Washington. In sum, variables related to the two Koreas tend to determine the larger direction of North Korea's South Korea policy, while U.S.-related variables have more specific impact on the forcefulness of North Korea's approach to South Korea. North Korea has generally taken a hard-line policy during the Lee government, but it has frequently and erratically shifted its tactics between highly provocative, threatening moves and sporadic, poorly-executed attempts at dialogue. It seems that Seoul's consistent stance toward Pyongyang and the weakening of the inter-Korean dialogue system have forced the reclusive regime to make such erratic tactical changes. It is highly likely that North Korea will continue its unfriendly South Korea policy such as inflicting tensions and provocative acts as usual in 2012. Given that there are a number of factors contributing to the North's negative strategies toward South Korea, North Korea will need to build tensions for internal consolidation, closing the door on the South's North Korea policy. With upcoming presidential elections both in South Korea and the U.S. overlapping for the first time in 20 years, North Korea will also exert its utmost efforts to foment negative public sentiment in the South toward the existing policy and to replace the Lee administration with new government which is friendly to the North.

Key Words: North Korea's South Korea policy, determining variables, election interference, Kim Jong-il's death, North Korea's provocations toward the South

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Preface

2012 is the year when North Korea has declared it will achieve the status of a “Powerful and Prosperous Nation”; it is also a year in which both the U.S. and South Korea have presidential elections. So far, Pyongyang has executed a long-term alternating cycle of hot and cool tactics in response to the policies of Seoul and Washington. However, these cyclical shifts by the Pyongyang government have amplified and grown more frequent during the Lee government.

This article will focus on the variables that had an impact on Pyongyang’s South Korea policy as well as the characteristics of its behavior toward Seoul over the past four years. It will also offer some predictions of North Korea’s policy choices in 2012.

The North Korean regime aims to guide the inter-Korean relationship in a direction which maximizes its interests. Its policy toward South Korea is mainly determined by its domestic political and economic conditions and the character of the ruling group as it evaluates the situations in Seoul and Washington.

The framework of analysis of this article, described in Section 2, identifies the determining factors behind Pyongyang’s policies and its decision-making process. Section 3 evaluates Pyongyang’s policy direction and the factors influencing its key decisions during the leadership of various South Korean presidents (from Kim Young-sam onward). Section 5 offers predictions of Pyongyang’s policies in 2012 based on the trends of its South Korea policy during the Lee Myung-bak government over the past four years, described in Section 4.

Framework of Analysis: The Policy-making System behind North Korea’s South Korea Policy

Policies are the result of interactions between political systems and

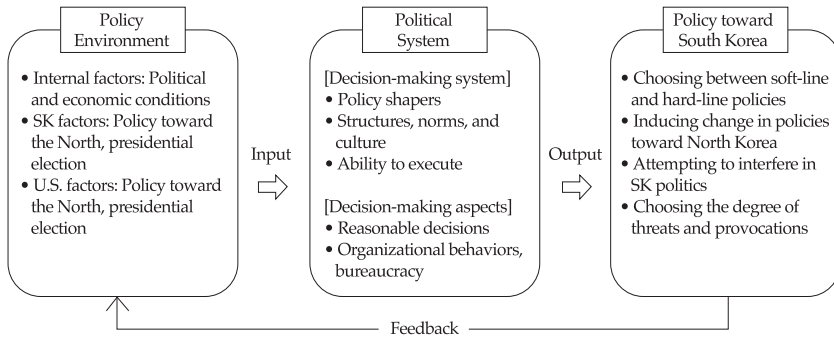
the conditions surrounding them.¹ With presidential elections scheduled in both South Korea and the U.S. next year, the environmental variables affecting North Korea's policy toward South Korea can broadly be defined as its political and economic conditions, the policy directions of Seoul and Washington toward Pyongyang, and the results of the presidential elections in those countries.

One additional variable would be any change in the features of North Korea's political system. North Korea's South Korea policy is determined through the prism of its policy-making system, whose performance is affected by the characteristics of the policy makers, the structural and normative characteristics of the policy-making system, and the ability to execute policies. Thus, the policy-making function could be described as $F(P) = N$ (NK's variables: $N_{pe} + N_s$) + S (SK's variables) + A (U.S.'s variables) Where P = NK's policy toward SK, N_{pe} = NK's political and economic conditions, and N_s = characteristics of NK's political system (refer to Figure 1).²

To explain and predict phenomena, we need to objectively extract some variables related to the causes of problems. In other words, we need to analyze trends in Pyongyang's South Korea policy and the variables that had a critical impact on that policy in various cases; for example, when the regime was stable or unstable, or when Seoul and Washington took hard-line or engagement approaches.³

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1. Chung, Jung-kil, *Theories of Public Policy* (Seoul: Daemyung Publisher, 1991), pp. 73–77; David Easton, "Categories for the Systems Analysis of Politics," in D. Easton (ed.), *Varieties of Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966), pp. 125–148.
 2. The biggest difference between the policy-making functions of the two Koreas is the degree to which policy-making reflects public opinion and interests. North Korea's policy does not heavily reflect the opinions and interests of its public. North Korea delivers its policies to its citizens unilaterally.
 3. The effect of regime-related issues and the presidential elections in the U.S. and South Korea on North Korea's South Korea policy will be described in a separate paragraph. Regime-related issues include domestic factors such as the death of Kim Il Sung, the health condition of Kim Jong-il and the transfer of power to Kim Jong-un. Also important are external factors such as the condolence scandal and increased criticism of Kim Jong-il. As the year 2012 has presidential elections both in Washington and Seoul, it is also important

Figure 1. North Korea’s Process for Making its South Korean Policy



Also, the stakeholders’ subjective viewpoints should be considered as important as the environmental variables, because North Korea’s policy is not always determined exclusively through an objective evaluation of any given situation. North Korea’s policy may conform with past practices or may be determined by the current hostile atmosphere.⁴

Therefore, this article will attempt to predict Pyongyang’s 2012 policy toward Seoul based on ① implications drawn from reviewing its former policies toward previous South Korean governments and the relationships among relevant variables, ② trends in Pyongyang’s policy during the Lee government, given that the future exists as an extension of the present, and ③ the internal and external challenges that North Korea is currently facing.

to consider how North Korea has changed its policy during presidential elections in the past in order to predict and analyze its 2012 policy direction.

4. For more detailed models of rational actors, organizational behavior, and the governmental politics of policy-making, refer to Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow’s, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2nd ed.) (New York: Longman, 1999). See also Han Kibum’s “Organizational behaviors in North Korea’s policy-making process and bureaucracy: Based on expansion of and retreat from economic reforms (2000-2009)” (Doctoral dissertation, Kyungnam University, 2009) for his research on the decision-making process behind North Korea’s economic reforms based on the decision-making models of G. T. Allison.

North Korea's South Korea Policy and Determining Variables for Each South Korean Government

Relationships among Determining Variables

As one of the ultimate purposes of North Korea's South Korea policy is to secure its own regime stability, the variables affecting its policy may also vary depending on the internal and external challenges that Pyongyang faces. To analyze this, the periods were categorized according to South Korean presidential administrations, as can be seen in Table 1, reflecting the assumption that North Korea's policy is largely affected by changes of leadership in South Korea and the U.S.⁵

Based on the assumption that North Korea's internal conditions will have a large impact on its foreign policy, the table categorized the North's conditions into five states: very unstable – unstable – somewhat unstable – somewhat stable – stable. Both Seoul and Washington's policies toward Pyongyang are denoted as very hard – hard – somewhat hard – somewhat flexible – flexible.

The exact criteria for judging North Korea's circumstances as 'unstable or stable' and policies toward the North as 'hard or flexible' will be explained in later in this article. Of course, there is some room for arbitrary judgment, given that circumstances of each period differ. The U.S. variables in particular tend to fluctuate significantly due to the North Korean nuclear issue. There could also be some time lag between changes in Pyongyang's situation and the implementation of its policy. Nevertheless, this article depicts the relationship between North Korea's South Korea policy and its various internal

5. Given that U.S. and South Korean variables, as well as North Korea's domestic variables, are subordinate factors in North Korea's foreign policy, it is necessary to divide these time periods according to policy changes in North Korea. However, considering that North Korea's South Korea policy by definition involves its counterpart and that each period shows consistent policy cycles between hard soft-line stances, the periods have been divided into the 7 stages shown above.

Table 1. NK's South Korea Policy and Relationships between Internal and External Variables

Period		NK Variables	U.S. Variables	SK Variables	Policy toward South Korea
Kim Young-sam Government	93.3–94.7 ① 94.7–98.2 ②	Unstable Very unstable	Very hard Somewhat flexible	Hard Very hard	Hard Very hard
Kim Dae-jung Government	98.3–00.12 ③ 01.1–03.2 ④	Somewhat unstable Somewhat stable	Flexible Hard	Flexible Flexible	Somewhat flexible Flexible
Roh Moo-hyun Government	03.3–04.12 ⑤ 05.1–08.2 ⑥	Stable Somewhat stable	Very hard Somewhat flexible	Flexible Flexible	Flexible Flexible
Lee Myung-bak Government	08.3– . ⑦	Somewhat unstable	Somewhat hard	Hard	Hard

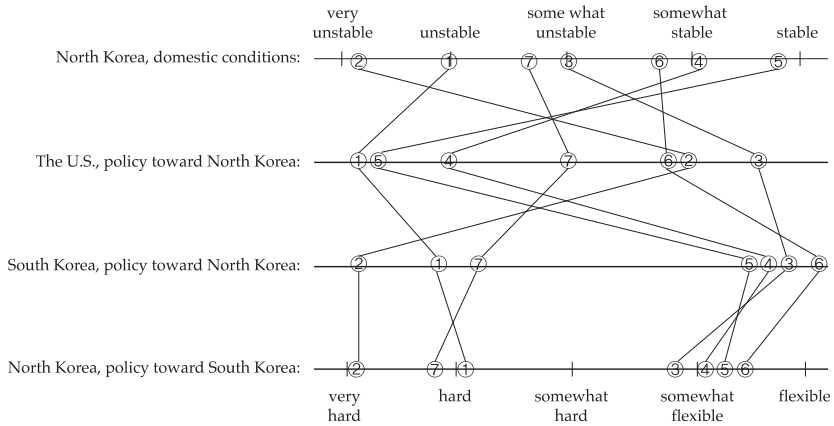
* Periods are categorized by former South Korean presidents and further subdivided by significant events such as the death of Kim Il Sung (July 1994 ②), the end of Clinton's term and the election of Bush (December 2000 ④), and the re-election of Bush (January 2005 ⑥).

and external variables, as summarized in Table 1, and arranges the dispersion of variables based on the degree of each variable's impact, as shown in Figure 2.

To sum up, Pyongyang's domestic situation can affect the two Korea's policies toward each other. When the North Korean regime is unstable, both Koreas tend to take hard-line policies (①②⑦ in Figure 2), while taking flexible positions toward each other when North Korea's system is stable. (③④⑤⑥).

Washington's variables, influenced by the North Korean nuclear issue, affect the degree of forcefulness of Pyongyang's policy toward Seoul. If Washington and Seoul take a tough stance toward Pyongyang when its system is unstable, Pyongyang then becomes less hostile toward Seoul (①) in order to reduce the burden of dual pressure.

Figure 2. NK's Policy toward South Korea and Related Variables



Whereas if Washington takes a flexible stance in the same situation, Pyongyang focuses on its relationship with Washington while keeping Seoul at a distance to prevent any interference (②).

If Washington takes a tough stance toward Pyongyang under the conditions “stable North Korea” and “flexible South Korean policy,” Pyongyang tends to take a flexible stance toward Seoul to alleviate the pressure from Washington (④⑤). Conversely, if Washington shows flexibility on issues related to Pyongyang, the reclusive regime reduces its flexibility in the inter-Korean relationship to focus on its relationship with Washington (③).

Pyongyang appears to approach inter-Korean relations most energetically when the relationship between the U.S. and North Korea is improving and North Korea’s domestic situation and inter-Korean relations are both stable (⑥). By contrast, Pyongyang tends to revert to a tough stance against Seoul when its domestic situation is insecure and Seoul’s policy toward the North is hawkish (⑦). The following paragraphs detail the relationship between North Korea’s changing internal situation and its policy toward South Korea.

North Korea's South Korea Policy during Times of Political Turbulence

When North Korea's domestic situation is unstable, it tends to display a passive attitude in its foreign policy. During periods of regime instability, it has limited political options and a weakened ability to carry out an active foreign policy. At these times it devotes all of its resources to engagement with the United States, whether the U.S. stance is hard or soft.

From the time Kim Young-sam took office in March 1993 until Kim Il Sung's death in July 1994, North Korea tried to stabilize its regime by accepting the regime changes in the communist bloc as a reality and advocating (December 1993) a transitional economic strategy for a buffer period (1994-1996). In foreign affairs, North Korea's top priority was to alleviate pressure from the U.S. caused by the first North Korean nuclear crisis. In the spring of 1994, tensions on the Korean peninsula were raised to extreme levels as Washington reviewed its plans for a military attack against Pyongyang. During this period, North Korea held a stern position against South Korea but also participated in dialogue from time to time.⁶ The background for this was that the Kim Young-sam government was regularly alternating its North Korea policy between engagement and hard-line approaches, and North Korea had neither the capability nor the will to improve the inter-Korean relationship. While in the process

6. Former president Kim Young-sam declared in his inaugural address (February 1993) that "No ally can come before our fellow Korean people." He even repatriated Yi In-mo, the North Korean partisan who had been held in South Korean prisons for decades, back to Pyongyang. In return, Kim Il Sung announced his "10 doctrines for national unification" (April 1993) and accepted exchanges of envoys amid the nuclear crisis. With North Korea's assent, working-level contacts to discuss the envoy exchanges were initiated (May 25) after South Korea's proposal (May 20, 1993) for higher-level talks. Working-level talks were held 8 times over the period from October 5, 1993-March 19, 1994. During these talks, South Korea recognized that North Korea lacked the capacity to improve the inter-Korean relationship. Kim Hyung-ki, *History of the Inter-Korean Relationship* (Seoul: Yonsei University Publisher, 2010), p. 191.

of negotiating with Washington, North Korea took a defensive stance toward South Korea to minimize pressure from Seoul. The reason why North Korea expressed willingness to engage in comprehensive negotiations on its nuclear program with former U.S. President Carter during his visit to Pyongyang (June 15, 1994) and accepted an inter-Korean summit was to achieve a breakthrough in the nuclear crisis and to prevent possible obstacles to improving its relationship with the U.S.

After the death of Kim Il Sung, North Korea faced an overall system-wide crisis which has come to be known as the 'Arduous March'; during this period the domestic ruling system was not functioning properly.⁷ However, North Korea successfully achieved the Geneva Agreement (October 1994) with the United States just before Kim Il Sung's death. This alleviated the negotiation pressure and secured promises of two light-water reactors, crude oil deliveries, and food aid through the process of U.S.-DPRK missile talks⁸ and the Four-Party Talks.⁹ During this period, Pyongyang's South Korea

7. After Kim Il Sung died and North Korea was struck by a series of natural disasters, Party Secretary Hwang Jang-yup defected (February 1997) to South Korea, becoming the highest-ranking North Korean official ever to do so. Since then, the North Korean regime has emphasized "Red flag ideology." Kim Jong-il advocated a system of "rule by the instructions of the deceased," but in practice this was a policy of passive rule.

8. Missile talks between the United States and North Korea, which began due to suspicions of North Korean missile exports, were held six times (April 1996, February 1997, October 1998, March 1999, July 2000, November 2000). With the Berlin agreement in September 1999, Washington announced that it would ease economic sanctions, in return for the suspension of missile tests. Afterwards, follow-up talks were held to discuss other pending issues.

9. The Four-Party Talks on establishing peace on the Korean peninsula, originally suggested at the U.S.-South Korea summit on April 16, 1996, were held several times over a two-year period: joint explanation sessions for the Four-Party Talks (March 1997, April 1997) → preliminary talks (held 3 times from August-October 1997) → Four-Party Talks (held six times from December 1997-August 1999). North Korea tried to connect the Four-Party Talks with large-scale food aid, proclaiming a "rice for peace" position (April 1997, Han Sung-ryul), but then altered its stance and demanded the

policy consisted of harsh criticisms and rejection of negotiations. It accepted rice aid from Seoul but refused to resume inter-Korean dialogue.¹⁰ Pyongyang concentrated its efforts on improving relations with Washington but stuck to hard-line tactics in its relations with Seoul, despite Kim Young-sam's conciliatory approach, in an effort to minimize any possible impact from regime competition with its South Korean counterpart.¹¹

North Korea's South Korea Policy during Periods of Stability

The period when North Korea regained domestic stability following Kim Jong-il's successful power succession coincided with the era of South Korean engagement under the Roh Moo-hyun government. With Roh's consistent engagement policy, the speed of Pyongyang's moves toward Seoul was largely determined by U.S. variables.

Around the time of the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung government in March 1998, Kim Jong-il completed his official power succession and reestablished domestic stability. Kim Jong-il needed a

withdrawal of the U.S. army stationed in South Korea as the surrounding situation changed.

10. Even when North Korea was expecting rice aid from South Korea in 1995, it avoided participating in talks on aid procedures and demonstrated negative behavior during the process of aid provision. After the ruling party in South Korea was defeated in local elections held in June 1995, the newly formed civilian government took a tough stance toward Pyongyang, which also maintained a hostile attitude.
11. The Kim Young-sam administration can be described as an "idle period" in the inter-Korean relationship. North Korea cowered like an "injured animal" as Kim Young-sam repeatedly employed "shadow boxing" tactics to fan the flames in its North Korea policy, Park Gun-young, "The Kim Dae-jung government's North Korean policy direction," p. 74. As Choi Wan-gyu pointed out, "People used to say that thanks to the Kim Young-sam administration's confusion regarding its North Korea policy and the financial crisis, Kim Dae-jung could achieve maximum results by narrowing the economic gap between the Koreans so as to restore their homogeneity, which in turn contributed to improving the inter-Korean relationship,'" Choi Wan-gyu, "The Kim Young-sam government's policy toward North Korea: Self-reflection and suggestions," p. 24.

stable environment and wanted to attract investment to revive the domestic economy. Though Kim Dae-jung was advocating an engagement policy, Pyongyang did not lower its vigilance against Seoul.¹² This vigilance included sporadic provocations and so-called “united front tactics,” which continued through the first two years of Kim Dae-jung’s term. At the same time the North also reduced the level of criticism directed against the South Korean government. North Korea’s cautious approach to South Korea was designed to maintain a certain level of tension on the Korean peninsula in order to maintain its regime stability and to ascertain the sincerity of Kim’s engagement policy. The North’s ongoing talks with the U.S. also affected this cautious approach. In May of 1999 U.S. Special Envoy William Perry visited Pyongyang and delivered a letter from President Clinton to Kim Jong-il. Also, in September of 1999, the sanctions on North Korea were lifted as a result of the U.S.-DPRK missile talks in Berlin.

From 2000, North Korea began easing its tough stance toward South Korea and actively pushing to improve inter-Korean relations.¹³ This change was the result of trust in Kim Dae-jung’s engagement

12. North Korea’s past provocations and threats include the June 1998 submarine infiltration, the launch of a Tepodong-1 missile in August 1998, the West Sea clash in June 1999, and the detention of South Korean tourists at Mt. Kumgang in June 1999. In reaction to Kim Dae-jung’s North Korea policy, Kim Jong-il took a policy approach of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence (January 1998), which included the abolishment of the National Security Act, the announcement of “Five Doctrines for National Unification” (April 1998), and a proposal for a unification festival (August 1998). In addition, citing the fundamental need to eliminate interference by foreign powers and dissolve the National Intelligence Service in February 1999 Kim Jong-il issued a demand for action plans on these issues. The North Korean side clarified that it was cautious about accepting South Korean rice aid (March 1998, April 1998, June 1999) because it suspected that Kim Dae-jung’s engagement policy was an “another attempt at unification through absorption of North Korea.”

13. Following Kim Dae-jung’s “Berlin Declaration” of March 9, 2000, the two Koreas exchanged special envoys three times (March 17, March 23, April 8) culminating in an inter-Korean summit in June 2000.

policy and expectations of inter-Korean economic cooperation. Another goal of the policy change was to stabilize the relationship with Washington, which had become uncertain during the U.S. presidential election year. At that time, sensing that many in the U.S. distrusted the Clinton administration's engagement policy, North Korea tried to normalize its relations with the U.S. before the end of Clinton's term.

President Bush took office in January 2001 and kept pressure on North Korea for the first two years of his first term; during this time, the inter-Korean relationship weakened and then gradually stabilized. At the time, North Korea had gained confidence due to its stabilized political situation. Accordingly, it began emphasizing practicality and openness.¹⁴ However, its relationship with the U.S. rapidly cooled. In 2001 the Bush administration called North Korea a "rogue state" and expressed plans to review its policy toward Pyongyang. The following year, President Bush labeled North Korea a member of the "axis of evil" and alleged that it was developing highly enriched uranium. Inter-Korean dialogue alternated between suspension and resumption; ① suspension (March-September 2001) → ② resumption (September-November 2001) → ③ suspension (November 2001-July 2002) → ④ resumption (August 2002-January 2003).¹⁵ North Korea canceled the inter-Korean talks whenever

14. On July 1, 2002, North Korea announced reform measures which partially introduced elements for developing a market economy and decentralizing economic management, while emphasizing practicality. The North demonstrated its confidence by opening the doors to Shinuiju, Mt. Kungang and Kaesong, and by expanding Kim Jong-il's foreign activities (e.g. trips to China and Russia).

15. After the U.S.-South Korea summit took place on March 7, 2001 U.S. President Bush began taking a hard-line approach toward North Korea, and Kim Jong-il suddenly canceled the planned high-level inter-Korean talks (①). However, North Korea resumed dialogue with the South in September 2001, despite the terrorist attacks of September 11, because of concerns that strained inter-Korean relations would not work in its favor (②). As the U.S. declared a new war against terrorism, South Korea went on red alert to protect its strategic facilities from terrorism, ministerial talks scheduled for November were canceled, and the dialogue between the two Koreas was suspended for 9 months. In 2002, South Korea tried to restore the frozen

South Korea appeared to lean closer toward the United States, and resumed them when they assessed that the continued freezing of inter-Korean relations would be detrimental to their interests.

In March 2003, Roh Moo-hyun was inaugurated as president of South Korea. During the Roh period, North Korea continued economic reforms and opening its market in order to produce a steady supply of resources amid a favorable external environment. However, North Korea's relations with the U.S. worsened due to the ongoing nuclear crisis (October 2002). Washington increased pressure on Pyongyang during the initial invasion of Iraq (March-April 2003).¹⁶ The Roh government inherited its predecessor's engagement policy, but its momentum was weakened.¹⁷ From late 2002, North Korea began emphasizing "inter-Korean cooperation," saying that "Confrontations on the Korean peninsula should be between the two Koreas and the United States."¹⁸ North Korea avoided responding to South Korean

inter-Korean relations by sending Special Envoy Lim Dong-won to North Korea (April 3–6). Shortly after, clashes broke out in the West Sea on June 29 and relations threatened to freeze again, but the situation calmed when North Korea publicly apologized (July 25) to South Korea and suggested resuming dialogue. The atmosphere of reconciliation and cooperation lasted until the end of Kim Dae-jung's term (④).

16. The Geneva Agreement collapsed as North Korea resumed its nuclear development program in response to the suspension in December 2002 of heavy-fuel oil aid to North Korea. Three-Party Talks were held in April 2003, immediately after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, at which the parties merely confirmed the gap between their positions. The U.S. called for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear program and increased pressure through the PSI. The Six-Party Talks began in August 2003, but North Korea resisted Washington's demands to "give up its nuclear program first" before receiving any benefits.
17. The causes of the weakened momentum included the second North Korean nuclear crisis, the launch of an independent counsel to investigate the "cash for summit" scandal (March 2003), and the decision to send troops to support Iraq's reconstruction (April, October 2003).
18. "Letter of appeal to the nation" issued by North Korea's Central Committee for National Unification on November 22, 2002; New Year's message, "Wield the dignity and power of DPRK under the banner of the great military-first policy," *Rodong Sinmun*, January 1, 2003; Paik Hak-soon, "Chapter 3.

remarks about its nuclear program but continued attending talks with South Korea until June 2004 in an effort to secure inter-Korean cooperation.¹⁹

2004 saw another United States presidential election and also marked the 10-year anniversary of Kim Il Sung's death. With Washington switching to a more flexible approach, some progress was made on the North Korean nuclear issue and in June 2004 the two parties negotiated a plan to freeze Pyongyang's nuclear program, while also discussing possible forms of compensation. However, with the U.S. presidential election the relationship once again entered a stalemate. Also, inter-Korean talks were suspended as North Korea had refused to participate for 10 months due to the second "condolence scandal" and South Korea's acceptance of a large number (468) of North Korean refugees. North Korea seemed to distance itself from South Korea in an effort to ensure regime stability and assess the surrounding situation.

In January 2005 President Bush entered his second term, calling North Korea as an "outpost of tyranny" and applying renewed pressure on it. In turn, North Korea counteracted by declaring in February 2005 that it possessed nuclear weapons. For the following two years, the U.S.-North Korea relationship worsened through a series of developments such as the BDA (Banco Delta Asia) issue and North Korea's nuclear test.²⁰ With increased pressure from the United States, Kim Jong-il suggested the resumption of both inter-Korean talks and Six-Party Talks at a June 2005 meeting with a special

North Korea's strategy toward South Korea," in *North Korea's National Strategy*, Sejong Institute (ed.) (Paju: Hanul Academy, 2003), p. 203.

19. During this period, the two Koreas agreed (June 2003) to "prevent accidental conflicts along the NLL and to cease propaganda activities at the DMZ." South Korea provided humanitarian aid after large explosion occurred in April 2004 at Ryongcheon Station in North Korea.

20. North Korea's return to the Six-Party Talks → September 19th Joint Statement (September 2005) and Washington's financial sanctions on North Korea via BDA → North Korea's missile launch (July 2006) and nuclear test (October 2006) → U.N. Security Council sanctions resolution.

envoy from South Korea.²¹ However, North Korea failed to take the initiative with respect to the talks, simply trying to take advantage of the inter-Korean relationship to reduce U.S. pressure. From 2005, North Korea's domestic policy became more conservative, as Kim Jong-il forced his people to make personal financial sacrifices in order to further develop nuclear weapons.²²

As the Bush administration abandoned "unilateral diplomacy" and became actively involved in North Korea's return to the Six-Party Talks → September 19th Joint Statement (September 2005) and Washington's financial sanctions on North Korea via BDA → North Korea's missile launch (July 2006) and nuclear test (October 2006) → U.N. Security Council sanctions resolution negotiations with North Korea from the beginning of 2007, North Korea agreed to close and seal its nuclear facilities in the February 13 Agreement, and later agreed to disable its nuclear facilities and report on its nuclear programs in the October 3 Agreement. Also, the inter-Korean relationship began to improve from the second half of 2007 as North Korea accepted a second inter-Korean summit.²³ Talks and cooperation

21. In June 2005 North Korea was persuaded by South Korea to resume the inter-Korean talks after a year's hiatus through aid inducements (200,000 tons of fertilizer and 2 million kW of electricity). Anticipation of the 60th anniversary of establishment of the North Korean military was another factor encouraging them to return to the talks. However, only the 15th Inter-Korean Ministerial Talks (June 2005) achieved anything in practical terms; during other ministerial talks up to and including the 21st session on May 2007, North Korea remained passive and instead used the inter-Korean relationship to try to relieve the pressure exerted by Washington, for instance by requesting the suspension of U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises and calling for greater inter-Korean cooperation.

22. Shortly after its first nuclear test in October 2006, North Korea mentioned expanding private investment, speaking of "the emergence of a powerful and prosperous nation," though it did not carry through with its plans. Han Kibum, "Organizational behaviors in North Korea's policy-making process and bureaucracy," pp. 152-154.

23. In 2007 there were a total of 55 sessions of talks between the two Koreas including high-level summits; this was twice the average of 24 sessions of talks per year since the 2000 summit.

between the two Koreas were activated in various sectors, though this did not last long. As President Bush showed a willingness to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue before the end of his term, Pyongyang hurried to strengthen the relationship with Washington before the next U.S. presidential election in November 2008. Also, it needed to secure a steady relationship with Seoul, as it was expected that a conservative government would assume power in the upcoming presidential election in South Korea in 2008.²⁴

Assuming that North Korea's domestic situation is stable and South Korea's engagement policy remains consistent, the forcefulness of North Korea's policy toward South Korea can be described based on American variables as seen in Table 2. In 1998–1999 North Korea focused on its relationship with the United States, taking advantage of Washington's flexibility, and did not take the initiative in the inter-Korean relationship (③-1). Concerned that President Clinton's flexible foreign policy could change with a new administration in 2000, North Korea actively approached South Korea and sought to create a favorable atmosphere (③-2). After the inauguration of the Bush administration, the uncertainty of the inter-Korean relationship grew (④), as Bush took a hard-line policy between 2001 and 2002. Yet in 2003 North Korea resumed its pro-active approach to South Korea as it assessed that a long-term freeze of relations with both Seoul and Washington would work against its regime (⑤-1). In 2004, the inter-Korean relationship cooled due to the presidential election in the United States and the second condolence scandal in South Korea (⑤-2). With Bush's re-election as U.S. president in 2005, North Korea put all of its efforts into dealing with the United States and made formulaic gestures of trying to move the inter-Korean relationship (⑥-1) forward. As a result some progress was made on the North Korean nuclear issue and, pressured by the imminent

24. In August 2007, North Korean representatives relayed Kim Jong-il's message that "It is high time for the heads of the two Koreas to meet, as the inter-Korean relationship and the surrounding situation have been improving recently" and suggested holding an inter-Korean summit. Kim Hyung-ki, p. 334.

Table 2. The U.S.-North Korea Relationship and Force of North Korea's Approach to South Korea

Period	SK Variables	U.S. Variables	Force of North Korea's Approach to South Korea
③ 1998-99, ③-1	Beginning of engagement policy	Progress in dialogue (O)	Speed adjustment, vigilance (Δ)
2000 ③-2	Continuation of engagement policy	Progress in dialogue, presidential election (O)	Active approach (O)
④ 2001-02 ④	Continuation of engagement policy, presidential election (02)	Resumption of pressure on NK (X)	Lack of drive (Δ)
⑤ 2003 ⑤-1	Inheritance of engagement policy, weakened motivation	Continued pressure on NK (X)	Resumption of active approach (O)
2004 ⑤-2	Continuation of engagement policy, condolence scandal	Talks stalemated, presidential election (Δ)	Lack of drive (Δ)
⑥ 2005-06 ⑥-1	Continuity of engagement policy, intervention in the North Korean nuclear issue	Resumed pressure on NK (X)	Lack of drive (Δ)
2007 ⑥-2	Expansion of engagement policy, presidential election	Progress in dialogue, imminent presidential election (O)	Active approach (O)

presidential elections in Washington and Seoul, North Korean officials responded to their South Korean counterparts by actively developing the bilateral relationship (⑥-2).

In conclusion, North Korea actively seeks to secure support from South Korea when the long-term prospects of the relationship with Washington are unclear (③-2, ⑥-2). Long-term pressure from Washington also forces North Korea to reinforce inter-Korean relations

to alleviate external pressure through “inter-Korean cooperation” (⑤-1). Meanwhile, North Korea appears to lose the drive to pursue diplomatic overtures when the U.S. returns to a tough stance (④, ⑥-1), or when they need time to assess Washington’s policy (⑤-2).

North Korea’s Regime Issues and Its South Korea Policy

North Korea has strongly resisted whenever external forces have attempted to interfere in its regime issues. The inter-Korean relationship soured in July of 1994 when the South Korean government declared a national emergency and labeled Kim Il Sung the Korean war criminal at a national security meeting after Kim Il Sung died. Despite South Korea’s rice aid, North Korea declined talks and maintained a cold relationship until the end of the Kim Young-sam government. Inter-Korean dialogue was suspended for 10 months after the South Korean government expressed disapproval of visits by civilian groups to Pyongyang to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s death in July 2004 and after they accepted a large number (468) of North Korean refugees. In May 2011, when North Korea found out that the South Korean military had used photos of Pyongyang’s ruling family (Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un) for target practice, Pyongyang accused South Korea of slander and threatened a retaliatory “sacred war.”²⁵

Meanwhile, when North Korea faces serious domestic problems they turn their focus to the regime, and at such times they tend to take a hard-line stance toward Seoul. For several years after Kim Il Sung’s death and for one year after Kim Jong-il’s stroke (August 2008), the inter-Korean relationship was strained. In September 2010, North Korea’s ruling Worker’s Party officially announced Kim Jong-un as a successor of his father, Kim Jong-il. Shortly afterward, North

25. Similar situations occurred in the U.S.-North Korea relationship. In January 2005, the re-elected Bush administration called the North Korean regime an “outpost of tyranny” and North Korea counteracted by declaring that it possessed nuclear weapons (February 2005) and calling Bush a “half-baked man in terms of morality and a philistine.”

Korea attacked the warship Cheonan and later attacked Yeonpyeong Island. These cases show that external challenges to North Korea's "authority" and issues related to its leader can impact its policy toward South Korea in a negative way. When external forces attempt to interfere in the regime's internal issues, it is difficult for North Korean officials to promote a "flexible policy" because their loyalty will come under suspicion. When North Korea is facing regime-related issues such as power shifts, it is incapable of focusing on the relationship with South Korea, and a tough stance dominates its power structure.

Interference in South Korea's Presidential Elections

In the past, the so-called "North Wind" has often affected presidential elections in South Korea. The bombing of a Korean Air flight around the 1987 presidential election and the revelation that North Korea was responsible had a significant effect on the opposition party. In 1992, a large-scale capture of North Korean spies (also known as the 'Central Area Party' scandal)²⁶ again harmed the opposition party's chances. There was also the 'Oh Ik-jae letter' scandal in 1997, but its effect was overwhelmed by the financial crisis. Some also argued that the letter had been manipulated. The second nuclear crisis unfolded shortly before the 2002 presidential election, and the second inter-Korean summit was held in 2007. However it is difficult to say for sure how many of these events were intended to influence South Korea's presidential elections.²⁷

26. For more information, please refer to Lim Soo-hwan's "The 14th presidential election and North Korean variables: From the perspective of development of democracy," Politics and Information Research Association, *Research on Politics and Information*, Vol. 10 No. 2 (Serial No. 21), p. 7.

27. Lee Jong-seok categorized the types of North Korean interference in South Korean politics as follows: 1) North Korea directly tries to affect South Korea's political situation and causes tension in the inter-Korean relationship; 2) North Korea's unintentional behavior works in favor of South Korea's conservative candidates; or 3) South Korean politicians intentionally raise North Korean issues during the campaign. The last category can be sub-categorized according to four forms: ① using inter-Korean relations to

North Korea showed considerably less interest in the 14th South Korean presidential election in 1992 than it had in the past. Pyongyang infrequently criticized candidate Kim Young-sam as a “fascist.” The reason why Pyongyang restrained its criticism of the candidate from the conservative ruling party was because of the defensive stance they had adopted after the collapse of the socialist bloc, the trend set by the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, and the fact that 5 years previously, as a member of the opposition party, Kim Young-sam had urged the Party to select a single candidate.²⁸ The 15th presidential election did not attract much interest from North Korea either. In a break from past practice, the North criticized the candidates from both the ruling and opposition parties. They criticized Kim Dae-jung because he had campaigned to save Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo and colluded in the parliamentary system with Kim Jong-pil.²⁹ Just before the 16th presidential election in December 2002, North Korea drew attention to itself by resuming nuclear development and missile exports.³⁰ Lee Hoi-chang, a candidate from the Grand National Party, used the latter

prepare a breakthrough in times of domestic political crisis (e.g. raising the possibility of a North Korean attack at sea), ② disclosing spy scandals related to North Korea to cast suspicion on opposing candidates, ③ attempting to promote a candidate’s legitimacy through unification-oriented remarks such as the July 7 Declaration, ④ confirming a candidate’s legitimacy by criticizing vulnerable aspects of the North Korean regime. Lee Jong-seok, “Presidential elections and North Korea: Hostile inter-dependence in inter-Korean relations and the possibility of change,” *History and Criticism*, Serial No. 60 (Autumn 2002), pp. 102–104.

28. In regard to South Korea’s presidential elections, the *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper has provided limited exposure, generally dealing with the issue in a small corner on page five dedicated to giving an overview of the South Korean situation. Lee Jong-seok, pp. 110–111.

29. Lee Jong-seok, p. 111; Joo Bong-ho, “The 15th presidential election and North Korean variables,” Politics and Information Research Association, *Research on Politics and Information*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Serial No. 21 (2007), p. 38.

30. On December 2, 2002 North Korea’s Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to the IAEA rejecting nuclear inspections. On December 10, the U.S. Navy intercepted Yemen-bound scud missiles on a North Korean ship, the *Sosan*. Just before the presidential election (December 19), North Korea’s Foreign Affairs Ministry declared (December 12) a resumption of nuclear development.

issue to criticize Roh Moo-hyun's stance on security.³¹ However, his efforts to concentrate the conservative forces were cancelled out by an unexpected swelling of anti-American sentiment within South Korea. A mass candlelight rally was held (December 14) to commemorate the deaths of two middle school girls who were crushed by a U.S. Army armored vehicle (December 7) just before the election. North Korea accepted the inter-Korean summit (October 2-4) in December 2007, but that had relatively little impact on the presidential election due to the focus on economic problems.

It appears unlikely that North Korea will actively interfere in future South Korean presidential elections. Pyongyang tends to propose talks to alleviate tension whenever a progressive party assumes power in Seoul, while increasing the level of criticism against the ruling party and its North Korea policy whenever a conservative party is in power.³² However, none of these tactics have had a major impact on South Korea's presidential elections due to its highly developed democracy, mature national consciousness, and other variables such as economic issues. Apart from attempted interference in presidential elections, North Korea has eased its hostile attitude and opened up possibilities for dialogue in order to form a favorable environment during periods of power shifts in South Korea. In late 1997, North Korea proposed talks without placing limits on the range of conditions or its counterparts.³³ In 2002, it tried to form a

31. Kim Hyung-jun, "The 16th presidential election and North Korean variables," Politics and Information Research Association, *Research on Politics and Information*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Serial No. 21 (2007), p. 50.

32. North Korean variables which heighten tension between the two Koreas (e.g. infiltration of armed communist guerrillas, the bombing of airplanes) have a bigger impact on South Korea's presidential elections than those variables which alleviate tension. Before North Korea solidified its autocratic regime and South Korea accepted democracy, the two Koreas would often create tension in order to exercise power and authority over each other. However, there is no reason now for a democratic South Korea to employ such "hostile inter-dependence" tactics. Perhaps North Korea still uses such tactics to conceal the vulnerability of its regime.

33. On August 4, 1997, Kim Jong-il opened up the possibility for inter-Korean

conciliatory atmosphere by promptly sending South Korea a letter on July 25 expressing apologies for the West Sea Battle which had occurred on June 29 and promising that such a clash would not occur again.³⁴

North Korea's South Korea Policy during the Lee Myung-bak Government

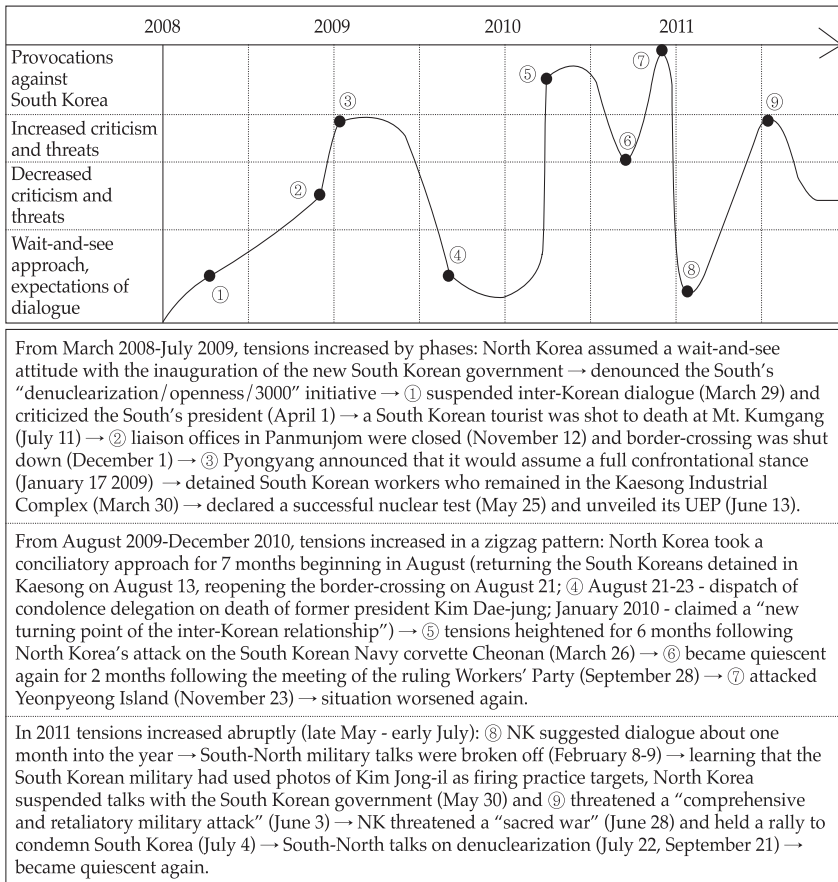
Simply put, North Korea's policy toward South Korea for the past four years has focused on trying to induce the South Korean government to change its hostile policy. As the Lee government has emphasized national security and reinforced the U.S.-South Korea relationship, North Korea has engaged in tactics such as a peace offensive, South-North cooperation, and a "Talk with the U.S., isolate South Korea" strategy, but they seem to have lost their footing. The purpose of these tactics was to weaken South Koreans' sense of alarm and to estrange relations between Washington and Seoul. Pyongyang changed its South Korea policy not only in content, but also in behavior. As shown in Figure 3, North Korea's foreign policy has fluctuated – maintaining a tough basic stance while alternating through three cycles of conciliation (a wait-and-see approach or dialogue), provocations, and threats.

As shown in Figure 3, North Korea's recent behavior toward South Korea shows three distinct characteristics. First, the alternating cycle between dialogue and threats has been shortened. Second, the

talks through the announcement of his first unification-related book, *Uplift the Banner of the Revolutionary Idea of the Great Comrade Kim Il Sung* (Pyongyang: Chosun Rodong Party Publisher, August 11, 1997).

34. North Korea rushed to resume the suspended inter-Korean talks and agreed to a groundbreaking ceremony for the re-connection of severed road and rail between the Koreas. It also sent a sports delegation consisting of athletes and cheering squads, as well as an economic delegation, to the Busan Asian Games. A reunion of separated families followed, and a series of joint events such as soccer matches were held to promote unification.

Figure 3. Changes in North Korea's Behavior toward the South (2008-2011)



level of threats has increased and North Korea has actually launched several provocative attacks. Third, the North seems uninterested in talks, although it occasionally proposes them.

Over the past four years, North Korea's South Korea policy has frequently alternated between proposals for dialogue and direct, provocative attacks aimed at inducing South Korean policy changes, while maintaining a tough stance. Of course, it has shown a shift in tactics between soft-line and hard-line approaches to taking the lead

in the inter-Korean relationship.³⁵ However, this alternating cycle has shortened. North Korea's behavior is marked by heavy threats and frequent provocations. It has often threatened South Korea with harsh and provocative rhetoric. The following are some examples of key phrases: "no need to be associated with the South," "an overall military retaliation," and "retaliatory sacred war." It also closed the border-crossing and the liaison office, detained South Koreans who remained in the North, froze South Korean assets at Mt. Kumgang, and launched direct and provocative attacks on the Chenonan warship and Yeonpyeong Island.³⁶ There have also been other incidents in the past such as the West Sea clash and the infiltration of North Korean submarines into South Korean waters, but never before have these occurred with such short frequency.

It is notable that North Korea's communication system has been significantly weakened. Though North Korea's leadership has shown some willingness to resume dialogue, this sentiment was not reflected in the behavior of the working-level officials who participated in the talks. For instance, Kim Jong-il sent a delegation to express condolences for the death of Kim Dae-jung in August 2009; Kim Ki-nam, secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party, and Kim Yang-sun, director of the United Front Department, were part of this delegation. Sending such a delegation would have been impossible without Kim Jong-il's approval, and this is an example of his willingness to improve the inter-Korean relationship. Subsequently, however, the North did not follow up with any further proactive approaches to

35. Chon Hyun-joon uses the term "strike and embrace" to describe North Korea's South Korea policy and has suggested a cycle of provocations → dialogue and external opening → compromise agreement → breakup of agreement → provocations. Chon Hyun-joon, *Characteristics of North Korea's South Korea Policy* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2002), pp. 3-4.

36. For changes in North Korea's behavior toward South Korea, please refer to Shin Seok-ho's "North Korea's provocative attacks during the Lee Myung-bak government: By periods and analysis of causes," in *TongilJeongchaekyeongu* [Research on Unification Policy], Korea Institute for National Unification, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2009, pp. 63-87.

Seoul.

Second, North Korea's intensive proposals for dialogue in January 2011 were interpreted as showing the "determination" of Kim Jong-il.³⁷ In fact, the minister of the People's Armed Forces suggested that "high-ranking military talks" between the two Koreas would not be possible without Kim Jong-il's approval and determination. However, the North Korean officials who attended the working-level military talks on February 8–9 in Panmunjeom did not seem to reflect this sentiment.³⁸

A third example is the gap between the position that Kim Jong-il expressed during his visit to China in 2011 (May 20–26) and the threat made by the North Korean military immediately after his return to Pyongyang. In China, Kim Jong-il expressed his willingness to improve the inter-Korean relationship, saying that "As North Korea is focusing on economic development, I would like to ease the tension on the Korean peninsula." He added that he had been sincere in his approach to inter-Korean relations. However, right after his return to Pyongyang, Kim Jong-il learned that his photo had been used as a target for shooting practice in South Korea and accepted a suggestion from the military that North Korea respond to this apparent "act of sacrilege" with harsh verbal attacks threatening "full

37. *Xinhua Daily* commented that North Korea's suggestions for dialogue are "not an impulsive decision but the result of its leader's deliberation." *Choson Sinbo* interpreted the remark "The first decade of the 21st century will bring the link to unification and prosperity" in the New Year's Joint Statement as a "concentrated appeal that reflects the thought and intent of the leader" (January 26).

38. Rather than spending 40 days "begging for dialogue," in fact North Korean military officials at the working-level talks appeared inflexible on issues such as the agenda for the high-level military talks and the rank of the chief negotiators. There are two possible interpretations of this. The first is that North Korea misjudged South Korea's firm position regarding the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong attacks and thought it would be possible to hold talks without resolving those issues. The other possibility is that the leadership directed them to "proceed with the inter-Korean talks" but did not properly control communication with the military or let the military handle the working-level talks in its own way.

military retaliation.”

It can be said that the lack of consistency in North Korea’s behavior toward South Korea, its heavy provocations and threats, and the gap between its sporadic statements in support of dialogue and its contradictory behavior, all derive from the characteristics of North Korea’s domestic political system, which has been changing in the past several years. During periods of power transition, North Korea’s communication system with South Korea becomes unstable. Both Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un wield influence over North Korea’s foreign and military policy. Its policy toward Seoul is controlled not by the United Front Department but by the military and is affected by the tough stance of North Korea’s governing power structure.

First of all, it is doubtful that Kim Jong-il has consistent control over policy. As he ages, he is becoming more sensitive about maintaining his authority and settling the issue of who will succeed him. He also has increasingly poor concentration and sense of balance. Kim Jong-il appears to only decide on the initiation and conclusion of major policies, and does not monitor the interim progress in most cases. Moreover, the frequent attempts to display the “boldness” of successor Kim Jong-un have interrupted the progress of dialogue and instead caused threats and provocations.

Second, the standing of the United Front Department, a traditional agency for inter-Korean talks, has declined. Most officers who were involved in the second inter-Korean summit were removed for having misjudged South Korea’s situation and for damaging the image of Kim Jong-il’s “infallibility.”³⁹ Other departments, including the Operation Department, which dealt with its South Korean counterpart and was supervised by the United Front Department, have been transferred to organizations affiliated with the military’s General Reconnaissance Bureau. As a result, it appears that the continuity of inter-Korean

39. Following the October 4th Declaration, it appears that the United Front Department judged that there would be no major change in the inter-Korean relationship under any South Korean government. It is assumed that the United Front Department promoted the October 4th Declaration at Kim Jong-il’s direction.

dialogue has been weakened.

Third, loyalty competition within the military has grown fierce. High-ranking officials are busy pledging their loyalty to Kim Jong-il and his successor, Kim Jong-un. As competition has increased, it is becoming more difficult for military leaders to suggest reasonable policies. The military has come to the forefront as the organization charged with restoring the deteriorating inter-Korean relationship. As the military's basic role is to remain loyal to the leader, they have tended to focus more on showing off their loyalty to Kim Jong-il than on taking care of the inter-Korean relationship.

Conclusion:

Prospects for North Korea's South Korea Policy in 2012

The prospects for North Korea's South Korea policy in 2012 can be assessed based on ① its behavior toward South Korea in the past, ② current environmental variables, and ③ characteristics of the North Korean power structure. First, as to its past behavior, we can refer to past experiences when Seoul and Washington have taken hostile stances toward Pyongyang. Regarding economic variables, we must remember that the North has scheduled many events for 2012 in celebration of the "Powerful and Prosperous Nation," and the effort to shore up the foundation of support for a successful power transfer to Kim Jong-un will be in progress. Meanwhile, variables involving the U.S. and South Korea include the presidential elections scheduled in both countries as well as the tone of their North Korea policies. The aforementioned elements affecting the 2012 outlook for Pyongyang's South Korea policy are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Currently, North Korea is going through a turbulent period due to the economic situation and the ongoing power transfer. Furthermore, neither South Korea nor the U.S. are taking conciliatory approaches toward North Korea. Thus the current situation facing Pyongyang's leadership is very similar to what it faced in 1996 and the second

half of 2004. In 1996, North Korea's domestic situation was unstable and had come into conflict with both the Kim Young-sam government in South Korea and the Clinton government in the U.S. due to the missile issue, despite the Geneva Agreement in place since October 1994. The U.S. was undergoing a presidential election in 1996, and South Korea had suspended relief aid. Accordingly, North Korea adopted a tough stance toward South Korea by avoiding talks, sending more troops to the Joint Security Area (JSA) at Panmunjom (April 5-6), and sending a submarine to spy on South Korea in the East Sea (September 18). North Korea adopted a lukewarm attitude toward the Four-Party Talks (April 16) and the U.S.-DPRK missile talks (April 20-21), and called for the conclusion of a peace treaty, while still in conflict with the U.S. over issues related to inspection of its nuclear facilities and the sealing of spent fuel rods.

The current situation is different from that of 2004, when the Roh Moo-hyun government still maintained an engagement policy toward Pyongyang and Kim Jong-il advocated practicality and openness. However, the surrounding situation looks similar to 2004 in that, at that time, North Korea rejected inter-Korean talks by raising the issues of the condolence scandal and South Korea's acceptance of North Korean refugees. With Washington taking a flexible approach to Pyongyang, the two parties seemed to reach an agreement on "rewards in return for the disablement of Pyongyang's nuclear program" at the 3rd session of the Six-Party Talks in June 2004. Yet their relationship also stagnated on account of the PSI drills and the passing of the North Korean Human Rights Act in Washington. 2004 was also a U.S. election year, with the current president running for re-election. Referencing the situations in 1996 and 2004, we can predict that in 2012 North Korea will likely display provocative behavior toward Seoul while taking a wait-and-see attitude toward Washington.

In line with recent North Korean policy toward South Korea, two possibilities can be considered for the year 2012. First, if North Korea is not influenced by additional pressure from the outside world, the current quiescent conditions that have existed since July 2011 may continue, as seen in Figure 3. Second, given that North

Korea's cycle of changing tactics appears to grow shorter with its greater impatience to break a deadlock, it seems that an abrupt behavior change from North Korea can be expected soon.

Meanwhile, if we predict North Korea's 2012 policy based on the environmental variables that it is facing rather than on past experiences, we must focus on the "celebratory events commemorating the debut of a powerful and prosperous nation." A series of celebrations and events are scheduled between February and April in North Korea: Kim Jong-il's 70th birthday (February 16), late Kim Il Sung's 100th birthday (April 15) and the 80th anniversary of establishment of the North Korean military (April 25). During this period, there will be large-scale events in veneration of the late Kim Il Sung, a rally to pledge loyalty to the three Kims, a military parade, and cultural and artistic events. The regime will probably provide gifts to high-ranking officials and expand food distribution to citizens. North Korea will try to strengthen the foundation of support for Kim Jong-un's succession through these celebratory events. Therefore, it is likely to show flexibility toward South Korea in order to focus on domestic events in the spring and to secure the necessary resources. Meanwhile, it is possible that North Koreans may grow increasingly restive as the plan to become an "economic powerhouse" is deemed a failure. If so, North Korea may launch provocative attacks against South Korea to emphasize the image of its "powerful military" and thus conceal the economic realities.

Next, the presidential elections in the U.S. and South Korea, scheduled in November and December respectively, will be important factors in setting a direction for Pyongyang's policy toward Seoul. It will be the first time in 20 years that both countries have elections in the same year. Given that the newly elected or re-elected presidents in both countries will set the direction of North Korea policy after their elections, North Korea will not behave in a reckless way. President Obama, who has maintained a policy of strategic patience toward North Korea, recently opened new possibilities for engagement through high-level talks between the U.S. and North Korea in New York in July. In the U.S., there is a growing recognition that it can no

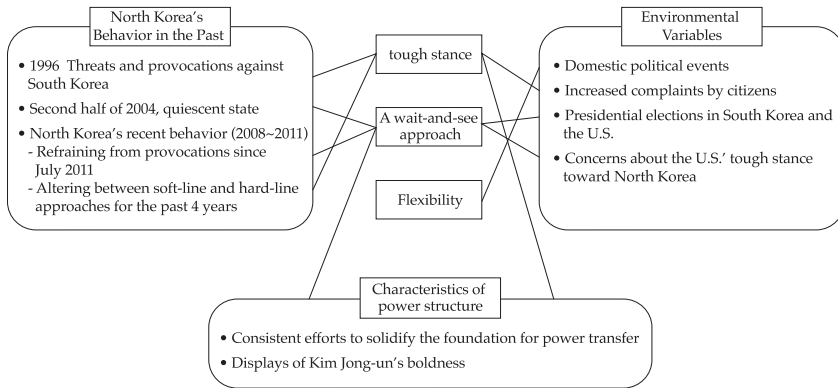
longer afford to neglect North Korea's nuclear capabilities and provocations. The Obama administration needs to show some fruitful progress on the North Korean nuclear issue in its bid for re-election. The reclusive regime ought to recognize Washington's changed approach. In dealing with the Lee government, North Korea has continuously called for a change to Seoul's hostile policy toward it. There is no doubt that any additional provocations would only help to rally conservatives in South Korea, which would put North Korea in an adverse situation. Therefore, in the autumn of 2012 North Korea is expected take a serious approach. However, if the U.S. appears to favor a presidential candidate who promises to take a tougher stance toward North Korea, it is also possible that North Korea may behave in an unexpected manner, for instance conducting an additional nuclear test, in an attempt to reverse the situation.⁴⁰ In this case, Pyongyang will refrain from launching direct threats or provocations against Seoul to prevent falling under pressure from both sides.

The issue here is that North Korea does not always make rational decisions. In 2012 it will likely concentrate its efforts on institutionalizing and justifying the power transfer to Kim Jong-un by strengthening his power base through several political events, as well as generational shifts in the military and the Party at the middle management level.⁴¹ If domestic discord occurs during this period, North Korea may again

40. According to Lee Soo-seok, in early 2012 North Korea will focus on a peace offensive or on maintaining the current situation. Lee also suggested that North Korea may cautiously launch some provocations to raise the issue of its nuclear program before the presidential elections in Washington and Seoul. Lee Soo-seok, "Directions and prospects of North Korea's 2012 policy toward South Korea," in *South Korea's Political Schedules in 2012 and Prospects of North Korea's Provocations against South Korea*, materials from a seminar held on June 29, 2011 by The Institute for National Security Strategy.

41. For information on the institutionalization and justification of Kim Jong-un's power succession, please refer to Han Kibum's "North Korea's governance and prospects for domestic and foreign policies during power succession," in *Tongil]jeongchaekyeongu* [Research on Unification Policy], Korea Institute for National Unification, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2010, pp. 102–103.

Figure 4. Determining Variables for North Korea's Policy toward South Korea in 2012



launch provocations to help promote Kim Jong-un's leadership and display his "boldness." Since August 2009, North Korea has shown a conciliatory attitude toward South Korea for seven straight months. Kim Jong-il sent a delegation to express condolences on the death of former President Kim Dae-jung and expressed willingness to improve the inter-Korean relationship. However, North Korea showed considerable recklessness by sinking the warship Cheonan and then shelling Yeonpyeong Island in order to display Kim Jong-un's military leadership, undoing all of its previous efforts at reconciliation in the process.

Putting together what has been discussed thus far, variables affecting North Korea's decision-making are summarized in Figure 4 based on North Korea's past behavior, environmental variables that the North is facing, and the characteristics of its power structure. In the past, North Korea's intense threats and provocations either originated from its conventional behavior or emerged in response to unusual political and economic situations. So far, though there are no signs of friction or confrontation amongst North Korea's ruling elites over whether to take a soft or hard stance, North Korea may still launch provocations when its lines of communication with South Korea are weakened and its power structure is governed by

hard-liners.⁴² Nonetheless, we can cautiously predict that North Korea is not likely to adopt a hard-line stance considering its important upcoming political events as well as the presidential elections planned in Washington and Seoul in 2012. Therefore, South Korea should formulate its tactics with the assumption that North Korea will take a wait-and-see attitude in 2012, while at the same time preparing for the possibility of provocative behavior such as additional nuclear tests, heightened tensions along the NLL and the DMZ, terror attacks at international events,⁴³ submarine attacks,⁴⁴ or large-scale military exercises.⁴⁵

While it may not attempt physical provocations, it is likely that the North will try other ways to cast doubt on the South Korean government's North Korea policy leading into the presidential election.

42. For more information, please refer to the following materials from the seminar held on June 29, 2011 on the theme "South Korea's political schedules in 2012 and prospects of North Korea's provocations against South Korea.": Ryu Dong-ryul's "North Korea's political & psychological warfare and its impact on South Korea's political system"; Cheon Seong-Whun's "Possibility of North Korea's 3rd nuclear test and impacts"; Kim Jin-moo's "Possibility and types of North Korean military provocations against South Korea"; and Yoon Gyu-sik's, "North Korea's cyber warfare capability and prospects for threats."

43. In August 2011, the South Korean press reported that North Korea had sent a team to assassinate South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin. In September there were assassination attempts against defectors (the attack targeted Park Sang-hak, head of "Fighters for a Free North Korea," and Kim Deok-hong, former head of North Korea's Yeokwang Trading Co.) under the instruction of the military's General Reconnaissance Bureau. *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 19, 2011.

44. At the Assembly Audit (September 19, 2011), Democratic Party lawmaker Shin Hak-yong stated that North Korean submarines had infiltrated the West Sea 50 times between January and August 2011, a huge increase compared to the past record: twice in 2008, 5 times in 2009, and 28 times in 2010. He added that these infiltrations were concentrated between June and August. *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 20, 2011.

45. During Kim Jong-il's visit to Russia (August 20-25), North Korea carried out large-scale joint military exercises in the West Sea near Nampo. It is likely that Kim Jong-un directed the exercises during his father's absence. *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 17, 2011.

It may use the media or cyberspace to make North Korea policy a key issue in the election. It is also likely to disclose secret inter-Korean contacts and distorted information about the Cheonan warship incident, and may even publish a "white paper" criticizing the current South Korean government's policy toward the North.⁴⁶ As discussed at the beginning of this article, North Korea has tried to affect South Korea's presidential elections in various ways in the past, but these efforts failed because of other factors such as South Korea's mature national consciousness and the effect of unrelated economic variables. South Korea needs to be mindful of the possibility of more subtle North Korean attempts to disrupt national unity, since the North is aware that physical provocations such as terror attacks, infiltration operations, and provocations are likely to work against it.

If South Korea establishes a North Korea policy approach that is in line with its unification policy and public consensus, and carries this policy out consistently, domestic public opinion about its politics will not be affected by North Korea's tactics. Conversely, South Korea can affect North Korea's South Korea policy by taking the lead in the inter-Korean relationship.

Kim Jong-il passed away on December 17, dramatically changing the situation just before the following article was due to be published. Shortly after the funeral of Kim Jong-il, North Korea issued a "National Defense Commission Statement" (December 30) which provoked a quarrel over the South Korean government's policy on condolences. The regime continued its denunciation of the South Korean government in its 2012 New Year's Joint Editorial (January 1). This section was written with the idea that it would be better to re-write our previous conclusion than to merely supplement it, considering the tremendous impact of Kim Jong-il's death. This part of the article puts the direction of North Korea's South Korea Policy for 2012 into

46. North Korea announced the release of a "White Paper of Reckless Acts against Unification: Conviction of the Group of Unparalleled Traitors who have Ruined Inter-Korean Relations," published by North Korea's Institute for National Unification on July 6, 2011.

perspective based on an evaluation of trends in North Korea's behavior toward South Korea after the passing of Kim Jong-il and the influence of Kim Jong-il's death on North Korea's stance toward South Korea.

North Korea's very first foreign policy measure after Kim Jong-il's funeral was to criticize the South Korean government's policy on condolences. On December 30, 2011, the North Korean National Defense Commission issued a statement condemning South Korea's strict security stance against North Korea, its policy to restrict condolences, and its efforts to encourage "regime change" as acts of "anti-nationalistic high treason," and clarified that it is "the common will of the Party, the State, the Military and the People" to "never associate with" the Lee Myung-bak administration. The NDC statement further declared that the North would make the Lee Myung-bak administration "pay till the end for the eternally unforgivable sins they committed" and heightened the level of threatening language directed against South Korea, modifying the previously used expression "Sea of Fire in the Blue House"⁴⁷ to "Sea of Revengeful Fire." The next day, on December 31, the National Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland issued a vehement denunciation of the South Korean president, proclaiming, "The sin of blasphemy against our supreme dignity will never be forgiven, and unless an apology is made for this deadly sin, an inevitable fight to the death is the only path to be taken." The North mentioned the issue of condolences again in the New Year's Joint Editorial published on January 1, 2012, insisting that "The ruling forces [in South Korea] have become an object of people's stern trial." Such statements exaggerated the condolence issue, portraying it as an issue that has divided national sentiment in the South. Also, various pacifying statements that appeared in previous years' joint editorials

47. North Korea had been softening its threats against South Korea for some time. However, its rhetoric heated up in late November as South Korea prepared to conduct military exercises marking the first anniversary of the artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (Nov. 24), and these rhetorical attacks continued into December.

could not be found in this year's edition.⁴⁸ Instead, the North concentrated on instigating "mass struggle" against "coordination among foreign powers, hostile policies against North Korea, and war exercises in preparation for the invasion of North Korea." From January 2 onward, North Korea has continuously repeated its assertion that "high treason will be paid for to the end" through various commentaries in *Rodong Sinmun* and has been echoed by the North Korean people. Judging from its past behavior,⁴⁹ North Korea's denunciation of the South Korean government can be expected to continue throughout January with the condolence issue as a pretext.

North Korea seems to have brought up the condolence issue as a strategic maneuver rather than an emotional counteraction, for the following three reasons. Firstly, considering the timing of the denunciation, we can presume that it was deliberately planned. North Korea suddenly started denouncing South Korea's handling of the condolence issue after Kim Jong-il's funeral ceremony, unlike at the time of death of Kim Il Sung.⁵⁰ Secondly, the South Korean government expressed "condolences to the people of North Korea" for the death of Kim Jong-il and allowed condolence visits by particular civilians, thereby subduing contention over the condolence issue within South Korean society, also unlike in the past. Thirdly, North Korean government raised the issue of condolences through a National Defense Commission statement, though this was an unusual case for the supreme institution of national guidance to be involved in;

48. In the New Year's Joint Statement of 2010, North Korea spoke of the need to "open the path to improved North-South Korean relations," and the 2011 Joint Statement said that "Dialogue and cooperative business projects must be actively pushed forward."

49. Incensed by the news that South Korea had used Kim Jong-il's portrait for target practice during reserve forces training, beginning in late May 2011 North Korea issued series of threats over the course of a month, including declarations of "no association," and "all-out military retaliation," and a military rally for the purpose of perturbing South Korea.

50. After Kim Il Sung's death, the funeral ceremony was held on July 19, 1994 and North Korea criticized South Korean government for its refusal to permit condolence delegations as a disrespectful and nonsensical treatment.

the statement elaborated that it represented “the common will of the Party, the state, and the military.” While making a strong effort to formally express its firm position, the “Statement” simply restated the North’s original position of “no association” with the South as a “position of principle” and did not display the same high level of belligerence shown over the issue of using Kim Jong-il’s portrait for target practice, such as talk of a “retaliatory war of the whole military and the people.”

The primary objective of the North in using the condolence issue as a pretext to reinforce its denunciation of the South Korean government seems to be its strategy of waiting for the shift in North Korea policy anticipated under the next ROK government. By refusing to talk with the Lee Myung-bak government, North Korea is obstructing the current South Korean government’s plans to “redeem” its North Korean policy. The NDC statement said, “Do not expect any change from us.” At the same time, through the New Year’s Joint Editorial, North Korea openly stated that the major attack objective of this year’s South Korea Policy is to instigate “anti-government struggle” within South Korean society. Another factor behind this may be North Korea’s mistaken assumption that the conflict between conservatives and progressives seen in South Korean society in 1994 would be revived. A second objective seems to be North Korea’s desire to promote internal solidarity. By raising the South Korean government’s reluctance to properly express condolences as an example of an “evil deed,” North Korea can reap the benefits of the “mourning” atmosphere within North Korea. The North Korean government has falsely propagated a rumor among the North Korean people that South Koreans are fervently mourning Kim Jong-il. The North Korean government must have considered that hostility against South Korea can help promote internal solidarity. It also can help build tension within North Korean society, preventing North Koreans from being distracted by the increased possibility of social instability after the death of Kim Jong-il.

The death of the supreme leader put North Korea on the defensive in foreign relations and forced it to shift to a minimalist stance

externally in order to focus on internal issues. North Korea's behavior toward South Korea after the death of Kim Il Sung was to crouch like a wounded animal and behave threateningly as if to say, "Touch me and I'll bite you." Newly ascended leader Kim Jong-un has his work cut out for him internally. Though Kim Jong-il's funeral is over, Kim Jong-un needs to maintain the mood of "mourning" until Kim Jong-il's 70th birthday (February 16) and secure the public's loyalty. By the time of Kim Il Sung's 100th birthday anniversary (April 15), Kim Jong-un will have to shift the mood to one of "celebration" rather than "mourning" in order to instill general faith in his leadership among officials and the people. By April, Kim Jong-un will have to show the country tangible signs of "becoming a powerful and prosperous nation" and demonstrate that he is carrying forward "the leadership achievements of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il" by presenting his own vision of leadership. For Kim Jong-un, fortifying his power base is a more urgent task than management of the general system. Kim Jong-un has to prove that he can stand on his own feet after the abrupt death of Kim Jong-il, and thus the most exigent task for him is to distinguish between loyal and disloyal subjects and position his closest aids in strategic posts. Following his assumption of the title of supreme commander of the Korean People's Army, Kim Jong-un needs to seize the positions of general secretary of the Korean Worker's Party, chairman of the Central Military Commission, and chairman of National Defense Commission, so he is busy taking charge of the affairs of the military, the Party, and the state. Frequent mass mobilizations will inevitably be needed to prepare for commemorative and celebratory events and to greet Kim Il Sung's 100th birthday anniversary as a "shining achievement." As explained above, the two urgent tasks for the Kim Jong-un administration are consolidating the hereditary succession of power and settling affairs internally, which means it needs to keep to a defensive position in South Korea policy for a while.

Taking into account North Korea's internal position, its attitude toward South Korea after the death of Kim Jong-il, and the factor of South Korea's upcoming election, the prospects for North Korea's

stance toward South Korea in 2012 are as follows. First, the possibility of North Korea responding positively to a push for inter-Korean dialogue is very low. North Korea has already declared its principle of “no association” with the Lee Myung-bak government through the NDC statement and is adhering to a position of “disregarding the South Korean government” as defined in the New Year’s Joint Editorial. It seems highly plausible that this situation will be maintained for at least one year. The reason North Korea will respond negatively toward inter-Korean dialogue is because its internal issues are more urgent. Moreover, North Korea has no wish to provide the Lee Myung-bak administration with a chance to “redeem” its North Korea Policy; on the contrary they would prefer to expand discussion of the South’s policy failures. A secondary factor could be that there is less of an urgent need to secure food aid from the South, since the prevailing mood has shifted from “celebration” over the dawn of the Great Powerful and Prosperous Nation to “probation” following the death of Kim Jong-il.

Second, this year there is an unusually high probability that North Korea will try to incite an anti-government struggle against South Korea. North Korea has been asserting that, in regards to changing South Korea’s “hostile North Korea policy,” it is necessary to “change the rider, not the horse.” At the end of December it invoked the phrase “fight to the death” in the context of the condolence issue; the New Year’s Joint Editorial continuously referenced anti-government struggle in the context of South Korea. North Korea will continue to fortify its criticism of the South Korean government, including its North Korea Policy, ahead of the South Korean general and presidential elections. This strategy aims to divide the national consensus within South Korean society in order to encourage a shift in North Korea policy under the next administration. Therefore we must pay close attention to further variations in North Korea’s Unification Front Strategy toward the South.

Third, despite North Korea’s defensive position, we should not exclude the possibility of a provocation against the South. Above all, Kim Jong-un’s ascension to the office of supreme commander of

the Korean People's Army counts as a partial admission of his preference for "military means," and since his ability to manage inter-Korean relations has yet to be verified, he might feel compelled to show off his military leadership skills. Especially the threat issued in the NDC statement of "a sea of revengeful fire," following last November's threat of a "sea of fire at the Blue House," signifies that North Korea could catch South Korea off-guard after exhibiting defensive behavior and seemingly focusing on North Korean internal issues. Special caution will be needed to guard against unexpected behavior by North Korea around the end of April following the 100th-day commemoration of Kim Jong-il's death (late March) and Kim Il Sung's 100th birthday anniversary.

Fourth, North Korea could try to widen the schism between the South Korean government and its people. That is, North Korea could thoroughly exclude the South Korean government while taking relatively proactive stance toward accommodating exchange and cooperation at the civilian level. In this way, North Korea could secure economic gains for itself while also demonstrating that it is proactively helping implement the tenets of the inter-Korean declarations as the nation nears the fifth anniversary of the October 4 Declaration. The North can also benefit from making North Korea policy a politically controversial issue within South Korean society.

In conclusion, we need to make detailed preparations against sudden changes in North Korea's South Korea policy and instability in inter-Korean relations owing to the uncertainty of Kim Jong-un's leadership. On the other hand, considering that Kim Jong-un's leadership technique is still being developed, we should maintain our efforts to manage inter-Korean relations and gain the advantage in dialogue and negotiations.

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