

An Analysis of North Korean Trends

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I. Political Trends

Unlike most people's prediction, Chairman Kim Jong-Il has successfully consolidated his power base. Kim Jong-Il exercises ultimate power and one-man rule continues to be most typical element of North Korean politics. But, unlike his father, Kim Jong-Il seems much more reliant on the military to maintain the regime. There are so many political slogans, which emphasize the role, importance and contribution of the military in maintaining the regime. The KPA is the most reliable organ functioning today in North Korea.

One of North Korean political slogans is "great nation with strong army." Without strong army or military, North Korea would be able to defend itself from external threats and to realize national objectives. From operational term, North Korea has introduced "army first politics." Army first politics implies that: other sectors should follow the KPA model in realizing national interests; every effort should be made to keep up the strong army; army will get the first priority in allocating valuable resources; and the army is the ultimate organ in deciding the final outcome.

Chairman Kim Jong-Il has promoted many generals to the Central Committee Members and National Defense Commission, chaired by Kim Jong-Il, is the core

¹ Views and ideas contained in this paper are those of the author. They do not necessarily represent ROK government or any agency.

powerhouse in North Korean politics. Most recently, Kim Jong-II has launched several overtures such as new economic management measures, U.S.-North Korean talks over nuclear issues, and Japan-North Korean talks. But no one has delivered what it was believed to do. Such policy failure would undermine Kim Jong-II and his leadership and credibility. But there is no organized anti-government group despite all rising people's discontent with the current leadership.

International isolation continues to deepen. For the past several years, North Korea has been quite active in its external policy. It has established diplomatic relations with many European countries, including Germany and U.K. And it has also improved its relations with China and Russia. But, due to nuclear issues, North Korea's efforts have not brought any concrete result. Thus, unless nuclear issues are resolved, North Korea wouldn't be able to join the international community.

II. Economic/Social Trends

North Korea is experiencing three types of economic crisis: food shortage, energy shortage, and hard currency shortage. Except recent a couple of years, North Korean economy has recorded negative growth rate, average about minus 3.5% per year for ten years.

Table 1. Statistics on North Korean Economy

	GNI (\$100 million)	GNI per Capita (\$10,000)	Growth Rate (%)
1990	232	1,146	- 3.7
1991	229	1,115	- 3.5
1992	211	1,013	- 6.0

1993	205	969	- 4.2
1994	212	992	- 2.1
1995	223	1,034	- 4.1
1996	214	989	- 3.8
1997	177	811	- 6.3
1998	126	811	- 1.1
1999	158	714	6.2
2000	169	757	1.3
2001	157	706	3.7
2002	170	762	1.2

Source: Bank of Korea, *North Korean Economy* (Seoul, 2003)

Due to natural disasters such as flood and drought, outdated irrigation system, loosing topsoil, and lack of seed and fertilizer, North Korea cannot produce food enough to feed their own people.² It is estimated that North Korea's annual production of grain is about 3.5 to 3.8 metric tons. Outside world have been providing food assistance to North Korea average amount is about 1 to 1.5 million metric tons. Without such assistance, North Korea cannot feed its own people. Food rationing system also collapsed. As a way to solve the problem, North Korean authority allows farmer's market. And in July 2002, North Korea has introduced new economic managements measures. But those measures have not produced what they are supposed to produce. Rather they have brought about higher expectation of North Korean people, and, resulted in policy failure. Policy credibility of the current North Korean leadership is severely damaged.

Such economic difficulties and problems cannot be overcome by North Korea itself. It needs external assistance and cooperation. The problem is how to find and

² It is estimated that 6 million metric ton of grain is required per year.

secure external assistance. North Korea cannot attract foreign investment and assistance due to its systemic problems of command economy. In order to get external assistance, it needs to introduce economic reforms, which make North Korean economy compatible with global market economy and undermine the security of the regime, being witnessed in Eastern bloc. Nuclear options might be considered as a means for North Korea to get economic assistance without undermining regime security. In the Beijing talks in other occasions, North Korea demanded for provision of economic aid, in addition to the compensation of the delay of the construction of LWRs in a package form.

Table 2. North Korea's Annual Grain Production

(unit: 10,000 ton)

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
442.7	426.8	388.4	412.5	345.1	369.0	348.9	388.6

Source: Ministry of Unification

Along with economic difficulties, social problems have been revealed. There are so many dislocated people and refugees. The number of North Korean refugees has increased in recent years. To meet such challenges, North Korea has tightened up the border and has strengthened ideological education. However, it seems impossible to stop the flow of information influx and the move of people.

III. Military Trends

Military power is the one and only reliable means North Korea possesses and

manipulates toward outside world. Thus it cannot afford to loose such valuable means. Given the status of North Korean economy, it is not possible for North Korea to extract further resources for conventional force improvement. Despite the initial cost, WMD, including nuclear weapons, is very much appealing as a way to keep its valuable military leverage into the future.

Table 3. Military Balance between South and North Korea

		North Korea	South Korea
Troops	Active	1,082,200	686,000
	Reserve	4,700,000	4,500,000
	Army	950,000	560,000
	Navy	46,000	63,000
	Air Force	86,000	63,000
Army	Tank	4,060	2,250
	Armored Vehicles	2,500	2,360
	Artillery	8,100	5,000
	MLRS	2,500	200
Navy	Surface ship	313	150
	Submarine	92	20
Air Force	Fighter	541	468
	Transport	318	200
	Helicopter	306	300

Source : IISS, *The Military Balance 2002-2003*

In recent days, North Korea has deployed more MLRS and long-range artillery along the DMZ. Along with that, North Korea reconfigured the command and control to enhance central command. The level and amount of training and exercises has been restored to the normal level. Military readiness is maintained well. In a word, North Korea maintains a very high level of military readiness to launch a surprise attack and

presents a very serious threat to the capital area of South Korea.

On WMD aspect, North Korean threats are more ominous. Two nuclear weapons programs, plutonium-based program and HEU program have made the situation on the Korean Peninsula more unstable and serious. Furthermore, if they were unchecked, North Korea would become one of main drivers of nuclear proliferation.

Table 3. North Korea's Nuclear Infrastructure

Name/Location of Facility	Type/Status	IAEA Safeguards
Power Reactor		
Sinpo(Kumho)	2 LWRs, 1,000MWe under construction	Yes
Yongbyon	Gas-graphite, nat. U, 5 MWe; unfrozen operational	No
Yongbyon	Gas-graphite, nat U, 50MWe; Construction halted	No
Taechon	Gas-graphite, nat. U, 200MWe; Construction halted	No
Research Reactors		
IRT, Yongbyon	Pool-type, HEU, 4MW; operating	No
Yongbyon	Critical assembly	No
Pyongyang	Subcritical assembly	No
Reprocessing (Pu Extraction)		
Yongbyon	Partially completed	No
Pyongyang	Soviet-supplied Lab-scale hot cells	No
Uranium Processing		
Pyongsan	Uranium mining; status unknown	N/A
Pakchon	Uranium mining; status unknown	N/A
Pyongsan	Uranium mining; status unknown	N/A
Pakchon	Uranium mining; status unknown	N/A
Yongbyon	Uranium purification facility; yes operating	
Yongbyon	Fuel fabrication facility; operations frozen	Yes

Yongbyon	Pilot-scale fuel-fabrication facility; dismantled according to North Korean officials	N/A
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Source:

[http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/resources/DeadlyArsenals/chapters%20\(pdf\)/14-NoKorea-pdf](http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/resources/DeadlyArsenals/chapters%20(pdf)/14-NoKorea-pdf)

IV. An Analysis of North Korean Strategies

North Korea's goals in nuclear game can be summarized as follow:

- Enhancing political prestige of Kim Jong-il leadership, internally and externally;
- Establishing diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan to weaken external pressure and to overcome international isolation;
- Acquiring economic aid/assistance and access to international financial institutes;
- Maintaining favorable military balance on the Korean Peninsula;
- Weakening the ROK-US alliance; and
- Taking the initiative, or lead, in inter-Korean relations.

For these objectives, the most desirable form, or end-state, of resolution for North Korea is 'Pakistan-style'; that is, being recognized as a nuclear state and at the same time normalizing its relations with the U.S. and Japan, who can provide what North Korea needs to sustain the system. The second option would be to retain nuclear option, but not realized, as far as it can; maintaining form of nuclear ambiguity. The third option is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons programs in exchange for regime security and provision of economic aid/assistance. From North Korean perspective, the third option is the worst and the first is the best, but not feasible. The second option might be the most probable case.

For that purpose, while engaging in dialogue and negotiation, North Korea will continuously demand more, and switch on and off dialogue whenever it feels necessary. North Korea will try to strengthen its bargaining position by using the participation in negotiation itself. And it will try to expand the period of negotiation. For that purpose, it will try to divide up the negotiation process.³ This implies that North Korea might agree on the principles and raise many issues and problems regarding technical things, as we have seen in the case of the follow-up meetings of the AF. Thus, if we were able to agree on the basic directions of the resolution, we would spend long time on negotiating the verification and inspection issues; scope, method, duration, and authority of inspection and verification will be more difficult issues to.

Second, North Korea will try to drive a wedge between the U.S. and the others—‘divide and rule’ to use the others as a buffer from the U.S. pressure and to secure room to maneuver. North Korea has and will use its bilateral relations to turn one against other. And then it will try to create a split among the others. For example, by exploiting its relations with South Korea, North Korea will try to minimize the U.S. pressure and to weaken the coalition against Pyongyang.

To create a split and differences, North Korea is very much likely to utilize ‘strategic ambiguity of its statements and behaviors.’ This might bring about different interpretations and understandings among the concerned parties. Consequently, this would be very likely to result in a more complex and complicated negotiation and resolution. Thus the first principle in dealing with North Korea is the maintenance of consensus, or coalition, among the concerned parties. Any sign of weakening of

³ For details of North Korean negotiating behavior, see Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior* (Washington, D.C.: USIP Press, 1999).

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consensus will serve North Korean interests.

With regard to the form of resolution, North Korea has always demanded for comprehensive package deal for what it can gain. In the meantime, North Korea tries to divide up what it is supposed to do—obligations—for what it gains: that is, comprehensive vs. salami. In a comprehensive package, North Korea can seek room to maneuver and to bring about the split among the others in the process of implementation of the agreement.

In sum, North Korea will try to expand the negotiation process and to mount pressure upon the participating countries. Especially, it will use its bilateral relations with South Korea, China, and Russia to neutralize the pressure from the U.S. And also North Korea will try to create some crises.

V. Conclusion

North Korea nuclear problems are very serious challenge not only to South Korea, but also to the international community by challenging and undermining the founding spirit of non-proliferation regimes. Taking into account of North Korea's incentives in acquiring nuclear weapons, it is possible to say that North Korea is not likely to give up the programs easily. As it did, North Korea will try to maintain strategic ambiguity of nuclear weapons programs. From North Korean perspective, the most desirable form of resolution is 'Pakistan-style.' From South Korean perspective, that is the worst case. In order to avoid such case, we must maintain consensus among the other five participating countries. Any disagreement among the other five countries would be very advantageous to North Korea. So, the first principle we should abide by

is the creation and maintenance of consensus among the five countries. Second, there must be a balance between dialogue and pressure. We should not exclude one option over the others. It is not wise to constrain the scope of responses in advance. It would be more desirable to have tailored responses to North Korean behavior. The principle of reciprocity must be respected. We should use our leverage over North Korea carefully and skillfully. South Korea needs to control pace and scope of inter-Korean economic and social cooperation accordingly. Third, we should focus on North Korea's deed, not word. Only when North Korea behaves as a responsible member of international community, we can respect North Korea's concerns. Especially, when North Korea provides concrete evidence of elimination of its nuclear weapons programs through extensive inspection, we can provide what North Korea needs most. Fifth, not least, we should encourage North Korea's policy change by using North Korean version of Nunn-Lugar action.