

# The North Korean Nuclear Test and Its Implications

Liu Lin

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## **Executive Summary**

On October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted a nuclear test and thereby became the world's ninth nuclear power, a development that will have wide-ranging security implications for Northeast Asia and the rest of the international community.

The nuclear test and the test firing of ballistic missiles three months previous constitute the most current developments in a nuclear quandary that dates back at least to the 1980s when U.S. intelligence sources reported on the development of a nuclear weapons program in North Korea. The past couple of decades have seen at least two major crises and a continuous deterioration of U.S.-North Korean relations. The recent events have given rise to worldwide condemnation and the full response by the international community will is yet to be seen.

### **Factors Contributing to the Nuclear Test**

The complex and multiple factors that contributed to North Korea's decision to perform a nuclear test in October 2006 can be summarized as follows:

#### *The legacy of the Cold War*

The nuclear test is the latest manifestation of the ongoing Cold War on the Korean peninsula and North Korea's consequent insecurity. More than 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, North Korea and the U.S. still have not established diplomatic relations and the armistice agreement that halted the Korean War in the 1950s has yet to be replaced by a peace-agreement. However, the current status-quo has also proved beneficial to the strategic interests of the United States since it provides a valid excuse for a strong military presence in the region which, in turn, is a prerequisite for continued U.S. leadership in East Asia.

### *The tilting balance of power on the Korean peninsula*

Since the early 1990s, the balance of power on the Korean peninsula has changed to North Korea's disadvantage by all possible means. *Strategically*, the implosion of the U.S.S.R. and the improved economic and diplomatic relations between China and South Korea has seriously worsened North Korea's prospects of external security guarantees. *Politically*, these developments have also meant increased isolation. *Economically*, North Korea has suffered severe setbacks due to its rigid economic system and a number of natural disasters. Lately, the conventional *military* balance has also changed in favor of South Korea.

### *North Korea's nuclear calculation*

The ongoing deterioration of North Korea's security situation and the increasing American hostilities made the nuclear option seem like the only plausible way for Pyongyang to deter a U.S. attack and assure national security.

### *U.S. hardening North Korea policy*

In 2001, the U.S. completed a policy review with regard to North Korea and after 9/11 the Bush Administration adopted a new security strategy centering on threats stemming from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. These new priorities, in conjunction with information on nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Pakistan, gave rise to hardening American rhetoric toward North Korea and deteriorating bilateral relations.

### *Civil-Military relations in North Korea*

The nuclear test may also be a reflection of the domestic power struggle between the military and the civilian leadership in North Korea, which would suggest that the military and the civilian hardliners now are dominating the political scene. The possession of nuclear weapons, in turn, serves to keep the present power structures intact.

## **Implications of the test**

The North Korea nuclear test will have a number of geo-political and strategic consequences for individual states and state-to-state relations in Northeast Asia and beyond.

### *Setback to the global non-proliferation regime*

The nuclear test constitutes a severe blow to the global non-proliferation regime and may be interpreted as a "green light" by states nourishing similar nuclear ambitions, especially if North Korea manages to escape any serious and wide-ranging repercussions. Moreover, and possibly even more concerning, is North Korea's proclivity to indiscriminant proliferation of nuclear technology and fissile material.

### *Catalyst for an arms race in Northeast Asia*

The test may spur an arms race in Northeast Asia, a scenario that China, and possibly also the U.S., fears the most. The recent developments have added new fuel to the debate on Japan's possible development of a nuclear arsenal. Regardless of Japan's decision, the nuclear test will most likely result in a strengthened U.S.-Japanese security alliance and an acceleration of the development of a theatre missile defense. Also South Korea will have to solidify its alliance with the U.S., and thereby enhance its conventional military capability, to meet the security threats from the North.

### *Further coordination among the states in the region*

The test could also further cooperation among China, the U.S., Japan and South Korea and maybe bring about a consensus on how to deal with Pyongyang. Nevertheless, South Korea and China will not back any hard-line policies unless, and maybe not even then, all diplomatic channels have been exhausted.

### *Prospects for the six-party talks*

The most urgent task at present is to revive the six-party talks. However, there is a range of challenging issues, such as the imposed sanctions, that need to be addressed. In addition to these newer issues, the parties still face the same differences in perceptions, which caused the talks to stall in 2005.

### **China's response to the nuclear test**

China has long been seen as the most influential external party in this crisis. Nevertheless, the test firing of missiles in July and the nuclear test in October illustrates China's limitations. The situation has turned into a diplomatic quandary for Beijing and the frustration with the northeasterly neighbor is mounting. Nevertheless, North Korea's geographic proximity and geo-strategic importance, forces China needs to address North Korea's provocations in a comprehensive and strategic manner that is in line with China's overall strategic goals of peace and stability. Although it certainly is in China's interest to rid the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons, regime change or military measures are not seen as plausible ways of achieving this since this could undermine China's internal economic development and the construction of an affluent society. China and the U.S. thus share the overarching goals vis-à-vis the Korean peninsula, but disagree on the strategies for achieving them. The situation is further complicated by the two states' competing geo-strategic interests in Northeast Asia. China's emergence as a great power is seen as a threat to the American dominance in the Western Pacific and China is regarded a "strategic competitor" by the current U.S. administration. Against this complex geopolitical background, it is essential for China to strike a balance between North Korea and the U.S. regarding the North Korean nuclear issue.

# **The North Korean Nuclear Test and Its Implications**

## **Introduction**

This paper will provide an analysis of the current North Korean nuclear crisis, especially the factors that led to the North Korean nuclear test on October 9, 2006 and the important implications of this test. The paper starts with a brief review of the evolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis, which serves as a background for further discussions. It continues with an outline of the various factors leading to the recent nuclear test by North Korea, including underlying historical factors as well as the current situation. The North Korean nuclear crisis is not only closely related to the "Cold War legacy", but is also affected by the domestic politics of both the U.S. and North Korea. It is not just a nuclear issue, but involves various interests of all the major players in Northeast Asia. Based on this, this paper will discuss the implications of the nuclear test for global and regional security. The North Korean nuclear test is another severe blow to the already fragile global non-proliferation regime. It also provides a catalyst for Japan and South Korea to build up their military capability, and even their nuclear capacities, which will lead to great changes to the balance of power in East Asia. The nuclear test has also put China and South Korea in a dilemma. Both countries have to perform a balancing act between supporting the UN sanctions and ensuring that the North will not be squeezed into a sudden collapse. Finally, China's response and attitude toward the North Korean nuclear test will be explored and analyzed. Although China felt disappointed and frustrated after the nuclear test, China's fundamental interests on the Korean peninsula have not changed significantly. China will still try to revive the six-party talks and bring about a diplomatic solution to this problem.

## **1. The Evolution of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis**

### *The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*

The Korean nuclear crisis centers upon the development of nuclear weapons by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Therefore, in order to fully understand this problem, it is useful to start by reviewing the

process of North Korea's nuclear development. North Korea's long interest in nuclear technology can be traced back to the 1950s. General Douglas MacArthur's threat to use nuclear weapons against North Korea during the Korean War made the country's founder Kim Il-Sung determined to develop his own nuclear weapons. In 1956, the DPRK signed an agreement with the Soviet Union on cooperation in nuclear research. Under the agreement, a nuclear research center was constructed near the small town of Yongbyon. In 1965 a Soviet IRT-2M research reactor was assembled for this center.<sup>1</sup> In 1974, North Korean specialists independently modernized the IRT-2M reactor, bringing its capacity to 8 megawatts. In the same period the DPRK began to build a 5MWe research reactor, which is called the "second reactor".<sup>2</sup> In 1974, Pyongyang joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), with which it signed a "Type 66"<sup>3</sup> Safeguard Agreement in 1977, thereby opening the Yongbyon nuclear facility for inspection.

The North Korean nuclear weapons program dates back to the 1980s. During this time, North Korea focused on practical uses of nuclear energy and the completion of a nuclear weapon development system, after which it began to operate facilities for uranium fabrication and conversion. It began the construction of a 200MWe nuclear reactor and nuclear reprocessing facilities in Taechon and Yongbyon respectively. In 1985, U.S. officials announced for the first time that they had intelligence data proving that a secret nuclear reactor was being built 90 km north of Pyongyang near Yongbyon.<sup>4</sup> In 1985, under international pressure, the DPRK signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), pledging not to employ its nuclear facilities to create weapons and to permit the IAEA to inspect and monitor its nuclear activities. From May 1992 to February 1993, the IAEA conducted 6 inspections on North Korea's nuclear facilities. But these inspections touched off a series of confrontations between Pyongyang and the IAEA. In March 1993, in response to an IAEA demand of "intrusive" inspections of North Korea's nuclear facilities, Pyongyang announced its

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<sup>1</sup> "Nuclear Weapons Program",  
<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/dprk/nuke.htm>> (April 28, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Type 66" refers to the INFCIRC/66 type Safeguards Agreement of the IAEA (INFCIRC/252). It is one of IAEA's Safeguards System which was established in 1965 and provisionally extended in 1966 and 1968. The system was established pursuant to the Article III.A.5 of the Statute of IAEA and authorizes the Agency to "apply safeguards, at the request of the parties, to any bilateral or multilateral arrangement, or at the request of a State, to any of the State's activities in the field of atomic energy".

<sup>4</sup> "Nuclear Weapons Program", *ibid.*

withdrawal from the NPT. This led directly to a breakdown in DPRK-IAEA negotiations and created the first Korean nuclear crisis.

Although the U.S. held several rounds of direct talks with the DPRK during the crisis, the large gap between the two sides prevented the talks from producing any tangible result. The crisis came to a head when North Korea removed the fuel rods from the 5MWe experimental reactors at Yongbyon in the absence of IAEA inspectors. In response, the U.S. threatened to impose two-phased sanctions on North Korea through the United Nations. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Defense advised President Clinton to quickly reinforce U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula. A preemptive strike to destroy the Yongbyon reprocessing plant was also under consideration.<sup>5</sup>

As the situation continued to worsen, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter decided to go to Pyongyang in July 1994 for a face-to-face meeting with North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung. This visit prevented the crisis from turning into a major conflict at the last minute. During the meeting, Kim Il-Sung agreed to freeze the DPRK nuclear program temporarily and start negotiations with the US toward a final solution of the problem. However, the sudden death of Kim Il-Sung shortly after the initiation of the Geneva talks brought much uncertainty to the negotiations because it was not clear whether his son, Kim Jong-Il, and the rest of the DPRK leadership would hold on to the agreement with Carter. It appeared that they did and on October 21, 1994, the Agreed Framework was signed, thereby providing a basis for the resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula.

### *The 1994 Agreed Framework*

Under the Agreed Framework, the DPRK agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear programs. Pyongyang also promised to return to the NPT and accept full-scale inspections of its nuclear program. In return, the United States agreed to provide two 1000MWe light-water reactors (LWR) to North Korea by a target date in 2003. Additionally, before the LWRs came into operation, the United States would supply 500,000 tons of heavy fuel annually to make up for the energy losses in North Korea. Concurrently, the United States and North Korea would gradually improve

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<sup>5</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *North Korea's Weapons Programs: A Net Assessment*.

<<http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/north-korean-dossier/north-koreas-weapons-programmes-a-net-asses>> (January 21, 2004).

their bilateral relationship, initially through the exchange of liaison offices and later through negotiations over other outstanding issues in U.S.-DPRK relations, including missile exports and human rights. The agreement also required the North and South Koreans to resume direct dialogue to discuss outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula.

The benefits of the Agreed Framework to the U.S. and North Korea were tangible and immediate. However, since the Agreed Framework only was "a nonbinding political agreement"<sup>6</sup> rather than an agreement in the formal, legal sense of the term, both sides could easily disobey their obligations. Officials at the U.S. State Department noted that this non-legally binding form was preferred in order to provide "the flexibility to respond to North Korea's policies and actions in implementing the Agreed Framework—flexibility that binding international agreements, such as a treaty, would not have provided."<sup>7</sup> In other words, if North Korea would violate the agreed framework, the United States could rapidly halt oil shipments and reimpose a trade embargo. Similarly, if North Korea suspected non-compliance on part of the Americans, it could within shortly reprocess the fuel rods, resume construction on the two larger graphite reactors, and refuel the 5MWe reactor.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the Framework had several other shortcomings. For example, according to the Framework, the dismantlement of the DPRK's graphite-moderated reactors and the related facilities would not begin until the completion of the second LWR. This meant that North Korea could, under the provisions of the agreement, possess a potential nuclear capability for an extended period of time. Moreover, the Agreed Framework failed to address other security issues of concern, such as the North's ballistic missile program, its chemical weapons program or a possible biological weapons program.<sup>9</sup> According to Robert A. Manning, it was not only the substance of the Agreed Framework that proved most troublesome, "but the apparent lack of a larger strategy for reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula and fostering a genuine inter-Korean reconciliation process".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate, *Nuclear Nonproliferation—Implications of the U.S./North Korean Agreement on Nuclear Issues*, GAO Report to Chairman, October 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Manning, "US Policy toward the Korean Peninsula-Beyond the Nuclear Accord", <[http://www.ppionline.org/documents/korean\\_peninsula.pdf](http://www.ppionline.org/documents/korean_peninsula.pdf)> (January 23, 1995)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. However, this point has been subject to debate among analysts. Some experts argue



These problems made the Agreed Framework quite fragile and difficult to implement. Although the Agreement was meant to build mutual trust between Pyongyang and Washington, both sides, soon began to breach the provisions of the agreement. In the United States, the Agreement immediately provoked strong criticism from the Republican opposition. They accused the Clinton Administration of yielding to North Korea's blackmail. Opponents also worried that the fuel used to power the two large LWRs could be reprocessed into nuclear weapon material by North Korea. Therefore, the U.S. Congress was reluctant to provide funding for the construction of the LWRs. Although the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was led by the United States, it relied almost entirely on financial support from the Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan. In addition, the KEDO projects were subject to annual financing as opposed to long-term funding. Due to this and various other reasons, such as the disputes over the nomenclature of the reactor type and Japan's suspension of funding for the LWR project following North Korea's 1998 missile launch, the construction of the light-water reactors were only 25 percent finished by 2003, the target date for completion, which was far behind schedule. Nor had the U.S. significantly eased economic restrictions on the DPRK, as called for in the Agreed Framework. Mutual steps toward establishing diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the DPRK were likewise delayed when the North Koreans balked at opening liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang out of the fear of being "spied" on by the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. intelligence detected that North Korea was pursuing a clandestine High-Enriched Uranium (HEU) program in the late 1990s as an alternate source of nuclear weapons development—due to the fact that IAEA inspectors were monitoring the plutonium-based facility at Yongbyon. All this essentially nullified the Agreement before the eruption of the second North Korea nuclear crisis.

### *The Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis*

After coming to power in January 2001, the George W. Bush Administration made a review of U.S. North Korea policy. After

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that the Agreed Framework did contain a larger strategy for the solution of the nuclear issue, but that the death of Kim Il-Sung and the pull-back of the U.S. Congress prevented the the Agreed Framework from being fully implemented by either side. See for example Ralph A. Cossa: "The U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework: Is it viable? Is it Enough?" <[http://nucstrans.org/Nuc\\_Trans/locations/korea/opusdprk.pdf](http://nucstrans.org/Nuc_Trans/locations/korea/opusdprk.pdf)> (April, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

completing this review in June 2001, the Bush Administration stated that it would engage Pyongyang in talks on a more comprehensive list of issues. Whereas the Clinton Administration had focused on negotiations with the DPRK over its missile program following Pyongyang's launch of a three-stage rocket in 1998, the Bush Administration sought to include the nuclear and conventional weapons programs into the talks as well. After the September 11 attacks, the U.S. adopted a new security strategy which stressed threats from a combination of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. With these new priorities, and with new information about nuclear cooperation between Pakistan and North Korea, the Bush Administration's rhetoric toward North Korea intensified. In the January 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush included the DPRK in the "axis of evil". Other documents and policy statements, including the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review and the September 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, all defined North Korea as a threat to America's national security.<sup>12</sup> These statements, combined with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, further convinced the North Koreans that they needed a deterrent against Washington as well as an American assurance of a security guarantee.

The present nuclear crisis erupted on October 3, 2002, when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs James Kelly met with DPRK officials in Pyongyang. During the meeting, Kelly presented evidence that the DPRK was operating a covert uranium-based nuclear weapons program in violation of requirements under the Agreed Framework and other undertakings. Rather than dismissing Kelly's allegations, the North Koreans acknowledged the program in their next meeting with the Assistant Secretary the following morning. As Kelly observed, "Kang [North Korean vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju]...surprised me by making it quite clear...that North Korea was proceeding with a HEU program and that it considered the Agreed Framework to be 'nullified'".<sup>13</sup> Following that meeting, however, North Korea adopted a "neither confirm nor deny" policy about whether such a

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<sup>12</sup> Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 9 January 2002); on the subsequent NPR disclosures, see William M. Arkin, "Secret Plan Outlines the Unthinkable", *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2002. For relevant discussion of North Korea in the national security strategy document, including the attention to preemption and to counter proliferation, see the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington D.C.: White House, 17 September 2002), 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> James A. Kelly, "United States to North Korea: We Now Have a Pre-Condition", YaleGlobal Online, 12 December 2002.

HEU program existed. North Korea portrayed its actions as a response to the Bush Administration's hostility and sought to hold the United States accountable for the nullification of the Agreed Framework.<sup>14</sup>

Two weeks later, on October 16, 2002, after intense internal discussion, the Bush Administration stated that the DPRK was conducting a secret nuclear program in violation of the Agreed Framework. On November 13, 2002, President Bush said that future shipments of heavy fuel oil would be halted. North Korea responded by removing IAEA cameras and seals at the Yongbyon facility and expelled the monitoring personnel. In early 2003, the DPRK made the situation even worse by announcing its withdrawal from the NPT and restarting the Yongbyon nuclear facility. Soon thereafter, the DPRK announced that it had begun reprocessing the 8000 spent fuel rods, a key step toward extracting weapons-grade plutonium. According to estimates by nuclear experts and reportedly by U.S. intelligence agencies, if North Korea reprocessed the fuel rods, as it claimed, it could produce four to six atomic bombs. Production of weapons-grade plutonium would also add substance to North Korea's threat to export nuclear materials.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Six-Party Talks*

In order to resolve the North Korea nuclear crisis peacefully, the Chinese government went through a range of diplomatic endeavors to bring about talks between Washington and Pyongyang. In April 2003 a three-party talk was held in Beijing between North Korea, China and the U.S. The three-way talks turned out well. Indeed, the Chinese attempts to "minimal multilateralism" provided Washington and Pyongyang, the two opposing actors, with a face-saving venue that later was to develop into to a larger multilateral diplomatic process for resolving the nuclear problem. However, the three parties all knew that it was only the beginning of a long and difficult process. Indeed, during the meeting the North Korean chief negotiator Li Gun reportedly told the U.S. delegates in private that the DPRK had completed nuclear weapons and promised "physical demonstration" if necessary.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan D. Pollack, "The United States, North Korea, and the end of the Agreed Framework", <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_moJIW/is\\_3\\_56/ai\\_105210219/p...](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_moJIW/is_3_56/ai_105210219/p...)> (August 2003)

<sup>15</sup> Larry A. Niksch, *North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program*, CRS Issue Brief for Congress, February 21, 2006, 5.

<sup>16</sup> CNN, "N. Korea 'admits having nukes'", April 25, 2003 <<http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/04/24/nkorea.us/>> .

What then followed was a series of shuttle diplomatic efforts. China wanted to continue the trilateral talk process, whereas Washington insisted that South Korea and Japan should be included in future talks. Upon Moscow's insistence, Russia was also added to the list of future participants in the potential multilateral talks. The U.S. also made a concession vis-à-vis the North Koreans by agreeing to direct bilateral talks within in the context of a multilateral setting. This finally led to Pyongyang agreement to take part in the six-party talks.

Until now, five rounds of six-party talks have been held.<sup>17</sup> Some consensus has been achieved during the talks, as best illustrated by the Joint Statement of Principle issued after the fourth round of the six-party talks in September 2004. In this joint statement the following key points are included:

- denuclearization of the Korean peninsula;
- normalization of relations between North Korea and the United States and between North Korea and Japan;
- economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, as well as multilateral energy assistance for the DPRK; and
- a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula.<sup>18</sup>

Although all parties agreed on the principles of "denuclearization", "normalization of relations", "peace regime" and even the "Northeast Asian security cooperation", there were still significant differences regarding the methods to achieve these objectives. For one thing, the North Korean nuclear issue is not simply an issue of non-proliferation but also concerns various political, economic and strategic interests of all the parties involved, especially the United States and North Korea. Just as John S. Park has observed "[d]omestic policy constraints, differing priorities, and conflicting historical analogies among each of the countries have brought vastly

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<sup>17</sup> For more discussions on the six-party Talks, see: Paul Kerr, "News Analysis: North Korea: Are the Six-Party Nuclear Talks Dead?", *Arms Control Today*, September 27, 2006; John S Park, "Inside the Multilateralism: The Six-Party Talks", *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2005; Scott Snyder., Ralph Cossa, and Brad Glosserman. "The Six-Party Talks: Developing a Roadmap for Future Progress", *Issues & Insights* 5, 8, Pacific Forum CSIS, August 2005; Scott Snyder, Ralph Cossa, and Brad Glosserman, "Whither the Six-Party Talks?", <[http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2006/0517\\_six\\_party\\_ta...](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/0517_six_party_ta...)> ; Phillip C Saunders, "What to Expect from the Six-Party Talks on the Korean Nuclear Crisis", <<http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/week/030825.htm>>; Ralph A. Cossa, "Six-party talks: conditions for success", *Asia Times*, November 13, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> "Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2004", September 20, 2004 <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm>>.

differing perspectives to the multilateral negotiating table."<sup>19</sup>

For the United States, the primary goal is to press North Korea to give up its entire nuclear program and return to the NPT, while North Korea's priority is to obtain a formal security guarantee from the U.S. Kim Jong-Il is primarily concerned with the survival of his regime and sees Washington as the biggest threat to that end. Therefore,

"[w]hile the country's economic crisis is profound, with even the possibility of a collapse, the North Korean regime is not willing to bargain away its nuclear capacity solely for economic assistance—survival of the regime, Kim's primary aim, depends on a strategic détente with U.S."<sup>20</sup>

China and South Korea, the other two most important parties for resolving the crisis, have repeatedly emphasized the need for a peaceful diplomatic solution. Both Beijing and Seoul are reluctant to exert economic pressure or sanctions on North Korea, which they think may lead to an escalation of the crisis and even the sudden collapse of the North Korean regime. Maintaining peace and stability are China and South Korea's primary concerns. Due to these profound differences, the six-party talks fell into a deadlock after the end of the fifth round of talks in November 2005.

### *The North Korean Missile and Nuclear Tests*

Now a year has passed since the last round of six-party talks wrapped up and the process is still in a deadlock. Despite promises to implement the Joint Statement of Principle through concrete measures, actions taken by both Washington and Pyongyang have actually escalated tensions. The U.S.' crack down on the Macau-based Banco-Delta Asia due to its alleged money laundering and counterfeiting made the North Korean leadership irritated enough to declare that it would refuse to return to the six-party talks unless the U.S. lifts the financial sanctions. Feeling insulted and ignored by the U.S., North Korea took a dangerous step on July 4 by test firing seven missiles, including one Taepodong-2 which could reach Alaska and Hawaii, despite warnings from China and South Korea. North Korea probably wanted to use the missile test to attract Washington's attention, which has been focused on the Iran nuclear issue, and press it to agree on bilateral negotiations, something North Korea has long sought after.

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<sup>19</sup> John S. Park, "Inside Multilateralism: The Six-Party Talks", *Washington Quarterly*, autumn 2005, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Lynn Walsh, "The Korean Crisis", February 8, 2003  
<<http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2003/02/o8korea.html>> (February 8, 2003).

However, the missile test was obviously a miscalculation on the part of North Korea. After the crisis, the U.S. and Japan showed no sign of being rattled by the incident. On the contrary, they proposed stricter sanctions on North Korea and successfully pressed the UN Security Council to pass a resolution condemning North Korea's action and requiring all member states to prevent missile-related goods and technology from being transferred to North Korea. According to the resolution, all member states are required to "prevent the procurement" of such goods from North Korea, while banning the "transfer of any financial resources in relation to DPRK's missile or WMD program".<sup>21</sup>

However, North Korea did not concede to the UN sanctions. Instead, it responded by conducting a nuclear test on October 9 in Hwaderi near Kilju city in the North Korean Hamgyeong province,<sup>22</sup> following a warning a few days earlier. This test shocked the world and resulted in universal condemnation, but the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il seems highly immune against international criticism and appears eager to show the world that North Korea can not be pushed around by others. Just as the missile launch on July 4 was a show of North Korea's pride and toughness, the nuclear test is but another show, however with much more serious implications.

North Korea's intentions seem to have been to use the nuclear test as a bargain chip to pressure Washington into direct talks with Pyongyang, a goal pursued by Kim Jong-Il for a long time. But the Bush Administration has refused to negotiate bilaterally with Pyongyang since it came to power. Starting in 2001, under the motto of "anything but Clinton", the Bush Administration tried a new policy of "malign neglect" toward North Korea. Although the Bush government repeatedly insisted that it sought a "peaceful solution...through diplomatic channels"<sup>23</sup>, had "no hostile intent" toward Pyongyang, "no intention to invade" the North, or "no intention to invade or attack" the DPRK,<sup>24</sup> it withheld that the pursuit of a diplomatic solution

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<sup>21</sup> "United Nations Security Council Condemns Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Missile Launches", July 15, 2006 <<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/prs/69022.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup> "North Korea claims nuclear test", October 9, 2006 <<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/10/08/korea.nuclear.test>> (October 09, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Peter Slevin and Glenn Kessler, "Bush Emphasizes Diplomacy toward North Korea", *Washington Post*, October 18, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> President Bush first declared that the United States "had no intention to invade the North" during his February 2002 visit to the ROK. Numerous statements from the White House have reiterated this pledge, and other administration spokesmen have asserted either that the United States "had no intention to attack" or "no intention to invade or attack."

only would be possible in a multilateral setting. Under such circumstances North Korea believes that it has no other way except to raise the ante in order to force the United States to negotiate according to its own terms. It may be logical from North Korea's perspective, but it is highly doubtful whether this provocative strategy will achieve the wished for results.

The nuclear test may also be a reflection of the domestic power struggle in North Korea. The test seems to indicate that the military and the hardliners in North Korean leadership now have the upper hand. After the death of the supreme leader Kim Il-Sung, his son Kim Jong-Il assumed power in North Korea. However, the new leader did not enjoy the same authority as his predecessor and had to ascertain his control over the various fractions of the regime. This was accomplished by a restructuring campaign and the removal and replacement of some elements more dangerous to the regime in order to open up for a new generation of leaders loyal to Kim Jong-Il. Concurrently, power was transferred from the Korean Workers' Party and placed in the hands of the military, for example by letting the National Defense Commission replace the Politburo as North Korea's supreme national decision-making body. The survival of Kim Jong-Il's regime has thus become increasingly dependent on the Korean People's Army (KPA), which is illustrated by the applied *songun*<sup>25</sup> (military first) policy.<sup>26</sup>

In February 2005, North Korea held a major conference in Pyongyang to reinforce the *songun* policy, which well reflects the increasing power and influence of the KPA.<sup>27</sup> Kim Jong-Il acquired nuclear weapons to deter a possible U.S. attack, invasion or regime change. In this regard, he is, not surprisingly, backed by the military, which certainly does not want to face defeat or destruction at the hands of the U.S.—especially after witnessing the "shock and awe" of the Iraq war. Possession of nuclear weapons therefore keeps Kim and the military in power. Consequently, the KPA seems to hold an important key to resolving the ongoing nuclear dispute with the United States.

In addition, North Korea may have thought that it was a good time to

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<sup>25</sup> To have a better understanding of the North Korean domestic situation, see Ken E. Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point*, September 9, 2006 <<http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>>; Ingolf Kiesow, *Perspectives on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs*, Defense Analysis SE-172 90 Stockholm; Andrew Scobell, *North Korea's Strategic Intentions*, July 2005, <<http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi>>.

<sup>26</sup> Ken E. Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point*, September 9, 2006 <<http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>>.

<sup>27</sup> Yoel Sano, "Military holds the key", February 2005, <<http://www.atimes.com>>.

conduct such a test. From Pyongyang's perspective, some important developments in the current global and regional security situation may well protect them from any kind of harsh international response. As Michael J. Green, an expert at the CSIS notes,

"[t]hey [the North Koreans] see the international society has its hands full with Iraq and Iran. They recognize that they're at the apex of South Korean softness towards the north. The next election in about a year will probably lead to a more conservative South Korean government. They calculate that China is not going to let them collapse."<sup>28</sup>

The time of the nuclear test also coincided with Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's first visit to China and South Korea. Kim Jong-Il's decision to test a nuclear device on October 9 may well have been timed to disrupt these two landmark summits between Abe and his counterparts in Beijing and Seoul. Yet in the short term, Pyongyang's provocation may have actually served to bring the three countries much closer, giving them something they could all agree upon: the need to deal with a nuclear North Korea. It is also possible that North Korea had chosen this date to celebrate the anniversary of the ruling Korean Worker's Party, which was founded on October 10, or to celebrate Kim Jong-Il becoming the secretary of the Worker's Party on October 8. No matter what North Korea's calculations were concerning the date of such a nuclear test, the most important thing is that this test turned North Korea into the world's ninth nuclear country, which will have a great long-term influence on regional and global security.

## **2. Main Factors Leading to the North Korean Nuclear Test**

The North Korean nuclear test obviously marks a failure in the world's decade long efforts to control North Korea's nuclear program. However, the current situation is, to a certain extent, an inevitable development of factors that have been at the root of the North Korean crisis for a long time and which have not seriously been addressed. Without a proper solution to these problems, the North Korean nuclear crisis will not come to a conclusion.

The North Korean nuclear crisis has historical roots that are further complicated by realist perceptions of world politics and is thus in need of an objective and rational analysis. It is not only a regional security issue, but also has a great impact on the global counter proliferation regime. It is not

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<sup>28</sup> As cited in: Elaine Shannon, "Crafting a Collective Response", *Time*, October 9, 2006 <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1544387,00.html>> (October 9, 2006).



only closely related to the "Cold War" legacy, but is also affected by the domestic politics of both the U.S. and North Korea. Some of the main factors that caused the nuclear crisis and led to the recent nuclear test are as follows:

### *Legacy of the Cold War*

Although the Cold War ended more than a decade ago, it never really ended on the Korean peninsula, nor in Northeast Asia. The North and South are still technically in a state of war. The Armistice Agreement has yet to be replaced by a permanent settlement. A change to the suspended state of war on the Korean peninsula is long overdue. Given the fact that the Cold War has in effect ended between China and the United States, China and the ROK, China and Japan, and the ROK and Japan, with the establishment of diplomatic relations, and even when relations between the North and South are improving to some extent because of the South's "Sunshine Policy"<sup>29</sup>, the missing element in ending the Cold War is the establishment of relations between the United States and the DPRK. That is the reason why North Korea repeatedly demands a normalization of relations with the U.S., although it has not yet received a positive response from the U.S. The main reason is that the U.S. has a larger strategic interest in maintaining the status quo. The basis for the U.S. military presence in the western Pacific has been, and will continue to be, preserving strong bilateral relations with key friends and allies, especially Japan and South Korea. The North Korean nuclear issue provides a very good excuse for the U.S. to maintain its military alliances in East Asia, which is considered a prerequisite for the continued U.S. leadership in this region. Besides, the developments on the Korean peninsula coincide with other significant developments in Northeast Asia, such as the rise of China and the shift of strategic balance. Therefore, the United States has realized that for it to continue to be a dominant power in Western Pacific for the decades to come, it must develop a larger strategy that goes beyond the Korean peninsula.

However, North Korea can hardly leave the Cold War behind unless it is recognized by the United States. The situation of North Korea is best

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<sup>29</sup> This policy was first proposed by former South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and calls for greater engagement with North Korea. For more information about "the Sunshine Policy", see Chung In Moon, "Understanding the DJ Doctrine: The Sunshine Policy and the Korea Peninsula", in *Kim Dae Jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges*, eds. Chung In Moon and David I. Steinberg (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999), 35-56.

described by Gavan McCormack:

"No country faces such a raft of unresolved problems from history. North Korea is a fossilized encapsulation of the 20th century: the legacies of colonialism, imperialist interventions, externally imposed division of the country, and incorporation in the Cold War, all remain unsolved. ...Nothing so serves to justify and sustain the continued harsh regime of dictatorship as the confrontation with huge, hostile, external adversaries."<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the current crisis can be seen as "the latest manifestation of the instability and danger emanating from the unresolved Korean War"<sup>31</sup>. The nuclear as well as non-nuclear military threats posed by North Korea are thus only one part of the more fundamental problem constituted by the insecurity stemming from the unresolved state of war. Consequently, negotiations that focus solely on North Korea's nuclear weapons program will, at best, produce positive results in the short time perspective. However, for agreements to be sustainable, it will need to acknowledge a wider range of issues.

#### *The Tilting Balance of Power on the Korean Peninsula*

Since the end of the Cold War, the balance of power has changed greatly on the Korean peninsula, which is putting North Korea in an increasingly disadvantaged position. Strategically, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea lost much of its external security assurance, while the South still enjoys the security assurance from the United States. The North's strategic situation has been further worsened by the normalization of relations and rapidly improved economic cooperation between China and South Korea. Economically, the South has enjoyed great successes while the North, due to its rigid economic system and great natural disasters, is facing unprecedented economic difficulties. Politically, the South has become a confident international player while the North has been further isolated from the international community.

More importantly, the military balance is also changing in favor of South Korea. Although North Korea spends 25-33 percent of its GDP on military expenditure, compared to only 3 percent in South Korea,<sup>32</sup> and has much

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<sup>30</sup> "Making Sense of the Korean Crisis", an interview with Gavan McCormack by Stephen Shalom, February 15, 2004,

<[http://www.zmag.org/content/print\\_article.cfm?itemID=4992&sectionID=1](http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=4992&sectionID=1)>.

<sup>31</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *A Comprehensive Resolution of the Korean War*, Special Report 106, May 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Ingolf Kiesow, *Perspectives on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs*, 36.

larger armed forces than its southern neighbor, in an era of Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), numbers count less. This became obvious during the first Gulf War, when U.S. forces were able to discover and hit Iraqi targets from their much more modern and sophisticated weapon systems before the Iraqis even realized that they were under attack. Even if they did realize it, they could not shoot back since they do not have the necessary surveillance and long-range attack capability.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, South Korea now has much more modernized armed forces than North Korea. Although the number of tanks at the disposal of North Korea's army is one and a half times as many as those of South Korea, most of the North Korean tanks are outdated and some are possibly not even functioning any more. The dire state of North Korea's economy has made impossible any purchases of new weaponry or upgrades of its outdated equipment. It has also proved difficult for Pyongyang to produce its own weapons except the research and production of certain missiles.<sup>34</sup> If taking the U.S. military presence in South Korea into consideration, the South's superiority in conventional military capability is even more apparent. This "disappearance of 'conventional balance' on the Korean peninsula"<sup>35</sup> is an important factor that made North Korea choose the dangerous path of developing nuclear weapons.

#### *North Korea's Nuclear Calculation*

During the first years after the Korean War, North Korea made impressive economic achievements with an annual growth rate at 30 percent in 1954-1956.<sup>36</sup> And though economic growth slowed down, North Korea still maintained a 7.5 percent growth rate throughout the 1970s. In the 1980s, however, North Korea's economic development started to decline and its economy reached a state of near-collapse in mid-1990s by a combination of circumstances, some of them self-inflicted, others beyond its control. Blocked by the U.S. and Japan from participation in such multinational institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, denied diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan, and subject to strong economic sanctions, North Korea is caught on the horns of a dilemma of desiring to engage much more comprehensively with the global economy

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 19.

while fearing that such engagement might undermine its political and security system.<sup>37</sup> In 2002, North Korea did introduce some potentially important measures of economic reform, such as the multifold increases in the price of food grains, fuel, electricity, transportation, rents and wages; the official legalization of farmers' markets; the granting of some price-setting autonomy to consumption-goods factories; and the development of two special Economic Zones (Kaesong just north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and Sinuiju, near the border with China).<sup>38</sup> However, it is hard to predict whether Kim Jong-Il will be able to move the process of reform forward or if he will return to his old policies. In fact, according to Ingolf Kiesow's observation, for the time being, the reforms

"...are obviously (temporarily?) reversed and at the Party congress in March 2004 only the mentioning of a need for more export industry looked like a reference to economic reforms. This may only be a result of the increased pressure from USA and may turn into more liberalizations, when the pressure is eased, but for the time being, North Korea seems to prepare itself for withstanding some further isolation, this time not a self-imposed one and possibly a temporary one."<sup>39</sup>

Upon taking power after his father's death in 1994, Kim Jong-Il first toned down the cult of personality and the ideology of "*Juche*" (self-sufficiency) but later reintroduced both policies with the addition of the "military-first policy". This not only reflected Kim Jong-Il's reliance on the military for regime control, but also exposed North Korea's urgent sense of insecurity. The toppling of the Iraqi government by the US forces in 2003 made Pyongyang feel greatly threatened. North Korea feared that it will be the next target of the United States. So it concluded that its only hope for survival was to possess what Saddam Hussein had not.<sup>40</sup> "Without nuclear weapons North Korea was a poor and insignificant country; with them, perhaps only with them, it might not only deter American attack but actually induce it to enter negotiations on long-standing grievances."<sup>41</sup> For any medium or small sized country it has become a hopeless task to use conventional weapons to deter the U.S. from an attack. A poor nation is tempted to draw the conclusion that nuclear weapons are the only possibly

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<sup>37</sup> "Making Sense of the Korean Crisis", an interview of Gavan McCormack by Stephen Shalom.

<sup>38</sup> Ingolf Kiesow, "A Perspective from Pyongyang through Foreign Glasses", in *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia*, ed. Niklas Swanström (Uppsala & Washington: CACI & SRSP, 2005), 188.

<sup>39</sup> Ingolf Kiesow, "Perspectives on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs", 22.

<sup>40</sup> "Making Sense of the Korean Crisis", an interview of Gavan McCormack by Stephen Shalom.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

affordable means available to deter the U.S. – and a leaked version of the Bush administration's January 2002 classified Nuclear Posture Review lists North Korea as a country against which the United States should be prepared to use nuclear weapons.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Pyongyang wants to use the nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip for national security assurances and regime recognition from the U.S. Rather than preparing for war, the North Korean regime's main aim is to use the threat of nuclear weapons to pressure the U.S. into 'talks' (negotiations) on a non-aggression agreement formally concluding the Korean War and recognizing North Korea's right to exist. North Korea's real motive is recognized by former U.S. President Carter, who in 2003 said that "they are using these fiery and public statements [about preparing for war] in order to accomplish their long-standing goal of negotiating a permanent and positive relationship with the U.S."<sup>43</sup>

#### *U.S. Hardening North Korea Policy*

The U.S. hard-line policy toward North Korea is perhaps one of the most fundamental factors that led to the current North Korean nuclear crisis. Under pressure from a deep internal crisis, North Korea has, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, desperately sought to break out of its extreme isolation. Using its capability to develop nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip, North Korea has attempted to open up economic relations with its neighbors and the rest of the world and at the same time negotiate a 'non-aggression pact' with the U.S. However, it seems that the U.S. has never taken the DPRK's demands seriously. Although during the Clinton Administration there were signs of détente between the two countries and an Agreed Framework was reached through negotiations, the commitments contained in the document were not fulfilled to a large extent by either side. North Korea was in the depths of economic crisis and famine so severe that Washington believed the regime might not survive and therefore the U.S. did not need to go ahead.<sup>44</sup> As the Republicans gained control of the Congress, who had opposed the deal from the start, they were reluctant to continue the implementation of the Agreed Framework and criticized the

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Kerr, "North Korea Quits NPT, Says It Will Restart Nuclear Facilities", Jan/Feb 2003, <[http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003\\_01-02/nkorea\\_janfeb03.asp](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003_01-02/nkorea_janfeb03.asp) >.

<sup>43</sup> Lynn Walsh, "The Korean Crisis", February 8, 2003, <<http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2003/02/08korea.html>>.

<sup>44</sup> "Making Sense of the Korean Crisis", an interview of Gavan McCormack by Stephen Shalom.

document as a result of misguided Democratic appeasement. It was not until the launch of the Taepodong missile by North Korea in 1998 that the U.S. felt a sense of urgency regarding the North Korean problem. In 2000, the U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and North Korea's Marshall Jo Myong Rok exchanged visits, and the two countries came close to normalization of relations and fulfillment of the commitments in the 1994 Agreed Framework.

However, the advent of the Bush Administration rolled back all the efforts of the Clinton Administration. Since his inauguration, U.S. President George W. Bush has abandoned the policy of engagement and begun to take a more hard-line policy toward North Korea, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The neo-conservative group within the Bush administration thinks that the North Korean regime is "evil" and that its people should be liberated. Whereas political, economic and historical differences can be negotiated, the line of reasoning within the current administration seems to be that evil only can be stamped out.<sup>45</sup> Just as the U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney once stated: "I have been charged by the President with making sure that none of the tyrannies in the world are negotiated with. We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it."<sup>46</sup> Bush himself has also clearly expressed his loathing for the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. Besides, considering that North Korea cheated during the first nuclear crisis, the Bush Administration does not want to repeat the mistakes of its predecessors and is therefore reluctant to accept the "aid for nukes" approach of the mid-1990s and insists on a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear weapons as the solution to the nuclear crisis. The administration further insists that the U.S. should not reward the blackmail of North Korea, and that North Korea had to dismantle its nuclear program completely before being provided any compensation in return. Just as Aidan Foster-Carter said:

"This time round, nothing less than full and verified nuclear disarmament will satisfy the U.S., plus probably a package deal covering Pyongyang's long list of other threats—chemical and biological warfare and the danger presented by its one

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<sup>45</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion on the neo-conservative fundamentalism of the Bush Administration, see G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-conservative Moment", *Survival* 46, 1 (Spring 2004): 7-22; Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine", *Political Science Quarterly*, 118, 3 (Fall 2003): 365-388; Roland Bleiker, "A Rogue is a Rogue is a Rogue: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Korean Nuclear Crisis", *International Affairs* 79, 4 (2003): 719-37.

<sup>46</sup> Fred Kaplan, "It's Time to Talk to Pyongyang", June 26, 2006, <<http://www.slate.com/id/2144507>>.

million-strong army."<sup>47</sup>

But at the same time the Bush administration has repeatedly emphasized its preference for a multilateral peaceful solution to the North Korea nuclear problem. In fact, Bush's North Korea policy reflects a division between different branches within the U.S. government. While the neoconservatives around Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld want an ultimatum, backed by the readiness to use force, and the president himself is disinclined to compromise, the State Department favors negotiation and cooperation with other regional powers.<sup>48</sup> The current U.S. North Korea policy seems to be a compromise between these two policy lines. Although Defense Secretary Rumsfeld reiterated the ability of the U.S. forces to engage concurrently in two major wars, it is obvious that the Iraqi war has drawn U.S. attention and resources away from the Korean nuclear crisis. Moreover, Washington seems to have become more aware of the dangerous problems involved with an eventual use of force against North Korea.

The series of crises reflects a historical trend: the Korean peninsula should not remain in a Cold War security situation any longer. Above all, a resolution of the problem will depend on seeing it, not in the narrow frame of a North Korean threat, but in a broad context of the Cold War and post-Cold War strategic situation. The North Korea nuclear issue is essentially a Korean problem but has a great impact on Northeast Asian security. It is time for the U.S. to go beyond the Cold War mentality since there will not be any real solution to the crisis as long as the Cold War continues on the Korean peninsula.

### 3. The Implications of the North Korean Nuclear Test

#### *A Blow to the Global Non-Proliferation Regime*

Although the power of the North Korean nuclear explosion, according to some U.S., French and South Korean experts, was equivalent to about 500 metric tons of TNT, which is unusually small for a nuclear blast, and despite the fact that Pyongyang's ability to "weaponize" its nuclear

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<sup>47</sup> Aidan Foster-Carter, "What is North Korea's Game?", <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2621349.stm>> (September 23, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> "Making Sense of the Korean Crisis", an interview of Gavan McCormack by Stephen Shalom.

materials—to place a bomb on a missile for delivery—is still uncertain, the test has important short- and long-term implications for global and regional security. One of the most serious consequences of the North Korean nuclear test is that it has meant a severe blow to the global non-proliferation regime. If North Korea can get away with its possession of nuclear weapons, it will give a virtual green light to Iran, which is now watching closely the international response to the North Korean nuclear test. In general, Iran is considered a more significant threat to U.S. interests and allies than is North Korea. After North Korea's nuclear test, Tehran seems to have become tougher in continuing its own uranium enrichment program. One day after the North Korean nuclear test, Iranian President Ahmadinejad affirmed that Iran will continue its nuclear program and "the Iranian nation will continue its path of dignity based on resistance, wisdom and without fear".<sup>49</sup> The head of the UN nuclear agency ElBaradei warned recently that besides Iran as many as 30 countries could soon have technology that would let them produce atomic weapons "in a very short time", joining the nine states have or are suspected to have such arms.<sup>50</sup>

Besides, the US is very much concerned about the possibility of nuclear proliferation by North Korea. It was just this fear of proliferation that prompted President Bush to declare in 2003 that the United States would never "tolerate" a nuclear-armed North Korea.<sup>51</sup> In fact, since September 2001, the nexus of proliferation of WMD and terrorism has been deemed one of the greatest threats to U.S. security. And President Bush has repeatedly made it very clear that the priority concern for the United States is proliferation. That is why the Bush Administration put forward the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)<sup>52</sup> in May 2003. The U.S. regards North Korea as one of the seven state sponsors of terrorism and many within the Bush Administration fear that North Korea will proliferate

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<sup>49</sup> "Iran vows to continue nuclear program", October 10, 2006, <<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/10/10/iran.nuclear.ap/index.html>> (October 10, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> "Nuclear chief: More nations 'hedging their bets'", October 17, 2006<<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/10/16/nuclear.proliferation.ap/index.html>> (October 17, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Rohit Pattnaik, "The Impact of North Korea's Nuclear Test", October 10, 2006 <<http://www.idsa.in/publications/stratcomments/RohitPattnaik101006Next.htm>> (October 10, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> The PSI allows the U.S. and other participants in the initiative to search planes and ships carrying suspect cargo and size illegal weapons or missile technologies. The PSI is a response to the growing challenge posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials worldwide.



nuclear technology. By implementing the PSI, the U.S. wants to ensure that nothing related to nuclear weapons capability or proliferation could enter or leave the North.

The self-contradictory policy of the United States toward non-proliferation also bears some blame for the current situation. The NPT, which was signed in 1968, was a deal by which countries without nuclear weapons pledged not to take steps to get them, while those with weapons pledged not to threaten the non-possessors and to take steps to eliminate their existing arsenals and move toward a comprehensive nuclear disarmament. However, in recent years, the U.S. has been talking about conducting new nuclear tests and developing tactical nuclear weapons that can be used in the battlefield. The U.S. also acquiesced to India, Pakistan and Israel's development of nuclear weapons and even proposed nuclear technology cooperation with India. Under such circumstances, the U.S.' insistence on others fulfilling their obligations tends to be regarded as double standards. Besides, after being labeled as one of the states within an "axis of evil" by President Bush after the Iraqi war, North Korea thinks that it can only maintain its security by developing nuclear weapons because it cannot match the conventional military capability of the United States. The nuclear weapon is the only trump card in its hand.

#### *A Catalyst for an Arms Race in Northeast Asia*

There has long been a concern that a nuclear North Korea will unleash a regional arms race in Northeast Asia, which is an area that is already troubled by a lot of potential conflicts. And this scenario is what worries China, and possibly also the U.S., the most. That is why, immediately following the nuclear test by North Korea, President Bush emphasized the U.S.' commitment to its allies in the region, including South Korea and Japan, and stressed that the United States will meet the full range of its deterrent and security obligations.<sup>53</sup> On her trip to Japan on October 18 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice echoed President Bush by saying that "the United States has the will and the capability to meet the full range of its deterrent and security commitments to Japan".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "President Bush's Statement on North Korea's Nuclear Test", October 9, 2006  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061009.html>> (October 9, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> "Rice Vows 'Full Range' Defense of Japan",  
<<http://www.abc7dc.com/news/stories/1006/369926.html>> (October 18, 2006).

Japan is very much concerned about its security after the North Korean nuclear test because it feels directly threatened. In the short term, however, Japan is still unlikely to go nuclear. On the one hand, it still has the credible "nuclear umbrella" of the U.S. On the other hand, the public opinion in Japan is still strongly opposed to the idea of going nuclear, due to Japan's historical experience as a target of nuclear attacks. The prospect of a nuclear Japan might also meet strong opposition from many other East Asian countries, where memories still linger on from Japan's wartime aggression. In the long term, it is still unclear what effects North Korea's nuclear test will have on Japan's policy or public opinion. In 1998, after the North fired a Taepodong-1 missile over Japan, public opinion shifted dramatically in favor of building a stronger defense. In the following years, Japan began building weapons that just a decade earlier would have been unthinkable, such as a troop transport ship that could serve as a small aircraft carrier, as well as aerial tankers that would allow Japanese fighter jets to reach North Korea.<sup>55</sup>

But the nuclear test will certainly rally public opinion around Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his calls for Japan to move in a more self-assertive and hawkish direction. In particular, the test will increase Abe's chances of winning support to revise Japan's so-called pacifist constitution to allow the possession of full-fledged armed forces. Just as Yasunori Sone, a professor at Keio University in Tokyo said:

"The nuclear test may prove to be an even bigger shock to public opinion than the missile. ...It won't make Japan build nuclear weapons. But it could turn into 'a wind from the North' that gives Mr. Abe and his policies a big lift".<sup>56</sup>

The North Korean nuclear test can also push Japan to speed up its cooperation with the United States in developing the ballistic missile defense system. After the July 4 missile tests by North Korea, Japan and the United States agreed to deploy Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) interceptor missiles on American bases in Japan for the first time. The PAC-3 is designed to intercept ballistic missiles, cruise missiles or aircrafts. It is an important part of the missile defense system and aimed at complementing the Standard Missile-3 installed on vessels equipped with the Aegis radar system capable of tracking missile launches. The U.S. has

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Fackler, "Explosion likely to bolster new Japanese leader's assertive policies", *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Fackler, "Explosion raises pressure on Japan's pacifism", *International Herald Tribune*, October 9, 2006.

also moved up its planned test of the X-Band missile-detecting radar system, which had been transferred from a U.S. base in Japan to the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force's Shariki base at Tsugaru, some 360 miles northeast of Tokyo.<sup>57</sup> Recently, it was reported that the U.S. also is considering deploying the advanced Patriot missile defense system around Yokota Air Base in Tokyo's western suburbs and around Yokosuka Naval Base, south of the capital.<sup>58</sup> Taken together, this means that the U.S.-Japan military alliance is being strengthened as a result of the North Korean missile and nuclear tests.

The same can be said about the U.S.-South Korea alliance, which has seen many frictions in the past few years. But North Korea's nuclear test will serve to solidify the alliance since South Korea has to enhance its conventional military capability and strengthen the cooperation with the U.S. to ensure its safety. Since 2004, the U.S. has been making readjustments to its force posture in South Korea, with troop reductions and base relocations. But the U.S. emphasized that the adjustments will not weaken the U.S.' security commitment to South Korea and it will spend 11 billion dollars by 2006 to equip its forces in South Korea with sophisticated weapons, including high-speed vessels, AH-64D attack helicopters and Stryker armored vehicles as well as two Patriot missile batteries. On October 20, 2006, the 38<sup>th</sup> ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting was held in Washington. During the meeting, both the U.S. and the ROK expressed their concern about the North Korean nuclear test and concurred that the ROK-U.S. alliance remains vital to the future interests of the two nations. In addition, a solid combined defense posture should be maintained in order to secure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Although the U.S. agreed to complete the transition of wartime operational control to the ROK after October 15, 2009, it offered an assurance that "the transition to a new command structure will be carried out while maintaining and enhancing deterrence on the Korean peninsula and ROK-U.S. combined defense capabilities".<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Associated Press, "U.S., Japan agree to Patriots on U.S. bases-Plan for missile deployment comes as N. Korea apparently preps test", June 26, 2006, <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13546585>>.

<sup>58</sup> "U.S. Mulls Defenses for Tokyo (PAC-3)", *Associated Press*, October 28, 2006.

<sup>59</sup> "The 38<sup>th</sup> Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué", October 20, 2006, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2006/d20061020ouskorea.pdf>>.

*Further Coordination among China, U.S., Japan and South Korea*

The nuclear test may facilitate the cooperation and collaboration between the related parties of the North Korean nuclear issue. In fact, the North Korean nuclear test may actually be a boost to the U.S.' long frustrated efforts to achieve consensus on how to deal with Pyongyang. Just as John Pike, a weapons expert with Globalsecurity.org has put it,

"Now that there is no such ambiguity [as to whether North Korea is a nuclear state or not], it should make it easier to bring China and South Korea into alignment with the U.S. and Japan and coordinate a strategy to contain the regime".<sup>60</sup>

The statements issued in both Beijing and Seoul after the Sino-Japanese and Japan-South Korea summit on October 8 and October 9, 2006 give the impression that the three countries are coming closer by adjusting their stands on the North Korean issue. Just one day before the nuclear test, Japanese Prime Minister Abe told reporters after his meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao that he and President Hu agreed that a North Korean nuclear test would be unacceptable. Abe said: "we need to prevent a nuclear North Korea, we saw eye-to-eye that North Korea's announcement of a nuclear test cannot be tolerated because it is a great threat to East Asia and the international community."<sup>61</sup> The two leaders also urged North Korea to rejoin the six-party talks which have been suspended for almost a year. Malcolm Cook, program director for Asia and the Pacific at the Lowy Institute of International Studies in Sydney says: "A nuclear test brings China and Japan closer together tactically. I don't think too much else would do that."<sup>62</sup>

South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun and Prime Minister Abe also put aside their differences on history and territorial issues and focused their talks on the nuclear test. At the press conference after his talks with Abe, Roh Moo-Hyun said:

"Now there is no difference between me and Prime Minister Abe. We agreed that a North Korean nuclear test is an unpardonable act, and that we should take a cool-headed, strategic response coordinated with the United Nations and related countries."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Elaine Shannon, "Crafting a Collective Response", *Time*, October 9, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Kahn, "China and Japan take steps to mend fences", *International Herald Tribune*, October 9, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Bryan Walsh, "A Boost for Diplomacy in Asia?", *Time*, October 9, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "Seoul joins Tokyo in bid to get tough with North", *International Herald Tribune*, October 9, 2006.

And he indicated that South Korea may reconsider its "sunshine policy" toward North Korea by saying that

"Now it has become difficult for us to stick to our policy of engagement with [the] North. We find it difficult to argue that such a policy is effective. South Korea has considerably lost ground in insisting on dialogue with North Korea while the international community is calling for a tougher approach with sanctions and pressure."<sup>64</sup>

But there may still be limits to how much unanimity that can be achieved in regard to North Korea. Cooperation and coordination may be possible at a tactical level. However, at the strategic level differences remain. As angry and concerned as they may be about the test, Beijing and Seoul will likely remain more worried about the possible collapse of the regime in Pyongyang and the subsequent chaos in the border areas than about the nuclear program itself. Overall, China and South Korea's objective is to seek a compromise between the United States and North Korea. Both countries want to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arsenal in exchange for external economic assistance and integration into the regional economy. On the other hand, Beijing and Seoul constantly demand Washington to adopt a more flexible negotiating stance toward the North. China and South Korea are eager to bring about a peaceful solution of the nuclear crisis, as stability on the Korean peninsula is in the interests of both Beijing and Seoul. For Beijing, its greatest interest lies in the maintenance of a peaceful surrounding to not upset its internal economic development, while for Seoul, the priority is to ensure a gradual reunification between the two Koreas. So although Beijing and Seoul support UN sanctions against North Korea, they probably would not back overly punitive sanctions, like a complete stop in trade with, and aid shipments to, North Korea. There are also no signs that South Korea will suspend the activities of the 15 South Korean companies in the Kaesong special economic zone and the joint tourism program in North Korea's Diamond Mountain, which have become symbols of the South's engagement policy. Both China and South Korea do not want to squeeze Pyongyang to the point of collapse, since this would have even more severe consequences than the nuclear test itself.

On October 15, the UN Security Council passed resolution No. 1718 unanimously. The resolution falls under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, and grants the Security Council the authority to impose a range of measures, such as the breaking of diplomatic ties and the imposing of economic

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

sanctions. The key provisions of the resolution include, but are not limited to: 1) a ban on the supply, sale or transfer to the DPRK of weapons of mass destruction and related goods, high-end military equipment, and luxury goods; 2) a ban on travel by North Korean officials involved in North Korea's WMD or ballistic missile programs; 3) a decision to freeze funds or other financial assets on the Member States territory that are owned or controlled by persons engaged in North Korea's nuclear- WMD- or ballistic missile-related programs; 4) a call upon Member States to take cooperative action, in compliance with domestic and international law, including inspection of cargo to and from the DPRK to make sure that the prohibited goods are not transferred.<sup>65</sup> In fact, even before the UN resolution was passed, Japan had already announced new sanctions of its own, cutting all imports from North Korea (mushrooms, coal and shellfish) and prohibiting North Korean vessels from docking at its ports.

However, it remains to be seen what effects these sanctions will have on North Korea and whether there are differences among the parties of the six-party talks as to how to implement the resolution. China, Russia and South Korea want to ensure that any UN response advances, rather than retards, a plausible scenario for resolving the crisis. The best result they are expecting is for North Korea to return to the negotiating table. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia "condemns this [nuclear test], but we must not break off the process of talks."<sup>66</sup> China, while approving the sanctions on North Korea added that such sanctions have to be "appropriate" and "prudent". It also insists that the only way to resolve this issue is to get all the parties back to the negotiating table. In a word, consensus among these four countries regarding their basic approach to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue is essential in order to prevent Pyongyang from playing one government off against the other. Consensus is also a prerequisite to enable these four countries to work together to pursue their common goals.<sup>67</sup> Yet not all parties will agree on hard-line policy. China and South Korea, in particular, are not willing to take a tough stance against Pyongyang and stress the importance of finding a diplomatic solution to this problem.

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<sup>65</sup> The UN Security Council resolution S/RES/1718 is available at : <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/No6/572/07/PDF/No657207.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>66</sup> Tony Karon, "Trying to Put the Squeeze on North Korea", *Time*, Oct 11, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999), 149-150.

### *Prospect for the Six-Party Talks*

After the nuclear test, the participating countries in the six-party talks except North Korea all called for an early resumption of the six-party talks, which until now have served as one of the most important conflict prevention measures in the solution of the North Korean nuclear issue. At present, the six-party talks still provide the most useful and appropriate framework for achieving a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

First, the military option is out of the question. Even President Bush has repeated his commitment to a diplomatic solution after the North Korean nuclear test. A military strike on North Korea would most likely lead to a counterattack on South Korea or Japan, which would result in millions of casualties. In addition, it would technically be extremely difficult to locate and target nuclear facilities and weapons. It also seems highly unlikely that President Bush would want another war on the Korean peninsula at a time when the United States is already deeply involved in the war in Iraq.

Some neoconservatives in the United States may favor the strategy of regime change. However, it would only make North Korea even more desperate and push it to produce more nuclear weapons instead of dismantling them. The North Koreans are very proud and "face-loving" and will not back down due to external pressures. "Whenever any country or institution has made a threat against it, Pyongyang has always retaliated with still more hawkish rhetoric."<sup>68</sup> Besides, from the perspective of North Korea, it has nothing to negotiate about except its nuclear weapons. So it had to "manufacture" a bargaining chip to elevate its status in negotiations.

Therefore, the only viable option left is to seek a diplomatic solution under a multilateral framework. At present, the most urgent task is to revive the six-party talks as soon as possible. Scott Snyder and Ralph Cossa have pointed out that:

"Despite the limitations and despite the Bush administration's judgment that North Korea is highly unlikely to negotiate away its nuclear weapons program, the six-party framework may still have an important role to play as a mechanism for crisis management, in addition to being a vehicle for multi-party negotiations. From this perspective, there is little concern that 'failed diplomacy' or even extended periods of inactivity will result in the demise of the six-party process; as long as the framework continues to exist, the North Korean nuclear crisis remains 'under control'....the

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<sup>68</sup> Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea", *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2005): 43.

current framework can manage the problem until conditions are more propitious for serious negotiation."<sup>69</sup>

Soon after the North Korean nuclear test, China sent a high-level delegation led by State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan to Pyongyang on October 18. Tang Jiaxuan met with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and delivered a message from Chinese President Hu Jintao.<sup>70</sup> On October 31, North Korea announced that it would return to the six-party talks. North Korea may think that with the nuclear test, it has already entered into the world nuclear club and become a full-fledged member, which would grant it a strengthened position in the negotiations. Therefore, a nuclear North Korea will perhaps be more confident and much harder to persuade to make concessions at the negotiation table, unless the U.S. first meets its basic demands, such as the lifting of financial sanctions. In a statement, North Korea declared that it "decided to return to the six-party talks on the premise that the issue of lifting financial sanctions will be discussed and settled between the DPRK and the U.S."<sup>71</sup> So the sanctions issue may become a core issue for the forthcoming six-party talks. There are also many other problems over which the talks may founder. The first matter is the UN Security Council sanctions that were imposed on North Korea after the nuclear test. Second, at this stage Washington and Pyongyang are still at odds on whether North Korea really is a nuclear power. After a recent meeting in Beijing, the chief U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill said that North Korea's test did not give it membership in the nuclear club and the U.S. would not negotiate on that basis.<sup>72</sup> Third, there is a big question of what Pyongyang will ask Washington to do in return for giving up its nuclear program. Having proved its capability of exploding a nuclear device, Pyongyang may ask for billions of dollars in compensation to give up its nuclear weapons and press for the construction of nuclear reactors to meet its dire energy needs. Under such circumstances, even if the six-party talks are to be resumed, it is probably just a start of a long and difficult process.

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<sup>69</sup> Scott Snyder, Ralph Cossa, and Brad Glosserman, "Wither the Six-Party Talks?"

<sup>70</sup> 中华人民共和国外交部网站: "金正日会见唐家璇" [Website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Kim Jong-Il met with Tang Jiaxuan", October 19, 2006]

<sup>71</sup> Donald Kirk, "North Korea: A bomb at the negotiation table", *Asian Times*, November 6, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



#### 4. China's Response to the Nuclear Test

No country has more leverage over North Korea than China does. In the past, North Korea and China were often called "as close as lips and teeth". In addition, China provides approximately 70 percent of Pyongyang's fuel and food import needs.<sup>73</sup> However, even China's influence on North Korea is limited, as shown by the North Korean missile tests in July and the nuclear test in October. North Korea is not a country that can be pushed around by any outside force. Besides, North Korea is a sovereign state, so it will not put the Sino-North Korean relationship above its national interests. Pyongyang will not give up the independent guarantee of national security gained through nuclear tests just because of China's concerns and the possibility of China applying pressure on it.<sup>74</sup>

China is showing more and more frustration over North Korea's provocative actions, especially after the nuclear test. Some experts say that North Korea's determination to proceed with its nuclear program has become a serious diplomatic liability for Beijing. The nuclear test will, according to the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, certainly have a "negative" effect on the bilateral relationship between China and North Korea. China has used the strongest term "brazenly" (*hanran*)<sup>75</sup> to condemn North Korea's nuclear test and said that there has to be some punitive actions. China certainly does not want to see a nuclear North Korea, especially considering that this could result in a potential arms race in Northeast Asia. China is worried that Japan will take this opportunity to revise its constitution so as to gain the right to modernize its military, wage war, or even go nuclear. Such a development would ultimately affect the balance of power in East Asia.

However, China is now facing a dilemma. North Korea's geo-strategic importance require Chinese leaders to take a more comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing Pyongyang's provocations and China has to

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph Kahn, "For China, test comes as diplomatic affront", *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> 沈丁立: "朝鲜核试验和中朝关系及中国的选择", [Shen Dingli, "The North Korean Nuclear Test, Sino-North Korean Relations and China's Choices"] <<http://military.people.com.cn/GB/42967/4789769.html>>, (October 7, 2006)

<sup>75</sup> 新华社, "朝鲜悍然实施核试验 中国政府坚决反对" [The Xinhua News Agency, "The Chinese government firmly opposes the North Korean brazen nuclear test"], <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2006-10/09/content\\_5180207.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2006-10/09/content_5180207.htm)>(October 9, 2006). It should be noted that the Chinese term "hanran" usually is used exclusively for enemies.

tackle the nuclear issue with concern to other important issues on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Therefore, although China is disappointed and will be willing to support stronger sanctions after the North Korean nuclear test, there will not likely be any drastic changes to China's policy. China emphasizes that any response must be "firm, constructive and appropriate".<sup>76</sup> It opposes calls for stringent international sanctions as well as any military action against the North.

It is still a question of finding the right balance. North Korea's test has sharply escalated tensions, but it has not fundamentally changed China's calculation of its national interests. Beijing would like to achieve a denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, but has shown few signs of accepting war or regime change as a plausible way to reach this goal.<sup>77</sup>

The core of the issue, as far as China is concerned, is not nuclear weapons. Rather, it is peace and stability. That is strongly in China's interest. China's Korea policy must be understood in the larger context of its grand strategic goals. Beijing's priorities remain, first and foremost, "to promote internal economic development and construct a well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*). After spending the 1990s advancing this goal, China wants to protect the gains it has made. Therefore, it needs a benign relationship with the world's major powers and a favorable international and regional security environment. China's other strategic priority is to reclaim Taiwan or, at least, prevent Taiwan from becoming formally independent of mainland China.<sup>78</sup>

A conflict on the Korean peninsula or regime change in North Korea could upset both these goals. A war on the Korean peninsula would most likely create a massive wave of refugees into China's northeastern provinces, which could influence stability negatively. Another possible consequence of a military confrontation would be a collapse of the North Korean regime which would present China with tremendous uncertainty. So in the short term, there will not be any dramatic changes in the relationship between China and North Korea.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu

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<sup>76</sup> "中华人民共和国外交部: 外交部发言人刘建超在例行记者会上答记者问, [The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Conference of FM Spokesman Liu Jianchao], October 12, 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Kahn, "For China, test comes as diplomatic affront", *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Shen Dingli, "The North Korean Nuclear Test, Sino-North Korean Relations and China's Choices.

<sup>79</sup> 沈骥如, "中朝关系短期内不会有太大变化", October 10, 2006, [Shen Jiru, "The

Jianchao has made it clear that China's policy for building a friendly Sino-North Korean relationship remains unchanged.<sup>80</sup>

Accompanying these security concerns, however, is China's desire to build positive relations with the United States and Japan. The U.S. preoccupation with Iraq has made it more dependent on China in solving the North Korea nuclear issue. From Washington's perspective, Beijing enjoys great political and economic leverage over Pyongyang and could therefore be a valuable partner. During the past few years, China and the United States have substantially improved their relationship and agreed to enhance cooperation on the North Korean issue. However, although China and the United States share a common set of overarching goals vis-à-vis the Korean peninsula (i.e. both wish to see a stable and non-nuclear North Korea), they have exposed great differences in how to achieve those aims, and under what terms. This is further complicated by the competition of geo-strategic interests between China and the U.S. in Northeast Asia. With the increasing rise of China, the U.S. has come to regard China as its main strategic competitor and a threat to its dominance in the Western Pacific. Facing such a complex geopolitical situation, China must strike a balance between North Korea and the U.S. in handling the North Korean nuclear issue. After the nuclear test, China has, on the one hand, joined the United States and Japan in seeking further sanctions on North Korea, to ensure that cooperation with the Bush Administration is maintained. On the other hand, China wants to see the sanctions carried out in a proper way. Any measures taken should be conducive to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, to peace and stability on the peninsula as well as in Northeast Asia at large.<sup>81</sup> China will firmly oppose to the use of force and calls for a peaceful solution to the problem. China will also try to persuade Pyongyang that returning to the six-party talks unconditionally is in its best interest.<sup>82</sup>

China's policy toward the North Korean nuclear issue will continue to be

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Sino-North Korean relationship will not see major changes in the short term"]

<<http://www.southcn.com/news/international/zhuanti/cxhsy/zx/200610100050>>

<sup>80</sup> "刘建超：发展中朝友好关系的政策没有变化", October 10, 2006, [Liu Jianchao, "The policy of developing a friendly relationship with North Korea will not change"]

<<http://news.sohu.com/20061010/n245719579.shtml>>

<sup>81</sup> 人民网, "外交发言人刘建超主持记者招待会：中朝没有进行任何形式的核合作", [*People's Daily*, The Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao, "China and North Korea have not had any kind of nuclear cooperation"], October 10, 2006.

<sup>82</sup> 金熙德: "核试验不会给朝鲜带来安全和发展", October 9, 2006, [Jin Xide, "The nuclear test will not bring security and development to North Korea"]

<<http://world.people.com.cn/GB/1029/42354/4896618.html>>

guided by three main aims: peace and stability on the Korean peninsula should be preserved; the peninsula should be nuclear-free; and the dispute should be resolved through diplomatic means.<sup>83</sup> These positions form the core of the Chinese approach to the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. Only by implementing these principles, can the common interests of all parties, including the DPRK, be served. The only wise choice for Pyongyang is to give up nuclear weapons and return to the six-party talks. The other parties should continue to work together and seek a political solution to this problem.

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<sup>83</sup> The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Conference of FM Spokesman Liu Jianchao.

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