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Nuclear Security 2012

**: Challenges of Proliferation and
Implication for the Korean Peninsula**

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Korea Institute for
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: Challenges of Proliferation and Implication for the Korean Peninsula

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X. ROK–U.S. Strategic Cooperation

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1. Introduction

With the collapse of the socialist bloc, the global Cold War structure dissolved and North Korea faced the challenge of a changed global environment. Within the Korean peninsula, North Korea responded to the South Korean offer of dialogue. Prime minister-level inter-Korean talks were held and in February 1992 the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement came into force.

On the international level, North Korea looked to the U.S. for a way out of the crisis. Since the 1990s their central foreign policy goal has been to ensure regime security and stability through improved political and economic relations with the U.S. In the early 1990s North Korea secured an official dialogue channel with the U.S. by pursuing a nuclear program, and they proceeded to develop their U.S. relations in coordination with U.S. engagement and extended policy.

Kim Jong Il, who formally took over after the death of Kim Il Sung, promoted a policy of building “a great and prosperous nation” as North Korea’s development strategy. The starting point for constructing a great and prosperous nation is restoring the economy from its state of systemic depression. However in order to achieve this goal they need to improve relations with the U.S. They are aware that improved U.S. relations are necessary in order to remove the political and military threat posed by the U.S. and also improve conditions for acquiring external aid. This is why in previous bilateral and multilateral negotiations and contacts North Korea has persistently pressed for “abolishing the hostile policy” of the U.S. toward North



Korea and signing a U.S.-DPRK peace treaty. North Korea believes that improved U.S. relations will lead to improved relations with Japan and the West and will also affect inter-Korean relations, and the removal of UN sanctions will allow them to restore their economy.

The main measures North Korea has chosen to take in order to achieve these policy goals include the development of WMDs such as nuclear weapons and mid- to long-range missiles, and the threat of proliferation. North Korea's WMD development plans pose a major challenge and obstacle to U.S. nonproliferation and counter-proliferation strategies.

On the other hand, since the collapse of the Cold War system the U.S. has emerged as the sole superpower in the new world order. With its tremendous national power, the U.S. has set non-proliferation and counter-proliferation of WMDs as its core national security goals in shaping the post-Cold War world order. After the socialist bloc collapsed, its intervention policy toward the remaining socialist countries focused first on preventing the spread of WMDs. Thus North Korea, with its nuclear development program, emerged as a "small but uncomfortable" challenge to the non-proliferation system.

With the signing of the Geneva Agreement (the Agreed Framework) on 21 October, 1994, the U.S. Clinton administration was temporarily satisfied that it had moved the nuclear issue into a resolution stage, but North Korea continued to present a challenge. North Korea used its missile programs as a negotiating card while continuing to develop nuclear weapons, and in October 2002 its uranium enrichment program brought on the 2nd North Korean nuclear crisis. To resolve

the nuclear issue the Six-Party Talks were started, bringing together South Korea, the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and North Korea. However, the 9·19 Joint Declaration achieved in 2005 appears to be facing the same fate as the Geneva Agreement. Proclaiming itself a nuclear power after performing two nuclear tests, North Korea is using the Six-Party Talks them-selves as a negotiating tool while working to enlarge its nuclear arsenal.

Nearly 20 years that have passed since the early 1990s, yet the North Korean nuclear issue remains unresolved. The complete elimination of the North Korean nuclear program in the name of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula is a major challenge not only to peace and stability on the peninsula, but also to the peace and mutual prosperity of the East Asian region. It is also an obstacle to the stable systematization of the international non-proliferation regime.

With these issues in mind, this paper approaches the North Korean nuclear issue from the positions of South Korea and the U.S. After first reviewing and analyzing the past development of the nuclear issue, this paper will examine the South Korean and U.S. positions, and finally it will offer a future course for ROK-U.S. strategic cooperation.

2. Circumstances Surrounding the Development of the North Korean Nuclear Issue

Since the early 1990s the North Korean nuclear issue has posed a serious challenge to peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and



in Northeast Asia as well as the global nonproliferation regime, and it has become a key obstacle to advancing inter-Korean relations. Breaking the Geneva Agreement, North Korea secretly continued to pursue nuclear weapons through uranium enrichment. This violated the terms of the Geneva Agreement as well as the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in effect since February 1992. It also posed a serious challenge to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty(NPT).

Ultimately the Geneva Agreement fell apart, and the 2nd nuclear crisis erupted in October 2002 over suspicions of a uranium enrichment program. In seeking a resolution to this crisis, the initial Three-Party Talks between the U.S., North Korea, and China were expanded to the Six-Party Talks,¹ which began in August 2003 and involved both Koreas, the U.S., Japan, China, and Russia. By June 2004 the Six-Party Talks had met three times but had failed to lead to substantive negotiations, and on 10 February, 2005 North Korea officially announced that it was leaving the talks and that it had developed nuclear weapons. Via a Foreign Ministry spokesperson's remarks(31 March, 2005), they began to demand that the Six-Party Talks be replaced by arms reduction talks.²

On 26 July, 2005 the 4th Six-Party Talks were held with China acting as a mediator, and the 2nd stage of these talks (13–19 September) produced the “9·19 Joint Declaration.” However, the day

¹- Jeffrey Bader, “Obama Goes to Asia: Understanding the President’s Trip,” (6 November, 2009), <www.brookings.edu>.

²- *Yonhap News* (7 November, 2009), <www.yonhapnews.co.kr>.



after this declaration was announced, North Korea announced via a Foreign Ministry spokesperson that until it was supplied with a light water reactor it could not give up its nuclear programs, indicating that it had no intention of abandoning nuclear weapons from the start. Subsequently, they confirmed the principles for executing the 9·19 Joint Statement at the 5th Six-Party Talks (9–11 November, 2005), but then walked out of the following round of talks without even agreeing on a schedule.

On 5 July, 2006 North Korea drew the attention of the international community by test-firing seven missiles of the short, medium and long range varieties, but this had the adverse effect of encouraging hard-line attitudes toward the regime. Humanitarian aid from South Korea in the form of rice and fertilizer shipments ceased, and the U.S. and Japan submitted a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution which both China and Russia ultimately approved. The Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1695, which expressed concern about North Korean missile launches and demanded that it refrain from additional actions, and urged North Korea to immediately return to the Six-Party Talks and comply with the 9·19 Joint Declaration.

As world opinion of North Korea declined, on 3 October, 2006 North Korea's Foreign Ministry announced that it was planning to conduct a nuclear test, which it did on 9 October. The UNSC responded by unanimously approving Resolution 1718(15 October, 2006), but its impact was minimal due to weak compliance by China, U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks, and the reconvening of the Six-Party Talks.

Subsequently China dispatched its envoy Tang Jiaxuan to North Korea and the U.S. for mediation diplomacy, the American and North Korean representatives to the Six-Party Talks met in Beijing (28–29 November, 2006), and the U.S. side submitted a preliminary action proposal to the North Koreans. Following the 2nd stage of the 5th round of Six-Party Talks in Beijing(18–22 December, 2006), the American and North Korean representatives to the Six-Party Talks met in Berlin(16–18 January 2007), and then on 8 February, the 3rd stage of the 5th round of Six-Party Talks was held, resulting in the “2·13 Agreement.” This agreement laid out a series of “Initial Actions for the Implementation of the 9·19 Joint Statement” as a comprehensive approach to resolving the nuclear issue and breaking up the Cold War structure on the Korean Peninsula.

The 2nd stage of the 6th round of Six-Party Talks, held in Beijing(17–30 September, 2007), produced the “Second Stage Actions for the Implementation of the 9·19 Joint Statement (The 10·3 Agreement).” But as the Bush administration neared its end, North Korea used delaying tactics to put off the issue of inspections in return for having its name removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror. After the Democratic Obama administration took power North Korea assumed a wait-and-see posture while holding out hopes for a new U.S. policy of tough and direct dialogue, but instead they ended up encountering a policy of aggressive diplomacy by the U.S.

In these circumstances, North Korea increased its offensive moves against the U.S., launching a long-range rocket on 5 April, 2009, and then performing a second nuclear test on 25 May in response to the



UNSC Chairman's Statement. This second nuclear test prompted a strong reaction from the international community. After the UNSC passed Resolution 1874, international sanctions and pressure have been applied under U.S. leadership. Pressure has been particularly strong from the Obama administration, which is pushing its vision for "Nuclear-Free World." They have shown a clear policy of alternating dialogue and pressure, upholding the option of direct U.S.-DPRK talks while showing a firm response to North Korea's violations of international agreements and norms. The U.S. appointed a mediator in charge of North Korean sanctions and has worked to strengthen international cooperation in enforcing North Korean sanctions, while directly implementing its own unilateral sanctions and taking strong actions to pressure North Korea such as targeting financial institutions like the *Chosun Gwangseon* Bank and pursuing ships bound for Myanmar.

Meanwhile the members of the Six-Party Talks have been cooperating on diplomatic policies to persuade North Korea to return to the talks. Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wu Dawei traveled to Russia, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea(2–14 July, 2009) for consultations among the Six-Party representatives, and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell visited Japan and South Korea(16–23 July). South Korea dispatched its Six-Party Talks representative and its director of peace negotiations to neighboring countries for policy consultations. North Korea embarked on a diplomacy offensive of its own. While reaffirming on 14 April, 2009 that they would not participate in the Six-Party Talks, they took

the opportunity during visits by former U.S. President Clinton(4–5 August, 2009) and U.S. Governor Bill Richardson(19 August, 2009) to express their willingness to hold bilateral talks with the U.S. Also, during Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wu Dawei’s visit(17–21 August, 2009) to discuss restarting the Six-Party Talks, while repeating their existing position they also stressed the need for U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks.

However the U.S. maintained its clearly expressed position of seeking to resolve the nuclear issue through close cooperation with South Korea and the other Six-Party members within the multi-lateral framework of the Six-Party Talks. Through various levels of bilateral talks, including ROK-U.S. summits, foreign ministers’ summits, and meetings of Six-Party representatives, they have developed a coordinated policy of ① holding continuous dialogue with the objective of North Korean denuclearization while continuing to enforce sanctions based on the UNSC resolutions; ② welcoming dialogue with North Korea, but insisting that U.S.-DPRK talks must occur within a multi-lateral framework; ③ working closely with the other Six-Party nations aside from North Korea in order to find the best solution to achieve denuclearization to bring North Korea back to the Six-Party Talks and achieve a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

North Korea particularly took advantage of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s visit to Pyongyang(4–6 October, 2009) to express their desire to improve relations not only with the U.S. but with South Korea and Japan as well. The Chinese side communicated North Korea’s wish for better relations to the South Korean government while

explaining the results of Wen's North Korean visit. Furthermore, during his meeting with Wen Jiabao, Kim Jong Il expressed his conditional willingness to reconvene the Six-Party Talks. Kim is said to have remarked, "If the results of the DPRK-U.S. talks show a willingness to continue multilateral talks," then "multi-lateral talks may include Six-Party Talks."

North Korea made persistent efforts to engage with the U.S., sending a delegation led by Foreign Ministry Director of North American Affairs Ri Gun to meet with U.S. Six-Party delegate Sung Kim at the civilian-level Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) held in San Diego California in October 2009. The Ri Gun delegation pursued civilian level contacts by attending a seminar in New York hosted by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations and the Korea Society.

As this series of diplomatic initiatives unfolded, the Obama administration decided to send Special Envoy on North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth to North Korea at their request, and on 5 November at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce event Bosworth announced in response to a reporter's question that he would be visiting North Korea within 2009. In a 6 November speech at the Brookings Institution, NSC Senior Director for Asian Affairs Jeffrey Bader said that the U.S. was prepared to meet directly with North Korea within the Six-Party Talks. However, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg emphasized that negotiations would only be possible through renewed Six-Party Talks, explaining that the purpose of the U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks would not be to negotiate but to send a message about denuclearization.

As efforts to restart the Six-Party Talks faltered, North Korea



proposed through its Foreign Ministry that the members of the armistice agreement should hold peace talks.³ North Korea announced its position of “peace talks first, then denuclearization,” arguing that a peace treaty would erase the animosity in U.S.-DPRK relations and accelerate the denuclearization effort, and set the lifting of U.S. sanctions as a precondition for restarting the Six-Party Talks. North Korea appeared flexible, speaking of the possibility of separate peace treaty negotiations or peace talks within the confines of the Six-Party Talks, but the essence of their proposal was to hold talks with the U.S. on a peace treaty. In this way they tried to change the fundamental character of the Six-Party Talks, originally dedicated to resolving the nuclear issue, and began using the talks themselves as a negotiating point. Furthermore, they sought to shift blame for the stalemate over the Six-Party Talks to the U.S. and South Korea and change direction to move toward a peace treaty. After this statement North Korea became even more firmly attached to its position of “establish a peace regime first, then denuclearization.”

The U.S. position remained firm. Emphasizing that North Korea must return to the Six-Party Talks, they maintained sanctions according to UNSC Resolution 1874. In his 2010 State of the Union Address Obama said that because of their pursuit of nuclear weapons, “North Korea now faces increased isolation and stronger sanctions.”⁴ Obama also repeatedly emphasized that sanctions would continue until

³- North Korea Foreign Ministry Spokesman’s remarks at KCNA Press Conference (11 January, 2010).

⁴- Barack Obama, State of the Union Address (28 January, 2010).



North Korea returned to the Six-Party Talks and fulfilled its denuclearization obligations, and that it would not be rewarded for simply returning to negotiations.⁵ He spoke of improved inter-Korean relations as another important element.⁶ While emphasizing that North Korea should return to the Six-Party Talks, he also spoke of the need to improve inter-Korean relations.

In early February 2010, China sent the director of the CCP's International Department, Wang Jiarui, to North Korea to pass on a message from President Hu Jintao. China's Xinhua News Agency reported that Kim Jong Il expressed his wish for "denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" and said that in order to restart the Six-Party Talks it was vital that the participating countries show sincerity.

However North Korea's behavior was inconsistent; indeed it exacerbated the situation by attacking and sinking a South Korean naval vessel on 26 March. The U.S. stressed that an investigation of the causes of the sinking must take top priority⁷ and that, while North Korea must return to the Six-Party Talks, they must first take positive steps toward denuclearization before substantive dialogue could occur.⁸ The results of the international investigation announced on 20 May

5- James Steinberg, An address at Woodrow Wilson Center (30 January, 2010); *Joongang Daily* (2 February, 2010).

6- Kurt M. Campbell, Press Availability at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Seoul (3 February, 2010).

7- Speech by Special Envoy Sung Kim at the "4th Seoul-Washington Forum," Dinner (4 May, 2010).

8- On 7 May, U.S. State Department Press Secretary Philip Crowley emphasized "There are things that North Korea has to do, not say. And they have to meet their international obligations, cease provocative actions."

showed that the cause of the Cheonan sinking was a torpedo attack by North Korea, and the U.S. strongly condemned the sinking, declaring it an act of aggression, a challenge to global peace and security, and a violation of the armistice agreement. The U.S. also strongly supported South Korea's move to bring the incident before the UNSC. On 9 July, after the UNSC adopted a Chairman's Statement, the U.S. warned North Korea against additional provocations and demanded that it observe the terms of the armistice, while urging it to follow up on the promises it made in the 9·19 Joint Statement.⁹

Through Kim Jong Il's two visits to China in May and August 2010, the North Koreans spoke of the denuclearization of the peninsula and a return to the Six-Party Talks. However the U.S. response was very cold. In response to Kim Jong Il's remarks on denuclearization, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley said that they would continue to assess North Korea's behavior and emphasized that North Korea must take concrete steps to follow the terms of its prior agreements. While stating that it would continue its engagement policy toward North Korea, the U.S. also emphasized a strategy of applying pressure. Thus it maintained the position that North Korea must show a commitment to its denuclearization promises with actions as well as words. Obama took the opportunity of the ROK-U.S. summit held during the G20 summit on 11 November, 2010 to reiterate the U.S. position. Stating that "The United States is prepared to provide economic assistance to North Korea and help it

⁹- White House Statement (9 July, 2010).

integrate into the international community, provided that North Korea meets its obligations,” Obama emphasized that North Korea must cease its belligerence and choose “an irreversible path towards denuclearization.”¹⁰

3. The U.S. and South Korean Positions on the North Korean Nuclear Issue

South Korea's Position

One of the 4 strategy points of “Global Korea,” the Lee Myung-Bak government’s vision for diplomacy and security, is “win-win policies and public management of inter-Korean relations .”¹¹ The first task here focuses on resolving the nuclear issue by establishing a peaceful, nuclear-free system on the Korean peninsula. The nuclear issue is a very tricky problem, but as a key threat to peace on the peninsula and an obstacle to progress in inter-Korean relations it must be approached head-on. It is also a threat to order in Northeast Asian and the global non-proliferation regime, and thus demands international cooperation.

This position argues that increases in inter-Korean cooperation and exchange did not succeed in easing military tensions and establishing trust, and without progress in these areas it will be difficult to develop

¹⁰- *Newsis* (11 November, 2010).

¹¹- The Blue House, “A Mature Global Nation: The Lee Myung-Bak Administration’s Vision and Strategy for Foreign and Security Affairs,” (March 2009).



a sincere inter-Korean relationship. In particular, the essence of the nuclear problem is that the North Korean leadership has not changed their basic understanding, and by giving up nuclear weapons and permitting transparent inspections the North Korean authorities can have a tremendous opportunity to help their country and improve their people's quality of life.

Thus South Korea is taking an active role in working to resolve the nuclear issue, directly participating in UNSC sanctions in response to the 2nd North Korean nuclear test, and boosting diplomatic efforts to bring North Korea back to the Six-Party Talks. More concretely, they see thorough implementation of UNSC Resolution 1874 as an important factor in bringing North Korea back to the table and thus emphasize its faithful execution. They also pushed for "Five-Party Talks" among the Six-Party members (except North Korea) for closer cooperation and consultation on ways of approaching North Korea, and held meetings of foreign ministers, Six-Party delegates, and high level policy makers from Six-Party member states such as the U.S., China and Japan. Further, they promoted close ROK-U.S. policy coordination through summits, meetings of foreign ministers, and meetings of Six-Party delegates. But most the important factor in this process is how South Korea approaches the North Korean nuclear issue. If the South Korean position is unclear it will be unable to draw international cooperation.

The North Korean nuclear issue is considered the most direct threat to South Korean security and a major obstacle to inter-Korean relations, and South Korea believes they must take a leading role in



dealing with it. Therefore they need a policy vision that approaches the fundamental roots of the nuclear issue. In the Lee Myung-Bak government's view, the nuclear issue has repeatedly vacillated between progress and setbacks, moving through phases of crisis situation → negotiations → settlement → failure to execute terms of settlement. Thus the resolution continues to be delayed and a genuine solution is never achieved.¹²

Two lessons can be taken from the progress of the nuclear issue thus far. First, the pattern of failing to properly honor agreements on the nuclear issue, implementing tepid sanctions in response to North Korea's violations, and rewarding North Korea for returning to its original state after such violations, is unlikely to induce North Korea to give up its nuclear programs. Second, this pattern is also unlikely to motivate North Korea to change its behavior.

Previous efforts to resolve the nuclear issue took a partial, incremental approach dealing with only part of North Korea's nuclear programs, and failed to address the fundamental nature of the problem. Without breaking this pattern it will be difficult to overcome the current limitations in resolving North Korea's nuclear development plans and its strategic nuclear card.

The previous Geneva Agreement was discarded after massive expenditures had been made for heavy fuel oil and construction of the

¹² For an analysis of the process leading to the Grand Bargain proposal, see the manuscript "The Lee Myung-Bak Government's North Korea Policy and Outlook for Inter-Korean Relations," in *Proceeding with the Grand Bargain Proposal*, KINU Academic Conference Series 09-02 (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, December 2009), pp. 52–55.

light water reactors. After the 2nd nuclear crisis, the parties reached agreement on the principle of denuclearization via the 9·19 Joint Declaration, but this ultimately lost its effectiveness after North Korea proceeded to perform a 2nd nuclear test and follow-up agreements were not carried out. The 2·13 Agreement which offered a phased approach of shut-down and sealing → disabling → dismantling was effectively ruined - North Korea restored its nuclear facilities although it received 750,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and the U.S. removed North Korea from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

At the ROK-U.S. summit in June 2009, President Lee Myung-Bak argued the need to discard the past approaches of applying weak sanctions in response to North Korea's violation of its agreements and rewarding North Korea for strategically alternating its positions without changing its fundamental attitude, and instead proposed a new strategic method of using a "Comprehensive Package" to address the fundamental roots of the nuclear issue. Subsequently during Secretary Campbell's visit to South Korea(17–18 July, 2009), both sides expressed the need for ROK-U.S. agreement on a "Comprehensive Package."¹³ The U.S. side reaffirmed its position that it would no longer reward North Korea for the nuclear problem and related concerns and that it would consult closely with its alliance partners South Korea and Japan regarding any U.S.-DPRK bilateral dialogue.

¹³- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Foreign and Security Affairs Policy Brief*, (July 2009).



While policy cooperation among Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo proceeded, President Lee pronounced “A New Peace Initiative on the Korean Peninsula.”¹⁴ in the president’s 8·15 Commemorative Address on 15 August, 2009. This initiative is based upon his belief that in order to achieve sincere peace and reconciliation between the two Koreas, it was necessary not only to resolve the nuclear issue but also to take steps to reduce arms and build trust. This initiative, which included the basic elements of the “Denuclearization-Development-3000” initiative, called for a comprehensive approach through cooperation programs in 5 major fields(economics, education, finances, infrastructure, and living conditions) in response to the North’s decision to abandon its nuclear programs.

This was explained as a way of making progress on the nuclear issue by going beyond mere aid provision and promoting comprehensive cooperation plans that would enable the North to achieve its own economic development. This position also rejected the partial, step-by-step approach and maintained that dialogue on the nuclear issue can occur at any time without conditions, and the level of dialogue can be made flexible according to the issue at hand.

This was a departure from the approach of proceeding incrementally from small, easy steps onward, instead pursuing the core tasks of denuclearization and conventional weapons reduction simultaneously, revealing a desire for a “fundamental solution.” As this policy became more concrete, North Korea showed a strategic shift from its former

¹⁴- *Yonhap News* (15 August, 2009), <www.yonhapnews.co.kr>.

hard-line policy toward the South, making conciliatory moves while seeking bilateral talks with the U.S. and holding high-level meetings with China. Meanwhile there were direct efforts among the U.S., China, and North Korea to restart the Six-Party Talks.

When President Lee visited the U.S. in September 2009, he spoke of the “Grand Bargain” proposal a “fundamental solution” to the nuclear issue in a speech at a discussion organized by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, The Asia Society and The Korea Society(21 September, 2009) and again in a speech at the UN (23 September, 2009). The basic ideas are: ① to break out of the previous pattern of repeated compromises and stalemates, of progress and reversals, a comprehensive approach is needed which solves the fundamental source of the nuclear issue; ② to rid North Korea of nuclear weapons through the Six-Party Process while at the same time providing genuine security guarantees and international aid; ③ to prepare a concrete action plan among the five involved parties based on a clear agreement on the endpoint of the North Korean denuclearization process.

The strategic significance of this proposal is, first of all, to proceed with negotiations in a way that forces North Korea to irreversibly follow through on its promises; to move immediately to the execution phase once agreements are reached; and to proceed with denuclearization and economic aid side-by-side. This approach seeks a fundamental solution to the nuclear issue. Through this process they will also seek to develop inter-Korean relations into a stable and “normal” relationship.

Second, by clarifying once again the principle of North Korea’s denuclearization, South Korea is clearly showing its desire to overcome

the cumulative fatigue effects of drawing out the nuclear issue and its dedication to the denuclearization policy. All Six-Party member states maintain the goal of denuclearization, but in reality each country has focused on its own interests and thus the solutions have been limited. Therefore they are trying to strengthen the commitment to denuclearization.

Third, as a direct player in resolving the nuclear issue, by actively proposing a solution South Korea is suggesting an alternative means of negotiation, which means in the future they will take on more of a leadership role in the negotiation process. By taking on this direct role, South Korea hopes to put an end to the North's U.S.-centered strategic logic, its continued use of the nuclear card, management of the North Korean nuclear issue under the U.S. global nonproliferation regime, and China's growing influence on the peninsula through its policy of maintaining the status quo.

Fourth, this initiative aims not to approach the nuclear issue by itself, but to take a comprehensive approach to all aspects of "the North Korea problem." As the 3rd generation succession to Kim Jong-Eun is underway, considering the North Korean leadership's concerns about internal conditions and regime maintenance, they are hoping to overcome the limitations of the existing negotiation options. While the "Grand Bargain" offers North Korea security, there are great expectations that it will also be effective in bringing about change.

South Korea has continued to adhere to this policy even after the North Korean attack on the *Cheonan*. That is, while participating in UNSC sanctions and implementing its own independent measures against



the North,¹⁵ South Korea will provide North Korea of any “window of opportunity” if it shows sincerity to resolve the nuclear issue.

The U.S. Position

In the post-Cold War era the primary goal of U.S. North Korea policy has remained consistent through alternating Republican and Democratic administrations. This goal is preventing the spread of WMDs and long-range missiles.

In the 1990s the U.S. pursued the Geneva Agreement and the Clinton administration’s North Korea policy initiatives based on the Perry Report. Maintaining the framework of the Geneva Agreement, they offered economic incentives while holding bilateral meetings with the short term goal of delaying North Korea’s missile test launches, the mid-term goal of shutting down its nuclear and missile programs and normalizing U.S.-DPRK relations, and the long-term goal of bringing an end to the Cold War in East Asia. The U.S. dealt with the North Korean nuclear issue from a crisis management standpoint, taking a step-by-step approach focused on the issues of nuclear programs, missiles, and the return of U.S. soldiers’ remains.

However, the Clinton administration’s approach was unable to stop North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. The Bush administration approached the nuclear issue with a fundamental lack of trust toward

¹⁵– Actually, the “package deal” approach is something the North Korean side proposed many times in negotiations with the U.S. and South Korea even before South Korea made its “Grand Bargain” proposal.



North Korea, and the North Korean side responded aggressively by pursuing nuclear weapons through uranium enrichment alongside their plutonium-based program. Ultimately North Korea signed the 9·19 Joint Declaration in 2005, but with their first nuclear test in October 2006 they pursued a nuclear strategy that effectively negated this agreement.

The Obama administration, which took office in January 2009, adopted a policy of “aggressive engagement,” remaining stern but extending an unclenched fist to North Korea. Accordingly, they sought direct dialogue with both Iran and North Korea on nuclear issues.¹⁶ They particularly stressed the North Korean nuclear issue as a responsibility of all countries and a decisive test of the viability of the global nonproliferation regime, and offered two choices. North Korea could abandon its nuclear programs and follow the path of political and economic integration, or else the U.S. would further isolate North Korea and take various steps to force it to observe global non-proliferation norms.¹⁷ The Obama administration established a position of managing and resolving the nuclear issue on the basis of a strong ROK-U.S. alliance.¹⁸

In short, the U.S. offered North Korea a chance for dialogue, saying that if the North Koreans respond in a logical way then both

¹⁶– Charles A Kupchan, “Enemies Into Friends,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (March/April 2010), p. 120.

¹⁷– *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁸– The Office of President-Elect, “The Obama-Biden Plan,” <http://change.gov/agenda/foreign_policy_agenda/>; The White House, *National Security Strategy* (May 2010).

sides can get what they need, but this does not mean the U.S. will bow to North Korean pressure. They planned to pursue an engagement policy through diplomacy and development, while using both dialogue and pressure from a principled position.

The Obama administration consistently maintained this position throughout the process of UNSC sanctions following the second North Korean nuclear test in May 2009, U.S. dialogue with North Korea in the latter half of 2009, and even after the *Cheonan* sinking in March 2010. The U.S. has demonstrated a clear stance of seeking to grasp North Korea's sincerity toward denuclearization through bilateral dialogue, while responding firmly to their military provocations. The Obama administration describes this policy as "strategic patience," and Secretary of State Clinton that the U.S.-DPRK dialogue carried out by Special Envoy Stephen Bosworth on his visit North Korea (8 – 10 December, 2009) was part of this policy, as a preliminary meeting to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to denuclearization and to explore whether or not North Korea is prepared to move in that direction.¹⁹

To summarize the Obama administration's basic position in response to North Korea's offensive, they approach the nuclear issue from the viewpoint of preventing proliferation of WMDs and maintain the goal of complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement (CVID), emphasizing that the North must thoroughly follow-through on

¹⁹- "Clinton Calls 'Exploratory' Meeting with North Korea 'Quite Positive'," *Voice of America* (10 December, 2009).



agreements. The Obama administration argues that since the policy of refusing to take diplomatic action in response to North Korea's bad behavior did not help to resolve the nuclear problem and only perpetuated a vicious cycle, that policy must change.²⁰

As part of the effort to realize President Obama's vision of "Nuclear-Free World," the U.S. is working to strengthen the NPT regime. The Nuclear Posture Review Report released on 6 April, 2010 called for a stronger Negative Security Assurance(NSA) policy, explaining that the existing NSA would need to be revised in order to back up the "Nuclear-Free World" vision. However the Obama administration, which emphasizes working with international society through its norms and organizations within the framework of multilateral consultation, identifies countries like North Korea and Iran which violate their agreements as "outliers" and excludes them from the strengthened NSA.²¹ Moreover, high-level policy-makers including Secretary Clinton, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, and Secretary Campbell have repeatedly affirmed the clear goals of "nuclear nonproliferation" and "nuclear disarmament."

As it nears the end of 2010, the Obama administration, having been defeated in the U.S. mid-term elections, is pursuing its North Korea policy through close ROK-U.S. cooperation, while demanding that North Korea demonstrate a willingness to change its behavior, and applying

²⁰- Victor D. Cha, "What Do They Really Want?: Obama's North Korea Conundrum," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (October 2009), p. 121.

²¹- U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (April 2010), pp. 9–10; pp. 15–16.

stronger sanctions and diplomatic pressure. Also, the U.S. is demanding that North Korea show “sincerity” about improving inter-Korean relations.

4. North Korea’s “Nuclear Weapons Possession” Strategy²²

Although the international community has been dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue for 20 years now, North Korea has still managed to develop nuclear weapons. The global implications of North Korea having nuclear weapons differ significantly from its previous status of simply having nuclear materials.

The fact of North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons impacts international society in three different dimensions.²³ First, it is a challenge to the current NPT-based world order centered on the U.S. and other nuclear powers, sufficient to disrupt the NPT system. If North Korea’s nuclear weapons development cannot be controlled, then Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Indonesia, Iran, Syria, Turkey and others with the capacity to develop nuclear weapons may begin to rethink their nuclear policies.²⁴ In South Korea as well, arguments for

²²– This section is a revised supplement to the author’s paper, “The Significance of Nukes and Missiles (WMDs) in North Korea’s Foreign Policy and Their Limitations,” *Peace and Security*, Vol. 3 (2006), pp. 22–25.

²³– Min Cho, “*Haekgukga Bukhan, Hangukui Seontaek* (Nuclear North Korea: The Choice for South Korea),” *Pyeonghwa Nonpyeong*, No. 11 (17 October, 2006).

²⁴– In his autobiography *Decision Points*, published in November 2010, President Bush wrote that in order to convince Chinese President Zhang Zemin to pressure North Korean on the nuclear issue, he warned him that “We won’t be able to Stop Japan from Developing its own Nukes.” *Chosun Ilbo* (11 November, 2010).



developing nuclear weapons have begun to surface.

Second, North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons can bring about a structural change to the international security order in Northeast Asia. This may lead to a reprise of the confrontation between naval and land-based powers that played out around the Korean peninsula during the Cold War. Of course, the likelihood of a new Cold War erupting is low, due to the deeply inter-dependent relations between the U.S. and China. However, since China appeared to "take North Korea's side" following the *Cheonan* incident, China's security threat to the U.S. is not a problem that can be ignored amidst the changing dynamics of the Northeast Asian region. While all sides participated in the international sanctions process in response to North Korea's nuclear test, a wide gap in positions emerged with China and Russia on one side and the U.S. and Japan on the other. This was not a simple policy disagreement; it was a difference in strategic calculations regarding North Korea's nuclear status.

Third, in terms of inter-Korean relations, after the North Korean nuclear tests South Korea's policy toward the North could hardly continue as before. Because of these tests the inter-Korean strategic structure which had excluded U.S. strategic support was altered. This change was demonstrated by the postponement until December 2015 of the planned transfer of wartime operational control to South Korea, and by President Obama's pledge at the October 2010 ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting to provide "extended deterrence" to South Korea.²⁵

²⁵- Refer to "The Guidelines for ROK-U.S. Defense Cooperation," (8 October, 2010) and the Joint Statement from the 42nd ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting(SCM) (9 October, 2010), <<http://www.mnd.go.kr>>.

With North Korea's announcement of a successful nuclear test, and international confirmation that the test had occurred, North Korea unofficially became a nuclear weapons state. With their new nuclear power the North Korean leadership began to display increased confidence in various areas.

First, Kim Jong Il gained confidence in the strength of his own individual grip on power and regime security, as the possession of nuclear weapons allowed him to justify and rationalize the talk of a "strong and prosperous country" and *Songun*(Military-First) politics. *Songun* is Kim's most important tool for guaranteeing the permanence of his regime.

Second, with the possession of nuclear weapons, the North Korean leadership believes they have secured a safety valve in terms of military and security strategy. Of course, a small number of nuclear warheads cannot be said to ensure a complete safety valve against the mighty nuclear powers that surround it. However they may assess that having nuclear weapons allows them to pursue their own security strategy, tactics, and diplomacy against not only the U.S. but also Russia and China.

Third, for totalitarian one-man dictator Kim Jong Il, nuclear weapons give him the means and the excuse to strengthen his basis of internal rule and exercise absolute control over aspects the system which have grown lax due to the severe economic difficulty. Self-congratulatory events celebrating the "success" of the nuclear test were held in Pyongyang and throughout the country for precisely this purpose. Also, with this new confidence Kim Jong Il used the 3rd Party Delegates' Conference to speed

the process of passing power on to his 3rd son Kim Jong-Eun, who is no older than 27.

Fourth, since declaring itself a nuclear power in February 2005, North Korea has argued that the Six-Party Talks should be replaced by arms reduction talks, and now that it has nuclear capability it can continuously press for arms reduction talks with the U.S. If North Korea for some reason chooses to return to the Six-Party Talks, its attitude toward the South Korean side will likely be to ignore it almost completely. Toward the U.S. it will grow bolder in its demands for security assurances and large-scale economic aid as well as the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the breakup of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Finally, nuclear weapons enable North Korea to essentially use South Korea as a hostage in its foreign and inter-Korean policies. The political debate that erupted in the South over the “Sunshine Policy” in the wake of the nuclear test is one representative example. Since before the nuclear test, North Korea had argued that its “nuclear deterrent” would “protect peace and stability” not only for itself but for South Korea as well. While this argument is clearly sophistic, it cannot be simply explained as propaganda directed at the South. The reality in South Korean society is that when North Korea claims UNSC sanctions constitute “an act of war,” this affects not only politics but policy discussion as well. By continuously provoking conflict in the ROK-U.S. alliance and within South Korean society and also increasing anti-U.S. sentiment, North Korea may gain more confidence in its ability to create favorable conditions for itself on the peninsula.

However not everything has gone according to North Korea’s plan



since it came to possess nuclear weapons. Under its nonproliferation policy, the U.S. is placing more emphasis than ever on ensuring that North Korea's nuclear weapons, materials, equipment and technology do not fall into the hands of terrorists or the states which support them. There is some question as to how much even China, North Korea's most "dependable" remaining supporter, is willing to allow North Korea to develop its nuclear stockpile. The same applies for Russia. If the North Korean leadership believes that even China cannot be relied upon to support the regime, and if that assessment was part of their reason for developing nuclear weapons, then in the future China will need to be much more cautious in its judgments and strategies regarding North Korea.

The North Korean leadership sees its relations with the U.S. as key to regime survival. The U.S. sees the UNSC's diplomatic and economic sanctions as insufficient and thus it has continued to strengthen its Proliferation Security Initiative(PSI) on WMDs, and in April 2010 it initiated the Nuclear Security Summit. The U.S. also increased its own unilateral sanctions against North Korea and applied pressure through military exercises based on a stronger ROK-U.S. alliance.

Regardless of the debate about their effectiveness, diplomatic and economic sanctions by the West under U.S. leadership will likely continue for some time. In the process North Korea's economic difficulties will worsen, and due to its weak base for economic recovery and growth, as the supply of external resources becomes limited over time this could deal a serious blow to its economy. Of course, the primary victims of these worsening economic conditions

will be the majority of the North Korean people who are excluded from the public distribution, which may lead to a dramatic increase in defection. Today, unlike in the 1990s, access to outside information has increased and can no longer be controlled to the degree that it was during the Cold War. This situation may cause more North Korean people to begin to see internal rather than external causes for their deepening international isolation, thus accelerating the erosion of regime durability.

Also unlike in the 1990s, now if economic conditions worsen, there is more possibility of collective displays of dissatisfaction. The reason the famine of the 1990s, which claimed an estimated 2–3 million victims, did not result in organized resistance to the regime was because the people had been passively dependent upon the public distribution system for so long that they lacked the experience of adapting to new situations. Now that they no longer rely on the state or the Party for their survival, many North Koreans have learned to fend for themselves, and so instead of meeting difficulties with increased regime loyalty, they are likely to look for outlets for their frustration with reality. As the regime proceeds with its 3rd generation feudalistic power succession, the North Korean leadership is approaching a serious challenge.

5. The Direction of ROK–U.S. Strategic Cooperation

Looking back at the past process of ROK-U.S. policy coordination in dealing with the nuclear issue, it is fair to say that the two



countries share common goals, but their approaches are influenced heavily by their respective security and strategic priorities. In other words, despite their common goal of completely dismantling the North Korean nuclear program, there is a significant disparity in their approaches based on their national goals and policy priorities.

South Korean policies prioritize first the Korean peninsula, then Northeast Asia, and then the world. The U.S. sees its priorities in the reverse order. For South Korea, its North Korea policy is inseparable from the issues of improving inter-Korean relations and unifying the peninsula. For the U.S., the primary objectives are maintaining the U.S.-led world order and stability in Northeast Asia. In the long run, after unification South Korea will prioritize building a single united nation, while the U.S. will be more concerned with questions of what to do with the alliance under a unified Korea and the issues of denuclearization and the future of U.S. troops based in the South.

This kind of disparity in the two countries' national security strategies is only natural. Although its national power is relatively declining, the U.S. still plays a leading role in shaping the global political order as well as the economic and security orders. On the other hand South Korea faces a nuclear-armed North Korea and must work with other regional powers including the emerging G2 power China, the economically advanced nation of Japan, the security power of Russia, and its ally the U.S. This strategic position represents a structural challenge for South Korea, the host of the G20 summit and the 13th-ranked economy in the world. Therefore in the process of resolving the nuclear issue and ultimately achieving the national goal

of unification, South Korea must strengthen and advance its refined relationship with the U.S.

More than anything, both South Korea and the U.S. have an interest in peace and stability on the peninsula, stability and economic interdependence in Northeast Asia, and the pursuit of free democratic values. Thus they share the goal of transforming North Korea into a responsible member of international society that will not challenge these interests. South Korea and the U.S. must execute a joint strategy toward the nuclear issue on the basis of this fundamental common interest. South Korea's "Grand Bargain" initiative and the comprehensive approach espoused by the U.S. are both variations of a "Package Deal" approach, and their details show considerable overlap. Thus both sides need to adhere to the position of inducing North Korea to make an irreversible commitment to denuclearization and directly encourage regional countries to join in negotiations. If North Korea returns to the Six-Party Talks and negotiations progress, they must dedicate more diplomatic efforts to building international solidarity to ensure that North Korea does not repeat its past negotiating behavior.

If multilateral negotiations produce an agreement, it must immediately proceed to the execution phase and promote a fundamental solution to the nuclear problem with denuclearization and economic aid proceeding in tandem, thus developing into stable and "normalized" inter-Korean relations. Inter-Korean relations must not advance and retreat according to North Korea's whims and tactical displays of "good faith" but rather through a fundamental solution to the single



greatest obstacle to better relations - the nuclear issue. In this way we must seek to change the basic pattern of inter-Korean relations. This process will contribute to the U.S. strategy of systematizing a stable nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Second, the nuclear issue must not be approached simply by itself but rather with a comprehensive awareness of all aspects of the North Korean problem. For the U.S. North Korea is undeniably a priority from the standpoint of the global nuclear nonproliferation policy. However from a technological and functional standpoint the U.S. did not previously consider it as a concrete objective among its security policy priorities. To achieve its own strategic objectives the U.S. must project more elements of Korean peninsula and Northeast Asian affairs in devising its detailed strategy solutions.

In dealing with issues of stability on the peninsula and improving inter-Korean relations, South Korea must take more of a leadership role and the U.S. must take more of an assisting role, under a framework of close ROK-U.S. cooperation. In this sense, the recent U.S. emphasis on the importance of first improving inter-Korean relations in the process of returning to the Six-Party Talks is seen as a positive sign. If this position becomes entrenched, North Korea will be forced to consider South Korea alongside the U.S. in its priority policy of U.S. relations.

Third, both the U.S. and South Korea must proceed with a principled but flexible strategy toward improving both U.S.-DPRK relations and inter-Korean relations. The U.S. must utilize the concerns between both sides and spur on efforts to induce North Korea to



become a responsible member of international society. While sticking to the policy of continued economic sanctions in response to North Korea's violations of principles, they must develop a comprehensive, detailed approach covering all the issues including gradually easing sanctions according to the level of North Korea's response on the nuclear issue, additional recoveries of U.S. soldiers' remains, economic and energy aid and cooperation, improved political relations, negotiating a peace treaty and other measures to address North Korean security concerns, etc., all within the framework of improved relations. By proceeding with this comprehensive approach they can boost the effectiveness of proactive engagement with North Korea. Throughout this process both countries must have strong communication on their comprehensive approach strategy. Upon this strategic baseline, they must exchange detailed plans and carry out concrete steps according to a prioritization that takes into consideration of their various strategic interests and developing situations.

Fourth, the processes of resolving the nuclear issue and advancing unification are not simply a game played against North Korea through ROK-U.S. cooperation alone. In addition cooperation must be expanded with neighboring China, Japan, and Russia in order to resolve the nuclear problem, establish a peace regime on the peninsula, encourage opening and reform in North Korea, improve inter-Korean relations, and prepare a base for unification. South Korea is working to promote expanded cooperative relations among these four neighboring countries, upon the foundation of strong ROK-U.S. ties, in order to spur on greater peace and prosperity on the peninsula

and throughout Northeast Asia. They are also advancing a policy of building bilateral and multilateral cooperative structures with China, Japan, and Russia along the lines of South Korea's "New Asia Vision Diplomacy."

U.S. global strategy contributes to backing up these South Korean policies. Actually South Korea is endeavoring to move beyond Asian regional issues and directly contribute solutions to global topics such as WMDs, climate change, terrorism, development aid for nations suffering from high poverty or natural disasters, peace-keeping actions, etc. South Korea has advanced from a recipient to a giver of foreign aid, and it should be encouraged to act as a partner in building a stable and peaceful order on the peninsula, in Northeast Asia, and throughout the world.

6. Conclusion

South Korea and the U.S. have shared interests in peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, stability and economic interdependence in Northeast Asia, and the pursuit of free democratic values. They also share the goal of transforming North Korea into a responsible member of international society that will not challenge their interests. Based on these fundamental interests South Korea and the U.S. must advance a more thoughtful policy toward North Korean issues.

From a practical viewpoint, if the aim is a welfare state that

promotes democracy, market economic principles, and respect for human dignity, then stronger relations with the U.S. is not just an important choice for both sides but an issue of mutual benefit, as the U.S. is an ally in continuous national development and a supporter of the ongoing tasks for the stable development of inter-Korean relations, including relieving security concerns and promoting peace, inter-Korean exchanges, and “normalization” of the North Korean system. Developing ROK-U.S. relations into a “21st century strategic alliance” means that the U.S. and South Korea will share the role of mature supporters of the future global political, economic, and security order. ROK-U.S. strategic cooperation means the two sides must become partners not just in traditional security co- operation but also in all areas of the bilateral relationship and improving the peace and welfare of the global community.

There is a difference between the capabilities of South Korea and the U.S. and their capacity to extend to international society. However the strategic alliance can be seen as a comprehensive cooperative relationship in which both sides can be open to each other and sufficiently understand the other side’s interests. In order to achieve a mutual vision of the alliance, coordinate a direction for that vision, and build detailed plans, the process must start from a solid framework of mutual trust.



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