Working Paper Series

Necessary Enemies: Anti-Americanism, Juche Ideology, and the Torturous Path to Normalization

September 2008

WP 08-3

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Note: This paper was prepared exclusively for the U.S.-Korea Institute's Working Paper Series.

The Making of the "Imperialist Enemy"

On June 26, 2008, President George W. Bush announced that he would eliminate sanctions from the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) and indicate to Congress his intent to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.[1] These steps were in response to the DPRK's written declaration, delivered to the U.S. via the Chinese government, detailing its nuclear program. At almost the same moment as Bush's announcement (July 27 local time), North Korea demolished the cooling tower of its main nuclear facility at Yongbyon, in full view of international TV news crews. The following day, a freighter carrying 37,000 tons of American wheat docked in North Korea to deliver the first installment of a promised 500,000 tons of food aid.[2] These events marked the culmination of more than five years of six-way talks over North Korea's nuclear program, involving the U.S., North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan. At the heart of these talks had always been the conflict between the U.S. and North Korea, two countries that nearly went to war in the summer of 1994 over North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons production. That crisis led to an Agreed Framework to freeze North Korea's plutonium production, but a second nuclear crisis erupted in the fall of 2002, after the U.S. accused Pyongyang of carrying out a secret uranium enrichment program in violation of the Agreed Framework. The second crisis peaked with North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006.[3] To the surprise of many, less than two years after the nuclear test, North Korea and the U.S. had climbed back from the brink of disaster and taken important steps toward potentially transforming their relationship from military confrontation to political and economic normality.

Of course, the U.S.-North Korean conflict long predates the 1994 nuclear crisis. As Gavan McCormack points out, the United States has been in conflict with North Korea longer than with any other country in its history.[4] Technically, the U.S. and North Korea have been in a continuous state of war since the summer of 1950, when the U.S. led U.N. forces to repel North Korea in the Korean War. The armistice that ended that conflict in July 1953 did not end the state of war, which continues to this day. Indeed, the Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions repealed by Bush in June 2008 had been in place since December 1950, longer than similar sanctions against any other state. While the U.S. may have intended for the Six-Party Talks to eliminate the potential threat of nuclear-armed North Korea, North Korea has stressed the need to eliminate the "hostile" U.S. policy toward the DPRK as its top priority to remove what it has perceived to be the "hostile policy" of the U.S. toward North Korea. The Six-Party agreements of September 2005 and February 2007 state explicitly, as did the 1994 Agreed Framework before them, that the U.S. and North Korea would move toward full diplomatic normalization. For the U.S., the effective end of the state of war with Pyongyang would remove its longest-standing enemy. But for North Korea, the transformation of its relationship with the U.S. from hostility to normality would be far more profound: almost since the founding of the DPRK in 1948, North Korea's very identity has been shaped by its conflict with the U.S. Without the American enemy, North Korea would not be what it is today. And should the state of conflict with the U.S. end in the near future, this may have an effect on North Korea's relationship with the outside world – and its own sense of identity – further-reaching than any experience since the Korean War.

North Korea's antagonism toward the U.S. was not inevitable, although it may seem that way in retrospect. The DPRK was founded under Soviet occupation in the midst an emerging Cold War, and therefore was aligned with America's chief global antagonist. But in the early years of the regime, the main target of hostile propaganda was the rival regime in Seoul and the "revival of Japanese militarism," not the U.S.[5] America was the enemy insofar as it enabled both the Syngman Rhee "clique" and the Japanese "militarists" to hold onto power. "American Imperialism" became North Korea's main enemy primarily as a result of the Korean War. Ironically, North Korea's war against the U.S. has created a mobilizing, militaristic regime with some striking resemblances to Japan in World War II.[6] The cult of the semi-divine leader, the indivisible organic nation-race, and later even the portrayal of "suicide squads" (*kyŏlsadae*) to defend the motherland against the Americans – indeed, the focus on the American enemy itself – all suggest a kind of (perhaps unconscious) continuity with Japanese wartime mobilization. One could say that the people of North Korea have been mobilized continuously for war against the U.S. since 1942, first under Japanese colonial rule and then under the DPRK, except for a five-year hiatus between August 1945 and June 1950. Like much else in the North Korean system, war mobilization has maintained the form of Japanese colonial militarism while obviously jettisoning its specifically Japanese and colonial content. Even some of North Korea's most prominent economic and foreign policy slogans, such as *charyŏk gaengsaeng* (self-reliance) and *juchesŏng* (autonomy or subjectivity) are identical to Japanese wartime slogans (*jiriki kyosei* and *shutaisei*, respectively, in Japanese).[7]

The Korean War was devastating for the entire peninsula, but especially for the North. American bombing in particular wreaked havoc on the population, the cities and factories, the transportation infrastructure, and the farms and dams of North Korea. Millions of North Koreans were killed, injured, or made homeless, hundreds of thousands fled to the South, and North Korea was all but destroyed as an industrial economy. The North Korean government has regularly evoked the memory of this awesome destruction to reinforce the image of America as a ruthless and implacable enemy. North Korea still insists (and no doubt most of its people believe) that the war was started by the U.S.[8] No visitor to North Korea even today can escape the feeling that the DPRK is a country at war. The war that began in June 1950 appears in the DPRK media as if it had just begun yesterday, and a sense of imminent and mortal threat from the U.S., heightened at the time of the Iraq invasion in 2003, has never gone away since the Korean War began. On the one hand, what Selig Harrison has called North Korea's "permanent siege mentality" has helped bond the society together and solidify the unchallenged rule of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.[9] On the other hand, the American security threat is no mere fiction from Pyongyang's perspective. No other country in the world has faced the threat of nuclear annihilation by the U.S. for nearly sixty years, as has North Korea; no country has been for so long the explicit target of a potential American attack. It is the condition of war, more than any other single factor, which justifies North Korea's permanent state of emergency.

It was in the midst of post-war economic recovery that Kim Il Sung first articulated the notion of *juche*, often (inadequately) translated as "self-reliance," which became official policy in the late 1960s and the "guiding principle of politics" in the 1972 DPRK constitution.[10] It is perhaps ironic that self-reliance was announced at the peak of North Korea's dependence on foreign aid. Yet, the roots of *juche* lie deep in Korea's modern history and in the experiences of Kim Il Sung and the DPRK leadership. National independence and self-reliance were among the foremost goals of the North Korean communists from the time of the anti-Japanese guerrilla war; overwhelming dependence on the Soviet Union before the Korean War and on socialist-bloc assistance after would have only reinforced this desire for self-assertion.[11]

The international conditions of the 1950s and 1960s also shaped *juche sasang* (*juche* ideology) in significant ways. North Korea was faced with an ongoing confrontation against South Korea, allied with the world's most powerful nation. The U.S. in turn was allied with Korea's former colonizer, Japan, which was rapidly re-emerging as an economic power in the 1950s and in 1965 normalized relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea), itself rapidly modernizing under Park Chung-hee. While confronting this formidable alignment, North Korea had to deal with the increasingly bitter divisions between its own major allies, China and the Soviet Union. And neither China nor the USSR could, as it turned out, be relied upon to fully back North Korea in its confrontation with the U.S. First Moscow, then Beijing, reached a rapprochement with the U.S. (in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively). North Korea tried to reach its own accommodation with the U.S. in the 1970s, but little came of this, and U.S.-North Korean hostility revived in the 1980s – reaching a climax in the nuclear crisis of the early 1990s.

Thus, a policy of "self-reliance" made virtue a necessity, as North Korea attempted to maintain a degree of autonomy amidst the shifting political winds of the Cold War. While North Korea successfully navigated the Sino-Soviet split, receiving aid and political support from both countries without fully falling into the Chinese camp like Albania or into the Soviet camp like Vietnam, this adroit maneuvering became moot after the Sino-Soviet rapprochement of 1989 and the Soviet collapse of 1991. After the end of the Cold War, North Korea seems to have seen its future, ironically, in improving relations with the U.S. Kim Jong Il allegedly even said in 1997 that "America is no longer North Korea's enemy."[12] Yet the DPRK leadership must view the possibility of normalizing relations with the U.S. with deep ambivalence. On the one hand, easing of U.S. sanctions against the DPRK is critical for North Korea to engage in any meaningful economic reform or even to revive its economy beyond a basic stage of survival, because these sanctions inhibit North Korea's access to international financial institutions and large-scale investment. Furthermore, a reduction of hostilities with the U.S. would free up valuable resources from defense to be put into more productive sectors of the economy. There may be strategic motivations as well: some long-time observers of U.S.-DPRK negotiations have suggested that, since the early 1990s, North Korea has committed itself to pursuing a new strategic relationship with the U.S. in order to balance China and Japan.[13] But on the other hand, the end of its adversarial relationship with the U.S. would lead North Korea into previously uncharted territory. A country that for sixty years has emphasized America's aggression and evil intentions, to its own people and to the world, would have to adjust to an entirely new image of the U.S. In DPRK propaganda, the U.S. has been blamed for most of North Korea's problems, from the division of the peninsula in 1945 to electricity blackouts today. It is conceivable that a new relationship with the U.S. based on reciprocity and equality (at least, as presented internally to the North Korean people) would enable the DPRK to maintain a self-image of autonomy and uncompromised sovereignty, while reaping the benefits of a newly non-hostile

environment. But *juche*, born and nurtured in a state of emergency for over half a century, is difficult to imagine without the ever-present American enemy.

Hostility toward the U.S. has profoundly affected North Korea's political and economic evolution, and has been inextricably linked to the idea of *juche*. After the end of postwar reconstruction in the early 1960s, the DPRK focused on preparing for a military confrontation with the Americans and their "fascist" lackeys in Seoul that would end in a decisive North Korean victory. Beginning in 1962, North Korea embarked on a renewed program of military build-up under the slogan *chŏnmin mujanghwa* ("arming the entire people"), diverting precious economic resources into the military at precisely the moment when Eastern bloc assistance for post-war reconstruction was discontinued.[14] North Korean rhetoric toward South Korea took on a sharply more aggressive tone in the early 1960s, after a brief "thaw" following the fall of Syngman Rhee in April 1960. In 1963, Park Chung-hee was elected President of the Republic of Korea, which gave him at least the appearance of greater legitimacy than the head of an unelected junta, and U.S. President Kennedy renewed the American commitment to defense of the South. The ROK government was newly stable, firmly anti-communist, and more formidable militarily than before and even showed signs of economic growth after several years of stagnation. By contrast, North Korea's relations with both of its Great Power patrons were tense despite the recent mutual defense treaties, foreign assistance was on the decrease, and the domestic economy was slipping. North Korea was ahead of the South only in terms of its political stability, or rather the near-absolute control of Kim Il Sung and his partisan group. In other respects, especially on the economic front, the DPRK was losing its competitive edge. It was this combination of factors – the more threatening external environment, the weakening DPRK position vis-à-vis the South, and the need to solidify power internally – that seems to have led to the increasing militarization of North Korea at this time. Especially in contrast to the policy of peaceful coexistence in Europe, North Korea's bellicose attitude toward the South disturbed the East European officials in Pyongyang, who did not believe that the American threat had objectively increased on the peninsula.[15] An official of the DPRK Foreign Ministry told the East German ambassador bluntly that North Korea might soon have to "liberate" the South by force in order to save the suffering South Korean people; the inter-German policy of co-existence could not apply to the relationship between North Korea and the Southern "fascists."[16]

As early as April 1962 the *chŏnmin mujanghwa* slogan began to make its appearance in the DPRK, in the provinces as well as in the capital.[17] By the middle of the year, the Korean People's Army (KPA) was put on a permanent state of high alert.[18] Major new defense facilities were built in the vicinity of Kanggye in Chagang Province, where the remnants of the DPRK government had retreated during the darkest days of the Korean War. All foreigners, including East European allies, were expressly forbidden from entering Chagang province after November 1962.[19] Kim Il Sung, through the Soviet Ambassador in Pyongyang, asked the USSR to increase its military assistance to the DPRK in mid-October, citing the critical position of North Korea's half-million-man army on the front lines against imperialism.[20] However, Khrushchev, in fact, cut off Soviet military aid to North Korea in the last two years of his leadership of the USSR; it wasn't until after the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 and the visit of Alexei Kosygin to Pyongyang in February 1965 that Soviet military assistance was resumed.[21]

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, and more specifically Khrushchev's "capitulation" to the U.S. over the crisis, dealt a damaging blow to the Soviet Union's reputation in North Korea, and was harshly criticized in China as well.[22] From the perspective of the North Korean leadership, Soviet behavior over Cuba suggested that the USSR would be willing to sacrifice the interests of small socialist allies for the sake of its own peaceful co-existence with the United States.[23] The Soviets' continued refusal to supply North Korea with modern arms and military hardware, despite further requests from the DPRK government, reinforced this suspicion of the USSR's reliability as an ally. North Korea would therefore practice "*juche* in self-defense." At the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) Central Committee plenum of December 1962, the Party officially adopted the slogan of "arming the entire people." The population was told to build socialism under the slogan "Arms in the one hand and a hammer and sickle in the other!" The entire country would become a fortress, with air-raid shelters and bunkers in every population center. As in the Korean War, new factories were built underground, and a system of tunnels under Pyongyang was expanded to protect much of the city's population from attack. The KPA entrenched itself deeply in the mountains facing South Korea. And, like Mao (who perhaps inspired him with the idea), Kim seems to have felt that his country could prevail even against a nuclear attack from the United States. North Korea's mountainous terrain, Kim told the Soviet ambassador, would weaken the effect of nuclear weapons and help his country to defend itself against the Americans.[24]

The DPRK leadership did not seriously expect an attack from the South, as North Korean officials admitted in candid conversations with some of the East European diplomats. The North Koreans recognized that the Park regime was occupied with stabilizing the political situation and improving the South Korean economy. But the urgency of the North Korean military build-up arose, in part, from the very fact that the Park regime was becoming more stable and therefore reducing the possibility of pro-North Korean forces taking power in the South any time soon. "Peaceful unification" was less likely to be in North Korea's interest than it might have been earlier, and the term itself was dropped from DPRK propaganda at the time.[25] The contrast to the situation in Vietnam, the other divided nation on the rim of East Asia, made North Korea's problems even more evident. The South Vietnamese regime was chronically unstable, and the National Liberation Front (NLF) was inflicting heavy casualties on American forces there. North Koreans had long admitted in private to East European officials that there was no longer any viable communist party or guerilla movement in South Korea. Instead, the North would have to liberate the South from without. And the fact that the Vietnamese comrades were able to fight the Americans without large-scale or nuclear retaliation, indicated to the North Koreans that they might be able to pull off an attack on South Korea without inviting full-scale war with the United States. Thus, from the perspective of the Pyongyang leadership, Soviet reluctance to support North Korea's military ventures was a major obstacle to the liberation of the whole peninsula.[26]

Whether or not North Korea's leaders really saw their country's situation as parallel to that of Vietnam is difficult to say. They did seem to envy the success of the NLF in South Vietnam, and in the late 1960s North Korea stepped up its attempts to destabilize South Korea through direct action, nearly succeeding in assassinating Park Chung-hee in January 1968. "Arming the entire people" should be seen as more than a tool for domestic political control; North Korea was preparing for a renewed war with the South, and might have been as ready for a swift counterattack in the event of a Southern provocation, as it had been in the spring of 1950. As it turned out, such a provocation never came, and what the December 1962 Central Committee Plenum declared as a policy of "equal emphasis," or a "parallel program of economic and military development," had disastrous long-term effects on the domestic economy. The Central Committee announced that 1963 would be another "buffer year," as 1960 had been. Industrial growth was projected at 11 percent for the year, still high by world standards, but less than the 18 percent projected at the beginning of the Seven-Year Plan, and much less than the Flying Horse years of the late 1950s.[27] The reduction in foreign aid and the economic drain of militarization were probably significant factors in this scaling-back of economic goals.

Between 1964 and 1967, state investment in military affairs rose from 6 to 30 percent of total government expenditure. North Korea by the end of the 1960s would have one of the largest armies in the world, four times the size of the Soviet military in proportion to the population.[28] It was simply not possible for North Korea to put such enormous resources into the military and at the same time develop its civilian industry to meet the goals of the Seven-Year Plan. In April 1963 Kim Il Sung spoke to the Soviet ambassador about the state of the North Korean economy, and admitted that the DPRK would have to invest more in mining and mineral extraction before they could build up manufacturing as they had hoped. A year into the Seven-Year Plan, factory production was falling far short of expectations. Agriculture was also not in the best of shape, and the goal of "complete mechanization of agriculture," as North Korea had been announcing since the mid-1950s, was simply unrealistic. The vast majority of agricultural production was still the result of human and animal labor, and there remained an acute labor shortage in the countryside.[29]

The year 1963 looked likely to be another year of hunger, similar to 1955. East European residents observed that distribution of essential food items was scanty in towns and villages, and most of the private markets had disappeared.[30] Consumer goods in general were in short supply, and what was available tended to be of very poor quality. At a plenum in September 1963, the KWP Central Committee called for an increase in the production of consumer goods, but did not allocate more resources for this production increase. Rather, the state exhorted factories to diversify and expand existing production into consumer items, and called for more necessary items to be produced at the local level. "*Juche* in economics" meant, in effect, making do with little or nothing from the central state, which is what the term would continue to mean in the long years of economic decline ahead.[31] The regime had made the choice between guns and butter, as it were, and would never veer from the priority placed on guns. If anything, the diversion of resources from the civilian to the military sectors of the economy would only increase over time, and by the 1990s, when North Korea seemed to be tilting against the hurricane winds of history itself, the DPRK would be utterly and grimly unique: a starving country with the world's fourth-largest standing army. Such a situation was by no means inevitable, but in retrospect it is clear that the wretched circumstances of North Korea in the 1990s had their roots

in the "parallel economic policy" of the 1960s.

The Pueblo Incident

The most serious U.S.-DPRK clash between the end of the Korean War and the nuclear crisis of the early 1990s was the *Pueblo* incident. On January 23, 1968, North Korean forces captured the USS *Pueblo*, a converted cargo carrier engaged in electronic intelligence-gathering off the East Coast of the DPRK. Eight days later, the Vietnamese National Liberation Front launched its "Tet Offensive" against South Vietnamese and American targets throughout South Vietnam. Even before Tet, President Johnson and most of his aides were convinced that the *Pueblo* incident had been coordinated between North Korea and other communist countries in order to distract American military forces from Indochina, and to pressure South Korea to recall its troops from Vietnam; after Tet, it seemed certain to many of the American leaders that North Korea was trying to open up a "second front" in order to tie down American forces in both Korea and Indochina.[32] It now appears, however, that North Korea captured the *Pueblo* without any prior consultation, much less coordination, with any of its allies, including the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam. Indeed, the "fraternal" socialist allies first learned about the incident from Western newspapers, and most of these governments – especially the USSR – were none too pleased with the North Korean action.

Border incidents involving the two Koreas had escalated dramatically since the full-scale American military intervention in Vietnam began in 1965. According to the State Department, North Korean incidents across the DMZ occurred fifty times in 1966, and nearly 600 times in 1967.[33] Some forty South Korean ships, mostly fishing vessels, were captured by North Korean coastal patrols in 1967. In October 1967, North Korean forces fired artillery against South Korean positions, the first time this had happened since the Korean War. Most spectacularly of all, in early January 1968, a team of thirty North Korean commandoes, disguised as ROK soldiers, slipped into South Korea in an attempt to assassinate Park Chung-hee, the South Korean president. The commandoes came within a few hundred yards of the presidential palace, or Blue House, before they were discovered by South Korean security forces on January 21. All but two of the commandoes were killed in the ensuing fire-fight. Two days later, the North Korean navy captured the *Pueblo*.

The *Pueblo*, with a crew of eighty-three under Commander Lloyd "Pete" Bucher, left the port of Sasebo, Japan on January 11 for the northeast coast of Korea. The ship had been outfitted with electronic intelligence gear to eavesdrop on communications from North Korea and the Soviet Far East. On January 23, the ship was discovered by North Korean coastal patrols in Wŏnsan harbor, about twenty miles from the port city of Wŏnsan and less than eight miles from the nearest North Korean island. The North Koreans ordered the *Pueblo* to surrender and be boarded. Bucher attempted to lead the ship to escape, but the North Koreans fired on the vessel, killing one of the crew and wounding four others. The *Pueblo* was commandeered by the North Koreans and the crew taken prisoner. The eighty-two surviving crewmen would endure almost a year of hardship, beating, and torture, pawns in a deadly diplomatic game between the United States and the DPRK.

The public response in the U.S. and South Korea was outrage; President Johnson had to deal with both belligerent South Koreans and domestic attacks from prominent Republicans. The Park Chung-hee government demanded military retaliation against the North. California governor Ronald Reagan called the *Pueblo* incident "the most disgraceful thing to happen in my memory of America," and Senator Strom Thurmond said he had no doubt that the seizure of the *Pueblo* "was closely tied to the war in South Vietnam."[34] Johnson and his advisors weighed their options, which ranged from some form of negotiation – politically distasteful, especially in an election year – to air strikes on the DPRK, which could lead to a disastrous all-out war in Korea just as the war in Vietnam was reaching its peak.[35] The State Department notified Kosygin through the Soviet Embassy that the Soviets had better restrain their North Korean clients. Kosygin responded that the U.S. reaction to the *Pueblo* seizure, which included dispatching aircraft carriers and other military provocations, "indicated that there were many hotheads in [the] Pentagon who needed tranquilizers."[36] In fact, the Soviets were equally, if not more, concerned about the "hotheads" in Pyongyang.

The day after the incident, ambassadors and acting ambassadors of all the socialist countries accredited to the DPRK assembled in Pyongyang for a briefing by Kim Chae-bong, the North Korean vice foreign minister. The fraternal ambassadors had only the vaguest idea of the crisis instigated the day before. Kim announced that "I want to inform you about the armed spy ship of which you might already have read in the newspaper." He explained that the *Pueblo* "had committed acts of piracy" in violating North Korea's territorial waters, and that its crew included two "members of the

notorious intelligence agency of the U.S." Kim hoped "that all socialist states fully support our actions and our attitude, and condemn unanimously the serious machinations of U.S. imperialism." The socialist diplomats were clearly stunned. The acting ambassador of Bulgaria asked if there was a connection between the *Pueblo* incident and "the events in Seoul," referring to the commando raid on the Blue House. Kim responded that this had been the act of "armed partisans," and the *Pueblo* incursion was part of the American suppression of a putative South Korean partisan movement. All of this demonstrated that "USA imperialism is maximizing preparations for another war of aggression."[37]

Publicly, the USSR and its allies rallied behind the DPRK position on the *Pueblo* and deplored this act of American "aggression." Privately, socialist officials, particularly the Soviets, saw the North Korean action as excessively confrontational and ultimately counterproductive, likely to strengthen the hands of the American hawks with regard to Vietnam, not to mention bringing the U.S. and North Korea to the brink of open warfare.[38] Czechoslovakia and Poland were represented on the Neutral Nations Commission that oversaw the Korean Armistice in Panmunjŏm; via the Czechs and the Swiss, North Korean and U.S. officials contacted each other to establish direct talks on resolving the *Pueblo* crisis. As the Czech ambassador to the DPRK told his Polish and East German colleagues on January 28, "As long as there are talks or chances for talks, one cannot speak of an imminent outbreak of armed conflict."[39] The weeks after the *Pueblo* capture were extraordinarily tense in North Korea, a country long used to military tension. The population of Pyongyang was put on highest alert on February 25, the date the Americans in Panmunjŏm demanded the return of the *Pueblo* and its crew.[40] Rumors of the imminent outbreak of war circulated in North Korea from the first day of the crisis. North Koreans believed that if the Americans attacked, the USSR and China would defend the DPRK with nuclear weapons. All Koreans from the age of five were required to carry a backpack of emergency supplies at all times.[41]

To the relief of the world, the *Pueblo* incident did not lead to nuclear war. Rear Admiral John Smith, senior United Nations representative at the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) in Panmunjŏm, and DPRK Major General Pak Chung-guk initiated a series of talks aimed at a peaceful resolution to the *Pueblo* crisis. The North Koreans announced that they would return the crew (but not the ship) if the U.S. admitted that the *Pueblo* had intruded into North Korean waters with hostile intent, gave the DPRK a "proper apology," and guaranteed against future such incidents.[42] By March, the U.S. was willing to go as far as acknowledging the intelligence-gathering mission of the *Pueblo*, expressing "regret" at the intrusion, and promising that U.S. ships would henceforth stay beyond twelve miles off the North Korean coast, but it would not concede to North Korea's demand for an apology. The talks dragged on for nearly eleven months, as the surviving *Pueblo* crewmen languished and the American leadership resisted strong public pressure from both the U.S. and South Korea for military action to end the crisis.

In May, Admiral Smith's term as MAC representative expired and he was replaced by Major General Gilbert Woodward, who continued more rounds of talks with Major General Pak. There would be twenty-nine rounds of talks in all. Finally, in December 1968, the U.S. side offered the North Koreans a formula designed by James Leonard, the State Department country director for Korea: the U.S. would give the DPRK a written apology as requested, but would immediately and publicly repudiate it. Leonard had realized that North Korea wanted a formal apology not as a binding agreement, but for domestic propaganda purposes. Given the virtually absolute control the DPRK government had over foreign news reaching the North Korean public, the American repudiation would never be known by most North Koreans. Thus, Kim Il Sung could declare victory against the Americans once again, and North Korea would retain its "face" against American aggression. *Juche* would be preserved. The Leonard proposal worked, and on December 23, Woodward and Pak Chung-guk met for the last time in Panmunjŏm. At 11:30 AM, as the prisoners were about to be released, Woodward declared,

> The position of the United States government with regard to the *Pueblo* … has been that the ship was not engaged in any illegal activity, that there is no convincing evidence that the ship at any time intruded into the territorial waters claimed by North Korea, and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not believe took place. The document I am going to sign was prepared by the North Koreans and is at variance with the above position, but my signature will not and cannot alter the facts. I will sign the document to free the crew and only to free the crew.[43]

One by one, the crew of the *Pueblo* crossed the "Bridge of No Return" into South Korean territory. After Commander Bucher came two crewmen carrying the body of Duane Hodges in a wooden coffin, and then the other seventy-nine crew members in thirty-second intervals. The *Pueblo* crisis was over.

For many years, the *Pueblo* remained docked in Wŏnsan harbor, a rusting reminder of American perfidy, its deck used by local fishermen for convenient angling. In the year 2000, just as U.S.-DPRK relations seemed finally to be making progress toward normalization in the waning months of the Clinton administration, the DPRK government had the *Pueblo* removed from Wŏnsan harbor, towed around the southern perimeter of the Korean peninsula to the West Coast (encountering no obstacle from South Korean coastal defenses), and re-docked in the Taedong River just outside of Pyongyang. The *Pueblo* was placed alongside a monument to the USS *General Sherman*, an American merchant ship whose captain had been sent to discuss the opening of Korea to Western trade in 1866. En route to Pyongyang, the *Sherman* ran aground on an islet in the Taedong River, and its crew was murdered by an angry mob of local residents.[44] The *Sherman* was taken apart, its hull burned, its cannons removed to Seoul for study, and its anchor hung on the main gate of Pyongyang as a warning to any other foreigners who would attempt to enter Korean waters uninvited. The message was clear: the *Sherman* and the *Pueblo* were two of a kind, American "warships" that had affronted Korean sovereignty, almost exactly 100 years apart. Placing the *Pueblo* next to the *Sherman* monument would remind the people of North Korea that, despite an apparent warming in U.S.-DPRK. relations, they must maintain their vigilance against American imperialism.

CROSSING THE COLD WAR DIVIDE

In the 1970s, the possibility emerged that North Korea and the U.S. might be able to establish a new, less hostile relationship in the context of rapidly changing Cold War dynamics around Northeast Asia. On July 9, 1971, Henry Kissinger, U.S. President Richard Nixon's special advisor for national security affairs, arrived in Beijing to begin secret talks with the Chinese government on Sino-American rapprochement. Seven months later, in February 1972, Nixon himself visited Beijing and met with Mao Zedong, an event that openly and permanently transformed the Great Power dynamic of the Cold War from a bipolar confrontation to a triangular relationship among the U.S., USSR and China.[45] The response in the two Korean regimes to this change was uncertainty, dismay, even shock. The two major combatants of the Korean War, bitter enemies for two decades, had also been the two closest allies of the rival Korean regimes; this sudden move toward rapprochement could not but be seen as betrayal by their respective client states. For South Korea's President Park Chung-hee, Nixon's overture to China was yet another sign of American weakness, alongside the looming failure in Vietnam, the announcement of the "Nixon Doctrine" in 1969 that reduced the American security presence in East Asia, and the unilateral withdrawal of 20,000 of the 62,000 U.S. troops in South Korea in early 1971.[46] For Park, America seemed willing to sacrifice its Korean ally in the game of Great Power *Realpolitik*, and leave it – like South Vietnam – to the mercy of the Communists.

North Korea had two Great Power allies, rather than one, but this was small comfort, as both the USSR and China were attempting to improve their relations with the U.S. in the early 1970s. DPRK relations with the Soviet Union, however, had been tarnished by Soviet "revisionism" – as the North Koreans saw it – since the 1950s, and peaceful co-existence between Moscow and Washington was nothing new. Despite the strains in Sino-DPRK relations during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, China had at least taken a consistently hostile position vis-à-vis the U.S., putting it in the same anti-imperialist camp as North Korea. For China to welcome the American President and talk of rapprochement was much more difficult for the DPRK leadership to accept than U.S.-Soviet détente. Nixon in China was all too reminiscent of Khrushchev in Washington more than a decade earlier.

One, perhaps unexpected, result of the Sino-U.S. rapprochement was to bring the North and South Korean governments into direct dialogue with each other for the first time since the Korean War. Kim Il Sung was the first of the two Korean leaders to publicly announce this, on August 6, 1971. The occasion was a rally in Pyongyang honoring Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian head of state and a close friend of Kim's.[47] Kim declared that the DPRK was "ready to establish contact at any time with all political parties [in South Korea], including the Democratic Republican Party, and all social organizations and individual personages in South Korea."[48] South Korea did not respond officially, but a few weeks later the two sides began talks on humanitarian exchanges between North and South Korea via their respective Red Cross delegations, at the truce village of Panmunjŏm. The Red Cross talks did not bear fruit with regard to their ostensible purpose, but undercover intelligence operatives of the two regimes met secretly during these talks, and proposed separate talks between high-level intelligence personnel. These secret talks continued through eleven rounds, until March 1972, when the Korean Workers' Party established direct (but still secret) links to the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), South Korea's notorious domestic security organization. The head of the KCIA, Yi Hu-rak, was a former officer in the Japanese army and the second-

most powerful man in South Korea.

In early May 1972, Yi traveled to Pyongyang and met with Kim Il Sung himself. At their meeting, the two men discussed the changing international situation, the problem of both their regimes' dependence on foreign powers, and need for the two Koreas to unite as one nation. Kim told Yi "let's not take issue with communism or capitalism," and even apologized for the attempted assassination of Park Chung-hee in 1968.[49] After Yi's return to the South, the North Koreans sent their Deputy Premier, Pak Sŏng-chŏl, to meet with President Park in Seoul. The result of these secret negotiations, like the secret overtures between China and the U.S. to which the Koreans were directly responding, was an agreement that shocked much of the world, including the majority of North and South Koreans: a joint statement on peaceful unification, signed by the leaders of the two Korean governments. The statement was released on July 4, 1972, a date presumably chosen to demonstrate the two Koreas' "Declaration of Independence" from the Great Powers, and from the Cold War itself. The July 4 Communiqué was far more important for its symbolic value than any concrete results, and the initial atmosphere of euphoria about imminent unification would within a year revert to one of mutual suspicion, acrimony and disillusionment. After a half-dozen meetings of the newly-created South-North Coordinating Committee, the two sides reached an impasse and the talks were suspended in mid-1973. Unlike the two Germanies, which sustained wide-ranging contacts and communication from the early 1970s onward, the two Koreas made virtually no progress in their relationship following the 1972 declaration. It would take another two decades, and an even more astonishing change in the international system – the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War – before North-South relations would make another significant breakthrough.

If North-South Korean contacts soon reached an impasse after the 1972 breakthrough, the 1970s were nevertheless the heyday of North Korea's expansion of ties beyond the communist bloc. North Korea's diplomatic relations had been confined solely to other socialist states until the late 1950s, and expanded only tentatively beyond that group in the 1960s, but between 1971 and 1980 the DPRK established new diplomatic ties with dozens of countries in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and above all, Africa. By 1980, North Korea had come from well behind in its diplomatic competition with the South, to near equality in the number of countries with which it had diplomatic relations.[50] North Korea also began reaching out to its most bitter First World foes, Japan and the U.S. North Korea energetically sought trade with and investment from Japan and Western Europe in particular. But North Korea's First World economic offensive resulted in massive unpaid debts, including 600 million dollars in arrears to Japan by the mid-1980s.[51] Although direct economic ties to the U.S. were impeded by continuing American sanctions against North Korea, some preliminary diplomatic discussions took place in Beijing. Even these tentative moves toward normalization were reversed in the 1980s. Japan imposed sanctions on North Korea after the Rangoon bombing in October 1983, which killed several members of the South Korean cabinet visiting Burma, and the explosion aboard a Korean Airlines flight in November 1987 which killed all 115 passengers. Both acts of terror were blamed on the DPRK. Two months after the Korean Airlines bombing, the U.S. put North Korea on its list of state sponsors of terrorism, where it would remain for the next twenty years.

At the same time, U.S. relations with South Korea took a turn for the worse under Carter, who during his 1976 presidential campaign had promised to withdraw American troops from the peninsula. Although Carter changed his mind on troop withdrawal soon after coming to office, Carter's emphasis on human rights put a chill in U.S.-ROK relations in the late 1970s.[52] This new ambiguity in U.S.-ROK relations would be eliminated under Ronald Reagan. Despite the massacre at Kwangju that marred Chun Doo-hwan's rise to power in the spring of 1980, Chun was the first head of state invited to the White House after Reagan came to office in January 1981. The new, much more hawkish U.S. administration subscribed to the "Kirkpatrick Doctrine" (named after Reagan's ambassador to the U.N., Jeane Kirkpatrick) which emphasized close ties to anti-communist Third World regimes in the global struggle against communism. South Korea, a newly industrializing state led by ex-generals and technocrats, was a perfect example of an "authoritarian" (as opposed to "totalitarian" – read "communist") regime under this doctrine, and the Reagan administration stressed the U.S.-ROK alliance in the fight against an expansionist Soviet Union. Conversely, U.S.-DPRK hostility was renewed in the context of a renewed American global anti-communism, what some have dubbed the "Second Cold War" of the early 1980s.[53] This in turn helped to push North Korea toward the USSR; Pyongyang and Moscow signed new economic and military agreements in the mid-1980s that brought the two countries closer together than they had been in decades.[54] Ironically, North Korea chose to lean toward Moscow just as the Soviet Union was reaching its denouement. By the beginning of the 1990s, all the communist states of Eastern Europe and the USSR itself were gone. The Cold War was over, and a weak and nearly friendless North Korea faced

a hostile and triumphant U.S. It appeared that North Korea would now have to practice genuine "self-reliance" for the first time in its history, and the future of the DPRK looked very bleak.

THE LONG NUCLEAR CRISIS

In the two decades since the end of the Cold War, the United States and the DPRK have experienced two major crises over the latter's alleged production of nuclear weapons. The first crisis nearly led to war in 1994, followed by an agreement that (apparently) ended North Korea's nuclear program and opened up a path to peace and normal relations between the two countries. Any movement down that path came to abrupt halt in 2002-3, when the second nuclear crisis emerged over U.S. accusations of another secret North Korean nuclear program and renewed U.S. threats of action against the DPRK.

But the crisis that emerged in October 2002 over the DPRK's nuclear program was only the latest round in the long confrontation between the United States and North Korea, continuing since the Korean War broke out in June 1950. This crisis is best seen as a symptom of the more fundamental problem of division and confrontation in and around the Korean peninsula. However difficult and problematic it may be, the best means for resolving the current crisis is for both the United States and DPRK to move from confrontation to engagement to an active process of reconciliation. U.S.-DPRK reconciliation within a broader multilateral framework would lay the basis for a Northeast Asian security regime that could substantially reduce the potential for conflict. The Six-Party Talks that began in 2003 – involving North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States – could serve as the framework for such a security regime. It is certainly better than the alternatives: military conflict over Korea or a nuclear arms race in East Asia. At the heart of any progress toward peace in the region must be an end to the state of war on the Korean peninsula and a resolution to the U.S.-DPRK conflict that addresses the legitimate security concerns of both parties.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, American security concerns shifted focus from global superpower confrontation to local conflicts and so-called rogue states. In regional terms, this meant above all the Middle East and Northeast Asia, and more specifically, Iraq and North Korea. In the 1990s North Korea became central to U.S. security policy and the focus of media attention as never before, at least not since the Korean War. North Korea was, in a sense, ideally suited to be the enemy *du jour*. On the one hand, it seemed a holdover from the Cold War, a peculiar outpost of Stalinist evil; on the other hand, it fit the profile of the small, autocratic renegade regime led by an idiosyncratic if not insane dictator. That, at least, was the U.S. media image of the DPRK. Perhaps only Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia, albeit in a rather different way, so neatly brought together for the American public new and old ideas of evil states. In any case, according to the conventional wisdom of the early 1990s, North Korea would soon collapse, following East Germany and its erstwhile patron the Soviet Union into the dustbin of history. The collapse did not in fact happen, and U.S.-DPRK relations lurched through a series of crises: North Korea's alleged production of nuclear weapons, which brought the two countries to the brink of war in June 1994; a famine in North Korea that peaked around 1996-98; North Korea's missile program in the late 1990s; and a second nuclear confrontation emerging in the fall of 2002.

These crises, while potentially rife with unpredictable and disastrous consequences, also created opportunities for the United States and North Korea to engage in substantial dialogue with each other for the first time in over a half-century of acrimonious confrontation. Not until the 1990s did the United States have a positive policy toward North Korea, as opposed to a negatively stated position of isolating the country and defending South Korea against the North. At the same time, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the DPRK appeared to realize that its best chances for survival and security lay, ironically, in improving relations with the United States – in order to remove both the American security threat, as well as barriers to foreign economic aid and investment.

But the emergence of cautious engagement between the United States and North Korea was a fitful and problematic process. Each step toward more normal relations was accompanied by, and developed out of, crisis. The first nuclear crisis led to the Agreed Framework of October 1994, the famine of the mid-1990s led to unprecedented amounts of U.S. private and government aid flowing to North Korea, the missile crisis of the late 1990s reinvigorated engagement, and the second nuclear crisis resulted in the creation of a new multilateral forum – the Six-Party Talks – for discussing peace on and around the Korean peninsula. The problem with a crisis-driven relationship is its unpredictability: a crisis can easily lead to catastrophe rather than dialogue. So far, the worst-case scenarios have not occurred, but it is far from certain that the current dialogue

process will lead to a satisfactory solution for all concerned. Meanwhile, in the absence of a peace agreement or normal relations between the United States and the DPRK, any number of nightmares could still become reality, including all-out war on the Korean peninsula or a nuclear arms race in East Asia, with all the dangers of proliferation that would entail. In short, a crisis-driven policy is not sustainable, and only a real breakthrough in U.S.-DPRK relations will end this dangerous cycle of confrontation, crisis, and reluctant engagement.

The first nuclear crisis between the United States and North Korea erupted in the early 1990s, when photographs from spy satellites, as interpreted by U.S. intelligence and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), suggested that the North Koreans were extracting spent plutonium from its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, about 100 kilometers north of Pyongyang.[55] The most logical use of the plutonium was for the development of nuclear weapons, and by 1993 the CIA had concluded that a North Korean nuclear weapons program was well underway and that the DPRK had already extracted enough plutonium for one or two weapons. The resulting confrontation over international inspections of the Yongbyon facilities between North Korea on the one hand, and the IAEA and the United States on the other, rapidly escalated between the spring of 1993 and the summer of 1994. The crisis came to a head in June 1994, with the United States threatening to call for sanctions against North Korea through the U.N. Security Council, the North Koreans denouncing such threats as "an act of war," and the Clinton administration weighing the option of an air strike on the Yongbyon facility, possibly leading to a second Korean War.

With the United States and North Korea on the brink of war, Jimmy Carter took up a long-standing invitation from North Korean leader Kim Il Sung to visit Pyongyang. Here the former U.S. President received Kim's "personal pledge to freeze North Korea's nuclear program" in exchange for American help with North Korea's energy program and a reduction of tensions between the two countries.[56] The Clinton administration took up Kim's offer, and after months of bilateral negotiations, the United States and DPRK signed the Agreed Framework in October 1994. In essence, the Agreed Framework exchanged North Korea's nuclear freeze for a U.S. promise (with the primary financial and technical backing of South Korea and Japan) to build a pair of light-water reactors on the east coast of North Korea, with a target completion date of 2003. In the meantime, the United States agreed to supply North Korea with fuel oil to compensate for the loss of energy from the frozen Yongbyon reactor. The United States, South Korea, and Japan administered this program through a consortium based in New York, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). Later the European Union joined the executive board of KEDO, and other countries also contributed to the energy project.

In reality, the Agreed Framework was more than just a deal to supply North Korea with energy. Its ultimate purpose was political: to prevent the development of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula and open up a channel for dialogue between the United States and the DRPK, leading in due course to the normalization of economic and political relations. However, a decade later, despite some progress on both the energy and diplomatic fronts, the light-water reactors had still not been built, and a second nuclear crisis effectively put an end to the Agreed Framework. Each side blamed the other for the failure of the agreement, and both had some justification. As the North Koreans saw it, the United States did not keep its promise to build the reactors in time and did not move with due rapidity toward normalization. The United States, under both Clinton and under Bush, suspected North Korea of not abiding by the terms of the nuclear freeze and of maintaining a clandestine weapons program.

This crisis should be seen in the broader context of North Korea's decades-long confrontation with a nuclear-armed United States, as well as the DPRK's pursuit of nuclear energy. The Armistice that ended the fighting in Korea in July 1953 was not a peace treaty, and the two remain to this day in a state of war with one another. It is, moreover, a highly asymmetric conflict: North Korea is much more vulnerable to U.S. hostility, including devastation by American nuclear weapons, than the other way around. Since the Korean War, North Korea has faced the possibility, and at various times, direct threat, of a nuclear attack by the United States. Within a few years of the war's end, the United States introduced nuclear artillery and mines into Korea, which it finally withdrew in 1991. Even after that, the United States has made it clear that it would consider using nuclear weapons to deter North Korea, including a possible pre-emptive strike.[57] Under these circumstances, it should not be surprising that North Korea would seek a nuclear deterrent against the United States, particularly with the loss of its main superpower patron and the collapse of its East bloc trade partners after the end of the Cold War.

North Korea's stated intention to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful purposes also should not be dismissed. With Soviet aid and advice, the DPRK established its first nuclear research center and reactor at Yongbyon in the 1960s.[58] In the 1970s and

1980s, North Korea embarked on an ambitious program of nuclear energy development, helped by both Soviet technical assistance, as well as substantial indigenous deposits of natural uranium. That Japan and South Korea were similarly developing nuclear energy on a large scale no doubt spurred North Korea's efforts. South Korea was also trying to develop nuclear weapons, until it was stopped by the United States in the early 1970s,[59] and this may also have contributed to North Korea's desire to develop its own nuclear deterrent.

In December 1985, the same year that North Korea signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the USSR agreed to help the DPRK construct a nuclear power plant near Sinp'o on the east coast of North Korea – the very place where KEDO would later propose building the two light-water nuclear reactors as part of the Agreed Framework. North Korea's failure to pay for construction led to Russia halting work on the Sinp'o project in 1992, leaving the DPRK 1.7 million dollars in debt to the Soviet Union's Ministry of Atomic Energy. When the Agreed Framework broke down in 2003, with little more than holes in the ground where the reactors were to be built, the North Koreans could claim with some justification that they had been cheated out of nuclear power plants twice, first by the Russians and then by the Americans.

The 1994 Agreed Framework marked a major breakthrough in U.S.-DPRK relations. For the first time there was an institutional mechanism for U.S.-North Korean dialogue and cooperation, however limited, and the two sides seemed ready to move toward a relaxation of tensions, economic exchange, and diplomatic normalization. But, in part because of Congressional criticism, especially after the House shifted to a Republican majority with the 1994 mid-term elections (just two weeks after the Agreed Framework was signed), the Clinton administration took a relatively passive approach to U.S.-DPRK relations. The Pyongyang leadership had expected significant steps toward normalization based on the Agreed Framework's call for both sides to move toward normalized relations within months of signing the agreement.[60] But this did not happen.

One area in which U.S.-DPRK relations did move forward after 1994 was in the field of humanitarian assistance. This was not because of significant lifting of the U.S. economic embargo of North Korea, although some relaxation did occur, but because of a humanitarian crisis in the DPRK. Floods devastated North Korea in 1995 and 1996, pushing an already fragile economy over the brink of disaster. Although the details of the famine of the late 1990s will probably never be fully clear, the number of famine-related deaths was likely in the hundreds of thousands, possibly even in the millions.[61] Countries around the world, including the United States, responded with donations of food, medicine, and other forms of humanitarian assistance. The absolute amount of aid given by the United States was greater than that of any other donor country – totaling perhaps one billion dollars, including oil given through KEDO – and for a time North Korea became the largest beneficiary of U.S. food aid in the world, as well as the largest beneficiary of American aid in East Asia.[62]

Humanitarian aid did not lead to substantial progress in normalization, however. It took another security crisis – North Korea's launching of a Taepodong missile over Japan in August 1998 – to push the United States into more active engagement with the DPRK. North Korea claimed, as Western intelligence sources later verified, that the missile launch was a failed attempt to send a satellite into orbit rather than a test of its military capability – although it could very well have been both. Nevertheless, the missile launch, along with American suspicions about underground facilities at Kumchang-ri and North Korea's threat to begin reprocessing the spent plutonium withdrawn from the Yongbyon plant, raised alarms in Washington and refocused the Clinton administration's attention on North Korea.

To address this new crisis, President Clinton appointed his former secretary of defense, William J. Perry, to visit the DPRK and lead a task force to review and assess U.S. policy toward North Korea. The resulting "Perry Report" of October 1999 called for renewed engagement, alongside strong deterrence, which built on the Agreed Framework and through a series of specified steps, led to "comprehensive normalization of relations and establishment of a permanent peace."[63] Following on the Perry Report, U.S.-DPRK relations moved forward again. The historic high point of the relationship came in the fall of 2000. In an unprecedented high-level visit, DPRK Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok – in effect the number two man in Pyongyang after Kim Jong Il – met with President Clinton in Washington, and shortly after Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang. The two sides renewed their commitment to work toward normal relations, and North Korea appeared to be on the verge of agreeing to curtail its missile development and exports, a major U.S. concern. But such hopes were soon dashed, partly because of North Korea's lack of movement on a missile deal, and partly because of the disputed presidential election in the United States, which occupied Clinton's attention and inhibited any bold diplomatic moves in the waning months of his administration. The Bush victory effectively put an end to the evolving policy of engagement.

The forward momentum in U.S.-DPRK relations that began to finally emerge toward the end of the Clinton administration, dramatized by the highest-level official exchanges ever between the two countries, was suspended after the election of George W. Bush. The new administration promised to "review" its Korea policy, and for a year, U.S. policy toward North Korea appeared uncertain and adrift. The visit of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung to the White House shortly after George W. Bush's inauguration, did not auger well for a U.S.-South Korean united front toward the DPRK. Kim's meeting with Bush was awkward at best, and the new U.S. administration made no secret of its doubts about Kim's "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with the North. The deterioration of U.S.-South Korean relations, which would soon plummet to historic lows of mistrust, is covered elsewhere in this volume. As far as North Korea was concerned, the Bush administration generally viewed the Agreed Framework as little more than appeasement and the Sunshine Policy as dangerously naïve. Attitudes in Washington toward engagement with Pyongyang hardened, and movement toward normalization soon went into reverse.

In fact, the administration did not have one voice on North Korea. The "hardliners" who tended to dominate the White House and the Department of Defense almost reflexively opposed dialogue with the DPRK, whereas the State Department leaned toward a "softer," more diplomatic approach. A limited dialogue between the United States and North Korea began again in 2002, initiated by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who announced that the United States was willing to speak with the DPRK at "any time, any place, without preconditions." A few high-level "North Korea hands" from the Clinton administration remained in the State Department, but several gave up in frustration. For instance, Jack Pritchard, special envoy for negotiations with North Korea, resigned in August 2003, just days before Six-Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear issue were to begin in Beijing.[64] Contradicting this more conciliatory approach was the bombastic rhetoric from George W. Bush himself, who told journalist Bob Woodward that he "loathed" Kim Jong Il and would like to see the regime "topple." In his January 2002 State of the Union speech, Bush had named North Korea as part of an "axis of evil" that included Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.[65] The Defense Department continued to see North Korea as a potential target for nuclear retaliation. It revised its war plans for Korea to include "Operations Plan 5030," which would provoke North Korea's military resources – for example, by flying American fighter planes close to North Korea to divert the DPRK's air defenses – without leading to all-out war, a plan some U.S. officials saw as "a strategy to topple Kim's regime by destabilizing its military forces."[66] Ultimately, however, the Pentagon itself viewed a military option as highly problematic, given the catastrophic results a war with North Korea would bring about.[67] The subsequent overstretch of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq after 2003 made war an even less realistic option. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of the Bush administration regarding both Iraq and North Korea seemed to suggest that "rogue states" with weapons of mass destruction were to be eliminated rather than bargained with. During the lead-up to war in Iraq, the general thrust of U.S. policy appeared to be "regime change" in Pyongyang, not diplomacy.

Amid this atmosphere of tension and uncertainty, the Bush administration finally sent a high-level envoy to Pyongyang in early October 2002, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly. Far from a diplomatic breakthrough, Kelly's visit triggered a new crisis in U.S.-DPRK relations, a second nuclear crisis that was almost a replay of the first, but with an accelerated time-table and even higher stakes. Kelly did not bring a message of reconciliation from the Bush administration, as the North Koreans expected, but an ultimatum: he confronted his North Korean hosts with evidence that the DPRK had been engaged in a secret program of enriching uranium for the purpose of developing nuclear weapons. Although enriching uranium was not strictly a violation of the Agreed Framework, it was clearly contrary to the goal of creating a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and directly violated a 1992 North-South Korean agreement on denuclearization. According to Kelly's account of the event, Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok-ju not only admitted to the charge (later denied by the North Koreans) but claimed that the DPRK had the right to weapons "even more powerful."[68] The Bush administration delayed announcing this astonishing news for eleven days – as it turned out, until Congress had already passed the resolution authorizing the war on Iraq. On October 16, the State Department released the news of the "Kelly revelations" and announced that as a result of its admission of a highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, North Korea was in "material breach" of the Agreed Framework. On November 14, KEDO suspended delivery of fuel oil to the DPRK. Food assistance to North Korea was drastically cut back. The Agreed Framework was all but officially dead, and the United States and North Korea were on the brink of a crisis as dangerous as that of the early 1990s.

Pyongyang concurred that the Agreed Framework had collapsed, but blamed the United States for breaking the agreement. North Korea accused the United States, essentially, of bad faith: it pointed to, among other things, the lack of progress in

lifting the economic embargo, the setbacks in normalization, and the failure to build the light-water reactors on time as indications that the United States had never been serious about abiding by the Agreed Framework in the first place. Not least, the nuclear policy of the Bush administration, by naming North Korea specifically as a potential target of nuclear attack in its Nuclear Posture Review of late 2001, directly contravened Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the Agreed Framework, which called for the United States to "provide formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the United States." North Korea denied the accusation that it had an HEU program, and the United States did not share publicly any new intelligence it may have had on the issue. But even if North Korea had broken the agreement by starting a uranium enrichment program, the timing of the Kelly revelations was peculiar, as U.S. intelligence had suspected North Korea of engaging in such a program since the late 1990s. It seemed the Bush administration was deliberately using this old intelligence to scuttle the Agreed Framework. If this was so, they succeeded.

As it had in 1993, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – only this time, it carried out its threat. Pyongyang removed the camera monitors from the Yongbyon facility and kicked out the IAEA inspectors, unsealed the 8,000 plutonium rods, restarted the reactor, and announced that it would start reprocessing the spent fuel. The U.S. response was inconsistent and even self-contradictory. On the one hand, the Bush administration announced that a North Korean nuclear weapons program was "intolerable" and the United States would never give in to "blackmail." On the other hand, the United States did not clarify what steps it would take if North Korea crossed the line into nuclear weapons production or even what that line would be. Strangest of all, the Bush administration refused even to call the situation with North Korea a "crisis," just at the moment when it was gearing up for war with Iraq on the basis of – what proved to be faulty – evidence that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction. To be sure, the United States made threatening gestures by mobilizing bombers and an aircraft carrier from elsewhere in the Pacific to within striking range of Korea, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld boasted before the Iraq invasion that the United States could fight a two-front war if necessary. But the main Bush administration line was that the North Korea problem would be solved "diplomatically," even if by "diplomacy" the United States seemed to mean making unilateral demands on the North Koreans rather than anything resembling negotiation.

The Bush administration's proposal to solve the second nuclear crisis, first articulated in early 2003, was characteristically one-sided. The United States would consider offering North Korea renewed energy aid, humanitarian assistance, and a promise not to attack the country – the latter being North Korea's main demand after the October 2002 crisis broke out – but only *after* North Korea completely dismantled its nuclear program and agreed to extensive and intrusive international inspections. Eventually this U.S. demand would become known as "CVID": complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's entire nuclear energy and weapons program. North Korea responded with typically bombastic and threatening rhetoric, hinting that it would react to any American escalation or outright attack with nuclear retaliation against South Korea, Japan, and even the United States itself. But Pyongyang's negotiating position remained consistent: the United States should give up its "hostile policy toward the DPRK" through a non-aggression agreement, in return for which North Korea would agree to verify that it was not manufacturing nuclear weapons.[69]

The Bush administration countered North Korea's demand for bilateral talks by insisting in turn on multilateral talks that involved North Korea's regional neighbors. Furthermore, the United States initially refused to "negotiate" the nuclear issue even within such talks. In particular, the United States wanted to involve China, seen to have special leverage over North Korea due to their long history of relations and China's indispensable role as supplier of oil and food. In the absence of formal U.S.-DPRK relations, Beijing had long been a neutral site for high-level meeting between the two governments, and in April 2003 North Korean, American, and Chinese officials met in Beijing to discuss a way out of the current impasse. The crisis continued. North Korea dropped hints of developing its own nuclear deterrent. The United States, while stating it did not intend to attack the DPRK, acted as if coercion and pressure alone would resolve the problem – by North Korea either giving in to American demands or collapsing.

President Bush, who pushed so strongly for war in Iraq, called for the world to give diplomacy a chance in North Korea. "Diplomacy failed for 11 years in Iraq," Bush claimed during the 2004 presidential campaign. "And this new diplomatic effort is barely a year old."[70] Leaving aside the question of whether diplomacy in Iraq "failed" or was simply discarded, the United States had been engaged in diplomacy with North Korea for a decade, a history upon which the Bush administration refused to build. In the end, the United States had little choice but to return to diplomacy, in effect bringing U.S.-DPRK

relations back to 1993. War was simply not a viable option if the United States wanted to avoid disaster in Northeast Asia and while military forces were bogged down in Central Asia and the Middle East. Meanwhile, however, many things had changed in North Korea, on the Korean peninsula, and in Northeast Asia. The countries in the region, including Russia, China, and even Japan – which hewed closest to the U.S. position, in part because of its security dependence on Washington – were willing to be more flexible and accommodating toward the DPRK than the United States was. Of equal, if not greater importance, inter-Korean relations had changed significantly since the days when ROK President Kim Young-sam feared a U.S.-DPRK agreement would go against South Korean interests. The engagement policies of Kim Dae-jung and his successor, Roh Moo-hyun, had created a new dynamic on the Korean peninsula that ran counter to the hard-line U.S. approach.

The DPRK responded harshly to Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech. A Foreign Ministry spokesman called the 2002 speech, "little short of declaring war against the DPRK," and accused the U.S. administration of "political immaturity and moral leprosy."[71] In contrast to the condemnation of the Al Qaeda-led attacks that North Korea had expressed immediately after September 11, the DPRK spokesman this time suggested that America had only itself to blame: "Herein lie answers to questions as to why the modern terrorism is focused on the U.S. alone and why it has become serious while Bush is in office."[72] By 2001, North Korea's proven connections to international terrorist networks were tenuous at best. The only terrorists harbored in DPRK territory were a few aging Japanese Red Army Faction hijackers, hardly considered a threat to anyone, and in recent years North Korea had signed onto a number of international anti-terrorist agreements. In September 2002, Kim Jong Il personally apologized to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for North Korea's kidnapping of Japanese civilians in the 1970s and 1980s, promising that such acts would never be repeated. The DPRK was clearly trying to distance itself from any association with terror tactics, and the idea that it was connected to Islamist terrorist networks, or participated in anything like an "Axis" with Iraq and Iran, strained credulity. It may be hard for Americans to imagine North Korea as an ally in the "war on terror," but by conflating North Korea with global terrorism, the Bush administration guaranteed a hostile response from Pyongyang, exacerbating the U.S.-DPRK conflict and undermining what remained of progress in relations with North Korea.

Despite heightened tensions with the United States, North Korea continued on the path of internal reform. A year after "New Thinking" was officially launched in January 2001, the 2002 New Year's Joint Editorial in the three main official DPRK newspapers celebrated the "successes" of the previous year and renewed the call for "radical change" in the economy.[73] In March 2002, the Supreme People's Assembly, North Korea's highest legislative body, approved a budget emphasizing technical innovation and modernization.[74] The second half of 2002 saw some of the boldest steps yet toward real reform in the DPRK. At the beginning of July 2002, the DPRK had begun to institute some of the most far-reaching economic changes since the regime was founded in 1948. The food distribution system on which much of the population had depended (at least until the famine of the 1990s) was reduced and modified; the price of rice was raised to near-market levels, and wages were correspondingly increased as much as thirty-fold; the official exchange rate for the North Korean *won* was reduced from 2.2 to nearly 200 to the dollar, approaching the black market rate; the taxation system, abolished in 1974, was reportedly revived.[75]

The results of this economic restructuring were mixed. Foreign companies did not flock to North Korea as Pyongyang's leaders may have hoped. A model Special Economic Zone (SEZ) established in the city of Sinuiju on the Sino-North Korean border failed to take off when Chinese authorities arrested the man personally appointed by Kim Jong Il to run the SEZ, a wealthy Chinese native of Dutch citizenship named Yang Bin, before he could start the project.[76] North Korea was beset by inflation, and while senior party officials and other elites with access to foreign exchange could cope with the changes, many ordinary North Koreans were adversely affected by the rise in food prices.[77] But the DPRK government did not retract the July 2002 reforms and continued to call for restructuring. It even attempted to revive the Sinuiju SEZ project under an appointed leader even more unlikely than Yang Bin: Julie Rixiang Sa, a Korean-born, ethnic-Chinese, U.S. citizen, and former (Republican) mayor of Fullerton, California.[78] At the same time, the DPRK started to announce a new "Military-First Politics" and the need for stronger defense against "imperialism." These moves can be interpreted as a reaction to changed external circumstances, above all a U.S. administration perceived as more dangerously hostile to North Korea's existence, as well as a defense of the military's domestic interests in a new age of North Korean *perestroika*. The 2003 New Year's Joint Editorial combined militaristic rhetoric with renewed calls for change in the economy and repeated the earlier slogan of "ensuring the greatest profitability while firmly adhering to socialist principles."[79] The DPRK seemed determined to continue

with economic reform under the firm control of the party-military apparatus, perhaps even moving toward a military-led modernizing state somewhat along the lines of South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s.[80]

The new-millennium North Korea combines economic changes at home with a strongly defensive posture toward the United States, in which the language of nuclear deterrence occupies a more explicit position than ever before. As in the early 1990s, it is difficult to tell whether the DPRK is primarily using the threat of developing nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip to gain economic assistance or genuinely wants to establish a nuclear deterrent. It may be both. After the October 2002 crisis, North Korea maintained a consistent position – a call for a security guarantee from the United States in exchange for giving up its nuclear program – through the first three rounds of the Six-Party Talks. The United States first responded by insisting it would not "pay for the same horse twice" (i.e., go back to the 1994 agreement, which the Bush administration portrayed as having been unilaterally broken by North Korea), but later suggested that such a deal might be possible.[81] However, after the third round of the Six-Party Talks ended inconclusively in June 2004, North Korea ratcheted up the rhetoric in its claims to possessing nuclear weapons.

In September 2004, the DPRK announced its unwillingness to proceed to a fourth round of talks. The venue for this announcement could not have been more public: a speech at the U.N. General Assembly by DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Choe Su-hon. The main reason North Korea could not participate in further talks, Choe said, was the "hostile policy" of the United States, especially its insistence on CVID and its real intention of overthrowing the North Korean regime. In light of this, "the DPRK is left with no other option but to possess a nuclear deterrent."[82] At a press conference following the speech, Choe clarified the point that North Korea had already reprocessed the 8,000 spent fuel rods from the Yongbyon plant and "weaponized" the material.[83] Nevertheless, Choe said, North Korea would still be willing to dismantle its nuclear program if the United States abandoned its hostile policy and normalized relations with the DPRK. In other words, North Korea was still playing the same game of brinksmanship from the early 1990s. Only now the stakes were even higher. In effect, North Korea was revealing its hand, claiming to actually possess nuclear weapons rather than leaving the issue ambiguous. The next step would have to be a North Korean underground nuclear test. North Korea did in fact return for a fourth round of talks, which established a rather vague agreement for Korean denuclearization on 19 September 2005. A fifth round ended in November after the U.S. announced it would freeze North Korean bank assets in Macau, at the Banco Delta Asia, due to suspicion that North Korea was using the bank to launder money for illicit purposes. The North Korea missile launches of July 2006 were probably, in part, a response to this American action.[84] Finally came the nuclear test of October 9.

TOWARD A NEW RELATIONSHIP?

The "fallout" from the nuclear test on North Korea's international position was less than one might have expected. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1695 issued warnings in response to the July 2006 missile test, and the much more strongly-worded Resolution 1718 followed the October nuclear weapon test. China was not willing to risk serious confrontation. For the Roh Moo-hyun government in Seoul, engagement with the North and maintaining "peace and prosperity" on the Korean peninsula was a higher priority than resolving the nuclear issue, and in a very short time South Korea's policy toward the North was essentially back to business as usual.[85] In the end, the U.S. appeared to back down from its condemnation, offering a set of incentives for North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks.[86]

North Korea did return to the talks, and the result was the agreement of February 13, 2007 which called for the DPRK to shut down and abandon its Yongbyon reactor, invite back IAEA inspectors, and fully reveal the extent of its nuclear program. In exchange, the U.S. and Japan would move toward normalization of ties with the DPRK, and they and other countries would offer energy and humanitarian assistance to North Korea.[87] The agreement, greeted as a major breakthrough in the nuclear crisis by all parties concerned, hit its first roadblock the following month when North Korea was unable to retrieve its 25 million dollars frozen in Macau's Banco Delta Asia (BDA). Pyongyang refused to go forward with its part of the February 13 Agreement until the funds were released, and the 60-day deadline for shutting down the Yongbyon plant on April 13 came and went. As always, opinions differed on how serious North Korea was about dismantling its nuclear program.[88] In the U.S., the response to the February 13 agreement ranged from accusations of appeasement and giving in to "nuclear blackmail" by the conservative press,[89] to enthusiastic support by present and former American officials involved with North Korea negotiations.[90]

Eventually, with some assistance from Russia and Hill's personal visit to Pyongyang in June, the BDA funds were released. North Korea followed by shutting down its reactor in July, and the six parties proceeded to a sixth round of talks in Beijing from September 27 to 30, just days before the second inter-Korean summit. The result of the sixth round of Six-Party Talks was a joint statement, released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on October 3, which added more substance to the framework established in the February 13 agreement.[91] This time, North Korea promised that it would shut down its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon and "provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs in accordance with the February 13 agreement" by the end of 2007. Furthermore, Pyongyang reaffirmed its promise not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how. The U.S. and Japan, for their part, reaffirmed their commitments to move toward normalization of relations with the DPRK; furthermore, North Korea would receive the equivalent of up to one million tons of heavy fuel oil – twice as much as in the 1994 Agreed Framework – in an arrangement to be worked out by a Working Group on Economy and Energy Cooperation. Less than a year after Pyongyang's nuclear test, the mood around the North Korean nuclear test had changed from visions of the apocalypse to hopes for peace and economic cooperation.

This cooperative spirit was doubly reinforced by the concurrent Second Inter-Korean Summit. At the time the Six-Party Agreement was being finalized, Roh Moo-hyun met Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang between October 2 and 4. The summit had originally been scheduled for late August, but North Korea had requested a postponement due to severe flooding in the North that summer. The resulting eight-point agreement signed on October 4, more detailed and specific than the June 2000 agreement, outlined a wide range of cooperative activities. Prior to and during the summit, Roh had emphasized economic cooperation, which was embodied in Article 5 of the agreement; among other things, the two sides agreed to create a second special economic zone in the area of Haeju. But perhaps the most interesting section – from the perspective of the other countries in the six-party process – was Article 4, which recognized "the need to end the current armistice regime and build a permanent peace regime." For this, "the leaders of the three or four parties directly concerned" would "convene on the Peninsula and declare an end to the war."[92]

The February 13 agreement, the October Six-Party Agreement and the 2007 Pyongyang Declaration are all important steps toward resolving the conflicts between North Korea and South Korea, Japan and the U.S., and establishing a lasting peace on the peninsula. But the road ahead is likely to be long and difficult. It is one thing for North Korea to give up its obsolete and decrepit nuclear facilities in Yongbyon; it is another for Pyongyang to give up the weapons it already has and the spent plutonium that can be used to make new weapons, as the U.S. will certainly demand. Nevertheless, the step-by-step, action-for-action outline of the agreement offers the chance to test each side's intentions at every stage, even if many of the important details remain to be worked out. For North Korea, the Six-Party Agreement and the second Pyongyang Declaration must appear as clear foreign policy successes. North Korea's primary adversaries arguably have conceded more than Pyongyang. North Korea has agreed to disable its Yongbyon nuclear facilities and declare its nuclear programs, but in exchange it has received promises of aid and movement toward normalization from both the U.S. and Japan. The U.S. in particular, after years of tough talk and name-calling, has made an almost complete reversal in its policy and entered into an agreement with North Korea strikingly similar to the 1994 Agreed Framework which the Bush administration had once loathed.

North Korea's June 2008 nuclear declaration, and Washington's lifting sanctions and dropping North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism in response, are of great symbolic importance in the history of U.S.-DPRK relations. But the two countries remain enemies, and the official end of the Korean War has yet to come. It remains to be seen whether North Korea will actually give up nuclear weapons, which are an important deterrent against external attack, a powerful bargaining chip, and a source of national pride. Within North Korea, nuclear weapons were justified above all as a defense against the "bloodthirsty Yankees" who are bent on the destruction of the Korean people.[93] Logically, then, the removal of American hostility would eliminate North Korea's need for nuclear weapons. But the loss of the imperialist enemy would also mean the end of much else that has defined North Korea – including social mobilization, economic austerity, militarization, and repression – for the last sixty years. Against all odds, North Korea has survived in the face of implacable American hostility. It has yet to face the test of friendship.

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[90] Glenn Kessler and Edward Cody, "U.S. Flexibility Credited in Nuclear Deal with N. Korea," *Washington Post*, February 14, 2007.
[91] For the full text of the agreement, see http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t369084.htm.
[92] "Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace and Prosperity." http://www.korea.net/news/news/newsView.asp?serial_no=20071004023. The ambiguous phrase "three or four parties" reflects the fact that South Korea is not a signatory to the armistice, which was signed by representatives from China, North Korea and the United States (representing the United Nations).
[93] Andrei Lankov, "Caution against Overestimating Pyongyang's Move," Nautilus Peace and Security Forum Online 08-051A: July 3rd, 2008. http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/08051Lankov.html.