

Briefing Memorandum

Nuclear Disarmament and North Korea

(an English translation of the original manuscript written in Japanese)

Hideshi Takesada, Executive Director, National Institute for Defense Studies

In April 2010, North Korea (DPRK) urged the United States to sign a peace agreement, while at the same time continuing its missile and nuclear testing. As the related parties work to reopen the Six-Party Talks, there has been an increase in visits between China and the DPRK by key figures. On 26 March, a naval patrol vessel from the Republic of Korea (ROK) was sunk by an explosion. In May, Chairman of National Defense Commission (NDC) Kim Jong-il visited China. Uncertainty surrounds the question of how to interpret the complex trends occurring on the Korean peninsula.

Nuclear summit and memorandum

In a speech he gave in Prague in April 2009, President Barack Obama commented that the United States would be taking concrete measures toward a world without nuclear weapons, urging the world to form policies that reduce dependence on nuclear weapons in order to bring an end to the Cold War mentality. In his speech, President Obama criticized the DPRK as a country that had broken the rules by launching a rocket that could be used for long-range ballistic missiles. Nevertheless, the DPRK performed another nuclear test immediately after the speech in May in addition to a ballistic missile test in July.

The nuclear development problems of the DPRK and Iran have yet to be resolved and concern over nuclear proliferation continues to grow increasingly widespread. Against this backdrop, in April 2010 the Nuclear Security Summit was held in Washington, D.C., where leaders from around the world gathered to discuss countermeasures to terrorism with nuclear weapons. On the final day of the summit a joint statement was released that clarified concrete measures to fight nuclear terrorism. The summit was also attended by China, who has distanced itself from the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and it was announced that the next summit is to be held in the ROK in 2012. There is significant meaning in the fact that the second Nuclear Security Summit two years from now will be held just south of North Korea, a country that the United States has labeled a rule-breaker. This indicates that concern over North Korea is increasing in connection with the problem of nuclear proliferation.

Later on 21 April, the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a memorandum entitled “Nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula,” an important diplomatic correspondence. The memorandum is an important document in which the DPRK announces diplomatic issues in consideration of historical perspectives. Specifically, the document notes that, “the DPRK will only produce the necessary amount of nuclear weapons, and will not participate in any nuclear arms race or excessively produce more nuclear weapons than are needed. We are prepared to join efforts for preventing global nuclear proliferation and for the safe management of nuclear substances from an equal stance as the other nuclear powers of the world.” Thus, the document recognizes measures for strengthening the nuclear proliferation prevention system led by the United States. The memorandum also offers prospects for restarting direct talks with the United States by reflecting details of the international dialogue that took place in Washington just a week beforehand.

This memorandum contains vital information; specifically, the part that states, “The purpose of nuclear weapons in the DPRK is to prevent and repel any invasion or attack on our country and its people until the time comes when the Korean Peninsula and the world as a whole become denuclearized.” When the DPRK uses the term “country” on the Korean Peninsula it is referring to both north and south together. This is true in its national constitution as well as the constitution of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). The portion that says “to prevent and repel an invasion or attack on our country and its people” means “in order to free the southern half of our country and its people, the ROK, from their occupation, and in order to prevent attempts by the south to reclaim the north.” In other words, the “purpose of nuclear weapons in the DPRK” is a phrase that signifies forcing the withdrawal of the US military, uniting the Korean Peninsula, and maintaining those conditions. The portion that states, “As long as non-nuclear powers do not collude with nuclear powers to take part in an invasion or attack on the DPRK, the DPRK shall firmly maintain its policy of not using nuclear weapons to attack or threaten non-nuclear powers” can also be taken to mean that the DPRK *could* make a first strike using nuclear weapons on allies of the United States. In March 2009, directly before the DPRK fired a Taepodong-2 missile, DPRK news indicated that the country would use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the event that Japan operated a missile defense system, and the new memorandum affirms such intentions.

There is debate surrounding how long the DPRK’s nuclear weapons development program has been underway. There is one theory that the country used the program to acquire structural security in the 1990s when there was talk about the DPRK structure disintegrating. There is also another theory that the DPRK has intensified its nuclear development efforts in response to the US invasion of Iraq, a state that does not possess

nuclear weapons. However, the memorandum points out that it is necessary to possess an accurate understanding of the nature and source of nuclear materials that were brought onto the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK first became aware of the United States' possession of nuclear weapons in June 1950, at the start of the Korean War. When the DPRK looks back and considers that fighting nuclear weapons with nuclear weapons was the only option that they were left with, it is safe to say that the country's motivation for developing nuclear weapons stretches back to the Korean War.

The memorandum also mentions that the DPRK maintains its stance for establishing a structure for lasting peace and denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. It points out that realizing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is vital for confidence building, noting that a peace agreement must be signed. The portions that assert the use of nuclear weapons by the DPRK to defend against those of the United States, maintaining balance on the Korean Peninsula, and the conclusion of a peace agreement, all profess that the country's nuclear development plan does not contradict normalization of US-DPRK relations. The memorandum tells us that the strategy of the DPRK is to develop nuclear weapons, resolve the division of the peninsula, and bring down the nuclear umbrella that the United States provides the ROK.

The DPRK's "nuclear logic"

No country develops costly nuclear weapons without a national strategy. Uranium enrichment activities in Iran are causing deepened concern over nuclear weapons development, and if Iran's nuclear weapons development plan does in fact exist, it could be attributed to the political dynamics of the Middle East, a strategy against the United States, opposition against Israel, and other circumstances. Countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons and countries that have abandoned nuclear development have all had a development strategy in mind when undertaking nuclear development or abandoning development plans. Libya, a country that decided to discard its nuclear weapons in exchange for a commitment for support from the United States, likely used its nuclear development plan as a means to guarantee its national structure, rather than as a form of "nuclear logic." If India and Pakistan are able to use nuclear weapons to balance each other out, there may be a common awareness that creates a stable form of nuclear weapons. Both countries have a nuclear strategy, and as these are not nuclear weapons that threaten the status quo, it was difficult for them to be challenged by the international community.

Nevertheless, in the case of the DPRK, nuclear weapon development is a means of unifying the country and its people and a way to change the status quo, and has been interwoven with

the country's unification policy measures since its very foundation. These aims are clear even from the DPRK's official news broadcasts. On 24 April, Ri Yong-ho, Chief of the General Staff of the DPRK's Korean People's Army (KPA), gave a speech at a commemorative event the day before the 78th anniversary of the KPA warning that, "All means available, including nuclear deterrence, will be mobilized and we will smash all invading strongholds to pieces." The fact that he criticized the Lee Myung-bak administration in his speech as being an "enemy against the unification of the motherland" indicates the nation's awareness of the association of nuclear weapons with the unification of the Korean Peninsula. While enhancing its level of nuclear deterrence, the DPRK works to make itself a powerful nation, continues to maintain the unification slogan, and allots efforts to practical training for and strengthening of its conventional military forces. From these actions one is able to perceive the presence of a nuclear strategy that incorporates unification policy.

In March 2010 there was an incident involving the sinking of an ROK patrol vessel, and it is undeniable that since April 2009 the DPRK has taken an uncompromising stance towards other nations, including the ROK. In January 2010, the DPRK conducted joint exercises using its army, navy, and air force, broadcasting to the world a pattern of military exercises that envision war with the ROK. There were reports of tensions resulting from artillery training near the five islands of the West Sea as well as tension in the DMZ. In relation to the internal developments of the DPRK, as the roles of NDC member Chang Sung-taek and NDC Vice-Chairman O Kuk-ryol increase, the country's hard-line stance towards other countries has stood out. This is related to the health problems of NDC Chairman Kim Jong-il and the occurrence of changes in the leadership structure of the DPRK.

Considering that the development of weapons of mass destruction by the DPRK is based on a long-term strategy, if the US military forces stationed in the ROK were to withdraw, the United States and the DPRK concluded a peace agreement, and the DPRK completed developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), military tension between the north and south would increase. Once the DPRK completes the development of ICBMs and decides that it has a sufficient level of deterrence against the United States, and the conditions necessary to make the United States' will to intervene waver are in place, there will be the possibility of the outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK's conventional forces cannot be deemed adequate to win a battle against the ROK, however that analysis does not extend to the technologies of WMDs. While the country is still far from perfection in terms of military technology prowess, its exchange with foreign countries has allowed it to start to overcome some of the challenges it faces in terms of ballistic missile guidance systems, liquid fuel system technologies, solid fuel technologies, alloying technologies for ballistic missiles themselves, as well as two and three-stage rocket technologies. Since their failure with the

Taepodong-2 missile in July 2006, it is important to note that today, two years and eight months later, the DPRK has achieved a certain degree of success in their Taepodong-2 missile tests.

Issues for Japan

What should Japan do in order to prevent nuclear terrorism, prevent the proliferation of WMDs, and realize a stable international community?

First, in order to prevent nuclear proliferation, Japan must hope for an active role by China, a country with a close relationship with the DPRK politically, militarily, and economically. NDC Chairman Kim Jong-il's visit to China reaffirmed that China holds the key to economic development for the DPRK. It will likely be vital to share an awareness with China, a country that also undertook an important role in the Nuclear Security Summit, that improvements made to the military capacity of the DPRK steadily impact the Northeast Asian region.

Second, considering the current concerns of the international community, there is a possibility that at the second Nuclear Security Summit, which is to be held in 2012 in the ROK, the key topics for discussion will be addressing nuclear terrorism, preventing the proliferation of WMD technologies and materials, and the presence of development cooperation for WMDs between the Middle East and Northeast Asia. Japan, the United States, the ROK, China, and European countries all share the same recognition of concern over the proliferation of nuclear weapons technologies. It will likely be important that Asia and Europe cooperate with each other on the issue of addressing nuclear proliferation.

Third, considering the DPRK's nuclear weapons development process, the path of nuclear-related negotiations, and the country's official news broadcasts, it will be necessary to think about the problem of nuclear weapons development by the DPRK from a long-term perspective. Also, considering that the DPRK's nuclear development and its training exercises for its conventional forces are a smaller part of its grand strategy connected with proposing a peace agreement with the United States and dissolving the older armistice agreement, the significance of military cooperation between Iran and the DPRK will also become clear. It is theorized that nuclear weapons are a way for the DPRK to deter the United States. However, it is important to remember that deterrence is also a vital middle-point along the path towards achieving their ultimate objective, unification of the Korean Peninsula. That is why the DPRK has strategically avoided abandoning its nuclear weapons in concession for oil, food, or structural support. This fact is an important one, and one that should be remembered in the various discussions on the topic.

The purpose of this column is to respond to readers' interest in security issues and at the same time to promote a greater understanding of NIDS. As you know, a "briefing" means a background explanation, and we hope these columns will help everyone to better understand the complex issues involved in security affairs. Please note that the views in this column do not represent the official opinion of NIDS. Please contact us regarding any questions, comments or requests you may have. Please note that no part of this document may be reproduced in any form without the prior consent of NIDS.

Planning and Coordination Office, The National Institute for Defense Studies

Dedicated lines: 8-67-6522, 6588

Telephone: 03-3713-5912

Fax: 03-3713-6149

NIDS' website: <http://www.nids.go.jp>