

THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND PEACE PROCESS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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I. Introduction

Following the North Korean test-firing of seven missiles in early July of 2006 and the continued saber rattling by North Korean authorities creating a “more severe” show of force culminating in the October 2006 nuclear test, both the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States have remained divided on the state of North Korean nuclear development with respect to its reprocessing capability, including highly enriched uranium (HEU), delivery means (missiles), and, perhaps most important, Pyongyang’s intentions and perceived impact on not only wider political developments on the Korean peninsula but also on Northeast Asia and other outlying regions, for example, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. The degree of this divergence, reflected in the tortuous path leading up to the 13 February 2007, six-party-talks agreement exists saliently at the bilateral level as well as within the respective governments of President Roh Moo-hyun (his supporting faction of younger people, political parties, media, nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], academia, private sector, labor groups, and the general public) and President George W. Bush (varying departments in the executive branch, for example, State, Defense, Homeland Security, Treasury, and the intelligence community; Congress; think tanks; and the NGOs).¹

As further epitomized by the absence of any general communiqué or statement, less a joint press briefing by the respective presidents following the Korea-U.S. summit meeting in Washington on 13 September 2006 and the establishment of a general—as opposed to a specific—policy framework at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for sanctions on North Korea agreed on by five parties to the six-party talks in the aftermath of the October 2006 nuclear test, the sharp difference in the official views of the two respective governments, which seemed to have tempered recently, extend into not only the realms of analysis and perceptions but also policy ramifications. This is most deeply exemplified by Seoul’s accelerated Policy of Peace and Prosperity—or engagement with North Korea—and Washington’s purported policy of “tailored containment.”

Such splits in the views and behavior between Seoul and Washington are not new: witness the divergent North Korean threat perception in existence between Seoul and Washington during 1945–50 leading up to the Korean War (1950–53) and the

1. For details on the diverging views of the February 13, 2007, agreement reached during the process leading up to the third round of the fifth six-party talks in Beijing, see Korus (2007), NAPSNET (2007), Eberstadt (2007), Snyder (2007), Hayes (2007), Nautilus (2007), DongaIlbo (2007), Yi and Seo (2007), Dong and Kil (2007), Yonhap (2007), YTN (2007), Kwon (2007), JoongAngIlbo (2007), Koh (2007), Cossa (2007), Nelson (2007), Blumenthal and Friedberg (2007), Rosett (2007), Yardley and Sanger (2006), Sanger (2007), Cooper and Yardley (2007), Straub (2007), Kessler and Cody (2007), Kessler (2007), Washington Post (2007), Hill (2007), and Rice (2007). For the text of the agreement, see DOS (2007).

deep differences in the national interests at work in formalizing the Republic of Korea–United States Mutual Defense Treaty (1954), the sharply divided reaction to the North Korean seizure of the U.S. reconnaissance ship *Pueblo* (1968), the North Korean special forces’ attempt on the life of President Park Chung-hee (the Kim Shinjo incident of 1968), and the downing of the U.S. EC-121 reconnaissance plane (1969), to mention just a few examples.

What separates the geopolitical significance of the current divergence in the views and policies of Korea and the United States from divergences of the past—including internal polarization in the respective countries beset by nationalism and Iraq—is that, unlike in the 1960s, the ROK is the 12th global economic power positioned in a strategic theater undergoing rapid power shifts, while the United States is preeminent in its global resources, perhaps with the exception of its leadership capability, a situation that can also be applied to Seoul for the past seven years.

Accordingly, this paper will attempt to analyze what in essence are the differing political motivations that seem to drive North Korea’s nuclear program in all of its noted aspects as well as the reaction to the nuclear program by Seoul, Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and Tokyo. The preliminary analysis here will also focus on the purported nature of the ongoing inter-Korean political process—with the peace process as one alternative variant—and possible disruptions in the regional and international security environment. The core objectives of this paper are to analyze the basic social and political forces shaping Pyongyang’s and Seoul’s security policies, with a focus on the nuclear component, as well as analyze the forces on Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo as they view and react to the wider Korean problem with respect to not only nuclear nonproliferation but also the balance of regional and global forces.

This paper recognizes visible shifts in national perception among the United States, South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia toward greater convergence as a result of the exacerbation of the North Korean nuclear problem, the rising significance of domestic economic and technological factors of modernization, and policy learning on the part of the respective regional elites in power. Although a greater cooperative relationship with the United States is desired (Soeya, Wang, and Welch 2003), parallel developments in nationalism, spin-offs from uneven historical memories, and political instability as well as the existential and real impact of U.S. unipolarity and actions have negatively impacted such consensual dynamics in this region, which is beset by weak state institutions and norms. This paper is a preliminary inquiry designed to question, stimulate, and steer one’s thinking toward issues of peace and security affecting the Korean peninsula rather than answer the questions or tailor a consensus on an extremely thorny subject—the Korean question.

II. North Korea's Nuclear Program

The state of North Korea's nuclear program, including its reprocessing capacity, missile delivery system, testing, and further ploys, has been dealt with elsewhere in detail (Snyder 2006; Harvard 2006; IISS 2004), and it need not be treated here. The quality of open sources on the subject has been uneven for the reason that Pyongyang remains extremely secretive about its program and tries to utilize its nuclear cover as a political (diplomatic) weapon. In this author's opinion, because of this inherent problem, a lack of human intelligence, and limitations on satellite imagery, not to mention the dearth of cultural (or nation-specific) training required for detecting the nuclear program in the North Korean context and the weakness of international intelligence cooperation, any state of analysis on North Korea's nuclear capability—including its highly dangerous chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction capacity—must be treated with caution. From this author's review of all the existing literature on the subject, and from in-depth interviews with think-tank scholars, former officials, and policymakers in Seoul, Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow and around the world for the past three years, preliminary findings point to the following analysis with respect to both the stage of North Korea's nuclear development and the threat it poses to its neighbors, including Seoul and Tokyo, in particular.

North Korea's HEU Program

North Korea's purported HEU program, its missile proliferation, and the threat these policies pose to Seoul and Tokyo remain quite robust although the HEU status is highly contested for the above mentioned reasons. There are no easy countermeasures. Proliferation of fissile material and related technology poses a greater risk of detection and sanction by the United States and the West, and they remain the riskier actions for Pyongyang, although they are not impossible, as witnessed by Pyongyang's past track record in this area.

The HEU program per se, divulged by North Korean authorities in Pyongyang to a visiting U.S. delegation headed by former assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs, James A. Kelly, in October of 2002 signified a major step in confirming Pyongyang's development of its nuclear program from bargaining, fund raising, and even peaceful energy purposes to potential weaponization. Such a path was confirmed by Pyongyang's quasi-successful—or, at the minimum, unsuccessful—test of its nuclear device conducted last October. Even if one were not taking the worst-case scenario or factoring in reasons for potential miscommunication or interpretational problems that may have seriously hindered what might have been the true meaning behind Pyongyang's verbal expression concerning its HEU activity at the time of Kelly's visit to Pyongyang in October 2002 (Pinkston and Saunders 2003),

deduced evidence since North Korea's October 2006 test seems to indicate that Pyongyang does have a basis for modest HEU capability.

Aside from Pyongyang's obvious need for a source of energy and its demand for a much more economic and safer means of energy for the future, Pyongyang's political cover for an intentionally ambiguous HEU program hits the chord with the peaceful use of atomic energy, to which all nations in theory have a right but in actuality do not, a condition widely complained of by nuclear have-nots such as Iran—or by India prior to gaining its international peaceful nuclear status with (some would argue) the dualistic backing of the United States. Pyongyang's continued claim for the right to peaceful nuclear energy through the covert development of HEU is nested in the global demand for greater nuclear energy, market dynamics, and the licensing process—all points that Washington cannot blatantly reject out of its daunting moral, political, diplomatic, financial, environmental, and practical imperatives. Hence the change in Washington's official negotiating rhetoric in recent years that indeed Pyongyang—and Iran—do have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy provided that they implement complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of the nuclear program reflects this unavoidable reality.

From a technological point of view, North Korea, according to various estimates, is in possession of anywhere between 3 and 13 bombs similar in scale to the U.S. atomic weapons that were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. The current North Korean capacity for miniaturization, warhead configuration, and detonation technology is very difficult to ascertain with accuracy, but it can be assumed to be improving or is at least ready for improvement as supported by past experience of testing and possible future tests as aired by major Western and Asian media in recent months in support of this trend. According to the blast detection and analysis of the October 2006 experiment, based on indirect calculations made by the Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources in South Korea and widely reported in the Korean media at the time, less than a full blast indicated North Korea's imperfections in both detonation technology as well as weapons miniaturization, with anywhere between 5 and 15 years necessary for the lead period.

North Korea's sale of technology and codevelopment and research with other international partners (for example, Pakistan's former A. Q. Khan network), as opposed to the indigenous development of HEU, are riskier for Pyongyang because of the relative ease of detection, particularly in terms of its fissile-related technology and material. Such developments can invite immediate sanctions because of the grave danger of weapons or techniques falling into the possession of hostile nonstate actors. The United States views preventing this as critical to its homeland security.

UNSC action without Chapter 7 provisions, which was taken after North Korea's test-firing of missiles in early July of 2006, at the time it was taken did not have in mind specifically the North Korean HEU program although the program certainly was an important consideration along with Pyongyang's recalcitrant behavior toward the six-party talks. Before its October 2006 test, Pyongyang would have been deterred in its HEU and related fissile material proliferation programs if the United States had pressured Seoul, Moscow, and Beijing to support its Proliferation Security Initiatives (PSI), which both Moscow and Beijing joined informally and incrementally after the October 2006 test. Although Seoul has not joined the PSI, the PSI has heightened South Korea's sense of divergence in views and policy in its evolving relations with Washington, and Japan. Pyongyang's tests in 2006 have also significantly undercut President Roh Moo-hyun's Policy of Peace and Prosperity and other Roh administration policies that are perceived to be failing both domestically and externally. Following the nuclear test in October 2006, assured U.S. sanctions—including military options—as a result of any fissile material falling into the hands of terrorists will surely act as a further deterrent.

The North Korean HEU program has another dimension with respect to its impact on South Korea. While Seoul relies heavily on nuclear energy to supply the country's power, Seoul also imports the bulk of its nuclear fuel, making the country a highly dependent and vulnerable energy importer in a region undergoing rapid economic, military, and political power shifts—with a rising China, a resurgent Japan, and an increasingly confident Russia. One of the gravest national security challenges that Seoul will face in the next 10 to 20 years is if global energy consumption were to accelerate—with growing instabilities in the Middle East; rising geostrategic competition over Africa, Central Asia, and the Russian Far East; and China, India, and Japan absorbing a significant market share. Even if the ROK had the financial resources to acquire nuclear energy, it would not be in a position to do so without the backing of Beijing, Moscow, Tokyo, the European Union, and Washington. In this respect, the North Korean HEU program presents the ROK with being deprived of rightful access to the peaceful enrichment and technology that Pyongyang, covertly, and Tokyo, overtly, enjoy. Tokyo in essence earned its ability as a trade-off for opening its markets to U.S. automobiles, attained through effective lobbying. Perhaps more important, such deprivation on Seoul's part can serve as an outright economic sovereignty issue, even though South Korea is a staunch ally of the United States and a member in good standing of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. I for one—along with a few other Korean academics—think this is the case.

North Korea's Missile Program (Means of Delivery)

What about Pyongyang's development of a missile program in terms of its proliferation perimeter and the actual threat it poses to Seoul and its neighbors, in particular Japan

and the U.S. forces deployed in the region? Proliferation has two dimensions: economic and strategic. Pyongyang, as we all know, is in very dire economic straits—with manufacturing, processing, energy, and agricultural production at the 15–25 percent level. Add to this the expansion of the second economy from 15 percent of the country's economy in 1999 to a much greater level today. Pyongyang's conditions have worsened with bottom-up monetization and inflationary pressures running in recent months up to the 500–600 percent level, which leads to a widening gap between haves and have-nots that generates an increasingly destabilizing societal impact. North Korea's means of livelihood, aside from counterfeit goods (U.S. currency, lottery bonds, stamps, cigarettes, alcohol, and even Viagra) for export, reside significantly in the arms market, specifically with respect to missile systems sold to countries like Iran, Syria, and Pakistan.

The means of delivery of these weapons, and parts thereof, that have been exported to these countries doubtless constitute a significant hard-currency earning for North Korea, particularly given the fact that the seven special economic zones (SEZs) as of 1998 in North Korea contributed only 40 percent of the hard-currency earnings at that time. These SEZs, moreover, have been experiencing greater difficulties, which would warrant greater demand for hard-currency earnings from other means. These funds—along with hard currency, food, and energy aid from Seoul and Beijing—go directly into propping up the core of the civil-military hybrid regime of Kim Jong-il. Thus, economics alone pulls Pyongyang toward delivery of the means of proliferation because such sales involve fast and significant sums of cash, a rare commodity for Pyongyang. It would take years of infrastructural reform to achieve the same thing, and the country would first have to acquire economic expertise and engage in international cooperation, which would be premised on significant progress on both nuclear and conventional arms control—another daunting challenge for now (Kim K. and Kim B. 2005, chap. 1).

What about North Korea's missile capability and its threat to Seoul and its neighbors? Pyongyang's means of delivery—which are nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons capable—pose a serious threat to major cities, industrial infrastructure, and critical ROK-U.S. military installations on the Korean peninsula as well as to Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF) and U.S. Forces in Japan (USFJ). The first and foremost threat to the Republic of Korea is the North Korean long-range artillery, particularly the multiple rocket systems located near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that could devastate or damage one-third of South Korea (its most northern part) in the first few hours of an inter-Korean conflict. The planned relocation of the Second Infantry Division from Dongdoochon to Pyongtaek will take the bulk of the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) out of the range of this awesome North Korean artillery threat, in essence giving a greater deterrent and counterattack capability to the Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC), although with initially much heavier losses to the

Korean component instead of the U.S. component as would have been the case prior to the relocation.

This North Korean positioning of artillery along with short-, medium-, and long-range delivery means, some located near the DMZ, is well camouflaged and hardened (most are in bunkers); their effective neutralization poses a daunting challenge to the CFC's counter-battery management capability. A significant loss of life is expected in the initial stage of conflict. By extension, the short- to medium-range missile being developed by Pyongyang can cover the entire Korean peninsula as well as Japan (Easley 2007), including the U.S. naval forces in the region. Korean missiles, unlike in the past, are becoming increasingly accurate, as the test-firing of the short-range missile by Pyongyang last June illustrates. The missile seems to have been test-fired with the specific intent of impacting the USFK in a potential conflict to reduce real-time response and disrupt rapid reinforcements of U.S. troops from reaching the coast, major ports, or air transport corridors and arteries in and around the Korean peninsula.

Obviously, the goal of Pyongyang's development of short- to medium-range missiles is either to reduce or completely eliminate any outside power's attempt to replace the North Korean regime by force. The prospects are low or nonexistent for the use of the military option to reunify the two Koreas, except in the case of the CFC preempting an imminent attack by Pyongyang on Seoul by launching an offense on Pyongyang, in which case South Korea will suffer significant damage: it would probably lose one-third of its demographic, industrial, and military capacity. North Korea would suffer an irrecoverable blow, including the possible demise of its regime. Rational-choice theory would also predict a very low possibility of a scenario in which a North Korean bolt-out-of-the-blue attack on Seoul as a result of coup d'état or palace revolution in Pyongyang if initially one faction or group in Pyongyang wants to replace another faction by grabbing on political authority through political chaos or a suicidal attack on the South.

Pyongyang's development of artillery capability and its increasingly accurate and lethal short- to medium-range missiles based on both counterforce and countercity strategy are premised on denying escalation dominance to the CFC at the initial stage of the conflict. Pyongyang seeks to disrupt U.S. military reinforcement to major ports, coasts, and air hubs in and around the Korean peninsula. Equally important is Pyongyang's ability to "hurt" preemptively and, thereby, coerce Seoul by denying the CFC's capacity for a surgical strike on North Korea's select military facilities—its nuclear processing cites, missile installations, C4ISR (command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), and hardened underground military installations that even a nuclear-tipped bunker buster would have difficulty destroying. Such a coercive strategy is made possible in essence by holding Seoul's population as

hostage, also enabling North Korea to up the ante in all aspects of its negotiations with Seoul, in particular with respect to arms control, disarmament, and confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) on the Korean peninsula, which more or less have been postponed by Seoul for the past seven years while it has pursued cultural, economic, social, and political intercourse at an accelerated level.

In short, the ability of Pyongyang to hurt Seoul not only makes up for Pyongyang's lack of economic and diplomatic prestige in its dealings with the outside world, including with Tokyo and Washington, but also gives Pyongyang the strategic leverage it once had under the 1961 and 1963 mutual defense treaties with Beijing and Moscow, which have undergone significant change.

The coercive dimension of Pyongyang's missile capacity made its impact felt on Seoul in July 2006 before the test-firing of missiles. An op-ed by the former U.S. secretary of defense, William Perry, and the former U.S. assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, Ashton Carter, appeared in the U.S. media calling for the United States to intercept North Korean missiles (Carter and Perry 2006). The logic of such a policy prescription, according to Perry and Carter, was based on the premise that, because Seoul does not consider Pyongyang an enemy (under the Sunshine Policy of President Kim Dae-jung and the Policy of Peace and Prosperity under President Roh Moo-hyun), North Korea would not retaliate on South Korea. By Seoul keeping silent, and even defending Pyongyang's missile launch as a legitimate defensive move that protects the security of the Pyongyang regime, Seoul's strategic vulnerability came to light. The stark reality remains that Pyongyang cannot realistically retaliate against any U.S. military action except by holding South Korea hostage, particularly given the fact that an attack on the continental United States is out of the question. In fact, an attack on the United States is impossible for North Korea, judging by North Korea's current missile capability as well as the devastating retaliation such a reckless policy would invite.

North Korea's development of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capacity has shown a robust growth in terms of design, booster-rocket technology, air pressurization, and accuracy, although there is obviously much room for improvement, as illustrated by the purported failure of the July testing of seven missiles in 2006. The significance of ICBM capacity remains more in Pyongyang's shift from the laboratory phase to the testing stage, rather than in its perfection, which exists only in the future. The missile program serves Kim Jong-il's prestige in the eyes of North Korea's domestic population in otherwise bleak social, economic, and cultural conditions. The missiles also have increased Kim Jong-il's standing in South Korea. Seoul's underlying psychology of nationalism, in particular against the United States, was stunted in the late 1970s during the time of President Park Chung-hee when Seoul ended its own missile program as a result of U.S. pressure (Kim B. 1993, 32–57).

Nationalism aside, Pyongyang's development of more robust short- to medium-range missiles has also given expansion to South Korea's previously curtailed missile program as Seoul seeks to better meet the North's threat with the specific exception of the Blue Dragon cruise missile with the articulated range of 500 kilometers (which falls outside the parameter of Seoul's international missile regime commitments). The delivery means test gives Pyongyang enormous international bargaining capability, recognition, and worldwide attention that it would otherwise not have.

North Korea's missile test, moreover, took place while the United States was preoccupied with Iraq and Afghanistan in low-intensity warfare with sectarian insurgents. The test also took place in the aftermath of the exacerbation of Hezbollah-Israeli conflict in which Iran was beginning to exert its own political and asymmetric influence in Lebanon (as the predominant proxy), in the Shiite ruling coalition in Iraq, and by extension in the greater Middle East. Thus, North Korea's missile test challenged U.S. global prestige and strategic leverage. Furthermore, North Korea's test firing of a missile while the United States is engaged elsewhere is obviously designed to further to dilute the perceived military overstretch of Washington, with the goal of creating strategic or tactical dissonance in the U.S. command structure. In addition, North Korea can also observe U.S. reactions as the United States leaves both Korea and Japan in the strategic cold, thereby heightening the sense of vulnerability of Washington's key two allies.

Because Pyongyang cannot test its more lethal short- to medium-range missiles on South Korea, Japan, or the outlying U.S. forces in the Western Pacific, it thereby cannot demonstrate to third countries its capacity (its accuracy, lethality, collateral damage, and morale) for proliferation. Iran, in its war with Iraq, showed its capacity indirectly with critical implications for possible inter-Korean conflict, if one were ever to occur. Here lies the operational value of proliferation to countries like Pakistan, Syria, and Iran, aside from the economic value: as a proxy testing ground.

Last, missile development as a means of economizing force structure vis-à-vis the CFC's weapons development resides in the unfavorable dynamics of an unsustainable arms race. Currently, the gross national product (GNP) of South Korea is approximately 20 times the size of the GNP of North Korea; in addition, South Korea far outstrips the North in its educational, training, morale, nutritional, technological, and demographic capability, and the gap is continuing to widen. In addition, the hardware that Seoul's forces are outfitted with—not to mention the presence of the USFK, USFJ, and the U.S. forces that are arrayed in Guam, the Philippines, and the Western Pacific (even when one takes into account the demands of Iraq and Afghanistan)—is superior to the North's. Pyongyang's defense budget as a share of GNP is not only unsustainable in its race with Seoul but also against the U.S. military factor. Accordingly, rather than basing force structure and military doctrine on a sustained conventional conflict,

Pyongyang is threatening Seoul where it hurts the most—Seoul's lack of strategic depth, its proximity to the DMZ, and threats to other cities in the South with high population densities—by developing all-weather WMD capability.

III. Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula and the Major Powers

This section will examine the peace process on the Korean peninsula, which is one possible variant of the evolving inter-Korean relations as formally defined by the government of President Roh Moo-hyun, and reactions at varying levels in Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow. The responses of the major powers constitute their fundamental assessment of the current situation. As yet, their policies and approaches toward possible abrupt or gradual changes in the balance of power on the Korean peninsula and the wider outlying Northeast Asia region are under-defined.

The stylistic framework for the peace process is formally premised on ending the Korean War (1950–53) by transforming the inter-Korean truce, preserved for the past half century, into a genuine peace agreement between Seoul and Pyongyang. President George W. Bush recognized this need two years ago during the 2005 Kyungjoo summit in Korea. In the most recently concluded six-party agreement on the North Korean nuclear process, a working group on the Korean peace process was established. Although both the regional and geostrategic environments have changed significantly since the cross-recognition formula proposed by former U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger in the 1970s, the essence, in this author's view, of any peace settlement has to take into account the balance of strategic power dynamics within and outside the Korean peninsula.

At the most basic level of discourse concerning the so-called peace agreement, there are some fundamental differences with respect to the causes of the current truce:

- Outbreak of the Korean conflict: Whether the conflict was an internal civil war or a state-to-state conflict with external involvement (including the question of who had the moral imperative to win or lose);
- Enabling conditions of the truce during the past six decades, including the criticality of the USFK in its role as a deterrent;
- Recognition—or nullification—of the legitimacy of the state in the Republic of Korea since 1945, including the role of “modernizing dictatorship” from 1945 to 1992; and

- Residual reaction to both dimensions of the debate since 1997 in the wider context of increasing power disparities between Seoul and Pyongyang, and the kind of future state both Seoul and Pyongyang are envisioning for the two Koreas.

The intensity of this debate at the current level is also apparent among the major powers—Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow—which has an impact on the so-called peace process (as one possible variant of the inter-Korean relations) on the Korean peninsula. The major powers are irrevocably drawn into the debate by virtue of their past involvement and, more important, their future intentions in the region as well as the international system. What makes the Korean peace process thorny—as one variant of the desirable future inter-Korean and greater East Asian order—is that even the internal assessment of these perceived trends is by no means coherent; it is inconsistent in each of the major powers (Rozman 2004, chap. 1).² In this author's review of literature dealing with domestic evaluation and policy ramifications in the United States, Japan, China, and Russia, it appears that these countries are divided about each power's vision of the developmental state and the type of desirable external order, including for Northeast Asia.

In policy terms, Pyongyang desires a formal peace agreement as one of the signatories along with the United States and China to the Kaesong truce talks in 1953, as South Korea was not a formal party to the truce talks. The peace agreement will formally end the Korean War and institutionalize the absence of conflict—as well as require neutralizing the United Nations command, the main deterrence keeper on the Korean peninsula for the past six decades, whose commander has been concurrently the commander of the CFC as well as the USFK. Fundamentally at stake here is the question of whether South Korea—which for reasons of relatively weak governance and underdeveloped economy, industry, and military preparedness for the past six decades had to rely on the U.S. military presence, training, and security assistance for deterring an unprovoked North Korean attack—can take on the task of defending itself on its own.

As the world's 12th industrial power, Seoul has developed its economic, social, cultural, educational, demographic, and diplomatic capabilities—as opposed to a unified political and autonomous military—in meeting the North Korean challenge to a significant extent. But the apparent problem in the face such a favorable trend has been Seoul's recent leadership (as manifested in the younger generation and the activities of NGOs) leading to the erosion of domestic political support for South Korea's military capability

2. Armitage and Nye (2007) offers one recent U.S. view, which bases its outlook toward 2020, on the continued centrality of U.S.-Japan relations with more active management of the two Koreas, China, India, and Southeast Asia.

ensconced in the CFC. If a looser command structure can be developed as a result of South Korea's favorable technological, economic, and doctrinal factors with the body politic acting in unison, such a development would strengthen the ROK's security. Unfortunately, such has not been case for the past seven years because of the turbulent nature of Korea-U.S. relations, particularly at the political level (Easley 2007). Several officials from South Korea, Japan, and the United States have stated in interviews with the author that, when one evaluates the policy of President Roh's national security team toward the USFK and the U.S. Department of Defense during the past four years, it suggests a movement toward "decoupling."

In this respect, nothing could have been more ill-informed and ill-timed than the launch by President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld of the U.S. force-in-transformation around the globe, which involves relocation, a reduced role for ground forces, enhanced power projection capability, an increased role for air and naval forces, and an emphasis on high-technology warfare, with the added consequence of reverting wartime operational control to South Korea. Seoul must ask whether South Korea is ready to take the leading role in deterring North Korea—with Washington playing a supporting role—as well as how much it will cost, what kind of force structure will result, and what the command relationship will be. As the legacy of the Guam doctrine of 1969 illustrates, Seoul has been taking on a greater responsibility in ground warfare vis-à-vis North Korea, particularly at the initial stage, while the United States expects to occupy itself with the application of air and naval power. The success of such a role change will depend on reforms in ROK force restructuring (acquisition, doctrine, and budget) as well as synergies it develops with the armed forces of the United States. This process of change in the binational command relationship, which has been proceeding since 1969 at various levels, is complicated by the following factors:

- Frictions in the political relationship between President Roh Moo-hyun and President George W. Bush, partly based on the nature, extent, and the policy ramifications of the North Korean threat, including both the nuclear and conventional dimensions;
- Rise of China, and Beijing's increased role in the Korean reunification process whether by default, military conflict, or a major crisis in the North or in the Sino-U.S. condominium because all would seriously complicate CFC military planning;
- Rapid socioeconomic and political transformation in Korea—and elsewhere—and the perceived unilateralism and the might-makes-right approach that the United States seems to be taking in its foreign policy since 11 September 2001 and throughout the first term of the Bush presidency, which does not seem to

resonate well in Korea, except with the possible exception of the far right faction in the Korea Grand National Party opposition; and

- Expansion of the political and economic system of South Korea into North Korea; President Roh has been attempting to institute highly populist economic policies for the past four years as he emphasizes the policies’ “pan-nationalist coexistence” with North Korea; President Roh is arguing against not only the collapse of the North Korean regime but is also propping up the civilian-military hybrid system in light of its nuclear development. Tied to this latent variable is whether, in the case of a sudden North Korean implosion, Roh’s administration would want to have the USFK go in and administer a faltering system. Roh’s answer seems to be “no,” at least at the political level and also for one level below, namely, the CFC—a policy that has caused increasing complexity and problems.

More fundamental to the dynamics leading to the peace process and what might be ultimate agreement is the purported nature of the Roh Moo-hyun government with respect to the teleological balance of power not only within South Korean society but also a reunified Korea. Roh has attempted to represent the rights of the excluded, the painful past of oppression and colonization, and the peripheral position of Korea in the international system, and his tone to one degree or another has been consonant with that of Pyongyang. South Korean society, however, does not seem to be accepting those policies.

By declaring a diplomatic war on the United States and Japan, and in essence taking the side of North Korea, China, and Russia while Chinese power has been on the rise in Pyongyang,³ Seoul finds itself not only tactically and strategically isolated from Beijing and Pyongyang, but also from Tokyo and Washington. In this case, a peace agreement would entail a permanent division of the Korean peninsula, with South Korea taking on most of North Korea’s transformational burden with minimal outside help and no arms control or CSBMs, and with continuous saber rattling by Pyongyang. Seoul would in essence be decoupled from the great-power dynamics, to its own detriment. A worst-case comparison is the Yemenese reintegration model, to which this author was privy 12 years ago in a study completed for South Korea’s Ministry of Unification. In such a scenario and in the light of the past four years of underlying nationalistic support of North Korea’s nuclear development by the authorities of Seoul, no major powers would support reintegration leading to a reunified Korea armed with nuclear weapons running on a highly nationalistic pulse. Such a development would be a sign of strategic confusion, even leading to isolation.

3. China has always wanted to sinicize North Korea, as was the case following the end of the Korean War (1950–57) when China gave critical military aid to a regime on the verge of extinction.

The challenge of the peace process is ever greater than in the past for not only South Korea but also North Korea, Japan, China, and Russia because the major powers are facing their own problems of managing change at varying state, societal, and industrial levels, with the United States ever more focused on technology as the driving force, to the possible detriment to a region so keen on its long-standing soft power.

IV. Policy Recommendations

The basic force driving the development of the nuclear program in North Korea together with the force driving the policies of Seoul, Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow has been political in nature. The key question here is the strategic choice that South Korea will have to make in the next five to ten years with respect to developing practical economic intercourse with Pyongyang with a view toward reform. Much rests with Kim Jong-il or the post-Kim Jong-il leadership, which does not seem to have a well-planned succession other than a stop-gap measure to go slow. If meaningful economic, trade, industrial, energy, and humanitarian dimensions of the relations with Pyongyang are not followed by comparable steps in the hard security area with respect to the development of North Korea's reprocessing facility and delivery means, both Koreas will be decoupled from increasingly cooperative relations being forged at an equally competitive level among the major powers, with particular respect to Sino-U.S.-Japan relations. In this framework, Seoul must not take sides but should build on the strong relationship with all the major powers, and Seoul should further act as facilitator for reducing distrust among Japan, China, and the United States by proactively providing a confidential diplomatic platform. This is something that President Roh Moo-Hyun has not been able to do for the past three years.

One important recognition by Seoul in such a strategic framework is the understanding that without robust, well-functioning Korea-U.S. relations and Korea-Japan relations, South Korea's geopolitical anchoring will resonate negatively, to the detriment of South Korea's strategic leverage in integrating and stabilizing North Korea as well as its ability to preserve and enhance its strategic autonomy in a region undergoing rapid power shifts. Equally germane to this challenge is South Korea's emerging opinion leadership as well as the remnants of the ancien régime as the country moves toward stabilizing the ongoing socioeconomic transformation with an eye to Korea's strategic direction—an aspect also lacking during the past seven years.

While Moscow continues to retract and consolidate its regime, a process that began with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the PRC faces many similar transformational challenges, and the postwar body politic in Japan potentially undergoes even more fundamental challenges of what in essence is incrementally creating a more normal state without regional or global alarm, the United States must also pull

back in its crusade for the expansion of democracy because it poses too much of a challenge to a region in flux, but with very brittle institutions, norms, and values. Washington also must moderate the strengthening of the military and diplomatic dimension of its alliance with Tokyo to the alarm of its neighbors.

Although the stabilization of the nuclear problem and the wider Korean problem will depend on indigenous political developments in Korea, as noted earlier, the following policies seems to be in order.

- Resuscitation of the Trilateral Coordination Group (TCOG) meetings among ROK, Japan, and the United States, at a higher level;
- Establishment of a serious second-track channel between the United States and North Korea;
- Appointment of a North Korea policy coordinator at the highest rank, to much more effectively calibrate U.S. policy toward the region and the issues, including much more robust interagency coordination; and
- Regularization of the six-party talks by fully empowering the heads of the six nations represented with the latitude to negotiate.

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