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# World Views : Negotiating the North Korean Nuclear Issue

Edited by Alain Guidetti

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Negotiating the North Korean Nuclear Issue</b> .....	6
Background .....	6
A Model Agreement .....	6
Dilemmas and Opportunities .....	8
<b>Analytical Summary of six Perspectives</b> .....	10
<b>Evolution of China's Policies</b> .....	15
From Passivity to Intervention .....	15
Stability as a Priority .....	20
The Internal Debate.....	21
Opportunities for Change .....	22
<b>Defining a US strategy towards North Korea</b> .....	24
Opening Dialogue .....	25
<b>The North Korean Nuclear Quagmire for South Korea</b> .....	27
Is North Korea a Weapon State.....	27
Why Nuclear Weapons.....	28
Nuclear Deterrence or Regime Change .....	29
<b>A Japanese View on 12 February North Korean Nuclear Test</b> .....	32
Threat Assessment .....	32
Risks of Misunderstanding.....	33
Reassuring Allies .....	34
<b>Russia's Policy on a Nuclear North Korea</b> .....	36
Taking a Backseat.....	37
<b>The Need for a Holistic Approach</b> .....	40
Demonised Victim?.....	42
<b>The Ultimate Strategy</b> .....	44
Multiple challenges.....	45
<b>List of Geneva Papers – Research Series</b> .....	47

## Introduction

The third nuclear test conducted by North Korea - the first ever in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - on 12 February 2013, the new sanctions imposed by the Security Council of the United Nations and the spiral of tension taking place between Pyongyang and the regional powers have again brought the North Korean issue to the forefront of the international agenda. The threat of North Korea to engage, inter alia, the US and its allies in nuclear war, as rhetorical as it may be, is a strong reminder of the inability of the international community to solve this issue over the last two decades.

The response of the international community has demonstrated unusual unanimity with the condemnation of the recent North Korean provocations and the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 2094 that severs an already tightened sanctions regime against North Korea. Yet this unanimity is also the lowest common denominator between the major regional actors, the US, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia. Besides the apparent propensity of Pyongyang to develop its nuclear program against all odds, differences in strategic interests and growing competition between the major regional powers impede a comprehensive handling of the North Korean nuclear issue, a situation that Pyongyang has been skilled at maneuvering to its advantage.

The North Korean nuclear issue, including the proliferation potential, is today one of the trickiest global security issues, along with cyber security and the Iranian nuclear crisis. The fact that more than two decades of uneven negotiation processes have not yielded results and that, today, North Korea is getting closer to a full nuclear capability without any prospect of settling this issue, or reaching a peace arrangement in the peninsula, does not bode well for global governance in an increasingly multi-polar world.

This publication intends to present the views of prominent experts from China, the US, South Korea, Japan, Russia and Europe on the global implications of the pursuit of the North Korean nuclear program as well as the possible options to break the current stalemate. It opens with a background on the international efforts made in regard to the North Korean nuclear programme and an analytical summary of the experts' contributions.

**Jim Canrong** (Associate Dean, School of International Studies, Renmin University) and **Wang Hao** (PhD student) present the changing policies of Beijing towards North Korea over the last decades and the current lively debate in China on the merits of keeping the current strategic priorities. **Joel Wit** (visiting scholar and research associate at the U.S.-Korea Institute

at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies) and **Jenny Town** (founder and editor of the North Korea website, *38 North*) suggest a profound restructuring of the US North Korean strategy towards a proactive policy and the launch of a high level dialogue with Pyongyang. **Chung-in Moon** (Professor of Political Science, Yonsei University and former Ambassador for international security affairs, South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade) argues that instead of such containment policies as Missile Defense, nuclear deterrence or "regime change", the only viable option is a consistent dialogue aimed at a negotiated peace settlement.

**Nobumasa Akiyama** (Professor, Hitotsubashi University) claims that Japan will not choose to develop its own nuclear capabilities and will prevent the development of an arms race in East Asia. **Ayrtom Lukin** (Associate Professor of International Relations and Deputy Director for Research at the School of Regional and International Studies, Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok) makes the case that Russia has no urgent needs to pressure Pyongyang while its concerns remain turned towards Washington. **Aidan Foster-Carter** (Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Sociology and Modern Korea, Leeds University, UK) draws a contrasted picture of the country that has engaged into the nuclear program. Finally, an editorial published in the aftermath of the nuclear test brings in a **GCSP** view on the issue.

*Alain Guidetti*

# World Views : Negotiating the North Korean Nuclear Issue

## Background

The inauguration of new leaders and governments in Seoul, Washington and Beijing has raised expectations that a new impetus might be given to the international efforts to break the deadlock in the North Korean nuclear issue. More than two decades of alternative phases of negotiation and confrontation - or cooperation and containment - have yielded few substantive results in the attempts to cope with both North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

Preliminary considerations by North Korea regarding the development of a nuclear programme date back to the signing of a nuclear cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union in 1959. This agreement provided Pyongyang with technical support in nuclear research and the development of facilities, including the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center, which has been at the origin of the plutonium production programme since the 1980s. The rationale for developing a nuclear military programme may have changed over time, but it is likely a combination of security concerns, domestic power consolidation and prospects for international prestige and economic gains.

The issue became an international concern and triggered a first crisis when international inspections started in 1992, according to the provisions of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which North Korea has been Party since 1985. Suspicion that North Korea had produced plutonium for military purposes in contravention to the NPT resulted in Pyongyang breaking its cooperation with the IAEA inspectors and threatening to withdraw from the NPT. The escalation between Washington and Pyongyang eventually ended with the Geneva negotiated Agreed Framework signed in 1994 between the two sides.

## A model agreement

The Agreed Framework is a masterpiece, because it provides a conceptual model for any agreement envisaged in order to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. Essentially, it consists of the freezing and dismantlement of the nuclear production facilities (and the related program), and their replacement by light water

reactors, in return for the normalisation of the bilateral relationships and the provision of security assurances to North Korea. The agreement also provides for the supply of energy (oil and electricity) to Pyongyang, a commitment to remain Party to the NPT and the return of IAEA inspectors. An international consortium, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), was mandated to implement the nuclear, energy and economic components of the agreement. The KEDO represents the most elaborated cooperation framework ever achieved in order to solve the North Korean nuclear issue.

As a result of this agreement, North Korea did suspend its plutonium production for almost ten years, while the implementation of other provisions of the agreement, in particular the construction by the US of two light water reactors, proved uneven. A second crisis, which erupted in 2002, introduced a new confrontational period and caused the collapse of the Framework Agreement. This occurred against a backdrop of increasing North Korean suspicion about the intentions of the new Republican administration, whose perceived hostility was underpinned by public statements against the engagement policy of the previous administration and narratives of "regime change" and "axis of evil". In addition, US mistrust was further generated by the suspected development of a secret uranium enrichment program (officially recognised in 2002) and proliferation activities, in particular with Pakistan. After the launch of new missile tests, Pyongyang eventually withdrew from the NPT and resumed its plutonium enrichment program.

A new phase of cooperation started in 2003 with the set-up of a multilateral framework under the auspices of China. The Six-Party Talks negotiation mechanism (China, the US, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia) produced quick results, notably the adoption of the Joint Statement in 2005. It provided a resolution of the crisis through an approach essentially inspired by the tenets of the Agreed Framework, namely: the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in return for security guarantees from the US, as well as normalisation and economic assistance. The Statement also called for the negotiation of a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War. But the document was more a vague declaration of intent than a strong commitment, and the still prevailing distrust between Pyongyang and Washington quickly exposed its implementation to further disputes and renewed tensions.

The spiral of tension reached a pick in 2006, when Washington imposed new financial sanctions against North Korea. As a response, Pyongyang launched several missiles and fired its first nuclear test, prompting a UN Security Council resolution imposing a comprehensive international sanction regime against North Korea that banned trade in nuclear, missile and conventional technology as well

as luxury products, while further restricting financial exchanges. The course then shifted back towards cooperation when discussions resumed unevenly in 2007 and 2008, until a resumption of confrontation and eventually a breakdown of the Six-Party Talks in December 2008. This heralded new missile launches and a second nuclear test by North Korea in 2009, which, in turn, triggered a new wave of sanctions by the UN Security Council.

Since 2009, the US Administration has shifted its North Korean strategy towards a so-called “strategic patience” based on the prevalence of containment over dialogue by imposing a strict conditionality (commitment by Pyongyang to a “complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement” of the nuclear programme) to the resumption of negotiations. This strategy has been particularly questioned since the launch of two rockets in 2012 and the conduct of a third nuclear test in February 2013, which brings Pyongyang closer to the status of a full-fledged nuclear power - with an assessed capacity of four to eight nuclear weapons. A new range of sanctions, tightening the already comprehensive dispositive, was unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council on 7 March. The spiral of confrontation continues with additional threats by Pyongyang and counter measures announced by Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

## Dilemmas and opportunities

Paradoxically, the pursuit of the North Korean nuclear programme presents security dilemmas as well as opportunities to the regional actors. The first dilemma applies to South Korea and Japan, two countries now confronted with the necessity of defining a domestically convincing response to a threat of a new dimension. The options range from boosting conventional deterrence to developing domestic nuclear capabilities or hosting US tactical weapons. Notwithstanding the domestic and international problems the latter would pose, any option would also alter the balance between Seoul and Tokyo and potentially trigger additional military buildup by either side.

Furthermore, the pursuit of the North Korean nuclear programme presents the basic dilemma for the US of trying to curbing it while facing the conflicting interests among the regional powers and managing its own relationships with China. Yet it also provides an opportunity to the US, which will likely take advantage of the crisis to further extend the Missile Defense program as a reassurance measure to its allies, while refusing to support the development of local nuclear capabilities or the (re)installation of tactical nuclear weapons.

Thus, China appears to face its own dilemma of having to support an ally whose nuclear ambitions have the effect of possibly triggering a regional military

buildup, in particular in the area of Missile Defense, which is doomed to hurt China's interests and the credibility of its deterrence. Beijing and Moscow have already expressed concerns in this regard.

Given the above mentioned dilemmas and the risks posed by the development of the North Korean nuclear programme in terms of proliferation, all regional actors could have a prevailing interest in an alternative option to a nuclear North Korea. As numerous US advocates of a comprehensive solution to this issue have suggested, serious negotiations should be envisaged in order to break the vicious circle of cooperation and confrontation, as well as lasting suspicions, experienced during the last two decades. Such a comprehensive solution should encompass all tenets that were established twenty years ago, but never properly implemented.

Seoul offers a window of opportunity, as the new South Korean President has committed to engage the North, despite the current difficulties. The position of the new US administration is still unclear, but the absence of results of its current strategy could motivate a change in the North Korean policy. The global context also plays a role in this equation: increasing regional competition between the US and China might ultimately prove to be an additional hurdle to any efforts made towards solving this issue.

*Alain Guidetti*

# Six Perspectives: Analytical Summary

This analytical summary puts into perspective six unique contributions and provides a review of each text. Despite unanimous condemnation of the last North Korean nuclear test from the international community, these papers reveal the similarities and differences in the perspectives of the six countries (outside of North Korea) that have perhaps the greatest stake in this issue.

## A Chinese perspective

Jim Canrong and his associate Wang Hao define three unique stages within the evolution of China's position vis-à-vis the North-Korean nuclear issue. Their historical overview concludes with an analysis concerning the possibilities and opportunities for future changes in the Chinese policy towards North Korea.

The first stage identified by Canrong and Hao, “watching from the sidelines”, was defined by China's policy of non-intervention through 2002. During this period, China seemed unconcerned with North Korea's nuclear ambitions. The second stage of Chinese foreign policy towards North Korea, from 2002-2009, focused on “active intervention”. North Korea's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) forced Beijing to engage with Pyongyang, in particular with the creation of the Six-Party Talks. The third stage in Chinese foreign policy began after North Korea's second nuclear test in 2009, with a clear shift to a focus on regional stability, rather than on a balance of stability and denuclearisation as during the previous period. Such “great change” in China's policy towards North Korea is related to various elements, in particular “serious suspicion at the strategic level” between China and the US and a willingness to preserve the status quo.

Throughout their analysis, Canrong and Hao take a critical, although cautious, approach to Chinese policy. They criticise China's passivity in regards to the North Korea question, especially in the face of the country's clearly increasing nuclear ambitions. The authors assert that China's difficult position has triggered an intense debate among policy makers who are divided between various factions from traditionalists to revisionists, for whom the North Korea is no longer a “strategic asset” but rather a “strategic burden”.

Looking ahead, Canrong and Hao see a continuation (or escalation) of the current nuclear test – international sanction – nuclear test cycle. They believe that China will remain a passive actor. As a result, they unsurprisingly see the US as the only state that will be able to directly impact North Korea, with China, Japan and South Korea playing a secondary role.

## A perspective from the United States

Joel Wit and Jenny Town's analysis provides a critical and provocative approach to the United States' policy on North Korea. They recognise several of the Obama administration's preliminary mistakes, and suggest a new direction for US policymakers.

Wit and Town argue that the administration's policy of “strategic patience” failed to produce positive results and, indeed, increased the process of North Korea's nuclearisation and the likelihood of a regional war. Conscious of this failure, many US officials are calling for a shift in policy, a shift which the Department of State seems unlikely to provide.

Wit and Town identify North Korea as one of the Obama administration's top foreign policy priorities. Bearing in mind the limited effects of sanctions and the differing approaches taken towards the nuclearisation of Iran and North Korea, they state that the US must move away from an action/reaction cycle and adopt a more forward-thinking strategy. This approach should be predicated on the development of strong diplomatic ties with North Korea. It should also further try to engage South Korea and China in the efforts to promote regional stability. Wit and Town argue that, if the US does not change their strategy towards North Korea and continue to isolate Pyongyang, they run the very real risk of increasing regional instability and nuclear proliferation.

## A South Korean perspective

Chung-in Moon begins his analysis with the dichotomy in South Korea's view of North Korea. From a legal and political point of view, Seoul does not recognise North Korea as a nuclear weapon state. It does recognise, however, that North Korea is (technically speaking) a nuclear weapons state – as the most recent test has clearly demonstrated. His approach tries to be realistic, and it ends on a cautiously optimistic note.

Despite the election of a new South Korean President willing to normalise ties with North Korea, Moon, as an advocate of the Sunshine policy, describes a pervasive sense of pessimism concerning Seoul's relationship with Pyongyang.



Moon notes several proposed avenues through which the North Korean problem could be addressed. He first addresses military action, a possibility that was quickly shot down as a result of its potentially catastrophic consequences. He also notes that some South Korean policymakers have adopted the logic of nuclear deterrence, and are arguing for the country to develop its own nuclear capabilities; an option which Moon notes is generally disadvantageous. The third proposal hinges on the isolation and transformation of the regime in North Korea; a proposal that is as undesirable as the two preceding it. Moon argues that the only viable solution is to continue dialogue and negotiations within the Six-Party Talks.

Chung-in Moon concludes with the observation that North Korea generally responds positively to constructive initiatives. From his point of view there is still a chance for a change in North Korea's attitude.

### A Japanese perspective

Nobumasa Akiyama provides a critical analysis of the Japanese response to North Korea's latest nuclear test. Despite the fact that the Northeast Asian countries were not fully surprised by North Korea's nuclear test on 12 February, the test displayed a worrying increase in the country's ballistic and technical capabilities.

Akiyama explains that, based on the available information, it is impossible to accurately gauge the strength of North Korea's nuclear threat. He argues that the test did not change the level of the threat North Korea poses to Japan. He notes that, despite North Korea's blackmailing of the US, China, South Korea, and Japan, it is not in Pyongyang's interest to continue a policy of nuclear escalation, as it will ultimately lead to the fall of the regime. In so doing, Pyongyang is currently pursuing a short-term strategy that has potentially disastrous long-term consequences.

Faced with the region's deteriorating security situation, Japan could decide to pursue a policy of nuclear proliferation. It is recognised, however, that this option would quite possibly lead to a regional arms race and is, therefore, undesirable. Akiyama argues that it is in the Japanese's best interest to fortify alliances with regional partners (as well as the United States) in order to increase defence cooperation, promote stability, and dissuade North Korea from continued nuclear escalation. Similar to his South Korean colleague, Akiyama is convinced that the resolution to the North Korea question can only be reached through negotiations and dialogues between interested states.

### A Russian perspective

Artyom Lukin offers a Russian perspective, explaining that despite the international community's unanimous agreement for sanctions on North Korea, two distinct groupings have been formed in regards to Pyongyang. South Korea, the US, and Japan are in favour of a hard policy line, while Russia and China favour a more passive approach. Lukin notes that North Korea's most recent test did not seem to greatly interest Russian officials, who are more concerned with the threat posed by the US than by North Korea.

There are, however, many who think that Russia would do well to be more concerned with North Korea. Regional instability could harm Russia's stability, increase the US' strategic position in the region, and lead to a nuclear arms race and the failure of non-proliferation. Russia should indeed be worried by these threats – but so far this does not seem to be the case. Russia's passivity seems to be enhanced by the opinion in Moscow that Russia has no way of exerting its influence over North Korea. According to Lukin, Russia has instead chosen a more comfortable option in the “backseat to Beijing”. Lukin notes that it is unlikely that Russia will change its strategy vis-à-vis North Korea until it has solved its current problem with the US; namely, the presence of US anti-missile defense systems.

### A European perspective

Aidan Foster Carter suggests that North Korea's nuclear problem is one of several different issues that are currently plaguing the country. He therefore takes a pessimistic approach, arguing that North Korea is incapable of generating change itself – instead any change must come as outside pressure from the global community.

Carter argues that North Korea's issues must be tackled in totality, and not in partiality, in order to reach a resolution of the problem. He explains the international community must pay attention to all aspects of the issue: including not only the country's production of highly enriched uranium (HEU), but also its production of chemical and biological weapons (CBW).

He argues that North Korea's desperate situation has been created through a combination of misguided economic policies, state criminal activities, human rights abuses and an inability to feed its people. Carter provides a pessimistic outlook on the situation, arguing that it is probable that solutions for this litany of problems do not actually exist. Carter notes that Kim Jon-un has failed to significantly change Pyongyang and, as a result, is unlikely to bring about significant positive change in the country. Finally, echoing Lukin, Carter asserts that China is quite possibly the state best poised to find a solution to the North Korea problem.

It is interesting to note here the different opinions of the authors presented above, both on who holds the key to dealing with North Korea and or how to solve the North Korean nuclear issue.

On the first issue - who holds the key to deal with the North Korea nuclear issue? - it clearly appears that for Foster-Carter and Lukin, China is the key actor. Despite deep differences on the political and economic course of North Korea as well as on the nuclear issue, China is the power that can alter the North Korean nuclear policy, as an ally to Pyongyang, a strategic and political partner, and the main economic partner.

On the other hand, Canrong, as well as Wit and Town, express directly or indirectly the view that the US is the key actor in dealing with the North Korea issue. The latter authors clearly stress the need for a “rethink of the diplomatic approaches to Pyongyang” and to adopt a “strong diplomacy” to restart dialogue with it, recognising that Washington’s handling of the issue with Pyongyang will define the future course of the crisis. On the other hand, the former argues that China will maintain a “strategically passive attitude” and that the US is “the country that is most able to resolve the issue”, a vision that leaves the US the bulk of the responsibility and the key to deal with Pyongyang.

On the question of how could the North Korean nuclear issue be solved, there are also different opinions between the authors. Wit and Town, as well as Moon believe that a negotiated solution is possible, either because a new diplomacy may change the US relationship with Pyongyang (the former), or because “there seems no other option but dialogue and negotiated settlement” given the impracticability of (South Korean) nuclear deterrence and regime change. Canrong does not envisage a negotiated solution given the “ambiguous attitude of the US” in this matter and sees several options: from “events on the Peninsula” (a regime change ?), to a new direction in the Chinese policy towards Pyongyang or a change in the US-China or US-North Korea relationships. Foster-Carter and Lukin take a more pessimistic viewpoint, arguing that a breakdown of the regime (the former) or a regime change seem to be the likely solution to the problem. Akiyama takes a more indirect position, focusing rather on the immediate implications of the third North Korean nuclear test.

In conclusion, the contributors gathered here generally agree that the most recent North Korean nuclear test has to be understood as a serious, potentially destabilising threat. Despite differences of opinion on who is best positioned to secure North Korea’s cooperation and how the North Korea issue could be solved, the experts share the view that the international community should mobilise, deepen inter-state cooperation, and resume negotiations with North Korea in order to avoid a potentially deadly situation.

*Clara Lepron*

## Evolution of China’s Policies toward the North Korean Nuclear Issue

Developments on the Korean peninsula are a key, ongoing issue in international politics. A fossilised leftover of the ideological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, it is a crucial element in the geopolitics of Northeast Asia. As the issue has become ever more acute in recent years, it has added to uncertainties and dangers on the Korean peninsula, attracting great global attention. This paper attempts to analyse the evolving policies and strategic objectives adopted by China as a stakeholder in this issue. It also aims at offering a Chinese perspective of the past and prospective developments of the North Korean nuclear issue.

The Korean peninsula has been a focus of international relations since the Korean War of the early 1950s. At bottom, this problem is a historical result of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century – but one that has not disappeared more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War. On the contrary, the situation on the peninsula has become more serious in recent years, even posing a risk of sudden military clashes and regional upheaval. The immediate problem in this general situation of persistent tension and confrontation on the post-Cold War peninsula is the North Korean nuclear issue: North Korea, despite broad international opposition, insists on developing a nuclear military capability. The result is a security dilemma and diplomatic deadlock of Northeast Asia.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), North Korea began researching nuclear technology in the late 1950s.<sup>1</sup> With the Soviet help in the mid-1960s, it built a nuclear research center at Yongbyon, about 130 kilometers north of Pyongyang, and trained a large body of nuclear technicians. Yongbyon thereby became North Korea’s nuclear industrial base.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the Cold War, North Korean nuclear development was only a potential problem, not an actual one, because the country enjoyed powerful support for its security, mainly by the Soviet bloc. Moreover, U.S.-Soviet confrontation was focused on Europe. North Korea’s nuclear ambitions amounted to no great issue in international rela-

<sup>1</sup> David Waller, “Managing the Nuclear Dilemma” *IAEA Bulletin* 49/1 September 2007.

<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Magazines/Bulletin/Bull491/49103520406.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

tions, especially since North Korea joined the IAEA in 1974, signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985 and agreed to international inspections in 1992, accepting the supervision of the IAEA.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the rapid changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of Soviet support, North Korea accelerated its development of nuclear technology, with the aim of ensuring its own security. From then on, the North Korean nuclear problem progressively became a major international issue and attracted the serious attention of the United States and of North Korea's neighbors – China, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

Since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, China's policies in relation to the ongoing issue have gone through three stages. This paper will analyse those three stages and briefly consider possible changes in that policy.

## 1. The first stage: watching from the sidelines

The United States began to take notice of North Korean nuclear developments in the 1970s. In 1988, it announced that North Korea had possibly begun a nuclear weapons program. The statement prompted an immediate and severe response from North Korea – and high-level attention from other countries. On 30 May 1994, a statement by the president of the United Nations Security Council formally urged North Korea to observe the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and asked the IAEA staff based in North Korea to conduct further inspections.<sup>4</sup> The next month, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang to mediate. In October, the United States and North Korea reached a consensus and signed the DPRK-U.S. Nuclear Agreed Framework, and this agreement became a major factor in the North Korean nuclear issue as it later developed. According to the agreement, North Korea would freeze all kinds of nuclear projects, would not restart them, and would install monitoring systems. However, the United States, Japan and South Korea repeatedly delayed fulfilling their promise to help North Korea dismantle its graphite reactor and install two light-water reactors. From then until the second crisis erupted in 2002, the North Korean nuclear problem repeatedly took a turn for the worse as the United States and North Korea continuously haggled over the allocation of funds for building the new reactors.

<sup>3</sup> See the IAEA website, <http://www.iaea.org>.

<sup>4</sup> "Statement by the President of the Security Council", UN Security Council, 30 May 1994. [http://www.un.org/zh/documents/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1994/28&referer=http://www.un.org/zh/sc/meetings/records/1994.shtml&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/zh/documents/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1994/28&referer=http://www.un.org/zh/sc/meetings/records/1994.shtml&Lang=E).

Between the emergence of the North Korean nuclear problem in 1994 and its worsening in 2002, China adopted a cautious policy of standing on the sidelines and not intervening. China's view was that the United States had caused the problem, because it had persisted in its Cold War policy of not recognising North Korea and because it retained and even strengthened its bilateral alliances with South Korea and Japan. As China saw the situation, North Korea, felt insecure as a result of these US policies and was thereby forced to develop a nuclear capability to face a possible sudden attack. North Korea's behaviour, then, was a problem for the United States, not China. Secondly, the issue had only just emerged and did not seem serious. Moreover, at that time China was generally cautious in its strategy. No wonder, then, that it adopted a policy of non-intervention.

## 2. 2002 to 2009: active intervention

The terror attacks of 11 September 2001, among their many influences on international affairs, to some extent impacted on the security situation in Northeast Asia. In the cause of fighting the so-called war on terror, US President George W. Bush in his January 2002 State of the Union address listed North Korea as one of three countries in what he called the axis of evil. In doing so, he further worsened relations between the United States and North Korea.<sup>5</sup> In February, the North Korean government declared that Bush's criticism of North Korea had injured the feelings of all North Koreans. In October, Pyongyang revealed to a special envoy of the United States that it had resumed nuclear development. This not only shocked the world; it led the United States to condemn North Korea's breach of the DPRK-U.S. Nuclear Agreed Framework and, in December, to terminate supplies of heavy oil that had been sent to North Korea as aid. In the face of great diplomatic pressure, North Korea remained steadfast, accusing the United States of failing to honour its promises. It tore open the seals on its nuclear facilities, removed the IAEA's monitoring equipment, ousted the agency's personnel and formally withdrew from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, thereby openly challenging the United States. This was the second crisis in the North Korean nuclear issue.

With the North Korean nuclear problem rapidly worsening, Chinese policy showed great changes. After sitting on the sidelines for almost 10 years, China switched to active participation and began to set its own strategic objectives and policy framework. The change resulted from two main factors. First, with the spread of international terrorism, China increasingly accepted the principle of nuclear non-proliferation and saw that upholding it was important for its

<sup>5</sup> "State of the Union Address", January 29 2002. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html>.

own security. Second, China began to recognise that the escalation of the North Korean nuclear issue was endangering the security and stability of the Korean peninsula, and even Northeast Asia. The crisis was thereby worsening China's surrounding environment and disturbing its process of peaceful development. With this new understanding of the situation, China took decisive and effective action. In July 2003 it appointed Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo as a special envoy to North Korea, thereby creating the conditions for multilateral negotiations to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem.<sup>6</sup> The result was the first round of Six-Party Talks in August 2003, bringing together representatives of China, the United States, South Korea, North Korea, Japan and Russia.

This development symbolised the beginning of China's efforts at actively mediating in the problem.

On the whole, China had two policy goals after the second crisis: denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula; and maintaining peace and stability there. These goals coincided with South Korea's. China put priority on denuclearisation in its policy towards North Korea, just as did the United States, Russia and Japan. Yet compared with the other three major powers, it was more worried about the risk military action that would change the status quo.

After setting these goals, China formed a policy framework at both the tactical and strategic levels and unrelentingly worked to achieve its aims. Tactically, China promoted multi-party talks with all of the interested countries. From 2003 to 2007, China, the United States, Japan, North Korea, South Korea and Russia held six rounds of six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue, holding down risks and moving closer to consensus.<sup>7</sup> The greatest result of several rounds of talks was the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party talks, issued on 19 September 2005. In this statement, North Korea agreed to give up all nuclear weapons and current nuclear plans, to quickly resume adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to again accept IAEA monitoring and inspections.<sup>8</sup>

At the strategic level, China encouraged North Korea to reform its economy and to open up to the outside world, with the aim of achieving a political and economic soft landing. China hoped that North Korea would change from an ideologically driven country to one that put national interest first. It would put its economy ahead of its military, instead of the other way around. At the same

time China downgraded its historically special relationship with North Korea and improved its relationship with South Korea. In doing so, it took an even-handed attitude to the peninsula. It chose to judge the situation according to actual rights and wrongs as it saw them, rather than deliberately favoring North Korea. Thus, it eliminated ideology from its relationship with North Korea.<sup>9</sup>

When it had offered unconditional, ideologically driven support, China had had little influence over North Korea. By being even-handed, it could now exert pressure, pushing North Korea toward a normal path of development. For example, a then member of China's State Council, Tang Jiaxuan, publicly stated on several occasions that China and North Korea had a normal relationship.<sup>10</sup>

In October 2006, North Korea brazenly conducted its first nuclear test, rendering irrelevant the consensus achieved in the joint statement of 19 September 2005. Thereafter, China expressed greater dissatisfaction with North Korea. Beijing supported Resolution 1718 of the UN Security Council and the sanctions that it imposed, aimed at forcing North Korea to stop its provocative behaviour.<sup>11</sup> Simply put, at this stage of affairs China was strongly pursuing the normalisation of North Korea. As a normal country, it could be expected to make rational calculations of its own interests and, under the influence of all the interested parties, abandon development of nuclear weapons. That would finally resolve the the North Korean nuclear issue.<sup>12</sup>

And if North Korea became a normal country, China could erect a pan-Northeast Asia multilateral security framework, fundamentally improving its surrounding environment and giving itself more strategic room for development.

Judging from the following events, China achieved two of its tactical and strategic aims: it avoided war and helped North Korea to develop relations with the other interested states. But the other two objectives – complete resolution of the North Korea nuclear issue and creation of a pan-Northeast Asian multilateral security framework – have so far met many obstacles. The difficulty in achieving them has been too great, in part because of the complexity of the diplomatic issues.

6 "Mainichi News: The visit of China's special envoy to North Korea has great significance to resolving the nuclear issue", Xinhua Net, 16 July 2003. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2003-07-16/1100389018s.shtml>.

7 In terms of the background in which China facilitates the Six-Party Talks, see James Cotton, "Whither the six-party process on North Korea?" *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, September 2005, pp.275-282

8 "Statement of the Fourth Round Six-party Talks", Xinhua net, 19 September 2005 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2005-09/19/content\\_3511768.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2005-09/19/content_3511768.htm).

9 Li Nanzhou, "Changing Situations within DPRK and Sino-DPRK Relation: from Traditional Friendship to Utilitarian Relation", *Contemporary International Relations*, 2006(09), pp.58.

10 Jin Canrong and Wang Hao, "Situations of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia in the post-Kim Jong-il era", *Ziguangge*, No.2 2012.

11 "The North Korean Challenge; China may Press North Koreans", *New York Times*, October 20, 2006.

12 Jin Canrong and Wang Hao, "Situations of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia in the post-Kim Jong-il era", *Ziguangge*, No.2 2012.

### 3. Changes in Chinese policy since the North Korea's 2009 nuclear test

North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May 2009. From that point, China's policy on the issue again showed obvious changes. These included expression of a guiding principle demanding that there be no war, no disorder and no nuclear weapons. Clearly, it had now elevated maintenance of stability of the peninsula above achieving denuclearisation. China and North Korea again appeared to enter a special relationship, as indicated by the 9-11 October 2010 visit to North Korea by Zhou Yongkang, then a member of the standing committee of the politburo of Communist Party of China. After that, the Xinhua news agency issued a report entitled "Relations between China and North Korea are again approaching a peak" and declaring that they were enjoying a new honeymoon.<sup>13</sup>

Complex motivations explain the great change in China's policy on the North Korean nuclear issue since 2009. First, the changes, appearing progressively, resulted from China's experiencing a series painful cognitive adjustments. For example, after the first nuclear test, China, in its anger, began to realise its two great limitations in this issue: that it had limited influence, and that there were great impediments to its policy of encouraging the normalisation of North Korea. That policy now seemed too idealistic. The 2009 test completely exposed these limitations.

Second, policy changed because China lowered its strategic objective: it gave up the pursuit of changing North Korea's domestic and international policies, and instead sought to preserve the status quo. China prioritised avoidance of upheaval on the peninsula, especially after Resolution 1874 of the UN Security Council. An intense domestic debate was behind this lowering of strategic aims. Third, China's relations with the United States have tended to become complicated since Barack Obama took over as US president in 2009, resulting in serious mutual suspicion at the strategic level and obviously poorer coordination between the two powers in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue. Notably, after the second test, the United States not only adopted a strong attitude; it also implemented new and severe sanctions that indirectly affected Chinese decision making.<sup>14</sup>

All in all, because North Korea's attitude has been continuously uncompromising and its behaviour ever more difficult, and because China's domestic politics and its relations with the United States have become more complicated,

China has had to adopt a softer approach. The result has been relative passivity in Beijing's strategy and objectives.

With such limited policies and and strategic objectives, China's room for diplomatic maneuver in North Korean nuclear issue shrank rapidly. Its effectiveness in promoting denuclearisation of the peninsula greatly diminished. Since 2009, regardless of China's insistence that the nuclear issue be discussed and resolved by means of the Six-Party Talks, North Korea has maintained an unresponsive attitude. So the talks, which had made no progress after 2007, remained deadlocked after 2009. Since the Cheonan and the Yongpyeong Island incidents of 2010, tension on the peninsula has continued to escalate. China has been in an increasingly embarrassing position. As early as 2010, as hostility between North Korea and South Korea intensified, the United States and South Korea increasingly blamed China for the situation. They asserted that China's policies encouraged North Korea's risky and provocative behaviour. After North Korea launched satellites in October and December 2012, China sought in the UN Security Council to mediate between North Korea and the states that it had angered. China ensured that the council's Resolution 2087 of January 2013 imposed no severe sanctions on North Korea. Instead the resolution only forcefully condemned North Korea's behavior and urged it to observe the earlier Resolutions 1718 and 1874.<sup>15</sup> China's attempts at mediation resulted in dissatisfaction on both sides. The United States, Japan and South Korea retained the view that China's policy toward North Korea was one of appeasement. North Korea, on the other hand, saw China as standing alongside the United States in condemnation. The awkwardness of China's position again became obvious after North Korea conducted a third nuclear test in February 2013 – so obvious that many Chinese citizens began criticising national policy on the issue.

Lately, China's increasingly awkward position has forced its policy makers into an intense new debate on the policy. In general, elites are divided into two main factions: the traditional faction and the revisionist faction (also called the new-thinking faction).

The traditionalists, for different reasons, advocate a continued special relationship with North Korea. Among them, a group called the strategic sub-faction thinks that for military purposes North Korea will always be a protective screen for China and therefore has great geopolitical value. Another group, the historical sub-faction, holds that China must not forget history by abandoning an ally. Meanwhile, the Yanbian sub-faction, named after a Chinese city near the border and composed of officials and scholars of Korean ethnicity, sees North Korea as a close sibling

<sup>13</sup> "Relations between China and North Korea are again approaching a peak", *Xinhua net*, 11 Oct 2011. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-10/11/c\\_12648095\\_4.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-10/11/c_12648095_4.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "U.S. Condemns North Koreans Missile Tests", *New York Times*, July 5 2009; Colum Lynch, "U.N imposes Tough New Sanctions on North Korea", *Washington Post*, June 12 2009.

<sup>15</sup> "Resolution 2087 2013 ", UN Security Council, January 23 2013.

[http://www.un.org/zh/documents/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2087%20\(2013\)&referer=/zh/&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/zh/documents/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2087%20(2013)&referer=/zh/&Lang=E).

and believes that the traditional friendship should be protected. A fourth group among the traditionalists is the ideology sub-faction, which believes China should set aside its own interests and support North Korea for moral reasons.

The revisionists hold views completely opposite to those of the traditionalists. They think that advances in military technology have greatly diminished North Korea's position as a strategic gateway to China.<sup>16</sup> In their view, North Korea is no longer a strategic asset to China but, rather, has become a strategic burden. They add that, by binding itself to North Korea, China is harming its national image abroad and maybe its security. In short, there is an intense debate in China about its policies towards North Korea. Because the two sides are about evenly matched, Chinese policy is not moving. The country is stuck with its passive policy.

#### 4. Possibilities and opportunities for change in Chinese policies

For a relatively long period ahead, North Korea can be expected to maintain its current domestic policy of putting its military first. It will also maintain its strategy of seeking nuclear weaponry as a means of achieving direct talks with the United States and thereby breaking out of its diplomatic isolation and improving its strategic circumstances. In essence, North Korea has four motivations for achieving nuclear capability: (1) to strengthen its security; (2) to bolster the legitimacy of the regime; (3) to hold a bargaining chip for eventual military or negotiated reunification of the peninsula; and (4) to raise its status and influence in Northeast Asia. Under these circumstances, the North Korean nuclear issue may enter a vicious cycle in which Pyongyang's nuclear tests lead to Security Council sanctions which in turn spur North Korea, in search of security, to conduct further tests.

At present, the parties involved in the North Korean nuclear issue maintain widely different attitudes. China, because of a series of domestic and international factors, maintains a passive attitude. The policies of the United States, Russia and South Korea are not entirely clear. Only Japan, out of concerns for its security, maintains determined opposition to North Korea's actions. Among all of these countries, the United States is the one whose attitude is most crucial, because only its immense power can satisfy North Korea's four objectives. So North Korea desperately desires direct talks with the United States. It is hardly surprising that, in North Korea's world view, China, Japan and South Korea are unimportant to solving its fundamental problems. However, this also means that resolving the North Korean nuclear issue faces difficulties at two levels. At one level, the

<sup>16</sup> Lin Limin, "Management of North Korean Nuclear Crisis and the Future of China's Diplomacy", *Contemporary International Relations*, 2006(08), pp.32-38.

country that is most able to resolve the issue, the United States, is maintaining an ambiguous attitude. On the other level, the country that is most sincere in wanting to resolve the problem, China, is circumscribed in its policy. Against that background, China can only maintain a strategically passive attitude.

It is of course possible that some international or domestic development will create an opportunity for China to significantly alter its policy. The authors see several possibilities.

One is that some event on the peninsula will force great change in the current situation. A second is that some consensus will emerge among the two main factions dominating Chinese policy towards North Korea. A hint that the revisionists may be prevailing appeared on 8 March 2013 when Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying repeated a formulation that had not been heard since 2006: that China and North Korea had a normal relationship.<sup>17</sup>

A third possibility is that the leaders who have taken the reins in China in late 2012 and early 2013 could, once they have consolidated their political authority, implement an entirely new policy. Finally, there could be a change in the relationship between China and the United States or in the relationship between North Korea and the United States. Without doubt, any of these possibilities would influence the North Korean nuclear issue and indeed the entire situation on the Korean peninsula.

As to the third nuclear test that North Korea conducted in February 2013, the Security Council on 7 March 2013 unanimously passed Resolution 2094, implementing a scheme of sanctions said to be the most severe ever imposed on North Korea. As a result, the North Korean nuclear issue has again entered a period of uncertainty and has become even more complex.<sup>18</sup> It must be said that the direction of future developments in this issue awaits further observation.

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<sup>17</sup> "Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying holds regular press conference on 8 March 2013", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 9 March 2013. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgstp/chn/fyrjh/t1019798.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> "Security Council tightens sanctions on DPR Korea in wake of latest nuclear blast", UN Security Council, March 7 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/>.

# When Enough is Enough: Defining a New Strategy Toward North Korea

North Korea's recent rocket and nuclear tests and the threats of more testing to come, illustrates an enormous need to rethink diplomatic approaches to Pyongyang. Our wait and see approach have increased Pyongyang's wherewithal and confidence to develop weapons and technology without fear of reprisal.

In the near term, this development poses a direct threat to U.S. allies in the region, most notably, South Korea. While almost no one believes Kim Jong Un is ready to pull the trigger on a nuclear attack, heightened nuclear capabilities may embolden Pyongyang to take other provocative acts, such as the sinking of the *Cheonan*, the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, skirmishes along the DMZ and NLL, not to mention inordinately bellicose threats. These provocations present great dangers in the region because they may trigger escalation and even accidental war.

An emboldened Pyongyang will also undermine the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella, escalating demands from U.S. allies in the region to counteract the trend. Evidence of this erosion has been manifested in the growing number of ROK politicians calling for the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula, or the development of a South Korean nuclear weapons program. Moreover, a Pyongyang armed with growing numbers of nuclear weapons and plagued by future political instability would increase the danger of a nuclear coup, nuclear civil war or the hemorrhaging of the North's arsenal beyond its borders.

The bottom line: new developments in North Korea's WMD capabilities have raised the stakes in calculating what it will take to build regional and global security. If the U.S. is truly concerned about Northeast Asia and the nonproliferation regime, North Korea cannot be put near the bottom of the Obama administration's foreign policy priorities.

However, the problem that looms ahead for the administration is how to change its relationship with North Korea. There is widespread agreement in Washington that the policy of strategic patience has failed. It has done little to stop North Korean provocations aimed at our South Korean ally or to slow down Pyongyang's

growing WMD programs. One prominent Republican expert's recent observation that "strategic patience" is more like a "strategic coma" is an assessment that is shared by many Democrats as well. That consensus has manifested itself in a Senate bill passed at the end of February that calls for a comprehensive review of the administration's North Korea policy, including alternative approaches. The point of the review is since the current approach does not appear to be working, should the United States not be seriously considering other ones? But the odds-on betting is that the State Department will just dust off a few well-worn talking points, meld them together, and send them to the Hill.

Without a proactive policy on North Korea, the US has been caught in a cycle of action and reaction for the past several years (they test, we sanction) with very limited effect on Pyongyang, its WMD programs, or its overall behaviour despite the administration's claims to the contrary. Even the newest round of sanctions outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2094, will have limited effect in isolation. The "credible information" clause leaves ample room for interpretation should a country not want to enforce the resolution. While sanctions are a necessary coercive tool meant to "buy time for diplomacy," in the North Korea case, diplomatic efforts have not followed suit.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the U.S. has not consistently applied this standard to other tough non-proliferation cases. In the case of Iran, the Obama administration has enacted strict sanctions on the regime, but also sends the third-ranking official in the State Department to meet regularly with Iranians in multilateral nuclear negotiations. However, when it comes to North Korea, the few bilateral talks that are initiated are held only through low-level diplomats at the United Nations or foreign ministry bureaucrats. Admittedly, no American president would just pick up the phone to call the leader of a country that had merely conducted its third nuclear test in defiance of the international community as Dennis Rodman recently suggested after his recent conversations with Kim Jong Un. Yet this administration studiously avoided contact with the North Korean leadership for much of its first term, probably because of concerns about domestic political blowback.

## Opening dialogue

The US government needs to break this cycle of action and reaction and adopt a proactive, not reactive, strategy of "strong diplomacy, strong containment." The comprehensive North Korea policy review, if conducted in earnest, would be a good first step of devising such an approach - evaluating what has already been done, what has worked and not worked, and what steps need to be taken in the

future. A review could also provide public political cover for the administration to adjust its policy course. But a review would only be the first step.

The key component of a new approach focused on strong diplomacy would be a willingness to hold face-to-face meetings between authoritative officials from both countries. Those meetings would clarify North Korean views, particularly on whether there is room to negotiate (we cannot get that from Pyongyang's hyperbolic media) and what realistic goals in the near, mid and long term would be. It would also help identify incentives and disincentives that would fit these difficult circumstances and would better resonate with the North Koreans. In short, rather than the administration's policy to date, which has essentially been "weak sanctions, weak diplomacy" and leading from behind, the new approach would be strong diplomacy backed by strong measures to contain Pyongyang with the U.S. leading charge.

Finally, strong diplomacy does not only mean towards DPRK, but also in working with allies - particularly the new South Korean government - and in getting China to play a more supportive role for what we are trying to achieve. Each country has a role to play. Now with a full roster of new leaders among the six party members, we may have an unprecedented opportunity to develop a new strategy that includes a division of labor to achieve realistic and phased goals on North Korea. The real danger here is that the international community, the U.S. included, will simply give up on this problem, opting instead for isolation of Pyongyang. This would be a big mistake.

*Joel S. Wit and Jenny Town*

## The North Korean Nuclear Quagmire: A South Korean Perspective

Defying fierce international opposition, North Korea alarmed the world by undertaking the third nuclear testing on February 12th. Immediately after the testing, the Korean Central News Agency announced that it was successful and that the North has become the ninth nuclear weapons state with smaller and lighter nuclear warheads from multiple type sources (i.e., PU and uranium). As the United Nations Security Council imposed additional sanctions on the North through the adoption of resolution 2094, whilst South Korea and the United States undertook their annual military training starting on 11 March, Pyongyang even claimed that it is entitled to exercise its right of nuclear preemptive strikes on South Korea and the United States. Military tension across the De-militarised Zone is high, and potential for conflict escalation is growing. How does Seoul then see this unruly Pyongyang's nuclear behaviour?

### Is North Korea a nuclear weapons state?: Capability Assessment

Seoul refuses to recognise North Korea as a nuclear weapons state from the legal and political point of view. Since the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) recognises the U.S., Russia, China, the UK, and France as the only legitimate nuclear weapons states, North Korea cannot enjoy such status legally. Furthermore, South Korea cannot accept its nuclear status for political reasons because it can enhance North Korea's bargaining power. Technically speaking, however, North Korea is either a nuclear weapons state or on the verge of becoming a full-fledged nuclear weapons state.

In order for a country to become a nuclear weapon state, the country has to satisfy four conditions: possession of nuclear warheads, deployment of workable missiles, success in nuclear testing, and the acquisition of miniaturisation technology. As of April 2009, North Korea was estimated to have produced about 40-50 kilograms of plutonium and to have acquired five to ten nuclear weapons. And Dr. Siegfried Hecker, an American nuclear weapons expert at Stanford, who visited and inspected a uranium enrichment facility in Yongbyon in November 2010, has recently testified that the North might have concealed one or two



uranium enrichment facilities and could have acquired one or two uranium bombs. Thus, North Korea has at the very least acquired plutonium bombs and one or two additional uranium bombs.

The capability to deliver them is another precondition. North Korea has so far proved that it has credible short- and middle-range delivery capability. It currently possesses several types of missiles: Scud B (range 320 kilometer, payload 1,000 kilograms), Scud C (range 500 kilometer, payload 770 kilograms), Nodong (range 1,350-1,500 kilometer, payload 770-1,200 kilograms), and Musudan (range 3,000 km plus, payload 650kg). Although test-launchings of inter-continental ballistic missiles Daepodong-1 missile (range 1,500-2,500 kilometer, payload 1,000-1,500 kilograms) on 31 August, 1998, Daepodong-II missile (range 3,500-6,000 kilometer, payload 700-1,000 kilograms) on 6 July, 2006, and similar ones on 5 April, 2009 and on 12 April, 2012 are all believed to have failed, the most recent launching of rocket Eunha 3 with a dual-use application to ICBM on December 12th, 2012 was successful. Thus, it does have the delivery ability to cause considerable damage to South Korea, Japan, and even the United States.

North Korea has undertaken three underground nuclear tests, on 9 October, 2006, 25 May, 2009, and 12 February, 2013. Despite North Korea's claims, most international nuclear experts believe that its first nuclear testing failed because the explosive yield measured by seismic analysis was quite low, only 0.5-0.8 kilotons. But its second and third nuclear testing proved to be successful, with yields of 2-6 kiloton and 7.5 kiloton respectively. Although it was not determined which warheads (i.e., PU, uranium or both) the North used in the third testing, there is a growing concern that as it claimed, the North could have tested uranium bombs. Specialists believe that the North has not yet acquired the miniaturisation technology to make its nuclear warheads smaller and lighter, but the North claims to have overcome such hurdles. In view of this, North Korea can be seen as a nuclear weapons state.

### Why Nuclear Weapons?- Motive Analysis

North Korea's official rationale is the logic of nuclear deterrence. For the North Korean leadership and even its ordinary citizens, the fear of an American nuclear attack is not contrived, but real. They believe that the United States has plans to stage nuclear attacks on the North, and the only way to deter them is to arm itself with nuclear weapons for second strike capability. President Bush's labeling of North Korea as part of an axis of evil and a rogue nation and the adoption of the preemption doctrine using tactical nuclear weapons, as indicated in the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, have reaffirmed such threat perception. Its attempt

to possess nuclear weapons can also be seen as a calculated move to make up for its inferiority in conventional arms race with South Korea through a non-conventional, asymmetric force build-up using weapons of mass destruction and missiles. Given that South Korea's defense spending is almost equal to the size of its GDP, the nuclear option might have been a cheaper way to cope with the South's superiority in conventional arms.

North Korea's nuclear venture also seems to be closely associated with the domestic politics of legitimacy- and coalition-building since it can satisfy several domestic political purposes. It can not only enhance new leader Kim Jong Un's political legitimacy by materialising the vision of 'a strong and prosperous great nation', but also serve as a vehicle for consolidating his political power through the co-optation of the military. With the added benefit of enhancing its international status and prestige by joining the elite group of nuclear states, the possession of nuclear weapons can strengthen Kim's domestic rule.

Finally, North Korea appears to regard nuclear weapons as a valuable economic asset for two reasons. One is as bargaining leverage for economic gains and the other is as a tool for export earnings. As the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework demonstrated, the North was able to win lucrative economic and energy concessions such as two light water nuclear reactors, a supply of heavy oil and other forms of economic assistance in return for freezing its nuclear activities and returning to the NPT. Although such concessions did not fully materialise, Pyongyang learned that the nuclear weapons card can be utilised as a powerful bargaining leverage in obtaining economic and energy gains. In addition, it should not be ruled out that the North may consider using nuclear weapons and related materials as a way of generating desperately needed hard currency. The latter possibility appears highly unlikely because of the hostile international environment against proliferators of weapons of mass destruction. Nevertheless, its past track record on the export of missiles and other military weapons shows that Pyongyang is capable of and willing to transfer nuclear materials for export earnings.

### Dealing with a Nuclear North Korea: Military Action, Nuclear Deterrence, or Regime Change?

Pessimism looms high in South Korea because twenty years' dialogues and negotiations turned out to be a total disaster. The Six Party Talks are now being regarded as a futile enterprise. Hard-line military options are favoured in this desperate ambience. Attention is now being paid to an effective missile defense (MD), especially the architecture of 'kill chain,' which has two important components. One is active defense such as the acquisition of intercept missiles including

advanced version of Patriot missiles. The other is offensive defense that is predicated on preemptive surgical strikes even at the risk of conflict escalation. But as William Perry, former US defense secretary, recently pointed out, it would be extremely difficult to reply on preemptive strikes since unlike 1994, targets in North Korea are now concealed. Subsequent escalation and insurmountable collateral damages could be another obstacle to this option. Geopolitics also matters. North Korea is different from Iraq. China, Russia, and even South Korea would strongly oppose such military actions. Catastrophic consequences of military actions would make the majority of South Koreans direly opposed to military actions.

A growing number of hardliners in South Korea are raising nuclear deterrence as an alternative. They argue that the U.S. should relocate its tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea, which were withdrawn in early 1990s. Despite Washington's repeated pledge to offer nuclear umbrella to South Korea as part of extended deterrence, they are skeptical of such commitment. If the U.S. does not relocate its tactical nuclear weapons, they demand that South Korea should move on developing its own nuclear weapons even if it jeopardises alliance ties with the United States. Realistically speaking, South Korea's nuclear weapons development does not seem to be viable not only because of nuclear domino associated with it, but also because of expected international isolation as well as the total paralysis of its atomic energy industry.

Regime change through tougher international sanctions has also been openly discussed in South Korea. A critical assumption underlying this option is that the North Korean nuclear problem cannot be solved without toppling the evil regime in North Korea. As long as Kim Jong Un stays in power, North Korea will want both dialogue and the bomb simultaneously. Removing him from a position of power and creating a new regime in North Korea is the best and surest way to solve the North Korean nuclear dilemma. Thus, the United States and its allies and friends should work together to isolate, contain, and transform North Korea. If they work together, transformation of North Korea will materialise much faster. This option includes UN Security Council resolutions, additional sanctions by individual countries, and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) that would allow investigation, interdiction, and confiscation of illicit arms transfers. But this option seems not viable not only because it would worsen the nuclear standoff, eventually escalating into a major conflict on the Korean peninsula, but also because of limited effectiveness of sanctions.

In my opinion, there seems no other option but dialogue and negotiated settlement. Despite its past erratic, deceptive, and provocative behavior, the North Korean leadership is not irrational. Though a tough bargainer, it has been willing

to cooperate if the proper mix of incentives is offered. North Korea has always responded positively to positive reinforcement, and vice versa. Recognition of its identity, provision of tangible incentives, and occasional face-saving treatment has and can yield positive results. A simple fact corroborates this observation. North Korea has never shown provocative behaviour while the Six Party Talks were in progress. It showed provocative behaviour when the Six-Party Talks stalled and frustrations heightened. Resuming the Six Party Talks, removing American hostile intent and policy on North Korea through improved Pyongyang-Washington ties, undertaking inter-Korean military confidence-building measures and arms reduction, and addressing North Korean leadership's fear of regime insecurity through recognition, exchanges and cooperation can certainly help the North give up its nuclear ambition.

*Chung-in Moon*

# A Japanese View on February 12 North Korean Nuclear Test

## Threat Assessment

North Korea conducted its third nuclear test on 12 February, 2013. North Korea declared that it was a successful test for miniaturising nuclear warheads.

Prior to the nuclear test, in December 2012, North Korea had demonstrated its technological capability to launch a satellite (or an object) with the technique to insert its payload into orbit at an altitude of roughly 500 kilometers, after a failed attempt.

Since there had been many indications prior to the event, it was not a surprise to regional security stakeholders including Japan. Nevertheless, a question remains how the nuclear test, combined with the satellite launch in December 2012, should be assessed in the context of proximity to nuclear ballistic missile capability of North Korea.

With regard to the satellite launch, the ballistic missile technology has some similar elements. However, there are some fundamental differences as the objective of ballistic missile is to deliver payload to another point on the earth. Instead of moving into an ellipse path around the globe, a warhead of the ballistic missile had to have sophisticated technology to manage re-entry of payload and its delivery to the target and to control warhead's explosion after passing through an acute environment of re-entry into atmosphere. Further, North Korea had already been deployed medium-ranged Nodong missiles, whose shooting range covers most of Japan.

As for the nuclear test, it revealed us little about their warhead production capability for following reasons.

First, we can only guess the scale of explosion from the seismic scale of the underground explosion. It is only a guess since the seismic impact of an explosion depends on various factors including geological characteristics of the testing site and alignment of the testing explosive in the cave. Therefore, it is not sure whether it was a successful test of miniaturisation of a warhead for mounting on missiles since we have no way of getting information of the specifications of testing explosive device only from the seismic scale.

Second, we also do not know what kind of materials North Korea used for testing. Is it plutonium or highly enriched uranium? Since the amount of plutonium stockpile is limited, conducting a test means the reduction of the amount of plutonium stockpile. It is also not likely that North Korea had acquired certain amount of HEU despite that it had shown their relatively modern enrichment facility to the American delegation in 2010.

On the other hand, according to an assessment by an American think tank, Institute for Science and International Security, North Korea might have already been successful in miniaturising warheads and ready to put plutonium-based warhead on short-ranged Nodong missiles. Although there is not public evidence that Nodong missiles with nuclear warhead are deployed, it could constitute a direct threat to Japan if it happens.

Even if that was the case, the recent test did not change this situation. Thus, the most recent nuclear test did not change much our threat assessment of North Korea's nuclear capability, which could directly affect Japan's security.

## Risk of Misunderstanding

As mentioned above, recent tests of both a nuclear explosion and a multi-stage rocket to insert an object into orbit did not cause major shift in our threat assessment. Nevertheless, one thing for sure is that with the series of demonstrations of missile and nuclear tests, it has become more difficult for the international community to roll back North Korea's determined path toward a nuclear armed state. It means that the international community needs to show a unified, determined posture not to allow North Korea to be rewarded from behaving like a nuclear armed state.

In the meantime, we need to understand that the real intention of North Korea was to change the game surrounding North Korea, in particular political dynamics in the framework of the Six Party Talk. Certainly, North Korea would like to develop its defense capability to prevent U.S. 'regime change' pressure, and increase its leverage in negotiations with the United States, South Korea, Japan and China, for gaining more economic and political benefits.

The question is if the United States and Japan along with South Korea and China do not respond/be frightened by the North Korea's test, and do not trigger a new round of appeasementistic negotiations with North Korea, what kind of blackmail diplomacy would North Korea conduct.

In reality, further escalation of tensions by North Korean military provocation will increase the risk in failure in achieving their security and political objectives

by causing retaliatory actions by the United States and others, and the end of the regime. Even if North Korea deployed the limited capability of pre-emptive nuclear attack against the United States and its regional allies such as Japan and South Korea, it would suffer even more risks of retaliatory damages in case of use or blackmail nukes. As long as North Koreans stay rational in their strategic and political objectives, an option of escalation would not be rewarding to them.

The most serious risk with self-declared ‘success’ of the nuclear test, therefore, is the misunderstanding on the side of North Korea. If it thinks that the United States will recognise North Korea’s deterrent capability vis-à-vis the United States because it considers that North Korea has acquired nuclear weapons deliverable to the U.S. mainland, it might take more aggressive posture vis-à-vis the United States, South Korea, Japan and even China. It is necessary for the United States along with its allies to remind it with Pyongyang.

Another possible calculation by North Korea is that it might seek more commitment by China through the testing. North Korea may want to impact on China’s strategy toward the Korean Peninsula.

China recently acknowledged the limit of its influence on North Korea, and is frustrated with the test. Therefore, China is more inclined toward supporting stronger United Nations Security Council actions.

On the other hand, what China worries may be that the nuclear test would prompt more military presence and involvement of the United States in the region by, for example, re-deploying its tactical nukes in the Korean Peninsula, deepening missile defense cooperation with Japan, or other means. North Korea may want to exploit such a risk for China as leverage to induce the Chinese government to be more proactive in mediating between North Korea and the United States as well as South Korea and Japan.

## Reassuring Allies

Certainly, the nuclear test caused anxiety about deterioration of security environment in East Asia. After North Korea’s testing, there are some voices in South Korea requesting reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons for the sake of retaining the right to make pre-emptive attack against North Korea’s nuclear missiles. Furthermore, some Korean conservative politicians advocate for South Korea to develop nuclear weapons of its own.

Some also argue that North Korea’s nuclear test might trigger Japan’s military buildup, as it might give Japan a good excuse to do so. If Japan and South Korea would further accelerate this buildup by developing military readiness, it could

deteriorate the security environment in East Asia. In particular, Japanese military buildup and potential pre-emptive strike capability, if it was equipped, might trigger escalation of military tensions with China, with whom it faces security challenges over the Senkaku islands.

However, given the serious implications of its decision, Japan will not respond to North Korea’s escalation by choosing to develop its own nuclear weapons capability. So far, it is also unlikely that Japan decides to step forward building up its own offensive (or pre-emptive) military capabilities in a way that it could cause arms races in East Asia.

More important for Japan is to envision how the United States and its allies, Japan and South Korea, will ensure their mutual commitments to alliances. The United States should accelerate its cooperation with Japan and South Korea for additional assurance. For example, U.S. development of ballistic missile defense and X-band radar, which are part of a suite of tools of a new defense strategy, based on U.S. ‘pivot’ in the Asian-Pacific region, are areas that mutual cooperation should further deepen. Japan, for its part, needs to prepare for thorough defense cooperation with the United States, South Korea and other partners in the region. At the same time, Japan along with the United States also needs to reassure China not to escalate tensions and arms races, by re-opening dialogue.

## Conclusion

In sum, what Japan should consider as steps that it could take to cope with North Korea’s provocative nuclear test is the combination of deepening defense cooperation and collective reassurance efforts by allies telling North Korea of their determination of not allowing it to exacerbate international tensions by increasing its capability for nuclear coercion. It would inform North Korea that provocation is not a sustainable strategy and has no reward.

Furthermore, the international community, in particular Iran, is closely watching how the United States responds to North Korea’s escalatory strategy. If the stakeholders including the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia are unable to respond decisively, it might affect Teheran’s calculation of how it would deal with the international pressure against their ambition.

*Nobumasa Akiyama*

## Russia's policy on a nuclear North Korea: taking a backseat to Beijing and not worrying too much (for now)

The international community has unanimously condemned the nuclear test conducted by North Korea on 12 February 2013. However, the danger emanating from the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs is perceived in very different ways by the key players in Northeast Asia. Whereas Seoul, Washington and Tokyo are extremely worried and want to impose harsher sanctions on the recalcitrant regime, Moscow and Beijing, while showing concern, are obviously not ready to act tough on Pyongyang. Russian Foreign Ministry officials made bland statements on the matter<sup>19</sup>, while reaction of the public was also muted. Overall, Russian reaction was more subdued compared to what we saw following the first nuclear detonation in 2006 when there was even a mass rally of protest in Russia's main Far Eastern city of Vladivostok.

Beijing's position is not surprising, as North Korea is its only treaty ally and serves as a crucial strategic buffer. Russia's soft stance appears more difficult to comprehend. Many supporters of tougher line on Pyongyang in South Korea, Japan and the US believe that Russia has ample reason to be far more pro-active on the North Korean nuclear problem than it is now.

First, they point out, Moscow should fear the emergence of a nuclear power right next door to its Far Eastern borders, all the more so because the North Korean regime has a reputation for erratic and unpredictable behavior. Second, nuclear and missile tests conducted by North Korea close to the Russian Far East may put the Russian territory at risk. Third, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs push the US and its Asian allies to build up missile defenses, something that Moscow has always been wary of. Fourth, North Korean actions may make Japan consider the nuclear option as a defensive measure. And, of course, nuclear-armed Japan would hardly be in Russia's interest. Fifth, North Korea may try to sell its WMD technologies, undermining global non-proliferation regime, in which Russia is a major stakeholder.

19 Remarks by Russian FM Sergey Lavrov, 12 February 2013, [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/Brp\\_4.nsf/arh/47B18E4A193BA1C644257B12005CF317?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/Brp_4.nsf/arh/47B18E4A193BA1C644257B12005CF317?OpenDocument); Moscow against North Korea trade sanctions, 19 February 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20130219/179567765/Moscow-Against-North-Korea-Trade-Sanctions.html>

Yet, to Russia itself, none of the above arguments seem convincing enough, at least for now. First, no one in the Russian policy-making community actually believes that North Korea will ever attack Russia, let alone use nuclear weapons against it. Unlike Washington and Seoul, Russia has never called for regime change in Pyongyang and always maintained stable relationship with the DPRK. Second, nuclear and missile tests, though carried out near Russian borders, are not viewed as posing substantial risks. Radiation has never exceeded the normal levels in the Russian Far East in the wake of the North Korean underground explosions. The fall of a North Korean missile on the Russian territory, as a result of a failed launch, is theoretically possible, but, given a low population density in the Russian Far East, it would have to land somewhere in the center of Vladivostok to cause major damage. Third, even if North Korea abandoned its missiles, the US would be unlikely to roll back its missile defense plans. Anyway, Russia frets more about the US-led missile defense system in Europe, with which North Korea has nothing to do, rather than the one in East Asia. Fourth, Moscow does not buy the argument that Japan may go nuclear in response to the North Korean threat. If Tokyo were at some point to resort to the nuclear option, it would do so in response to the 'major' Chinese threat, not to the 'minor' North Korean one. At any rate, Japan's nuclearisation seems highly unlikely, as long as it is covered by the US extended deterrence. Fifth, unlike the US and its allies, Russia is not accusing the DPRK of nuclear and missile trafficking. Perhaps Moscow finds no reliable evidence of such trafficking. Or else it might calculate that Pyongyang's potential clients pose no threat to Russia.

There is another reason why Russia is not particularly afraid of North Korea. During a recent televised event, Russian Federal Security Service Chief Alexander Bortnikov, in the presence of President Vladimir Putin, pointed to rising 'geopolitical pressure on Russia by the United States and its allies'<sup>20</sup>, thus making very clear where the main threat is coming from. Pyongyang's nuclear and missile mischief becomes less important to Moscow at a time when it is consumed with the confrontation with Washington. Moreover, a brash challenge mounted by the North Koreans to the US may even evoke sympathy from some circles in the Russian elite.

Therefore Russia feels taking the backseat against North Korea. Frankly, it does not have a lot of leverage over Pyongyang, apart from Moscow's Security Council membership. Russian trade with the DPRK is very insignificant, so trade embargo would hardly have any noticeable effect. The ban on the import of North Korean labor would be a more effective step, as the guest workers from

20 FSB Chief: US steps up geopolitical pressure on Russia, 14 February 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20130214/179471294.html>

the DPRK toiling in the Russian Far East are one of foreign currency sources for the regime. However, even if Moscow used available leverage to full capacity, Pyongyang would hardly change its ways. North Korea's most important political and economic partner is China. Only Beijing could force the DPRK to stop nuclear and missile tests. Yet China seems unlikely to do so, even though the latest test provoked a lot of angry rhetoric in the People's Republic.

It seems that Moscow has deliberately taken a backseat to Beijing in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue. In practical terms, this means that Russia will not press for harsher measures on the DPRK than China does. Allowing Beijing to be in the driver's seat does not imply that Russia has become China's junior partner. This simply reflects a reality that North Korea is a second-rank priority for Russia, whereas for China it is a primary concern. Also, it cannot be ruled out that Moscow and Beijing have some tacit agreement, whereby Russia would follow China's line on North Korea, with China deferring to Russia's strategic interests elsewhere (Syria?).

All of the above is not to say that Russia is happy watching North Korea progress toward full-fledged nuclear and missile capabilities. Moscow is aware that the more international actors possess nuclear and missile arms, the less valuable Russia's strategic deterrent becomes. That is why, in the long run, the North Korean problem poses a real threat to Russian national interests. However, Moscow is unlikely to tackle this risk in a determined way until its more pressing foreign policy problems, especially with the US, are resolved.

Russian policy-making and expert community are more or less in agreement that Pyongyang's nuclear choice is first and foremost motivated by the regime's existential insecurity. Hence, there are no reasons to hope that the DPRK will renounce its nuclear and missile capabilities any time soon. The North Koreans have pursued these capabilities for too long and at too high a price. Even if positive transformations occur on the Korean Peninsula (for example, a peace treaty is signed, with the US diplomatically recognizing the DPRK), this would hardly convince Pyongyang to abandon nukes. Nuclear weapons have become too important to the DPRK's political system, ensuring its external security and helping its internal consolidation.

The only realistic scenario for North Korean denuclearisation would be the fall of the regime or at least its radical transformation. If an isolationist, highly nationalistic and totalitarian regime is replaced by more moderate elites seeking integration into the international community, there would be a chance that they could choose to forego nuclear weapons. In this respect, the South African experience may serve as a precedent, as the Republic of South Africa has been so far

the only country that renounced an independently built nuclear capability.<sup>21</sup> The complete dismantlement of South Africa's nuclear devices in 1990 came as a result of the demise of the besieged apartheid regime. One may hope that, under certain circumstances, the South African scenario could be repeated in North Korea.

*Ayrtom Lukin*

<sup>21</sup> Ukraine and Kazakhstan could be identified as similar cases, but they renounced nuclear weapons that were inherited as part of the Soviet legacy, not created by their own efforts.

# North Korea: The need for a holistic approach

A century ago, in my country, pundits and politicians referred to ‘the Serbian question’, ‘the Irish question’, or wherever it might be. The Irish, I dare say, called it ‘the English question’.

That parlance sounds old-fashioned now, yet it is still useful. Take the North Korea question. What exactly *is* the North Korean question? It is not one question, in fact, but rather many.

Flailing and failing to curb this ultimate rogue state, we are like the blind men in the proverb. Different interlocutors and constituencies each grab one bit of the DPRK elephant - nuclear threat, state crime, human rights, famine - and prioritise it, disregarding the rest of the beast.

Such segmentation is a recipe for the policy failures that are all too evident. There may be no good answer, or no answer at all, to the North Korean question. But for both conceptual and practical reasons, the beginning of wisdom is to grasp the animal as a whole in all its aspects.

A short article risks becoming a list, but here goes. We start of course with nuclear concerns. Outwitting the IAEA and everyone else, the DPRK now has two nuclear programmes. One, based on enriching uranium (HEU), is so far completely uninspected. The al-Kibar episode reminds us that North Korea’s nuclear risk includes proliferation as well as its own military arsenal. The former may be subject to negotiation, but on the latter it is hard to be optimistic.

Potential nuclear weapons - actual weaponisation is among the many unknowns - are only one category of DPRK weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In its 2011 dossier on North Korean security challenges, the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) determined that Pyongyang “has a chemical weapons programme and probably a biological [one too].” CBW is relatively inexpensive, and here too DPRK links with Syria raise proliferation concerns.

As John Bolton has noted, no interlocutor has even begun to address North Korean CBW. His point may be generalised. Twenty years and more of fitful negotiations with the DPRK by various parties, mostly on the nuclear issue, have

covered - let alone gained - very little ground. To go back to our metaphor, vast swathes of the elephant still remain untouched.

Long-range missiles (ICBMs) are a third WMD-related area. The link is obvious, the ground well-trodden. Under Clinton the US began missile talks, which George Bush abandoned. The DPRK had hinted it could be bought off here, but a decade later the door may be now closed.

If WMD use will hopefully remain hypothetical, North Korea’s conventional military threat is very real, as seen in 2010 with the torpedoing of the *Cheonan* and shelling of Yeonpyeong island. In 1987 North Korea proposed drastically cutting both sides’ armed forces to 100,000 in five years. A decade later the ‘sunshine’ era (1998-2007) saw a few steps to ease tensions, including hotlines and an end to cross-border propaganda, but no serious military cutbacks.

As the far richer South forged ahead qualitatively - its defence budget is now bigger than the North’s entire GDP - the DPRK sought asymmetric advantage via not only WMD but also cyberwarfare. This is now continuous, if eminently deniable. Seoul has accused Pyongyang of several distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks in recent years. In a new variant last spring, global positioning system (GPS) satellite signals in greater Seoul, including Incheon airport, were mysteriously jammed for a fortnight; fortunately no accidents ensued.

Terrorism is another asymmetric tactic. The US State Department long ago listed the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism after two notorious outrages: the 1983 Rangoon bomb, and the downing (also by a bomb) of KAL 858 in 1987. Its delisting in 2008 was a political move to assist the nuclear six party talks (6PT), but this brought protests from Japan which saw it as premature while the issue of past DPRK abductions of Japanese citizens remains unresolved.

Abductions are not only terrorism but also state crime. South Korea has many more victims than Japan - 85,000 going back to the Korean War and 500 since - but rarely prioritises this.

The broader category of state crime may be unique to North Korea. Since the 1970s DPRK diplomats and others have regularly been implicated - in over 100 separate incidents - in a wide range of criminal activities: trafficking (alcohol, drugs, ivory and more), counterfeiting (cigarettes, pharmaceutical, US dollars), and insurance fraud. This seems to have tailed off in recent years. Also, North Koreans who do this can no longer be assumed to be state agents.

All of the above are activities, military and more, whereby North Korea threatens the wider world. This lengthy list is not complete. A further impingement, refugee flows, originates in the DPRK’s domestic policies. This regime has long been a menace to its own people as well as to others, in two ways. From the start it was

a vicious police state, on the Stalinist model. And for two decades it has failed in even the most basic duty of a state, to feed its people.

Once sheltered by a dearth of hard data, the DPRK's extreme human rights abuses are now extensively documented: above all in annual lengthy White Papers by the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU) in Seoul, and a dozen substantial reports on specific aspects by the US-based NGO Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK). Strikingly, the gulag camps can even be seen online using Google Maps and Google Earth. There is nowhere to hide.

Action however has proved harder. All diplomacy must prioritise, but too often human rights go on the back burner, subordinated especially to the nuclear issue. The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) annually condemns North Korea, which of course calls this a plot and has refused access to two special UN rapporteurs. In a new initiative, this month the UNHRC is expected to endorse a call by Japan and the EU for a special commission of inquiry into what UNHRC's Navi Pillay has called the world's worst human rights situation. Yet in a recurring dilemma, such pressure will not improve the regime's bad temper nor change its behaviour.

### Demonised victim ?

Most North Koreans, if lucky and careful, avoid the gulag. Yet few are unaffected by their rulers' other, more recent body blow (some would say crime): their culpable failure since the mid-1990s to supply even basic levels of food, shelter and healthcare. Extreme weather did make matters worse, but the main cause was and is a pig-headed clinging to failed farming policies and refusal of market reforms. Malnutrition and its consequences are now endemic. An official nationwide nutrition survey last autumn found 28% of all children to be stunted.

That survey was conducted jointly by the DPRK and UN agencies. One consequence of the humanitarian disaster has been to promote such cooperation, but it is often fraught. Hopes that such joint efforts would gradually change the leopard's spots have not borne fruit.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) classifies the DPRK as a "complex emergency". Both words apply beyond the humanitarian field alone. The sheer persistence of North Korea in all its multiple ghastliness - none of which is getting better - can cause complacency or fatigue. Yet all this, and more - man-made environmental disaster is yet another dimension - remains grave and urgent. The situation and inter-relation of variables is also complex, so there can be no simple or simplistic solutions for any of it.

A dwindling band of *bien-pensants* sees North Korea as a demonised victim. Its people are indeed victims, though many remain oddly loyal to a regime that recently has brought them only harm. The summary above shows a regime like no other (thankfully), and also one that is wholly responsible for its own actions and plight. The Kim regime chose its path long ago: marching to its own deviant and defiant drum, scorning world opinion and international law. It can hardly be surprised or complain, though it does, if the global community censures and sanctions its recidivist behaviour. When individuals act like this, we call them psychopaths. Social science prefers structural explanation, so we may see Kim Jong-un as a prisoner of the position and patterns he inherited. Yet in principle he could challenge them, but he does not.

What can be done? The varied fates of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria - all of which the DPRK has noted - have surely cured any neo-con who thought intervention to topple evil was easy. China had a better idea: promoting the economic development and reform that the Kims had neglected, in hope of commerce and its profits creating new interest groups which might defang the militarists. Yet with the Korean People's Army (KPA) heavily involved in mineral and other exports, though now rivalled by the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) which has revived under Kim Jong-un, Beijing's hypothesis increasingly looks a forlorn hope.

China is of course the key. Reports of cross-border trade being curtailed suggest that with the latest nuclear test, Kim Jong-un may have bitten the hand that feeds him once too often. The once taboo idea that China should dump its ingrate reprobate ally is increasingly discussed, even at official bodies like the recent Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

That remains unlikely, but exasperation will push China closer to other interlocutors who insist that carrots must be balanced by sticks. At the very least it should expedite the urgent task of co-ordinating what are at present the separate secret contingency plans, in the event of a DPRK collapse, of China on the one hand and the US and ROK on the other. Any North Korean contingency will be dangerous enough in itself - turmoil, refugees, loose nukes - but the thought of the world's two superpowers confronting each other there as well is appalling. We may not be able to change North Korea, but the world must be ready to act in unison if we are not to risk yet another intervention which may make an already bad situation worse.

*Aidan Foster-Carter*



# The Ultimate Strategy

By conducting its third nuclear test (after 2006 and 2009), on 12 February 2013, North Korea was primarily signaling that its new leader Kim Jong Un does not intend to depart from the strategic objective set by his father, Kim Jong Il, to make his country a fully fledged nuclear power. Leadership consolidation and personal prestige may well have been a consideration for the young leader, but such strategic rationale appears further entrenched in this third move towards creating a nuclear deterrent. This in turn poses a renewed challenge to regional actors, in particular the United States, China and South Korea, whose North Korean policies have been unsuccessful in preventing a nuclear buildup and the risks it implies for regional stability.

Beyond leadership consolidation, which may have played a central role for Kim Jong Un in his decision to conduct a third nuclear test as early as one year after his accession to power, a quest for national prestige and hard security concerns remain the primary drivers of the North Korean nuclear policy. There is little doubt that the prospect for North Korea to be recognized as a fully fledged nuclear power is the strongest incentive for its leadership, which can only otherwise rely on a poor economic record for its domestic legitimacy and international status. Further progress is expected toward the miniaturization of a nuclear device that might one day reach US territory as a result of this third nuclear test that occurred only two months after Pyongyang had tested a long range vector. Furthermore, the long history of confrontation with the US, South Korea and Japan has generated a sense of insecurity, exacerbated not just by strongly antagonistic narratives, but also by the 2011 Libya intervention, the lesson of which was for the North Korean leadership not to give up nuclear capabilities.

Against this backdrop, the recurrent question is whether there is still room for negotiation. Indeed, over the last two decades, in particular since the adoption of the Agreed Framework in 1994, the central tenets of international efforts to manage the North Korean nuclear issue and by extension security on the Korean Peninsula have been based on the belief that the nuclear programme is negotiable. According to this rationale, a deal could eventually be struck that would nullify the nuclear programme in return for security guarantees and substantial

economic support to the DPRK. Today, this belief is increasingly questioned by those who argue that since the North Korean nuclear programme is moving from an early stage of building fissile material toward an advanced stage of setting up a nuclear weapon, there is no point for Pyongyang to walk away from the doorstep of the select club of nuclear states. In other terms, the nuclear programme may have shifted from an asset for negotiation to a nonnegotiable objective, to be achieved "at any price".

Indeed, Pyongyang seems to have made the choice last year to ignore the signals from the international community that resuming dialogue was perhaps back on the agenda, after three years of deadlock in the context of a US policy of "strategic patience" that could do nothing to prevent the quiet buildup of the North Korean nuclear programme in the absence of negotiations. The Leap Day Agreement (Feb. 29, 2012) between the United States and North Korea, which provided a freeze in the nuclear programme in return for humanitarian assistance, and established the basis for extended talks, offered an opportune opening out of the current standstill. But a failed North Korean rocket test in April that year and a subsequent (successful) test last December jeopardized this promises. Yet the door still remained open while the prospects of possible new talks were still on the table, with the new Obama Administration presumably more open to dialogue than the one of the previous term.

## Multiple Challenges

Furthermore, during the recent election campaign, the South Korean President-elect Park Geun-hye expressed her intent to reopen dialogue with the North, in sharp contrast with the outgoing Lee Myung-bak's hard line policy. In the new circumstances, however, she is now unlikely to be able to follow-up to her pledge any time soon.

The nuclear test also presents a renewed challenge to China caught in the dilemma of having to restrain the nuclear aspirations of its ally without risking a breakdown of the regime. Beijing's priority remains stability on its border and *status quo* on the Korean Peninsula, but the cost of this policy may be substantially increased as the North Korean nuclear advances risk causing a regional military buildup and upsetting the current regional balance. This is in all likelihood what makes Beijing nervous - as recent statements in the Chinese press condemning a nuclear test indicate - especially with regards to the overall regional context of an increasing military competition with the US. China may be suspicious that Washington may take advantage of this situation to justify further military deployment, in particular its Missile Defense, while Tokyo and Seoul are currently in

the process of readjusting their military strategies in the region and upgrading their military capabilities. Balancing these two imperatives will likely, as in 2006 and 2009, lead Beijing to subscribe to further UNSC sanctions against Pyongyang, while also making sure that those will not become a genuine “game changer” on the Korean Peninsula.

Finally, the nuclear test above all challenges the US as it questions the relevance of its North Korean policy of “strategic patience” as well as highlighting the limits of US influence over China. Its current efforts to engage Beijing in a new set of sanctions are likely to produce some results, but will hardly be a genuine solution to the problem since China will go no further. The familiar pattern of a vicious circle of sanctions and provocations is likely to repeat, with little impact on the development of Pyongyang’s nuclear programme. Whether there is a way out will largely depend on the capacity of Washington to move beyond the policy of “strategic patience”. Alternative options have been provided by the advocates of a negotiated peace agreement and those of a North East Asia nuclear weapons free zone. They may not be a guarantee of success, but they may well prove to be a driver for further engaging China as well as a worthwhile response to North Korea’s ultimate strategy.

*Alain Guidetti*

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