

North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: The Ultimate Tool for Unification?

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Abstract

The misgivings surrounding North Korea's nuclear weapons development program show no signs of improvement, as it is unclear whether North Korea is undertaking a program of uranium enrichment for weapons development or whether it is engaged in nuclear cooperation with the Middle East. The question of whether or not North Korea will ultimately abandon completely its nuclear weapons development program cannot be analyzed without reference to the objectives of its nuclear program. Are the nuclear weapons to obtain assurance for regime survival? Are they weapons of mass destructions to ensure that conventional strategies are stalled? Or is North Korea's declaration of being a nuclear weapons state made with some other intention?

This paper examines the aims of North Korea's nuclear weapons development program through an content analysis of North Korea's statements and remarks; it argues that North Korea's nuclear weapons constitute a strategy to change the status quo of a divided Korea by deterring U.S. intervention in order to make possible the ultimate objective of North-led unification.

An important point for Japan and other countries involved is that if North Korea even considers abandoning its nuclear program, this would be after North-South unification. Additionally, there is likely to be increased military tension on the Korean Peninsula if the military role of the United States on the Korean Peninsula comes to an end and there are rapid changes in South Korean society coupled with enhanced autonomy of South Korea's national defense.

Introduction

Suspicion that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK, or North Korea) was developing nuclear weapons surfaced in the early 1990s, immediately after the end of the Cold War. Seeking to resolve the issue, the United States commenced negotiations with North Korea; the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework was concluded in October 1994, and it looked as though North Korea would abandon its nuclear weapons development program. Almost 15 years have passed since then, however, and the nuclear issue of North Korea remains unresolved. It is still unclear whether North Korea has the resolve to abandon all its nuclear weapons, whether it has a program of uranium enrichment for weapons development, and whether it is engaged in cooperation with the Middle East or Pakistan over the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Will North Korea take the strategic decision to abandon its nuclear weapons development program if the international community continues to provide aid in the future? The most important point for consideration is the purpose of North Korea's nuclear weapons development. If the purpose of the nuclear weapons development is to obtain an assurance of regime survival,¹ then North Korea will likely abandon its nuclear weapons once it judges that it has secured this assurance. If the nuclear development is to provide a nuclear deterrent to compensate for current military weaknesses, then North Korea will perhaps take the strategic decision to abandon its nuclear weapons once it considers that it has patched up any insecurity in its conventional forces. If it is a nuclear deterrent in the face of threats by the United States, then North Korea will perhaps abandon its nuclear development if the United States withdraws its troops stationed in South Korea, concludes a non-aggression pact with North Korea, and pledges nuclear non-use, so that North Korea considers that there is no longer a military threat.

In response to the declaration by North Korea of possession of nuclear weapons, the international community is pressing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. The time has now come to consider what the purpose of North Korea's nuclear development is, and what the conditions are for North Korea to abandon completely its nuclear weapons development program. This paper puts forward a hypothesis for

¹ The official North Korean media uses the expression "the regime must not be overthrown." This means it is seeking an assurance for regime survival.

the real intentions underlying North Korea's nuclear development, based on content analysis of statements and remarks made by North Korea.²

From Nuclear Misgivings to Nuclear Declaration

There are various views as to when North Korea shared its development of nuclear weapons. One view is that the interest dates back to the time of the Korean War, which broke out in June 1950, when North Korea faced the possibility that the United States might use nuclear weapons. Another view is that North Korea elected to pursue its own self-defense through nuclear development as a result of being caught in the middle of the dispute between China and the Soviet Union. Then there is the view that the North Korean leadership saw nuclear development as a valid internal means for regime survival. It would also be possible to take the view that North Korea attempted to compensate for lagging behind in modernizing its conventional military capability since the 1980s by developing weapons of mass destruction.

At first, it was believed that North Korea's interest was in nuclear power generation to improve its electric power situation. North Korea embarked on the introduction nuclear power generation technology during the 1950s by sending nuclear scientists to Soviet research laboratories. North Korea was caught in the Sino-Soviet dispute during the Cold War, and sought to improve its nuclear power generation technology while attempting to find a more autonomous route.

Suspicion about nuclear weapons development started to surface in the early 1990s. North Korea declared its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but U.S.-North Korea talks took place and the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework was concluded in October 1994. The United States pledged heavy fuel oil supplies to North Korea, and launched the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to construct two light-water reactors and dismantle North Korea's graphite-moderated reactor; it looked as if a roadmap toward North Korea abandoning its nuclear weapons had come into view.

² The *Korean News* referred to in this paper is distributed by the Korean Central News Agency, and is a North Korean state-run news organ that explains the standpoint of the Korean Workers' Party and the North Korean Government. Its website is <http://www.kcna.co.jp/>. The *People's Korea* is a news organ distributing articles to the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, which receives articles from the Korean Central News Agency of the DPRK and broadcasts them, and to the media of other countries. The website of the *Choson Sinbo*, which publishes the *People's Korea*, is <http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/>.

However, during the three-day visit to North Korea of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly from October 3, 2002, a high-ranking North Korean official admitted that North Korea had a program of uranium enrichment for the purpose of developing nuclear weapons. There were suspicions that North Korea was engaged in nuclear weapons development after the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework and also while the KEDO projects were being implemented; this meant the collapse of the preconditions for the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework.³ North Korea immediately announced a meeting of foreign ministers, proposing that the United States and North Korea conclude a non-aggression treaty, and denied any reports relating to suspicions of nuclear development.⁴

At the unofficial three-party talks between the United States, China, and North Korea held in Beijing on April 24, 2003, the North Korean representative stated to Assistant Secretary of State Kelly that North Korea possessed nuclear weapons.⁵ It could be seen that North Korea had returned to the path of admitting the existence of a nuclear weapons development program.

The first Six-Party Talks commenced in Beijing on August 27 in response to this development, but in October it became apparent that North Korea had completed the reprocessing of spent fuel rods. On October 20, U.S. President George W. Bush proposed that North Korea be given multilateral security assurances. Amid escalating tensions, the project to construct a light-water reactor in North Korea was suspended on December 1.

In January 2004, North Korea invited U.S. experts, including nuclear scientists and policy specialists, to Nyongbyon, where they were guided around the nuclear facility. A spokesman for the North Korean foreign ministry stated that North Korea had showed its nuclear deterrent to the U.S. delegation; North Korea had started to adopt actions aimed at publicizing the existence of its nuclear weapons development to the outside world.⁶ The second round of Six-Party Talks was held in February, and the third in June; however, North Korea would not budge from its stance that the first condition was for a change of policy from the U.S. side, which, it maintained, was attempting to overthrow the North Korean regime.

³ *Asahi Shimbun*, October 17, 2002 (evening edition).

⁴ North Korea totally denied possession of nuclear weapons at a conference of foreign ministers. *Korean News*, October 31, 2002. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>.

⁵ *Mainichi Newspaper*, April 25, 2003.

⁶ *Korean News*, January 10, 2004.

On February 10, 2005, the North Korean foreign ministry announced its measures to “cope with the U.S. hostile policy toward the DPRK.”⁷ The announcement stated that U.S.-North Korea negotiations had become meaningless and included a declaration that North Korea was pulling out of the Six-Party Talks, as well as the statements that it had made nuclear weapons “for self-defense” and would “bolster its nuclear weapons arsenal.” North Korea had thus officially declared its possession of nuclear weapons. In the declaration, North Korea confirmed its basic policy of resolving the issue through dialogue, and stressed the point that its actions were in order to protect its own regime. One month later, on March 3 the North Korean foreign ministry issued a memorandum stating that North Korea would enter into talks with the United States if the United States renounced its “hostile policy aimed at a regime change in the DPRK.”⁸ The memorandum mentioned the U.S. inclusion of North Korea in the “axis of evil,” and denounced the United States for trying to “bring down the regime” in North Korea. At this stage, North Korea’s remarks concerning the protection of its regime were noticeable.

On March 31, the Korean Central News Agency proposed the U.S. military threat should be included in the agenda of the Six-Party Talks, maintaining that now North Korea had become a member of the nuclear club, the countries participating in the Six-Party Talks needed to hold disarmament talks to resolve the issue from an impartial standpoint. The second meeting of the fourth round of Six-Party Talks collapsed in September of the same year, and a six-point joint statement was adopted on September 19 (the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks). It was believed that the countries involved in the Six-Party Talks would start to move toward the abandonment of all North Korea’s nuclear programs in accordance with this statement; however, North Korea also set its sights on having the sanctions imposed by the United States on North Korean financial institutions lifted. This was because the United States had not budged from its stance of severe criticism of North Korea in the wake of counterfeiting of U.S. currency and the Banco Delta Asia money laundering issue. North Korea commenced its tactics of directly entwining the lifting of sanctions on financial institutions with the nuclear weapons development issues. There was no common ground at all between North Korea, which stressed its fear of U.S. efforts to overturn its regime, and the United States, which maintained that the

⁷ *Korean News*, February 11, 2005.

⁸ *Korean News*, March 3, 2005.

nuclear issue and the sanctions on financial institutions were two separate issues.

In May 2005, it started to become noticeable that the North Korean media were saying that the employment of powerful military means was a possibility. The *Rodong Shinmun* of May 31, for example, ran an article entitled “Rapid Task Force (meaning a rapid deployment force) is a detached force for overthrowing the regime.” The article maintained that the machinations of the United States to overthrow of the North Korean regime had grown increasingly unscrupulous and had intensified, and stated that the North Korean army and people would use sophisticated and revolutionary means to take revenge on America. This “great destructive power, newly developed with sophisticated technology” meant nuclear weapons.⁹ This utterance includes the nuance that North Korea did not develop nuclear weapons just to gain an advantage at the negotiating table, but also that it would not shrink from using them to hinder the strategic intentions of the United States.

North Korea carried out a test launch of ballistic missiles on July 5, 2006, after which it released a declaration on October 3 that it would carry out a nuclear test as a requisite for the process of securing a nuclear deterrent against the U.S. threat. It stated that the capability to deter war had become necessary for the country's self-defense, in order to protect North Korean sovereignty and its right to existence.¹⁰ It stated that North Korea would “in the future conduct a nuclear test,” explaining that this was a nuclear test in order to complete nuclear weapons development for self-defense. The important thing to note here is the statement that North Korea's nuclear weapons would “serve as reliable war deterrent” against the “daily increasing threat” of the United States and would safeguard the “peace and stability” not only of North Korea, but also of the Korean Peninsula: North Korea's nuclear deterrent was thus explained as not for North Korea alone, but for the peace and stability of the whole Korean Peninsula.¹¹ North Korea has always asserted that the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea should be withdrawn for the stability of the whole Korean Peninsula, and

⁹ *Korean News*, May 31, 2005.

¹⁰ The English version of the *Korean News* of October 4 reported as follows: “The DPRK's nuclear weapons will serve as reliable war deterrent for protecting the supreme interests of the state and the security of the Korean nation from the U.S. threat of aggression and averting a new war and firmly safeguarding peace and stability on the Korean peninsula under any circumstances.” <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>.

¹¹ The above article admits that the aim of the nuclear test was the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea: “The ultimate goal of the DPRK is not a ‘denuclearization’ to be followed by its unilateral disarmament but one aimed at settling the hostile relations between the DPRK and the United States and removing the very source of all nuclear threats from the Korean Peninsula and its vicinity.”

it is clear that North Korea's aim in possessing nuclear weapons is related to its policy of North-South unification.¹² It would appear that North Korea itself admits that its possession of nuclear weapons relates to the scenario of North-South unification following cancellation of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance.

The appearance of the term "nuclear deterrent" in the North Korean media means "nuclear weapons for the purpose of protecting the peace and stability of the whole Korean Peninsula." In other words, what North Korea is stressing is not nuclear weapons to assure survival for the regime north of the 38th parallel known as North Korea, but nuclear weapons to guarantee the peace and stability of the whole Korean Peninsula; one should therefore conclude that it implies a demand for the withdrawal of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea.

How did South Korea regard the aim of the North Korean nuclear test and its use of the phrase "nuclear deterrent"? The announcement on October 9 of North Korea's nuclear test was analyzed in South Korea: the explanation was that the North's nuclear weapons development was in order to force the United States to retreat from its hostile policy toward North Korea and to bring about the normalization of U.S.-North Korean relations, that it was to assure the security of the regime, that it was to secure economic compensation, and that it was for the internal unity of the regime.¹³ This interpretation is that North Korea is developing nuclear weapons as bargaining chips to take to the negotiating table. It is the interpretation that the weapons of mass destruction are in order to obtain an assurance of survival for the regime in the half of the peninsula north of the demilitarized zone.

The United Nations discussed sanctions after North Korea went ahead with its nuclear test, but around December, in the immediate aftermath of the test, the United States began feeling their way toward reopening the stalled negotiations with North Korea. The United States held bilateral negotiations with North Korea in Berlin in January 2007, and the Six-Party Talks were reopened the following month, February, with an agreement reached on February 13 to implement the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks (the September 19 Joint Statement). With "action

¹² North Korea has consistently insisted that U.S. troops stationed in South Korea should be withdrawn and U.S.-North Korean diplomatic relations normalized for the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula. It has repeatedly stressed that the issue of the military potential of the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea should be added to the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. See, e.g., *Korean News*, July 25.

¹³ *Choson Online* (Internet version in Japanese), October 10, 2006. <http://www.chosononline.com/>.

being met with action,” the way was clear to wait for North Korea to take the strategic decision to abandon its nuclear weapons.

“Wipe Out at a Single Stroke, then Reunification”

While the countries involved in the Six-Party Talks continued their efforts, North Korea made remarks with references to how the nuclear deterrent might be used, which stressed that having carried out a nuclear test it now possessed a nuclear deterrent. In 2007, a commemorative event was held in Pyongyang on April 25, Korean People's Army Day, to mark the 75th anniversary of the Korean People's Army. This was the first ceremonial parade since the nuclear test, and the remarks made at the time by the top echelons of the Korean People's Army carry particular significance. General Secretary Kim Jong Il visited Kumsusan Memorial Palace, and attended a parade of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Korean People's Security Force, the Worker-Peasant Red Guard, and the Young Red Guard. Chief of the Korean People's Army General Staff (General) Kim Kyok Sik gave an address at the parade, stating, “Should the United States imperialists infringe even a bit upon the sovereignty of the DPRK and its right to existence, the KPA will wipe them out at a single stroke and accomplish the historic cause of national reunification, the cherished desire of the nation, without fail.”¹⁴ The means by which North Korea could “wipe out” the conventional forces of the United States “at a single stroke” are not North Korea's conventional weapons, which are slowly slipping into obsolescence: the reference is to weapons of mass destruction. The statement means, “If the United States intervenes in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, we will not flinch from using nuclear weapons.” With regard to what would come after the use of nuclear weapons, Chief of Staff Kim Kyok Sik did not say that the stability of North Korea would be maintained; he said that “national reunification” would be accomplished.

If this speech by Chief of Staff Kim Kyok Sik is compared to the Korean People's Army Day speech given before the nuclear test on April 25, 2006, by (then) Chief of Staff Kim Yong Chun, the difference is clear. Chief of Staff Kim Yong Chun said, “Should the United States start a war of aggression on the Korean Peninsula at any cost despite our repeated warnings, our revolutionary armed forces will mobilize the military deterrent force built up for years and wipe out the aggressors to the last

¹⁴ See “Grand Military Parade Held on Army Day,” in the *Korean News*, April 26, 2007.

man and win a final victory in the stand-off with the United States.”¹⁵ It can be seen from the difference between the remarks of the chief of the general staff before and after the nuclear test that the aim of the nuclear weapons development program went further than merely maintaining the status quo. In his People’s Army Day speech on April 25, 2001, Chief of Staff Kim Yong Chun stated, “If the U.S. imperialists were to start a war against North Korea, the North Korean armed forces and the North Korean people would mobilize all of the war potential that has been built up over the decades and retaliate with a devastating blow. The enemy would come to a miserable end.”¹⁶ At a speech on the 70th anniversary of the Korean People’s Army, Vice Marshal of the Korean People’s Army Kim Il Chol said, “If the U.S. imperialists and their followers invade the inviolable land, sea, and sky of the DPRK even 0.001 mm despite its repeated warnings, the army and people who hold the dignity and sovereignty of the country and nation as dear as their own lives will deal merciless blows at the invaders and achieve the cause of national reunification without fail.”¹⁷ If we compare these four speeches, the only speech in which the three expressions “at a single stroke,” “wipe out,” and “achieve national reunification” all appear was the congratulatory speech made by the Chief of the General Staff at the parade after the nuclear test. We can see that in this speech the nuance of “nuclear weapons with the objective of unification” appeared for the first time.

The U.S.-North Korea talks aimed at persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program continued. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill held two days of talks with North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gui Guan in Geneva, Switzerland, from September 1, 2007. They discussed a report that must be submitted by North Korea of the entire nuclear program, methods to disable nuclear facilities, the issue of removing North Korea from the list of states-sponsors of terrorism, and the issue of cessation of application of the Trading with the Enemy Act. Following this, there was great optimism, particularly in the United States, regarding North Korea’s pledge to disable its nuclear facilities by the end of 2007. However, there were still unresolved differences in position between the United States, which demanded that North Korea include the issue of uranium enrichment for weapons development in its report, and North Korea, which refused to comply. On September

¹⁵ See “Report on Celebrations of the 74th Anniversary of the Heroic Korean People’s Army” in the *Korean News*, April 25, 2006.

¹⁶ *Korean News*, April 25, 2001.

¹⁷ *Korean News*, April 25, 2002.

3, a spokesman for the North Korean foreign ministry stated that North Korea had agreed to practical measures to disable its existing nuclear facilities, that the United States would remove North Korea from the list of state-sponsors of terrorism, and that the United States would take the political and economic redress measures of removing the sanctions applied to North Korea under the Trading with the Enemy Act.¹⁸ It was clear that North Korea was speeding toward normalization of relations with the United States.

As has already been stated, North Korea's stance at the Six-Party Talks and the U.S.-North Korea talks, as well as the nuances of official reports in the media, show that a new frame of reference is required for approaching North Korea's nuclear weapons development: this is the viewpoint that North Korea's objective is to change the status quo of a divided Korean Peninsula, and its tactics are to prevent U.S. intervention through a nuclear deterrent, enabling it to attain its final goal of autonomous, peaceful unification. North Korea's calculation in using these tactics is that while it flaunts its nuclear deterrent the unification of the Korean Peninsula becomes more of a possibility, and it has built up a military force to that end. To what extent does this viewpoint differ from the interpretations that have been put forward up until now?

Nuclear Weapons to Maintain the Status Quo: Two Interpretations

There are two different views on the aim of North Korea's nuclear weapons development. One argues that North Korea developed its nuclear weapons in order to have an advantage in negotiations and ensure concessions from other countries, thus exploiting benefits: economic aid, security assurance, the survival of the regime, etc. Every time the U.S.-North Korea negotiations or the Six-Party Talks were at a stalemate, North Korea has said it will exercise forceful means. In addition, North Korea itself has admitted that there are economic objectives, and has admitted to obtaining foreign currency through missile exports. Slogans in praise of Chairman of the National Defense Commission Kim Jong Il were noticeable in the streets of Pyongyang following the nuclear test of October 2006, announcing him as the "leader who led the nuclear development." There have also been repeated statements demanding treatment as a state possessing nuclear weapons. North Korea probably

¹⁸ *Korean News*, September 3, 2007.

calculated that with the possession of nuclear weapons it would have a system of weaponry independent of China or Russia. When North Korea carried out its nuclear test, it proclaimed that it was carried out “100 percent using indigenous technology.” The implication here is that they are weapons that do not rely on China or Russia.

The core argument of this view is that North Korea’s aim in developing nuclear weapons is mainly political; avoiding the collapse of the regime and maintaining the status quo of a Korean Peninsula divided at the 38th parallel. This school of thought believes the possibility that North Korea will take the strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program when it judges that it has obtained an assurance for regime survival. They predict the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue will follow the case of Libya—in other words, a scenario in which a strategic decision is made to furnish all nuclear-related facilities in return for an assurance for regime survival.

South Korea’s Sunshine policy, which lasted 10 years, can also be categorized with this school. The thinking behind the Sunshine policy is that North Korea developed its nuclear weapons for the political purpose of compensating for its economic poverty and the fragility of its regime. Former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung stated of the Sunshine Policy that South Korea held control over the North Korean economy, and that a North Korea dependent on the South would not provoke the South.¹⁹ Underlying the Kim Dae-jung administration’s policy was the idea that conflict on the Korean Peninsula was being averted through the provision of economic aid to North Korea.²⁰

When then South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun visited Germany in 2004, he stated that North Korea was prepared to give up its nuclear weapons; when he met for talks with a delegation of North Korean ministers in June 2005, he noted that Kim Jong Il had stated that a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula was the last wish of President Kim Il Sung.²¹ Also, on October 9, 2006, when North Korea announced that it had carried out a nuclear test, Roh Moo-hyun gave his opinion that North Korea was prepared to give up its nuclear weapons. Roh Moo-hyun continued the three major aid projects for the North: tourism to Mt. Kumgang, Kaesong Industrial Complex, and the North-South railroad link. This policy was the reality of the Sunshine Policy: it was the projection that if South Korea continued its aid, the time would come when

¹⁹ *Chosun Online*, October 20, 2006.

²⁰ *Chosun Online*, March 1, 2002.

²¹ *Chosun Online*, October 10, 2006.

North Korea would abandon its nuclear weapons. This was because South Korea regarded the North's nuclear weapons as a political means for maintaining the status quo. This point of view is therefore the interpretation that North Korea flaunts its possession of nuclear weapons as a negotiating method in order to preserve its regime and maintain the status quo of North-South coexistence.

The second view affirms that although there are the political aims of securing an assurance for regime survival, obtaining economic benefit, and maintaining the status quo, North Korea gave equal weight to its military aims when developing its nuclear weapons.

The Korean People's Army had lagged behind the South Korean army and the U.S. Army stationed in South Korea in terms of modernization, and North Korea needed to rectify its military inferiority. Given the situation of the North Korean military industry, however, the country was very unlikely to catch up with the modernized weaponry of the United States or South Korea. The argument goes that North Korea judged that its conventional weapons, lagging behind in terms of new technology, would not be able to defend the country, and so it developed nuclear weapons in order to maintain the military equilibrium.

South Korea's military modernization has progressed at a rapid pace since the 1980s, when the U.S.-South Korea Alliance was patched up and South Korea's international standing improved, and it is certainly true that North Korea began to hasten its nuclear development during this period. North Korea has pointed to the "U.S. nuclear threat" and the "threat of U.S.-South Korea military exercises." The argument is that North Korea's nuclear development has both political and military objectives, and that North Korea's aim was to maintain the status quo through military power.

This school of thought interprets North Korea's hints throughout the negotiation process at the use of nuclear weapons as being made because it is aware of its lagging conventional weaponry and is in fear of a change in the current situation. They conclude that while the North Korean media denounces the joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises and the modernization of the U.S. and South Korean armies, such utterances are made out of fear of the military balance being upset and are, in fact, defensive.

However, this argument does not really hold water if we consider that the lagging modernization of North Korea's weaponry began to become apparent in the 1980s, yet its nuclear ambitions date back to before then.

Alternative Interpretation

There are two meanings to the expression “maintaining a nuclear deterrent against the United States” used in reports and utterances by North Korea about its nuclear development. One meaning is that the nuclear weapons prevent military attack by the United States. The second meaning, which becomes apparent when one considers that North Korea has repeatedly stressed that the United States should not intervene in the internal affairs of the people on the Korean Peninsula, is that the nuclear weapons prevent the United States from military intervention in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea sees the Korean People’s Army as a means toward North-South reunification, and so one should regard the aim of North Korea’s nuclear weapons as being to neutralize U.S. forces in case the Korean People’s Army launches a reunification campaign and conflict breaks out. North Korea has not directly referred to the possibility of using nuclear weapons to prevent U.S. intervention in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, but this can be inferred from North Korea’s statements, its unification policy, and its military tactics.

To sum up, North Korea’s aim for developing nuclear weapons might be to wring beneficial terms out of the U.S.-North Korea negotiations, to obtain economic benefit, to safeguard itself against military pressure from the United States or South Korea, or to extract assurance for survival for the regime and security. However, these interpretations can not wholly explain North Korea’s nuclear program. We need a third interpretation: the backdrop to North Korea’s conduct is a nuclear strategy in which nuclear weapons are the ultimate means to alter the status quo of a divided Korean Peninsula and bring about unification. This interpretation fits well with the following facts. Even at a time when North Korea’s relations with China were becoming strained, the South Korean people were becoming more wary, the United States was taking a harder line toward North Korea, and a UN resolution of sanctions against North Korea was to be expected, the country still went ahead and carried out a nuclear test. North Korea does not envisage a nuclear war with the United States; rather, North Korea’s calculation is that if it possessed intercontinental ballistic missiles, the United States would certainly elect to maintain a neutral position in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula from the perspective of minimizing damages. North Korea urges normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations, and its aim in proposing a U.S.-North Korea non-aggression pact is to ensure U.S. neutrality in the event of such a contingency. There is no contradiction here with North Korea’s

official utterances calling for withdrawal of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea and wishing for a suspension of U.S.-South Korea military exercises.²² North Korea's aim is to change the status quo of a divided Korean Peninsula; its tactics of preventing U.S. intervention through the nuclear deterrent so that it can achieve the ultimate goal of unification.

In this sense, North Korea's nuclear weapons differ from those of India and Pakistan, which are for maintaining the regional balance. They differ also from the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union or France. There is no need for North Korea's nuclear arsenal to reach parity with that of the United States; if North Korea's nuclear weapons can ensure that North Korea coexists with the United States and that the United States remains neutral in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, then they are sufficient.

This interpretation does not deny the use of the nuclear card in negotiations, nor does it deny possession of nuclear weapons as a means to compensate for the lagging modernization of North Korea's conventional weaponry. However, in addition to these two aims, it suggests that the nuclear weapons could be used for military ends, and that they are for the purpose of changing the status quo and bringing about unification.

Extending this argument, three conditions are necessary for the success of North Korea's tactics: (1) the anti-North sentiment in South Korean society diminishes so that South Korea's armor is no longer for the purpose of defense against the North; (2) the United States withdraws its troops stationed in South Korea and the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command is dismantled, so that there is no longer a situation in which the United States would automatically become embroiled in any contingency on the Korean Peninsula; and (3) North Korea builds intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads capable of striking the U.S. mainland. If all three conditions were met, North Korea's nuclear strategy would be complete.

The strategy is that even though North Korea's conventional weapons are inferior, it could still achieve peaceful unification with South Korea by manipulating the fear of its nuclear weaponry. With its nuclear strategy part of a larger military strategy intertwined with unification, North Korea is likely to continue the negotiations until

²² North Korea stressed, "Rather than suspending its aggressive policy toward North Korea and fanning North-South hostility in South Korea, the United States should withdraw its troops stationed in South Korea." From an article in *Democratic Korea*, May 27, 2008, appearing in the *Choson Sinbo* (Japanese website), May 30, 2008. <http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/sinboj/j-2008/04/0804j0530-00004.htm>.

unification is realized. When suspicions surfaced about its nuclear development, North Korea denied its nuclear ambitions at first, only later admitting to nuclear weapons development. Even when it looked as though it had pledged to abandon its nuclear weapons, North Korea denied the existence of a program of uranium enrichment for nuclear development; despite overseas aid being held back, instead of clearing the suspicions away completely, North Korea carried out a nuclear test and declared its possession of nuclear weapons.

The reason why North Korea does not see its nuclear weapons only as a bargaining chip for negotiations lies in the calculation that if South Korean society altered its stance toward North Korea and the U.S.-South Korea Alliance faltered, it would be possible to advance North-South dialogue. If nationalist sentiments related to the self-respect of the South Korean people start to emerge, South Korean society will exhibit a nationalism that yearns to be independent of the United States. If changes are made to the operational control during a military contingency of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, there could possibly be changes to the U.S. pledge to defend South Korea. If there is an increase in South Korea's autonomy with regard to its defense, the U.S.-South Korea Alliance will change and there will be no guarantee that the U.S. nuclear umbrella protecting South Korea will be permanent. North Korea will surely have calculated that should this happen, its own weapons of mass destruction will be the only force to stand out and will thus have great military significance. While the scenario is fairly unlikely to take place, this strategy of North Korea's can still be conjectured on the basis of North Korean media reports.

North Korea's nuclear strategy, which places its nuclear weapons at the center of the military force supporting its unification policy, appears to take into consideration the uncertainties surrounding North Korea. If one conjectures on the basis of the reports in the official North Korean media, the potential uncertainties that North Korea is calculating are as follows. (1) When North Korean intercontinental ballistic missiles are able to reach the eastern United States, public opinion in the United States, which is sensitive to defense of the homeland, might be hesitant about military intervention on the Korean Peninsula. (2) If North Korea ends its nuclear tests, the United States might shift the focus of its efforts from clarifying misgivings about nuclear weapons development to nonproliferation policies. (3) If North Korea extends the range of its nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, China, South Korea, the United States, Japan, and Russia might interpret North Korea's nuclear strategy differently because of the geographical differences between these countries. (4) If Japan points to the

North Korean military threat, South Korea and China might not give their support to Japan's view because of their historical differences with Japan. (5) Differences might emerge in the policy toward North Korea between China, Russia, and South Korea on the one side, and Japan and the United States on the other. (6) Regarding the future development of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance, depending on the policies of future administrations of both the United States and South Korea, there might be movement toward abolishing the alliance. (7) If North-South economic exchanges expand and North-South interdependence deepens, the time might come where the two parties construct an alliance or federal system. (8) There is little chance that China or Russia would give their backing to a war for unification of the Korean peninsula, but they might give their tacit consent if North Korea were to hint at the use of its nuclear deterrent in order to avoid war, and they might give their tacit consent to a peaceful unification led by North Korea that lessens the clout of the United States.

It is surely possible that North Korea is making the interpretations and calculations given above. One only has to follow the tone of North Korea's official reports to see that it is likely. Unification of the Korean Peninsula led by North Korea has been the ultimate objective of North Korea since its founding in 1948. North Korea has stipulated that the Korean People's Army is a means for unification, so when confronted with the reality of increasing military disparity with the United States and South Korea, it had no option but to try its hand at developing some way of compensating for this disparity. This led to its nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the objectives of North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons on the basis of its official statements. It has indicated that North Korea did not develop weapons of mass destruction simply to obtain an assurance of the survival of the regime in the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, but instead it developed weapons of mass destruction for the peace and security of the whole Korean Peninsula. Conventional interpretations have explained the aim of North Korea's nuclear development in terms of diplomatic negotiations, obtaining an assurance of survival for the regime, obtaining food and other aid, and holding out against the threat of U.S. military weapons.

However, if one looks carefully at the insistence of North Korea that the U.S. should not intervene in national issues, that the United States should withdraw troops

stationed in South Korea and that if the United States intervened North Korea could wipe out the United States at a single stroke after which it would unify the peninsula, it is possible to conclude that North Korea is assuming a revision of the status quo. This view may lead to a possible scenario in which North Korea would use its nuclear weapons in order to unify the Korean Peninsula, or in order to prevent U.S. intervention.

Any explanation of the intentions underlying North Korea's nuclear weapons development is difficult because there is no primary source of information relating to its military strategy. However, it is possible to analyze the situation by putting together the bits from utterances at official North Korean functions and from media reports; one cannot deny that the nuclear strategy is part of the policy for unification.

The Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo concept was proposed in 1980 at the 6th Party Congress of the Korean Workers' Party. Its principles of autonomy, peace, and a grand national unity do not envisage the continuation of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance. North Korea is still calling for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance to be broken and for the United States to withdraw its troops stationed in South Korea; one should therefore consider that North Korea is implementing policy toward abandoning the U.S.-South Korea Alliance and promoting North-South unification through solidarity across the social classes of South Korea.

If this hypothesis is true, what are the most important points for Japan and the other countries involved? The first point is with regard to the aim of North Korea's nuclear weapons; the viewpoint of nuclear weapons to secure an assurance for regime survival is insufficient when taken alone. This viewpoint is widely held in China, but it should be noted that this is some way from the policies of Japan, the United States, and South Korea, which read military significance into North Korea's nuclear weapons development and are giving consideration to resolution of the nuclear issue in conjunction with the threat of ballistic missiles. This difference in approach is likely to be an issue for future discussions at the Six-Party Talks.

The second point is that if ever one assumes North Korea might consider abandoning its nuclear weapons, this would only occur after the unification of the Korean Peninsula. This point is of great importance when we consider at which point in the Six-Party Talks process North Korea will make a strategic decision. When thinking about the future of the Korean Peninsula, we need to consider the worst possible scenario. What will become of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance when there are no longer any troops stationed in South Korea after the role of the cease-fire

agreement on the Korean Peninsula has come to an end, U.S.-North Korea relations have been normalized, and the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command has been dismantled? South Korean society will change, and South Korea's national defense structure will change in order to respond to increasingly diverse threats. Enhanced cooperation between the North and the South would lead both countries to start to consider a federation or union or some system of "one nation, two governments." After that, the role of the United States in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula will decline even further.

The third point is that the focus of future North Korean military policy will likely be on the development of submarine-launched ballistic missiles and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Improving its missile technology must be a particularly pressing issue for North Korea at present. North Korea needs to preserve its nuclear weapons development program, and it is likely to further develop military cooperation including nuclear and ballistic missiles with the Middle East.

In formulating policies on North Korea, whether engagement, providing assistance, or negotiation toward denuclearizing North Korea, it should be reminded that North Korea defines its nuclear arms as a tool for achieving unification. This point should not be lost when we consider how best to urge North Korea to make a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear weapons.