



Asia Program

SPECIAL REPORT

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Six-Party Stall: Are South Korea and China Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?

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SUNG-YOON LEE
The Folly of Fabled
Sentimentality: South Korea's
Unorthodox Courtship
of North Korea

PAGE 5

KIRK W. LARSEN
Part of the Problem or the
Solution? The ROK, the United
States, and the 6-Party Talks

PAGE 13

KERRY DUMBAUGH
China and North Korea—
The View from Washington

PAGE 18

BOJIANG YANG
China and North Korea—
The View from Beijing

PAGE 22

ABSTRACT This Special Report, based on a symposium held at the Wilson Center June 14, 2006, examines the positions of two key players, South Korea and China, in the multilateral 6-party talks attempting to find a peaceful solution to the problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. **Sung-Yoon Lee** of Harvard University argues forcefully that South Korean pandering to the "criminal" regime of North Korea is clearly part of the problem in the talks. **Kirk W. Larsen** of George Washington University, analyzing the views of both Seoul and Washington, concludes that the two governments have different goals and different priorities in the negotiations—thus contributing to the difficulties in the talks. **Kerry Dumbaugh** of the Congressional Research Service states that China may be most comfortable with "strategic ambiguity" and the status quo in North Korea, which helps to explain Beijing's approach to the 6-party talks. **Bojiang Yang** of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations maintains that China is making a sincere effort to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, and argues that the U.S. is not above criticism at the talks.

INTRODUCTION

MARK MOHR

These four essays, originally presented at a June 14, 2006, symposium at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, attempt to shed light on the position of the governments of South Korea and China with regard to the 6-party talks, the multilateral negotiation first established in 2003 to seek a peaceful, diplomatic solution to the issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The participants in the talks are the United States, South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan and Russia. At the time of the symposium, the 6-party talks had been at a standstill for over six months.

Much has happened since then. On July 5, the North Koreans set off two rounds of missile tests. On October 9, they tested a nuclear device. On October

14, the United Nations Security Council passed, by unanimous vote, a resolution applying specific trade and financial sanctions against North Korea. Then, on October 31, the Chinese announced that North Korea had agreed to return to the 6-party talks. Although a specific date was not mentioned, the talks are expected to resume in the next few weeks. The essays that follow provide some insight into why progress in the 6-party talks is so difficult, mainly by examining the differing goals and objectives of South Korea and China for these talks, and how, in turn, such goals differ from those of the United States.

Looking at the historical background which led to the 6-party talks, it was in the late 1980s that the United States became seriously concerned about the possibility of a clandestine North Korean nuclear weapons program. In 1994, the United States and the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea (DPRK—North Korea’s official name) signed an agreement, known as the Agreed Framework. According to the terms of the agreement, the DPRK would freeze and eventually dismantle its plutonium production facilities. In return, the United States would arrange for the provision of two light-water nuclear power reactors to North Korea and also provide the North with a shipment of 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually until the first light-water reactor came on line. Additionally, North Korea was to allow the United States to place in canisters the approximately 8,000 spent fuel rods produced by its five megawatt nuclear reactor. These fuel rods contained enough plutonium to produce five-six nuclear bombs. The canisters were to be removed from North Korea when the nuclear components for the first light water reactor were delivered.

The spent fuel canning project had been essentially completed, and the foundation poured for the first light-water reactor when, in the fall of 2002, a visiting United States official delegation to Pyongyang accused North Korea of secretly enriching uranium, thereby violating the terms of the Agreed Framework. In a bizarre contretemps, North Korea initially denied the charges, then admitted the existence of such a program to the United States delegation. However, a few weeks later, the North Koreans publicly denied they were enriching uranium; they said the United States delegation had been “confused,” and gotten its facts wrong.

When the delivery of heavy fuel oil shipments to North Korea was subsequently suspended, North Korea reacted by first expelling the International Atomic Energy Agency monitors from the spent fuel canning site, then unsealing the canisters, removing the spent fuel rods, and reprocessing them to extract weapons-grade plutonium. The North Koreans also restarted their five

megawatt nuclear reactor, which produces the spent fuel rods containing plutonium.

To deal with this new crisis over the North Korean nuclear weapons program, the regional players established the 6-party talks. China is the host for the talks, which began in 2003. There have been five rounds of talks to date.

In September 2005, seeming progress was made in the talks when all members signed a statement agreeing to a general set of principles whereby North Korea would eventually give up its nuclear weapons program in exchange for certain benefits.

However, a few days before the signing of the agreement, the United States declared that a bank in Macau was helping North Korea counterfeit U.S.\$100 bills. The United States government announced sanctions against the bank. North Korea interpreted Washington’s action as a “hostile gesture,” and declared that it would not return to the 6-party talks until the United States lifted these new economic sanctions. That is where things stood when the Asia Program held its June 14 symposium at the Wilson Center to examine both South Korea’s and China’s positions at the 6-party talks.

In the first essay, **Song-Yoon Lee**, Kim Koo research associate at Harvard University, bluntly blames the government of South Korea, over the last eight years, for a morally bankrupt policy of rewarding a “criminal” regime without demanding any accountability or reciprocity. He notes that, by its very existence, South Korea poses a long-term threat to North Korea. Moreover, North Korea has not changed its long-term goal of wanting to “liberate” the South. Lee feels that the Kim Jong Il regime will not agree to a negotiated settlement of its nuclear program because “the acquisition of a credible nuclear arsenal is an essential component, indeed, perhaps the linchpin, of North Korea’s national survival policy.”

THE ASIA PROGRAM

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Lee bolsters his argument by noting that calls for the United States and Japan to adopt a “softer” or “more flexible” position vis-à-vis North Korea overlook the very purpose of the 6-party talks—which is not to condone North Korea’s tactic of nuclear brinkmanship, but to persuade North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs. To assume, states Lee, that one can seek denuclearization by dangling a few carrots in front of a hardened dictatorship whose very survival depends on exporting calculated strategic threat is, unfortunately, a bit like trying to cure pneumonia with vitamins and cough drops; the intent may be earnest, but the application is thoroughly misplaced.

Furthermore, notes Lee, on May 31 of this year the South Korean people voiced their opposition to the present South Korean government by handing it an overwhelming defeat in local elections. He predicts that North Korea, fearing a change in government in Seoul—the next South Korean presidential elections are scheduled for late 2007—and a harsher policy, will try to wrest as many concessions from the present Seoul administration as possible. Lee further asks why South Korea should “forgive and forget” the long list of atrocities that Kim Jong Il and his regime have perpetrated against South Korea.

In the second essay, **Kirk W. Larsen**, Korea Foundation assistant professor of history and international relations at George Washington University, analyzes the views of both Seoul and Washington at the 6-party talks, concluding that their respective goals and priorities vary widely. He notes that there remains a great deal of room for differences of opinion regarding the degree of urgency with which each interested party views North Korean nuclear proliferation as well as the best way to resolve the problem.

For example, the United States views a nuclear-armed North Korea as troubling not only because of the possibility that the DPRK might use nuclear weapons in battle, but also because the DPRK might share or sell its weapons to terrorist groups who might use them against American targets. For many in South Korea, however, the prospect of a nuclear-armed North Korea is not so troubling as the possibility of an American-led sanctions regime or military strike leading to a conventional war on the peninsula. Such a conflict would likely result in the destruction of Seoul and the death of hundreds of thousands (if not more) South Koreans.

South Korea, notes Larsen, has grown much stronger in recent decades, both economically and politically. With the election of Kim Dae Jung as president in 1997, there was a sea change in South Korea’s view of North Korea, from that of a threat to one more of an estranged and misunderstood brother. That change has continued to the present, although political developments in South Korea such as the May 31 by-elections and the ensuing break-up of the ruling Uri Party point toward the possibility of South Korea and the United States moving closer together in the near-term. Nonetheless, concludes Larsen, the divergences between Seoul and Washington at the 6-party talks have contributed in part to the present stalemate. Taking into account the reasons for the divergences mentioned above, it is not difficult to understand why South Korea and the United States, from their respective vantage points, view the other as “part of the problem” in the current multilateral negotiations on North Korea.

Kerry Dumbaugh, specialist in East Asian affairs in the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division of the Library of Congress, asserts in the third essay that North Korea is an enigma, and what China says to North Korea is a mystery. She notes two dramatically different United States views toward what China is doing in the 6-party talks. One view is that China is doing a credible job with the 6-party talks and is being a helpful host and interlocutor for the United States in the whole process. The other view holds that China is being duplicitous on the North Korea question, insincere in its statements supporting a freeze or dismemberment of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, and consistently supportive of North Korea while critical of the United States.

Turning to an analysis of Beijing’s motives, Dumbaugh says that China appears to have three fundamental policy objectives that do not change. These are stability on the Korean peninsula, regional damage limitation, and maximization of Chinese leverage and influence. In this context, explains Dumbaugh, China’s food and energy assistance appears to be an insurance premium that Beijing remits regularly to avoid paying the higher economic, political, and national security costs of a North Korean collapse. Viewed another way, Chinese assistance can be seen as a life preserver, thrown out by an admonishing crew after entice-

ments and instructions on how to climb into the boat of economic prosperity have been ignored.

Dumbaugh concludes that Beijing's endgame in the 6-party process is most likely to preserve "strategic ambiguity," maintaining maximum flexibility and influence for China, while at the same time preserving the status quo. While the status quo on the Korean peninsula may be frustrating for many current United States foreign policy objectives, it is not necessarily frustrating for Beijing's policy objectives. For China, the status quo is better than many of the alternatives. It means having a North Korea that is neither collapsing nor aggravating regional sensitivities by testing nuclear weapons; it means continuing a negotiating process whose five other partners look to Beijing as a key player and to which North Korea is at least nominally committed; it means maintaining the non-nuclear weapons status of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea; it means containing, at the least, the U.S. presence and American options in Asia; and it means keeping North Korea at least partially economically beholden to—and perhaps some day economically interdependent with—Beijing.

In the final essay, **Bojiang Yang**, of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, states that China's policy toward North Korea must be understood in terms of China's overall diplomacy. China wants a peaceful international situation so that it can concentrate on internal economic development. A peaceful international situation starts first with those countries on China's periphery. He notes that China's position on North Korea's nuclear weapons program is as follows: first, there must be denuclearization, and second, this must be done in a peaceful manner. These are really two sides of the same coin, he asserts. If neither goal or only one were accomplished, this would inevitably lead to regional instability, which is anathema to China.

Paralleling Larsen's comments about Seoul and Washington, Yang states that while Beijing and Washington share the same goals, they differ on how to deal with the problem. The United States, in his opinion, tends to view the North Korean

nuclear issue mainly from the standpoint of international nonproliferation. China, on the other hand, views it both as a nonproliferation and a regional stability issue.

Yang acknowledges that some in the United States feel that China is not doing enough, but he calls such criticism unfair. China is relatively new at the practice of international diplomacy; in the early decades after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, China was opposed to the international world order. For the past few decades, however, China has been gradually integrating itself into the global international regime, and is "well on the road to becoming a responsible stakeholder." It is doing all it can, as host of the 6-party talks, to move to a successful resolution of the North Korean nuclear weapons problem. However, Yang asks if the United States, which often is critical of China's actions, is doing all it can to resolve the issue? He claims that U.S. policy toward North Korea is inconsistent, with different branches of the executive often speaking with different voices. More harmful is the message that the administration conveys to North Korea of an intent to harm it. He states that this makes it even more difficult for China to get both sides to seek common ground.

In conclusion, all four essays point to different aspects of the complexity of the 6-party talks, and offer reasons why the talks had been stalled for so long. It is clear that each party views the talks from its own national perspective, and even among allies such as Washington and Seoul, there are clear differences regarding goals and methods. China, as host, has placed itself in the middle of the talks, but its relationship to North Korea is not transparent. North Korea has been able to exploit the differences in the outlook of the other parties. The authors offer no panacea or "quick-fix" that would lead to a breakthrough in the talks. The essays do, however, indicate a need for more communication and understanding among the five parties other than North Korea, for it seems that only by presenting a "united front" will the five be in a position to influence North Korea's behavior. Unfortunately to date, the five have been anything but united.

THE FOLLY OF FABLED SENTIMENTALITY: SOUTH KOREA'S UNORTHODOX COURTSHIP OF NORTH KOREA

SUNG-YOON LEE



Stripped down to its bare bones, international politics is about choosing sides. This less-than-sophisticated sounding maxim may not be immediately apparent in conventional multilateral diplomacy, where parties without much ado shift positions and

alliances as befit them. However, in times of war, the maxim is irrefutable. And in the case of nuclear diplomacy—international politics played at the highest level next only to waging war and conducting peace negotiations—the maxim is virtually incontestable.

Undoubtedly, the Republic of Korea today is part of the problem in the stalled 6-party talks. Placing the international politics of Northeast Asia under Ockham's razor, one finds a "strategic balance" emerging in the region, which is glaringly visible in the contours of the 6-party talks. More plainly and precisely speaking, there are two separate "camps" in Northeast Asia, consisting of China, Russia, North Korea, and South Korea on one hand, and the United States and Japan, on the other. South Korea is turning away from its sole military ally and benefactor, which also happens to be the world's greatest power—not to mention the United States-Japan-South Korea security structure that has ushered in the greatest period of growth in 2,000 years of recorded Korean history. At the same time, it is devotedly courting its traditional suzerain, China, and the world's truly exemplary criminal/failed regime, North Korea. These actions are, at the very least, "noteworthy." In plain, practical terms, South Korea's "sunshine policy" of appeasing North Korea is myopic and, ultimately, self-defeating.

SOUTH KOREA SHOULD CHOSE ITS SIDE WISELY

Beyond slogans of "autonomous foreign policy" or "self-reliance" lie the lives and livelihoods of an entire nation, an entire people. The Roh Moo Hyun administration, purportedly the sole legitimate government on the Korean peninsula, must be held accountable one day *by all Koreans* for the North Korea policy it pursues. Particularly sensitive to historical grievances visited upon them by stronger regional powers, both North Koreans and South Koreans would rather deny their long and ongoing dependence on external powers. While North Korea—one of the most economically dependent states in the world today—has erected an extreme state ideology called *juche* ("self-reliance") out of such denial of reality, South Korea under President Roh has also been grappling with "self-reliance fever." Since its inception in February 2003, the Roh Moo Hyun administration has increasingly shown signs of an itch to inch away from its political and military ties with the United States under the guise of rhetorical "self-reliant (*jaju*) foreign policy" and in favor of *uri minjok* ("our ethnic Koreans"). While the public's ingrained victim mentality offers fertile grounds for political manipulation, the far more important task for the South Korean government is to channel such powerful potent energies toward constructive cooperation with the United States, not cater to the North Korean dictatorship and pro-North Korean elements within its own borders.

Pushed aside in the peace negotiations between Japan and China during the 16th century Korea-Japan War of 1592–98, unceremoniously dismissed by Russia and Japan as the two nations toyed with the idea of carving up the Korean peninsula at the thirty-ninth parallel in the months leading up to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, consulted neither by the

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Americans nor the Russians in the partition of Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel in 1945, Koreans have compelling reasons to feel sensitive to external forces beyond their control. However, the path for the Republic of Korea, as a nominal equal party to the others in the 6-party talks, is clear. South Korea must reaffirm its commitment to democracy and the rule of law, and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States and Japan. Even though it was shunned by the United States and North Korea in the bilateral talks that produced the Geneva Agreed Framework in 1994, South Korea today has an unprecedented opportunity to play in the 6-party talks a proactive role in determining the future of the Korean people.

In theory, either camp may be standing on the wrong footing, and perhaps the United States and Japan are to be blamed for the current impasse. Perhaps the two countries should adopt a “softer” or “more flexible” position vis-à-vis North Korea along similar lines taken by China and South Korea. In reality, however, such presumptions overlook the very purpose of the 6-party talks—which is not to condone North Korea’s tactic of nuclear brinkmanship, or even to produce paper agreements, but to persuade North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs. To assume that one can seek denuclearization by dangling a few carrots in front of a hardened dictatorship whose very survival depends on exporting calculated strategic threat is, unfortunately, a bit like trying to cure pneumonia with vitamins and cough drops; the intent may be earnest, but the application is thoroughly misplaced.

THE NORTH KOREAN DICTATORSHIP IS NOT A SIMPLE-MINDED DONKEY

Whether it is a “carrot on a stick,” a phantom, unattainable incentive dangling before its very nose in

the form of the two light-water reactors courtesy of the Agreed Framework, or “all carrots and no stick,” in the form of South Korean and Chinese appeasement policies, the Kim Jong Il regime will not agree to a negotiated settlement on its nuclear program. The acquisition of a credible nuclear arsenal is an essential component, indeed, perhaps the linchpin, of North Korea’s national survival policy. It is essential to its most immediate and vital goal of regime preservation, and secondarily, its goal of competing over the long-term with its neighbor, South Korea, and—as difficult as this may be to imagine for South Korean youngsters today—eventually “liberating” it. The North Korean dictatorship has designs and priorities of its own, and does not merely react to the hostility coming out of the White House or the unbound generosity bursting forth from the Blue House (the South Korean president’s official domicile). For a state like North Korea, nuclear weapons are not something it can bargain away for short-term economic gains.

The 6-party talks should not be a forum for expressing devout hopes. There is a place for the missionary impulse, or patient diplomacy, and nuclear negotiations with a failed regime living in persistent fear of absorption by the South—whether or not South Korea wills it, but by its sheer existence—is no place for well-intentioned moral suasion. North Korea’s nuclear blackmail might one day render the Republic of Korea’s military, as formidable a conventional fighting force as it is, a paper tiger. It might one day even persuade United States troops to leave South Korea, or to stand by on the sidelines as North Korea forcibly takes over the South. The North Korean state’s pursuit of a credible and threatening nuclear arsenal is not an undertaking that began on a whim. It is an all-encompassing national policy that the Kim Jong Il regime will continue to pursue with relentless

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determination, even at the cost of starvation of another million or two of its own people.

For the North Korean regime, dangling before the international community the *possibility* of a negotiated settlement of its nuclear weapons program is the very means to reaping economic dividends and continuing to stay in power. On the North Korean nuclear issue, it is actually Kim Jong Il who is the one dangling the unreachable “carrot on a stick” before the very noses of the international community, and not the other way around. For the economically moribund Kim Jong Il regime, carrots from the international community are a necessary condition to its survival, while nuclear weapons—short of a war or a regime collapse—are a sufficient condition for its long-term well-being. In the present political environment where appeasement reigns over containment, North Korea will certainly continue to be sufficiently nourished *as long as it does not* surrender its nuclear weapons. This simple fact of life the North Korean state knows: whereas carrots are perishable, nuclear weapons carry no expiration date.

In the lexicon of international politics, there are, of course, distinct terms for describing the policies of the principal actors that make such an unusual situation possible. In the case of North Korea, “nuclear blackmail” or “extortion” fit the bill. In the case of the international community, “appeasement” is the word. And in the case of the South Korean state, which has the most to lose in sustaining such a scene, its propping up of the North Korean regime in the current context may very well be characterized as “collaboration with the enemy.”

“BY KOREANS OURSELVES”: INTER-KOREAN COLLABORATION AT THE EXCLUSION OF THE UNITED STATES

Today, June 14, 2006, coincidentally marks the sixth anniversary of the North-South Joint Declaration by Kim Jong Il and Kim Dae Jung.² The unprecedented summit by the leaders of the North and South stirred up sentimental feelings and created mass euphoria in South Korea. People blithely came to infuse with faith their wish that peace and unification lay within their grasp. More importantly, the summit pageantry roused up intense ethnocentric nationalism—a tendency long dormant in the Korean psyche—the kind of nationalistic impulses that have little to do with “patriotism” or “national interest,” but that favor

“Koreanness” to the exclusion of outsiders, a phenomenon frequently found in the fervor of fans at international sporting events. With the summit, the Korean spirit was truly given the word: Article I of the Joint Declaration calls for making progress on inter-Korean relations “independently” or, more precisely, “by Koreans ourselves”—*uri minjok g’iri*.³

The Korean phrase carries an unequivocal connotation of “at the exclusion of the United States.” Stemming from a deeply-rooted worldview of “we versus they,” or “Korea versus the outside world,” the Koreans have a peculiar habit of referring to their country, language, territory, school, neighborhood—even mother, father, and, a bit alarmingly, *husband* and *wife*—as “our country,” “our language,” “our wife,” et cetera. The Korean word for “our” is *uri*, and this word encapsulates the sense of solidarity and tribal mentality that Koreans espouse and value.

History will show that the phraseology and the terms of the Joint Declaration were largely dictated by North Korea. The phrase “by Koreans ourselves” is a quasi-official North Korean slogan. It is even the name of a branch of the North Korean propaganda machinery. It also happens to be a popular slogan among pro-North Korea and anti-United States South Koreans, while “615Tongil.org” (615Unification.org) is the official website of “Alliance for Unification,” a virulent pro-North Korea, anti-United States South Korean political non-governmental organization.

Earlier today, on June 14, 2006, visiting the South Korean city of Kwangju on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the “6/15 Joint Declaration,” the head of the North Korean delegation, Kim Young Dae, had the following to share with his South Korean hosts:

In the spirit of the 5/18 Kwangju Uprising,⁴ the 6/15 Joint Declaration must be actualized without fail. The 5/18 Uprising was fought on behalf of anti-Americanism, independence, and democracy. We should unite our strength *by Koreans ourselves* [emphasis added] and repel foreign rule and foreign interference, and continue our fight with courage.

THE EVER-CONVERGING INTERESTS OF ROH MOO HYUN AND KIM JONG IL

There are, of course, political permutations of such *uri* (our) mentality to be found in South Korea, most notably, in the name of the governing Uri Party. Just

two weeks ago, on May 31, 2006, the South Korean public rose up and to the “Our Party” of President Roh Moo Hyun bluntly said: “No, thank you!”

In the aftermath of the South Korean people’s unsentimental “spring cleaning” at the polls on May 31, 2006—President Roh’s governing Uri Party having suffered the most lopsided defeat in South Korea’s history of democratic elections—can we expect the Roh administration to shift its North Korea policy closer in line with international laws and norms, or will it, undeterred, stay the course and continue to reach out to the criminal regime of Kim Jong Il? For a man who once said in public, “Even if we mess up⁵ all affairs of the state, we’ll be fine as long as we make good on North–South relations,” what policy options are President Roh likely to pursue in order to salvage his remaining time in office and his own legacy?

Has South Korea’s “sunshine policy”—reinvented as “Northeast Asia peace and prosperity policy” under Roh Moo Hyun—now run its course, in view of the crushing blow to the Uri Party in the local elections? The past eight years of rule by two consecutive leftist governments might be said to be, in the Korean context, a form of *han puri* ([political] “exorcism”)—the venting of pent up frustration on the part of those who had been marginalized or pushed aside in the nation’s lunge toward the accretion of wealth, social and political privileges.⁶ Has the tide turned? Will South Korea now tone down its one-sided infatuation with Kim Jong Il, as President Roh enters his lame duck period stripped of political support? Or will President Roh now accelerate his overtures to Kim Jong Il, exhibiting an “all or nothing” adventurism, and seek to overturn his political standing with a dramatic inter-Korean summitry?

On May 10, 2006, while on a visit to Mongolia, President Roh declared that he was prepared to make “major concessions” to North Korea and provide it with “systematic material aid.” He went on to say, “Due to our peculiar relations with the United States and other nations in the region, there are issues that I cannot address openly. However, if former president Kim Dae Jung opens the door, there are things that I could do *without detection*”⁷ (emphasis added). Just days later the Minister of Unification publicly called for a summit between Roh Moo Hyun and Kim Jong Il this year, further elaborating that he was at liberty to spend all of the \$1.2 billion North–South cooperation fund if only North Korea

would give a good reason to which the South Korean public could agree. For the cash-strapped North Korean leader and the legitimacy-shorn South Korean leader, a well-timed dramatic embrace would be an investment that would bring near-certain short-term gains. The key question is just when Kim Jong Il will agree to admit Roh Moo Hyun into North Korea for maximum influence on the outcome of the presidential election in the South in December 2007.

AN OMNIPRESENT CONTEST FOR PAN-KOREAN LEGITIMACY

Each cheerful summit embrace or high profile meeting between North Koreans and South Koreans guarantees mass euphoria and political gains for any South Korean leader. For the North Korean leader, there is the virtual guarantee of substantial short-term economic returns. But whether such high drama can bring the two Koreas closer together in any meaningful way is an entirely different matter. In any serious discussion of inter-Korean rapprochement one must ask the following question: What do the terms “South Korea” and “North Korea” mean, that is, as a nation state, political system, and ideology?

As a “people,” the two Koreas are the same, a single *minjok* (the same ethnic people), as all Koreans readily accept. For over a thousand years, from 935 to 1945, the Korean territory remained undivided and Koreans developed a highly homogeneous culture of shared common history and language. However, over the past sixty years, the two Koreas have become—beginning as by-products of World War II and breathing side-by-side as contestants for pan-Korean legitimacy—entirely different creatures. One is an open, capitalist democracy, while the other a most isolated, communist, hereditary dictatorship. In short, are genuine peace and reconciliation possible between two antithetical systems, be they under the guise of “confederation” or “federation,” while each inhabits only half of a single sovereign arena, namely, the Korean peninsula?

In light of the continued unbearable suffering of the North Korean people under the Kim Jong Il dictatorship, how will future generations of Koreans, living under a free and democratic government, judge South Korea’s policy of appeasement of Kim Jong Il during the Kim Dae Jung–Roh Moo Hyun continuum, 1998–2008? How will history judge

South Korea's presumptions regarding its North Korea policy under Kim and Roh, namely: through near-unconditional economic aid, to seek gradual change in the North, which prevents the collapse of the North Korean system and prolongs its regime? Will the pragmatic, moral, intellectual, and *legal* underpinnings of South Korea's unorthodox courtship of the North withstand the test of time? Or will the shadow of betrayal and collaboration hover over Korean politics for a long time to come?

KOREANS ARE NOT BENEATH THE LAW

“Collaboration with the enemy” is a euphemism for “treason.” While a state may, for the sake of strategic expediency, pursue an appeasement policy in the short-term or even temporarily collaborate with an enemy state or a state that poses a threat to its national security, such policies in the end need to be held accountable on their overall legitimacy and efficacy. Just as the vicissitudes of political fortune determine whether a rebel is rewarded as a revolutionary hero or punished as a traitor, so, too, will South Korea's leaders be judged one day in the court of public opinion on their unorthodox policy of appeasing North Korea. If Kim Jong Il all of a sudden becomes an apostle of peace and democracy and allows for popular election, shuts down his political concentration camps, dismantles his weapons of mass destruction, and grants his people the most basic human rights such as the freedom of speech, movement, assembly, thought, and religion, then South Korea's appeasement policy over the past eight years will be celebrated as a success.

The window of opportunity for all these changes to take place hinges on the presidential election in December 2007. If the Roh Moo Myun camp and his apostles of appeasement can manage to stay in power beyond December 2007, then they will have secured another five years to accomplish the enormous feat of reforming North Korea. If the presidential candidate from the opposition Grand National Party (GNP) is elected, then the odds are that the ten years of appeasement under Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun—and the manifold irregularities like state-directed cash transfers into Kim Jong Il's personal accounts justified as “investment in peace”—will come under scrutiny by a very different jury and an unforgiving South Korean public. What the North Korean people—one day free from fear—will

say about such a policy years from now is a separate troubling matter.

The political and economic implications of such a changing of the guard are certainly not lost on the North Koreans. Just three days before visiting South Korea for the “6/15 Joint Declaration” festivities, Ahn Kyung Ho, director of the Secretariat at the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, offered the following remarks at a public event in the Central Workers' Hall in Pyongyang:

If the GNP [South Korea's Grand National Party] comes to power, the June 15 Joint Declaration will be reduced to nothing, with the roads between Pyongyang and Seoul and the path to Mt. Geumgang blocked; the construction of the Gaesong Industrial Complex will be completely suspended, and the whole nation will go down in flames of war ignited by the United States.”⁸

Further compounding the question of legitimacy and efficacy of South Korea's appeasement of the North is the less politically malleable question of legality. Legal norms certainly are subject to manipulation, and both domestic and international laws can easily be overlooked, distorted, and even brushed aside for the sake of expediency. However, crimes of egregious nature like genocide and terrorism are more difficult to pardon fully or ignore indefinitely. Such crimes, at the very least, are rarely forgotten completely.

What should South Korea's position be on Kim Jong Il's crimes against humanity? South Korea is a model industrialized nation, based on democracy and the rule of law. The South Korean people have earned their democracy and their basic rights, protected under the rule of law, for which they may rightfully feel proud. At the same time, as a functioning democracy, the South Korean state has the duty to protect and enforce the rule of law. From a legal standpoint, South Korea does not have the luxury or freedom to turn a blind eye to Kim Jong Il's many crimes against his own people and against South Koreans.

Should South Korea let bygones be bygones and treat Kim Jong Il as a partner for peace? That is, for the sake of expediency, should the Republic of Korea forgive Kim Jong Il for the acts of terrorism, such as the killing of key South Korean cabinet members in Rangoon on October 9, 1983, including the foreign

minister, deputy prime minister, and minister of commerce and industry, and eighteen others?" What about the blowing up of the Korean Airliner 858 on November 29, 1987, on its route to Seoul from Abu Dhabi via Thailand, which claimed 115 innocent lives? Should South Korea turn a blind eye to Kim Jong Il's abductions of hundreds of innocent civilians from South Korea, Japan, and other states, or his willful starvation of some ten percent of his own people since the mid-1990s through diversion of international food aid and withholding of food based on a repressive class system?

For the South Korean government to take such a stance for the sake of political expediency or rhetorical "peace" is to imply, to its own constituency and future generations, that Koreans are beneath the law. To the international community it would be a message that Koreans are beneath the standards of the civilized world. The South Korean state has not only a moral but also a legal duty to protect and carry out justice.

The Criminal Act of the Republic of Korea and special laws such as the Punishment of Violence Act, the Aviation Act, and the Safety of Aircraft Operation Act explicitly call for bringing perpetrators of terrorism to justice. Beyond its domestic laws, the Republic of Korea is obliged, under various international conventions to which it is a state party, to take action against terrorist attacks on its own citizens and aircraft flying its own flag.

Under Article 6 of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (which the ROK signed on December 3, 1999), and Articles 3, 6, and 7 of the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation (which the ROK joined on August 2, 1973), and Article 7 of the International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism (which the ROK signed on October 9, 2001), the Republic of Korea is under specific legal obligations to take action against Kim Jong Il's acts of terrorism and support of international terrorism.¹⁰

In sum, even if South Korea is unable, in the short-term, to prosecute Kim Jong Il and establish justice on the Korean peninsula, at the very least it should at once drop its policy of appeasement and take up a firmer stance against the criminal regime that it purportedly seeks to transform. This is the key to tipping the balance of stalemate in the 6-party talks. By joining the side of the United States

and Japan, South Korea can reaffirm its commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and denuclearization. It may also be laying the groundwork for genuine peace and reconciliation among Koreans in the long-term.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to public belief, the first Republic of Korea president to visit Pyongyang and be welcomed by its citizens was not Kim Dae Jung but Syngman Rhee, South Korea's first president. President Rhee visited Pyongyang on October 27, 1950, four months into the Korean War, as the commander in chief of the Republic of Korea forces. Providence did not bring Rhee and Kim Il Sung into a cheerful embrace, as by then the North Korean leader had fled the city. In a few weeks, Pyongyang would be reclaimed by the North Korean forces, with the massive aid of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. Yet this would be the closest that South Korea would ever come to unifying the Korean peninsula on its own initiative, that is, under a unified democratic government.

The Republic of Korea eschews war as a means to achieve reunification, unless militarily provoked or attacked by the North. Article 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea explicitly renounces aggressive wars. Instead, the ROK makes it its binding duty to establish a unified, free and democratic government on the Korean peninsula. Article 4 of the Constitution reads thus: "The Republic of Korea seeks unification and formulates and carries out a policy of peaceful unification based on the principles of freedom and democracy." The preamble to the Constitution also states the importance of the "mission of democratic reform and peaceful unification of our homeland" and consolidating "national unity with justice, humanitarianism and brotherly love."

In South Korea's quest for peace, reconciliation, and reunification, the ultimate task at hand is to establish a single unified government, as its Constitution dictates, "based on the principles of freedom and democracy." South Korea's ultimate legal, moral, and practical task is to establish peacefully a unified government on the Korean peninsula that is *free and democratic*. "Peaceful reunification" is a popular refrain that all members of the 6-party talks subscribe to, if with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

However, to date, no state has come forth calling for a free and democratic reunification. Henceforth, South Korea should take the initiative and proclaim—as an openly stated policy—its policy of seeking a “peaceful and *democratic* reunification.”

Different states are governed by different national interests. It is not necessarily the duty of the United States or Japan to establish justice, democracy, or even peace on the Korean peninsula. That task squarely falls on the shoulders of South Korea’s leaders. Neither is it necessarily the duty of the United States government to accept North Korean refugees into its borders, yet it has, and will continue its efforts to address the plight of the North Korean people. On the compelling problem of North Korean human rights, the Republic of Korea should dispossess itself of its bizarre muted stance out of fear of offending Kim Jong Il and stand with decency, if not entirely dignity, and cast its vote with world public opinion.

Just as it is the duty of the Japanese government to account for and protect each Japanese national abducted by North Korea, so too, is it the basic duty of the South Korean government to do the same for its own victims. And just as it is the duty of the international community to prevent state-directed production and sale of drugs, money-laundering, counterfeiting other nation’s currency and pharmaceutical products, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, South Korea must stand up to North Korea and use its considerable economic leverage by insisting on some semblance of normalcy in state behavior and reciprocity in inter-Korean relations. South Korea should actively participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative instead of shying away from it.

Diplomacy may not take “no” for an answer, but a multilateral nuclear negotiations framework like the 6-party talks has its inherent problems. It is, however, a most useful forum for gathering information, ascertaining the other parties’ intent, keeping record for the sake of history, and unmistakably, for spreading and sharing responsibility. The United States should not bear the burden of nuclear diplomacy with North Korea alone, or with only Japan as its trusted supporter. The North Korean nuclear problem is a legitimate and pressing international issue that affects the peoples of all six nations, no other people more than the Koreans, on both sides of the thirty-eight parallel.

As a proliferation issue the North Korean nuclear threat may affect the United States more directly than other participants in the 6-party talks, but as an issue of both immediate and long-term human security, South Korea has the most to lose by continuing its policy of appeasing the Kim Jong Il dictatorship. North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and its strategy of nuclear blackmail must not be condoned any longer, and it is essential that South Korea become a productive player in the 6-party talks instead of a liability, for the sake of genuine peace, justice, the rule of law, and—if for no other reason—a history that future generations of Koreans, or *uri minjok*, may proudly look back on and embrace as their own instead of trampling all over it in shame, anguish, and anger.

ENDNOTES

1. Etymologically speaking, the original metaphor behind the often-heard phrase “carrots and sticks” appears to be an unreachable “carrot on a stick” dangling before the uncooperative donkey’s nose. The efficacy of such a contraption in inspiring the donkey to pull his cart over a substantial distance seems at best dubious.
2. The North-South Joint Declaration was signed by Kim Jong Il and Kim Dae Jung shortly past 11:00 p.m. on June 14, 2000. That the principals, the supporters of the Declaration, and the unsuspecting South Korean public since all have without questioning referred to it as the “6/15 Joint Declaration” (“June 15 Joint Declaration”) or celebrated the event with epithets like the “6/15 Era” or “6/15 Spirit” is quite a feat in itself. Beyond the Korean superstition (aversion to the word “four,” which is a homonym of “death”) the expression “6/15” carries an auspicious connotation that invokes “8/15,” or August 15. Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule on August 15, 1945, and not coincidentally, on August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea was established. And in the two-month interval between June 15 and August 15, various political inter-Korean events have been staged, such as the chaperoned, short, single-shot meetings between separated families. In short, the artificial verbal construct “6/15” connotes pageantry over content, style over substance.
3. The English translation offered by the ROK government falls flat and short of delivering the full meaning of the phrase in question: “The South and North have agreed to resolve the question of reunification independently and through the joint efforts of the Korean people, who are the masters of the country.” Neither does the North Korean version, as carried by the Korean Central News Agency, offer much insight: “The North and South agreed to solve the question of the country’s reunification independently by the concerted efforts of the Korean nation responsible for it.”

4. The May 18, 1980, anti-military popular uprising in the southwestern city of Kwangju.
5. This is a muted translation of the Korean term Roh Moo Hyun used, *g'aeng pan chi da*, which, more faithfully translated, should read “screw up.”
6. The notion of *han*—long-held agitation and a sense of fatalistic injustice—and its ‘exorcism,” might be recognizable to readers in the New England area familiar with the angst of the Boston Red Sox fans and their collective relief upon the Red Sox finally winning the 2004 World Series.
7. The Korean phrase, *seul geu meo ni*, means taking action “without detection.” The phrase carries a strong connotation of doing something irregular, or even criminal, without being caught. In light of Kim Dae Jung’s illegal secret wire transfer of \$500 million to Kim Jong Il just days before his summit in June 2000, the implications of the message are inappropriate, if not unsettling.
8. *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 12, 2006.
9. The North Korean bomb planted at the Martyr’s Mausoleum in Rangoon was intended for South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan, during an official visit to Burma. The Republic of Korea earlier in the same year had joined the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, including Diplomatic Agents, on May 25, 1983.
10. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 6 of the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, on December 15, 1997, and entered into force on May 23, 2001, specifically call for each state party to the convention to take “such measures as may be necessary to establish jurisdiction over the offenses” committed “on board a vessel flying the flag of that State” or “against a national of that State,” or against “a State or government facility of that State abroad.” Article 7 of the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation (entered into force on January 26, 1973) stipulates the following: “The Contracting State in the territory of which the alleged offender is found shall, if it does not extradite him, be obliged, without exception whatsoever and whether or not the offense was committed in its territory, to submit its case to competent authorities for the purpose of prosecution.”

PART OF THE PROBLEM OR THE SOLUTION? THE ROK, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE 6-PARTY TALKS

KIRK W. LARSEN



After five largely fruitless rounds, the 6-party talks have ground to a halt and remain in limbo. The optimism that emerged from the September 2005 joint statement, a document that appeared to represent a breakthrough in negotiations, lasted less than 24 hours as different parties, in this case the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) made it patently clear that they strongly disagreed as to the proper interpretation of the joint statement.¹ If one seeks to explain the causes of this impasse, there is plenty of blame to go around. One major factor that helps explain the deadlock is the large and growing gap between Republic of Korea (ROK) and U.S. perceptions of the nature of the problem and its potential solution.

It bears noting that the exact nature of both the problem and the solution is not a matter of unchallenged consensus in either Washington or Seoul. In both capitals, well-meaning observers and advocates can and do disagree over the ultimate goals of the 6-party talks as well as over which tactics are most likely to achieve these diverging goals. Moreover, differing frames of reference also make discussion of a single, unproblematic consensus on either problems or solutions rather difficult. Whatever one's opinion on goals, tactics, and frame of reference, it is useful to situate the current stalemate in a much wider historical context. A variety of significant historical transformations have all influenced present-day ROK attitudes and policies toward its neighbor to the north.

TALKS INTENDED TO FAIL?

Many observers take the goal of the 6-party talks to be that which was straightforwardly articulated in

the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement: "The Six Parties unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the 6-party talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner."² However, there are at least two other plausible interpretations of the underlying rationale for the talks. One is that the goal of the 6-party talks, especially from the American administration's point of view, is to fail. Or, to put it more accurately, given the expectation that the talks will inevitably fail (the DPRK, intensely jealous of its sovereignty and status, is extremely unlikely to agree to the types of intrusive inspection and observation that constitute "verifiable denuclearization" in the eyes of the United States and others), the purpose of the 6-party talks is to demonstrate to the rest of the world that all reasonable efforts to resolve peacefully and amicably the North Korean nuclear weapons issue have been made. Once the other major interested powers recognize the ultimate futility of talking with North Korea, they will have little choice but to accede to the demands of American hard-liners for more forceful measures: a comprehensive sanctions regime or even military strikes on DPRK nuclear facilities.³ If this is, indeed, the (unstated) purpose of the 6-party talks, then South Korea can clearly be seen as "part of the problem" due to the fact that the ROK (along with the People's Republic of China) has consistently refused to place all blame for the failure of the talks at the feet of the DPRK. Rather, the ROK has taken great pains to play a balancing role between the great powers and has, therefore, doled out blame in equal amounts to both the DPRK and the U.S. (some critics would contend that the ROK is more forceful in its criticism of American policy and negotiating behavior than it is of the behavior of the DPRK). This behavior is consistent with the stated intentions of South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun to shift away from sole reliance on the U.S.-ROK security alliance and toward a future in which South Korea plays "a role of a balancer in Northeast Asia."⁴

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GOAL IS TO KEEP TALKING?

Another potential interpretation of the rationale for the 6-party talks is that the talks are intended to neither fail nor succeed. The thinking behind this interpretation is that a comprehensive mutually agreeable solution is not likely to be achieved. Moreover, in the unlikely event that an agreement is reached, it will run the very probable risk of becoming impossibly bogged down in the details of implementation and enforcement. In addition, an agreement would, by definition, acknowledge and support the existence of an odious and oppressive regime as well as grant the DPRK more time and room to engage in clandestine nuclear activities regardless of whatever it promises on paper. However, the risks of a complete and irrevocable failure of the talks (these include a DPRK nuclear test and/or an American-led military strike on North Korea) are considerable. Thus, while unproductive and frustrating, continuing the 6-party talks is the least worst of a range of bad options. In this scenario, South Korea can be said actually to play a productive and useful “good cop” role vis-à-vis the more hard-line and demanding role played by the “bad cop” in Washington. South Korea’s extensive and growing engagement with the North allows Seoul to continue to importune Pyongyang to keep returning to the bargaining table, while Washington’s apparent refusal to accept anything less than the “complete verifiable and irreversible disarmament” (CVID) of North Korea insures that an agreement (one that the DPRK is sure to break) is never reached.

DIVERGENT VIEWS

Neither of the two strategies enumerated above can be explicitly endorsed by the major powers involved in the 6-party talks. To formally articulate these rationales is to insure that the talks do not achieve their intended purposes. As such, the official line remains that the purpose of the 6-party talks is not to fail or to stall, but to succeed in achieving the “verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner.” However, even if one stipulates that this is the universally accepted goal of the 6-party talks, there remains a great deal of room for differences of opinion regarding the degree of urgency with which each interested party views North Korean nuclear

proliferation as well as the best way to resolve the problem. In these areas, there is considerable disagreement between Seoul and Washington.

With the obvious possible exception of the DPRK itself, all of the members of the 6-party talks agree that a North Korea without nuclear weapons is preferable to a nuclear-armed DPRK. However, there is considerable disagreement over the degree of urgency with which each party regards the issue. For the United States, a nuclear-armed North Korea is troubling not only because of possibility that the DPRK might use nuclear weapons in battle but also because the DPRK might share or sell its weapons to terrorist groups who would use them against American targets. Moreover, nonproliferation advocates fear that “allowing” North Korea to go nuclear will have a powerful demonstration effect that might set off a wave of nuclear weapons proliferation across the region and even the world.

For many in South Korea, the prospect of a nuclear-armed North Korea is, indeed, troubling, but not so troubling as is the possibility of an American-led sanctions regime or military strike leading to a conventional war on the peninsula, a conflict that is likely to result in the destruction of Seoul and the death of hundreds of thousands (if not more) South Koreans. Moreover, many in Seoul fear the consequences of a North Korean collapse brought about by international pressure; these include the possibility that the Kim Jong Il regime might be replaced by leaders even more recalcitrant and dangerous, and the likelihood that a regime implosion would result in massive flows of North Korean refugees into South Korea (and China), with all the attendant economic and social dislocations they would cause. Thus, the United States, a global superpower with a military presence and interests in many parts of the world, sees the North Korean nuclear issue as one with dangerous ramifications on many levels and, therefore, as one of considerable urgency. South Korea, for its part, applies a primarily regional lens to the issue as it weighs its concerns about North Korean nuclear weapons against fears of a North Korean collapse or conventional war on the peninsula.

In addition to disagreements over the degree of urgency, there are also differences of opinion on tactics. South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun has consistently declared his opposition to the use of military force and even to a comprehensive sanctions regime, preferring the strategy of using carrots rather

In addition to disagreements over the degree of urgency, there are also differences of opinion on tactics. South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun has consistently declared his opposition to the use of military force and even to a comprehensive sanctions regime, preferring the strategy of using carrots rather than sticks. U.S. President George W. Bush has repeatedly stated his intention to not “reward bad behavior” by offering inducements before North Korea completely submits to American demands for disarmament.

than sticks. U.S. President George W. Bush has repeatedly stated his intention to not “reward bad behavior” by offering inducements before North Korea completely submits to American demands for disarmament. Policy- and opinion-makers in both Seoul and Washington disagree over whether a sole focus on the nuclear weapons issue (or even more narrowly, on Pyongyang’s plutonium reprocessing, setting aside for the time being the alleged heavy enriched uranium (HEU) program) or an effort to secure a comprehensive agreement on a variety of issues including conventional forces on the peninsula, human rights, normalization of diplomatic relations, and aid is more likely to bear fruit.⁵ Finally, even among those who are in agreement that carrots are generally preferable to sticks, the precise sequencing of said carrots is still a matter of debate, not to mention an issue about which Pyongyang has its own strongly held opinions.

In the end, it is apparent that there is significant disagreement between Seoul and Washington over a number of issues related to the 6-party talks. Whether this allows one to characterize Seoul (or Washington) as “part of the problem or the solution” depends in large part on which set of goals, priorities, and tactics one prefers. However, regardless of one’s preferences concerning these issues, it is important and useful to consider some of the reasons why such a gap has emerged between two allies formerly thought to be quite close, particularly on security issues. These reasons can be found in transformations that have changed both the ROK’s attitudes towards its security needs as well as the ROK’s capacity to assert its newfound attitudes.

A MORE CONFIDENT AND CAPABLE ROK

For much of the duration of the U.S.-ROK alliance, Washington has been able essentially to dictate terms to the leadership in Seoul. But a series of transformations has resulted in a much more confident and assertive South Korea. The ROK’s rapid industrialization, sometimes termed the South Korean economic miracle, has catapulted the nation of 48 million people into the top ranks of the world’s largest and most productive economies (South Korea’s GDP is greater than that of all African nations combined; the ROK consistently exports more goods than all Latin American nations south of Mexico put together).⁶ This development alone gives Seoul more confidence in asserting its own interests in international affairs. Moreover, the ROK’s rapid and impressive transition from military dictatorship to vibrant democracy adds to South Korea’s sense that its voice deserves to be heard. This development also means that ROK leaders must acknowledge the will of the South Korean people in a way rather different from that of dictators such as Park Chung Hee (1961–1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (1980–1987). Gone are the days in which an ROK leader could forge ahead with highly unpopular policies such as when Park approved normalization of relations between the ROK and Japan in 1965.

The will and attitudes of the South Korean people, which ROK leaders must now represent, have changed dramatically over the course of the last few decades. The end of the Cold War (removing overt superpower support for North Korea), South Korea’s rise to economic and political prominence, and the

diminishing number of South Koreans who directly experienced the horrors of the Korean War have all combined to contribute to an attitude among younger South Koreans that sees North Korea as less of a threat and more of an estranged and misunderstood brother. A recent public opinion survey of South Korean youth indicated that nearly half of those polled would take North Korea's side in the event of an American attack on DPRK nuclear facilities.⁷ And while the slightly older echelon of the upcoming generation generally appears to be adopting less dramatic and perhaps more pragmatic attitudes, they, too, are beginning to assess the various threats and challenges faced by South Korea in ways different from that of their forbears.

In addition, a combination of more recent events have also given impetus to Seoul hewing to a course that is increasingly at odds with that of Washington. The rapid unification of Germany and its costly aftermath have resulted in a dramatic paradigm shift in South Korean attitudes toward unification. Gone are the hopes for instant and immediate absorption of a collapsed North by the South. The exorbitant cost of the German unification experience, combined with a cold-eyed acknowledgment that demographic and economic realities will likely make a rapid unification of the two Koreas even more expensive for South Korea, has given many ROK decision makers pause. Moreover, a growing number of ROK citizens, having directly experienced interactions with their Northern brethren in the form of DPRK defectors, find themselves increasingly skeptical about the prospects of a swift, pain-free unification.⁸ Thus, while an earlier generation of South Koreans might have welcomed a Washington-led effort to engineer a North Korean collapse, growing numbers of South Koreans prefer to keep North Korea afloat and keep the millions of hungry North Koreans safely on the other side of the DMZ. In addition, ROK citizens are fully aware of the fact that first North Korean nuclear crisis of the early 1990s almost led to an American military strike on the North Korean nuclear power plant at Yongbyon. Given that the DPRK promised immediate and full retaliation to either full sanctions or a military strike (including the memorable threat to turn Seoul into a "sea of flames") it is little wonder that present-day South Koreans think twice before simply signing on to any American-led effort that might result in the same disastrous ending.

The election of longtime opposition figure Kim Dae Jung in 1997 was hailed by many as a milestone shift in ROK politics. Kim soon articulated what became known as the "sunshine policy," a policy of engagement with the North that explicitly downplays confrontation and emphasizes areas of mutual agreement. Kim was likely spurred on by the aftermath of the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis and the attendant need to calm jittery foreign investors by seeking to reduce tensions on the peninsula. He also likely acknowledged the imperative to avoid a costly German-style unification. Whatever the case, the "sunshine policy" amounted to a radical shift in South Korean attitudes and behavior toward the North. The goal of this new policy is to keep the DPRK afloat so as to avoid the instability and social and economic dislocation threatened by a sudden North Korean collapse. The hope is that gradually increasing engagement will not only improve the DPRK's economy so as to lessen the costs of a future unification but also cause North Korea to adopt a less confrontational and threatening posture toward its neighbors in the region. Although popular support for the "sunshine policy" may have ebbed from the euphoric high that followed the 2000 summit meeting between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il, the Roh Moo Hyun government remains committed to a policy of engagement with the North, an approach Roh has rechristened the "policy for peace and prosperity."

Thus, when one considers the current impasse in the 6-party talks, it becomes clear that a South Korea that has experienced dramatic shifts in attitudes at both the popular and elite levels and that now enjoys the confidence and capacity to make its voice heard is, indeed, part of the reason why Seoul and Washington cannot see eye-to-eye on the 6-party talks and, therefore, why the talks have failed to reach any satisfactory resolution.

Is this divergence permanent and irrevocable? On the one hand, political developments within the ROK such as the May 31 by-elections and the ensuing break-up of the ruling Uri Party (not to mention the possibility of political re-alignment in the United States after the 2006 Congressional elections) point toward the possibility of the ROK and the United States moving closer together in their attitudes and policies towards the DPRK in the near-term future. On the other hand, some of the long-term trends in South Korea indicate that even

if the two nations could come to complete agreement on North Korea, a fundamental re-shaping of the relations between the United States and the two Koreas is likely to continue for some time to come.

ENDNOTES

1. The 6-party talks refer to negotiations held between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Republic of Korea (ROK), the United States, Japan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Russia, primarily designed to address the North Korean nuclear weapons program. For the text of the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement, see "Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2005," at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm>. The DPRK followed up on the Joint Statement with a demand that light-water reactors (LWRs) be provided before North Korea dismantled its nuclear weapons program: "The U.S. should not even dream of the issue of the DPRK's dismantlement of its nuclear deterrent before providing LWRs." For a discussion of this impasse, see Peter Hayes, David von Hippel, Jungmin Kang, Tadahiyo Katsuta, Tatsujiro Suzuki, Richard Tanter, and Scott Bruce, "Light Water Reactors at the 6-party talks: The Barrier that Makes the Water Flow," *NAPSNET Policy Forum Online* 05-78A: September 21, 2005. Available from <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0578LWR.html>.
2. See "Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2005." Available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm>.
3. A prominent advocate of one strand of this type of thinking is Victor Cha, the director for Asian affairs in the Bush administration's National Security Council. Writing of "hawk engagement" in 2002, Cha argued that "engagement would not only provide insight on the degree of change in DPRK intentions, but would also lay the groundwork for punishment if the regime fails to fulfill its obligations." Victor D. Cha, "Hawk Engagement and Preventive Defense on the Korean Peninsula," *International Security* 27 (Summer 2002): 40-78.
4. See, for example, Sekai Nippo, "Korea in Crisis: Korea as regional 'balancer,'" *World Peace Herald*, January 31, 2006. Available from <http://wpherald.com/articles/29/1/Korea-in-Crisis-Korea-as-regional-balancer/Caught-between-China-and-Japan.html>.
5. For an example of the belief that the members of the 6-party talks should focus first and foremost only on North Korea's plutonium-based nuclear weapons program, see Selig S. Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2005). For advocates of a much more sweeping "grand bargain," see, for example, Michael O'Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula: How to Deal With a Nuclear North Korea* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003).
6. Yang Sang-hoon, "The Republic of Korea Keeps Moving Forward," *Chosun Ilbo*, February 16, 2006. Available from http://www.koreafocus.or.kr/main_view.asp?volume_id=45&cate_code=A&g_cate_code=AB&g_code=100018
7. In the survey of 1,000 youngsters aged between 18 and 23, conducted by *The Korea Times* and its sister paper *The Hankook Ilbo* on February 16-19, 2006, nearly 48 percent of respondents said that if the United States attacked nuclear facilities in North Korea, Seoul should act on Pyongyang's behalf and demand Washington stop the attack. Park Song-wu, "48% of Youth Would Support N. Korea in Case of US Attack," *The Korea Times*, February 21, 2006. Available from <http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/nation/200602/kt2006022117121711950.htm>.
8. For a recent exploration of some of the travails of North Korean defectors in South Korea and the ROK government's attempts to ease the transition into South Korean society, see Norimitsu Omishi, "North Korean Defectors Take a Crash Course in Coping," *New York Times*, June 25, 2006. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/25/world/asia/25korea.html?ex=1308888000&en=f4e1694c7348fa29&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

CHINA AND NORTH KOREA— THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

KERRY DUMBAUGH



In addition to the enigma that is the North Korean government, one of the great mysteries to many Americans is exactly what Beijing thinks of and says to North Korea. There has been a good deal of factual reportage over the years about PRC–North Korea interaction, but much of it appears contradictory. On the one hand, Chinese officials often appear to put the lion’s share of the responsibility on the United States to be “flexible” and “patient” with North Korea in the 6-party talks. On the other, China has sided with the United States in favor of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution declaring North Korea to be in breach of U.N. nuclear safeguards and has criticized North Korea’s February 2005 announcement of a boycott of the talks as “unacceptable.”¹ Chinese officials stress that a nuclear-free Korean peninsula is one of their priorities, then appear to support North Korea’s position of postponing nuclear dismantlement for ten years or longer. What is the United States to make of such a mixed track record? For years, diametrically opposed opinions about exactly what are China’s real security concerns and political objectives on the North Korea issue have dogged the policy debate in the United States.

U.S. SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

The conventional school, espoused by many in the U.S. government, holds that China is doing a credible job with the 6-party talks and is being a helpful host and interlocutor for the United States in the whole process. According to this view, we can count on the sincerity of Chinese leaders when they say that Beijing’s principal priority is a non-nuclear Korean

peninsula.² A common feature in this view also is that like American officials, Chinese officials have grown both weary and frustrated with the unpredictability and intransigence of their erratic neighbor. Sino–North Korea relations and interests have grown increasingly incompatible. While North Korea has remained insular, highly ideological, and committed to what many find to be a virtually suicidal policy direction, China has rejected ideological zeal to become a pragmatic, competitive, market-driven economy that increasingly is a major economic and political player in the international system.

The chief rival to this viewpoint could be called the complicit school, which holds that China is being duplicitous on the North Korea question, insincere in its statements supporting a freeze or dismemberment of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, and consistently supportive of North Korea while critical of the United States.³ According to this view, Beijing actually has substantial leverage with Pyongyang but elects not to use it in order to ensure that the North Korean issue continues to complicate United States regional strategy and undermine the United States position in Asia. Therefore, China sides continually with North Korea and against the United States in the 6-party talks. At least one proponent of this viewpoint has suggested that China’s principal goal is to prolong the 6-party talks indefinitely in order to buy maximum time for North Korea to expand its nuclear arsenal and accustom the international community to the reality of its nuclear weapons status.⁴ Furthermore, Beijing and Pyongyang actually may be coordinating their policies on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, including the timing of North Korea’s more provocative pronouncements. Thus, announcements that North Korea is boycotting the 6-party talks and needs to be persuaded to return actually may be tactical moves choreographed by Beijing.

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CHINA'S REAL SECURITY INTERESTS

So what are China's real security interests in North Korea? Looking at the mix of conflicting possibilities, what are the common features, and what inferences can be drawn about the political and strategic motivations Chinese leaders have in their North Korea policy? Determination of Beijing's policy motivations can be suggested by the likely answers Beijing would give to six basic yes-or-no questions on North Korea—answers that might be summed up as the “three yeses and three noes.” The three questions to which Chinese leaders are most likely to have to answer “yes” to are: Do we support North Korea? Do we feel strongly about the historical ties and the human and capital investment we have made there? Ultimately, are there limits to our support? The three questions to which Chinese leaders are most likely to have to answer “no” to are: Are we happy about the policy direction North Korea is taking? Are we happy with the amount of control we exert over Pyongyang? Are we willing to abandon them and sever our security interests there? The presumed answers to these questions show a mixed picture of Chinese policy goals that at times are in conflict with one another. Beijing has to continue to recalculate and re-balance these competing goals as events unfold on the Korean peninsula. At its very core, though, Beijing appears to have three fundamental policy objectives that do not change.

Stability on the Korean peninsula and in North Korea itself appears to be the first of these fundamental policy goals. It easily can be argued that the political, economic, and security consequences to China of a destabilized North Korea are far too serious to be dismissed as a top priority for policymakers in Beijing. However unpredictable and annoying the North Korean government may be, its collapse would severely tax the economic resources and logistical skills of the Chinese central government, disrupting Beijing's critical domestic priorities for economic growth and social stability. Nor is it likely that Chinese officials in pursuing this goal are as casually tolerant of North Korea's erratic and unpredictable behavior as they outwardly may appear. Since first entering into their 1961 military alliance with North Korea, Chinese leaders have eschewed the cult-like aspects of Maoism and instead have achieved robust economic and technological growth by adopting market mechanisms and a more prag-

matic and consultative policymaking style. It is not hard to imagine that Beijing is more than a little frustrated with the kind of destabilizing ideological fanaticism that the Pyongyang regime still embraces.

Within this context, Beijing's continuing economic assistance to North Korea becomes easier to understand. Rather than a deliberate attempt to undermine an ultimate resolution to the 6-party talks, as some have suggested, China's food and energy assistance appears to be an insurance premium that Beijing remits regularly to avoid paying the higher economic, political, and national security costs of a North Korean collapse. Viewed another way, Chinese assistance can be seen as a life preserver, thrown out by an admonishing crew after enticements and instructions on how to climb into the boat of economic prosperity have been ignored. But for a series of real and symbolic reasons—including the economic and political costs to China, the responsibilities of its military alliance, the common communist roots it shares with North Korea, and the modern historical ties of the two countries—Beijing seems unwilling to let North Korea sink. Under the circumstances, the life preserver is the best that can be offered.

Another logical fundamental policy goal for Beijing is the search for regional stability—more specifically, Beijing's interests in keeping Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and other regional governments on the non-nuclear side of the ledger. An unpredictable North Korean regime with demonstrable nuclear weapons capabilities could serve as an excuse for Asian neighbors and for the United States to recalculate their own strategic and security policies in ways ultimately damaging to China's interests. Leaders in Beijing are aware that an unpredictable North Korean regime equipped with verified nuclear weapons very likely would lead to decisions by Japan, South Korea, and possibly Taiwan and other Asian neighbors to develop their own nuclear deterrents and ballistic missile capabilities. In keeping with Beijing's own domestic policy priorities, its emphasis on social stability, and its ambition to be the supreme power in the region, nothing is more to be avoided than the proliferation around China's periphery of nuclear-armed governments more capable of defending their own national interests when those conflict with China's.

In addition to the real possibility of acquiring more nuclear neighbors, Beijing probably anticipates that the United States response to these enhanced

regional security concerns would be an accelerated and more robust missile defense program, particularly for its regional friends and allies, or a revitalized or enhanced network of regional alliances. Beijing has no long-term interest in seeing the United States regional presence strengthened. Its broader policy interests, instead, are to “manage” the prominent United States presence in the region, and even over time to erode it. In addition, China’s military alliances with North Korea, enshrined in the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, raises substantially the stakes for Beijing in the event that the international community or United States military elect to employ more aggressive or even military means to deal with North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. Beijing, in that case, would have an unhappy choice to make: to abandon an ally or else jeopardize domestic priorities by armed conflict on behalf of its annoying neighbor. Chinese leaders very likely do not want to have to make that choice. Beijing’s domestic growth priorities and a military force structure that is increasingly focused on Taiwan appear to leave little room for a North Korea contingency.

Beijing’s third overarching policy goal appears to be a concerted effort to maximize its leverage with all the relevant parties in the 6-party talks. In the case of North Korea, although observers continually speculate and there are varying amounts of disagreement, no one knows what kind of leverage Beijing has with Pyongyang. It may be that Chinese leaders are uncertain as well, given North Korea’s penchant for the unexpected and its demonstrable willingness at times to reject Chinese overtures, carrot and stick alike. If Chinese leaders are, in fact, unsure of the extent of their own leverage, they appear unwilling to be more assertive in testing what those limits might be.

In the calculation of Chinese leaders, then, Beijing’s food and energy aid to Pyongyang appears to serve multiple purposes: it not only helps to stabilize the tottery regime (Beijing’s first key priority), but also seeks to contain the regime’s more egregious eccentricities by raising the costs of misbehavior while suggesting that rewards are possible for good behavior. In other bilateral relationships, Chinese leaders have learned the value of economic inter-dependence. Beijing appears to have grown more confident in the power its own giant economy has not only to confer economic benefits but to narrow the range of policy options available to its smaller economic partners. In addition to food and energy assistance, Beijing may calculate that greater investment and economic interaction across the Sino-North Korean border will likewise serve to shape North Korean interests more in line with those of China.

China’s interests are also served by trying to maximize its leverage with the other partners in the 6-party talks, especially with the United States, and for this Beijing needs the 6-party talks to continue. Continuation of the process allows Beijing to continue its mediating role and offers it the potential, however slight the prospect of a successful conclusion to the talks, of being an original crafter of a key international agreement rather than a late-comer. Continuation of the process provides a more neutral forum for regular conversations with Japan than might otherwise be possible given Sino-Japanese tensions. Finally, continuation of the process burnishes Beijing’s credentials with South Korea and gives Beijing leverage with the United States government as well as a wealth of opportunities for bilateral discussions and senior-level meetings with United States policymakers.

While it is impossible not to speculate about what final resolution Chinese policymakers hope to see in North Korea, for the moment one might say that Beijing sees its fundamental policy objectives as being best served by “strategic ambiguity” and maintenance of the “status quo.” Such a broad-brush approach would allow Beijing to reassess constantly its tactics based on whatever unexpected circumstance arises in the moment.

THE END GAME

So what is the end game for Beijing? While it is impossible not to speculate about what final resolution Chinese policymakers hope to see in North Korea, for the moment one might say that Beijing sees its fundamental policy objectives as being best served by “strategic ambiguity” and maintenance of the “status quo.” Such a broad-brush approach would allow Beijing to reassess constantly its tactics based on whatever unexpected circumstance arises in the moment. Beijing need not even have a specific “resolution” to the North Korean issue in mind, other than the avoidance of a “bad” resolution. In the meantime, strategic ambiguity assures that no one can be certain of how little or how much leverage Beijing has with Pyongyang—an uncertainty that leaves Beijing with maximum flexibility while allowing it opportunities to make the most of whatever leverage it has.

Strategic ambiguity also means that no one be certain of the actual state of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.⁵ It may even mean, as one policy analyst has suggested, that Chinese leaders actually are fairly ambivalent about whether or not North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, notwithstanding China’s repeated assurances that it shares United States and international priorities on this matter. Instead, China’s more important objective is to keep North Korea’s nuclear capabilities (whatever they are) hidden, explaining why some of Beijing’s sternest warnings to Pyongyang have been on the occasions when that regime has threatened to “demonstrate” its nuclear weapons capabilities in some way.⁶ Again, this kind of ambiguity serves multiple Beijing objectives—among them Beijing’s calculated efforts to avoid anything that could lead to the nuclear arming of Japan and other Asian neighbors or to pre-emptive military action by the United States and the international community—and reinforces Beijing’s key role in the 6-party talks, which by their very existence give China a certain amount of leverage and influence with the United States.

In addition, while the status quo on the Korean peninsula may be frustrating for many current United

States foreign policy objectives, it is not necessarily frustrating for Beijing’s policy objectives. For China, the status quo is better than many of the alternatives. It means having a North Korea that is neither collapsing nor aggravating regional sensitivities by testing nuclear weapons; it means continuing a negotiating process whose five other partners look to Beijing as a key player and to which North Korea is at least nominally committed; it means maintaining the non-nuclear weapons status of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea; it means containing, at the least, the U.S. presence and U.S. options in Asia; and it means keeping North Korea at least partially economically beholden to—and perhaps some day economically interdependent with—Beijing.

ENDNOTES

1. Attributed to PRC U.N. Ambassador Wang Guangya, “Annan Says 6-Party Talks in North Korea’s Interest,” Voice of America press release, February 15, 2005.
2. China has repeatedly held to its general view on the importance of denuclearization, although some find meaningful the varying apparent strengths of its assertions. In one press conference, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Kong Quan stressed “the Chinese side’s persistence on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and on maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula is resolute and unwavering.” Foreign Broadcast Information Service (February 17, 2005). At another press conference four days later, the same spokesperson described China’s position “that we stick to the goal of a nuclear free peninsula.” Foreign Broadcast Information Service (February 21, 2005).
3. John Tkacik, “Does Beijing Approve of North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions?” *Backgrounder No. 1832*, Heritage Foundation, March 15, 2005.
4. Ibid.
5. Even confronted with North Korea’s public announcement of February 10, 2005, that it already had made nuclear weapons, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman was taciturn, saying only “We are still analyzing and studying the DPRK’s February 10 statement.” Foreign Broadcast Information Service (February 17, 2005).
6. A view expressed by Larry Nicksch, specialist in Asian affairs, Congressional Research Service (CRS) in an as yet unpublished CRS report.

CHINA AND NORTH KOREA—THE VIEW FROM BEIJING

BOJIANG YANG



It is quite difficult to convince my American colleagues why China's current attitude toward the DPRK is reasonable, and why China hesitates to take a more "hawkish" policy, as expected by some Americans. Indeed, especially in regard to North Korea's nuclear weapons program, while China shares the same goal with the United States, namely to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, it does not necessarily share the same methodology in resolving the crisis.

One of China's most important diplomatic relationships is with North Korea. One must understand China's comprehensive diplomatic strategy since the end of the Cold War in order to have a deeper understanding of Chinese policy vis-à-vis the DPRK.

Current Chinese diplomacy is based on China's "World View" and "Development View." For China, international relations in the Globalization Era differ from those in Cold War. The first difference is the prominence of global issues. Common threats for countries are increasing, and China believes these challenges can only be managed through international cooperation instead of through efforts by an individual country or the combined efforts of a few countries. The second difference is a commonality of various countries' interests. A common feature of current relations among countries is a strong mutuality of political, economic and security interests, which promotes closer interdependence. The pros-

perity of one state may lead to prosperity for another state, and the loss of such prosperity may negatively impact the economy of the second state. Therefore it is unrealistic to approach international relations as a "zero-sum game" when a "non-zero-sum game" is clearly the better approach. The third difference is that there is a higher status and greater appreciation for international norms, placing a greater burden on international organizations in their conduct of international relations. China has basically completed this process by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), and rather than being a challenger to the world international regime, as it had been for several decades beginning with the 1950s, China has gradually transformed itself, since the late 1970s, into being a defender of the international world order, well on the road to becoming a "responsible stakeholder."

THE CONTEXT OF "PERIPHERY" DIPLOMACY

For China, its Korean peninsula policy is an extremely important and complex one. The general goal of China's diplomacy is to maintain peace and stability and build up a benign external environment so that China is able to concentrate on its domestic development. There have been three pillars in China's diplomacy in the post-Cold War era: its relationship with surrounding countries, its relationship with other powers in the world and its relationship with the developing countries. Among these three pillars, "periphery diplomacy" has been given more and more importance in recent years. Concerning Chinese periphery diplomacy, three key terms—

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Mulin (睦邻), to create harmonious relationships with neighbors; Fulin (富邻), to benefit neighbors by facilitating economic cooperation; and Anlin (安邻), to reassure neighbors—are crucial to understanding its essence. The stability of the Korean peninsula, given its unique geopolitical location and historical ties with the Chinese mainland, is indispensable in order for China to realize its diplomatic goals under the periphery doctrine. China needs to maintain the region of northeast Asia as a major international resource for developing its domestic economy, while at the same time preventing it from being a source of disruption and instability. Given such a basic goal, any negative elements perceived as obstacles must be overcome and removed.

Periphery diplomacy is undoubtedly the main factor when China considers its policy toward the DPRK, but not the only one. Another key factor is that of power diplomacy, namely diplomacy toward the other powers in the region. This is also of high importance. Compared to when the first DPRK nuclear crisis broke out in the early 1990s, China has definitely been playing a more significant role in helping to resolve this second crisis. Basically two major factors are involved. One is that Sino-DPRK relations have recovered from their bottoming-out when China established diplomatic relationship with South Korea in 1992. *Ten Stories of a Diplomat*, written by Qian Qichen, former Chinese vice premier in charge of foreign policy, attests to the difficulties of Sino-DPRK relations when China was establishing formal diplomatic ties with South Korea. Another factor is China's increasingly cooperative ties with the United States following the September 11th tragedy.

Expectations that China be a “responsible stakeholder” in the international community and help to defend the non-proliferation regime have brought new but increasingly significant responsibilities to Beijing. Specifically, when China deals with the nuclear issue, what is on its mind is not only to maintain border security and regional peace in northeast Asia, but also to fulfill its international responsibilities as a rising power. In other words, the nuclear crisis not only takes up China's tremendous diplomatic resources and efforts aimed at maintaining regional stability that is absolutely needed for its domestic development, but also provides China with a sort of internal litmus test to gauge its progress as a “responsible stakeholder” in the eyes of the rest of the world.

THE DPRK ON CHINA'S DIPLOMACY CHESSBOARD

Pursuing a denuclearized Korean peninsula and resolving the nuclear issue in a peaceful manner are the dual principles of China's Korea policy. Lots of American colleagues are curious which one really has the top priority, but in fact, the two are really indivisible, like two sides of the same coin.

The logic on this point is quite simple and clear: on one hand, China attaches great importance to peace and stability on its periphery. Therefore, a nuclearized Korean peninsula, in addition to damaging the international non-proliferation regime, would cause regional instability by triggering a regional nuclear or conventional arms race. China of course opposes this. Actually, as seen from Chinese President Hu Jintao's remarks when meeting with a senior DPRK delegation on July 11th, seven days after the DPRK launched its latest round of missile tests, China opposes not only the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, but “any behavior that causes tension on the Korean peninsula.”

On the other hand, China insists on dealing with the nuclear issue and any other Korean peninsula-related issue in a peaceful manner. This is because a non-peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue could also lead to regional chaos. Based on the aforementioned periphery diplomacy doctrine and given the sensitivity to China of the Korean peninsula, any chaos in that part of the world could have serious negative effects on Chinese domestic stability.

Let me spell out these negative effects as I see them. First of all is the issue of border security. The land border dividing northeastern China and the DPRK is about 1,400 kilometers, too long to be strictly controlled. I have visited the DMZ (demilitarized zone) between the ROK and the DPRK from both the southern and northern sides. There is an extremely long, solid concrete wall dividing the same people into two separate parts. If a refugee flow occurred on the northern half of the peninsula, it is much more likely to surge first through the land border with China rather than to the DMZ, thus flooding the northeastern side of the Chinese border. In other words, if there is any instability or chaos on the Korean peninsula, China would be the first to suffer. Therefore China, for its own security interest, naturally has to try to avoid such a scenario.

Secondly, there is the issue of social and economic problems in northeast China. For example, there are

many state-owned enterprises in the region. They are called “first sons of the Republic” because they were established shortly after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Against the backdrop of China’s profound reform that has been taking place over the past quarter century, not every one of these state-owned enterprises is in a good situation. The consequences for those laid-off are also not good. Furthermore, northeastern China is also the major habitat of Chinese citizens of Korean ancestry. They cross the border and visit their relatives and friends on the other side of the border frequently. When they get together, it is quite difficult to tell one from the other, since they speak the same language. From the North Korean side of the border, nationals come to China to work or to visit, then often return home with extra cash or commodities. In this context, based on the history of the Sino-DPRK relationship, the border is managed in a quite friendly way.

Thirdly, there is the geography of northeastern China. It is not so far from Beijing, the heart of the country. Actually in history, more than once, rebellion resulting in dynastic overthrow originated in this region. Therefore, it is no wonder that many in China get nervous at the possibility of instability on this part of our border.

Since the second wave of the North Korean nuclear crisis broke out in late 2002, China has tried its best to help resolve the problem by hosting several rounds of multilateral talks, and by trying to bridge the gap between the United States and the DPRK so that they would be able to have face-to-face talks. China could not have gone out of its way any more to treat the issue seriously. Yet China is criticized for its effort. Such criticism is absolutely groundless, and is made mostly out of ignorance about China’s crucial national security interests in stability on the Korean peninsula. In short, in light of its own and the region’s security interests, China wants the crisis to be resolved; but for the sake of its own and the region’s security interests, China wants this resolution to be a peaceful one.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

For more than twenty years, China has been focused on joining the existing international system in which the United States is the sole superpower. Such a process was successfully completed when China

joined the WTO. It is obvious that China is aiming not to challenge the existing international regime, but to cooperate with it on issues like anti-terrorism, non-proliferation, and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Actually even with regard to the sensitive Taiwan issue, while insisting on the principle that this is a domestic issue, China has nonetheless (albeit on a track-two level) been engaged in various discussions with the United States, Japan and the EU respectively for a couple of years.

China has also been dedicated to establishing cooperative relations with other powers in the world, especially with the United States. Observing China’s diplomacy over the past several years, it is actually the so-called “American factor,” or the “American angle,” which has come to the fore in Beijing, whether it is in dealing with its neighboring countries, energy needs or many other issues. Namely, when China considers its policy toward almost every single corner in the world, “Sino-U.S. cooperation” has been factored in as a kind of “pivotal framework.” The DPRK nuclear issue can be seen as a typical instance for China to try to resolve a regional security issue in collaboration with the United States, while at the same time keeping in mind its own national security interests. For the past ten years, China actually has made great efforts to do just that. In the 1990s, it was engaged in the 4-party talks involving the DPRK, South Korea, the United States and China. It also hosted trilateral talks among DPRK, United States and China shortly after the outbreak of the second nuclear crisis, and hosted four rounds of the 6-party talks until last September. At that time, those talks achieved a significant accomplishment, the September 19 joint statement of principles.

Sino-U.S. cooperation and collaboration on the nuclear issue is significant in that the two countries had never worked so closely on a specific regional security “hot spot” before. This means a lot for China in terms of reengaging in the modern international community, and remodeling its relationship with the United States. Yet the American perception and evaluation of China’s efforts wax and wane—when things are going smoothly China is praised but once there are difficulties or setbacks, China is criticized. So how should we judge such a situation, and what should we make of the differences between the United States and China in dealing with the nuclear issue?

First, Beijing and Washington have a different understanding of the nature of the DPRK nuclear

There is an issue that puzzles and disturbs China, distracting it from trying to play a more constructive role. This is U.S. policy and the U.S. evaluation of China's own role. It is really not encouraging for China to observe the differences in U.S. bureaucratic politics in handling the North Korean nuclear issue.

issue. While the United States tends to view it mainly from the standpoint of international nonproliferation, China views it both as a nonproliferation and a regional stability issue. Furthermore, for Chinese scholars, the nuclear crisis is deeply rooted in the mutual isolation between the DPRK and the United States. Contributing to this isolation, and playing an important role in the DPRK's desire to seek nuclear weapons, is the U.S. policy, over the past half century, of seeking containment and sanctions against the DPRK. That is why China constantly claims that the improvement of U.S.-DPRK relations is the key for the success of the 6-party talks. In its perception, the United States does not really understand the complex mix of factors among northeast Asian countries that influences the consideration of security issues in the region, many of which pre-date the 20th century.

Secondly, China needs further to increase its skills in multilateral diplomacy. China is a country with thousands of years of civilization, but the People's Republic of China (PRC) did not join the international community until its accession to the United Nations in 1971. In this respect, China is still a young country without much experience in the post-World War II international system. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, until the outbreak of the East Asian financial crisis in 1997, China looked mainly to bilateral means to handle diplomatic and especially regional security issues. So for China, involved in resolving the DPRK nuclear issue by hosting the 6-party talks, this is not only a means of enhancing its cooperation and improving its ties with the United States, but also a significant symbol in its shift to a diplomatic paradigm involving more of a multilateral approach. But given the above mentioned three pillars, China needs to walk a line between cooperating with the United States as well as with other powers, and maintaining good ties with its neighbors, including North Korea. This is difficult to do. In addition,

China was accustomed to reacting, but not acting, to the outside world in the past, but now it is required to be proactive in certain circumstances. This really signals a change for China's diplomacy.

Thirdly, there is an issue that puzzles and disturbs China, distracting it from trying to play a more constructive role. This is U.S. policy and the U.S. evaluation of China's own role. It is really not encouraging for China to observe the differences in U.S. bureaucratic politics in handling the North Korean nuclear issue. Such disagreements are public, at times self-contradictory and do not help resolve the problem. Not only are there differences among different departments, such as the State Department and the Pentagon, but even inside the same department—witness remarks from the State Department in Washington and those of the U.S. embassy in Seoul—you seldom hear a united voice. Such a situation confuses the other parties in the 6-party talks, for example, the ROK. Especially for the DPRK, a highly centralized country, it must conclude that such U.S. actions as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the financial sanctions against Banco Delta Asia are all part of a united policy of the “united” Bush administration to harm the DPRK; this in turn has a negative impact on the 6-party process. In other words, it is difficult to convince the DPRK that the government which has aimed sanctions at it is also the government that sincerely wants to conduct diplomatic discussions with it. For China, such a confusing situation on the U.S. part makes it extremely difficult to walk the line—not among various international players—but between the hawkish and the moderate elements in Washington, D.C. When there is an impasse with the 6-party talks, China is always told to try harder to increase pressure on Pyongyang, yet when it tries to collaborate with others in the region, its motives are called into question. In light of all of the above, how should China behave?

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