

**Getting Out of the Military-First Dilemmas:
In Search of North Korea's
Coevolution Military Strategy**

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I. Introduction

Ever since Kim Il-sung's death in 1994, the military-first policy has been maintained as Kim Jong-il's principal strategy for governance and survival in North Korea. The policy's effectiveness as a force in domestic politics and political propaganda is debatable, but its critical flaw is that it creates doubts as to whether it will be effective enough to ensure North Korea's security and powerful state building in a rapidly changing world order.

The military-first policy is designed to enable North Korea to become a strong and prosperous state by 2012, but in fact it is restricting the development of nonmilitary sectors. Running the state through the army and focusing almost all of state capacity on the military disrupts the effective distribution of resources and aggravates the problem of an overweening military and an excessive emphasis on security. Thus despite its designers' intentions, the military-first policy will inevitably fail as a national strategy.

Kim Jong-il initially adopted this strategy in order to facilitate the maintenance of his regime. There is a possibility that despite Kim Jong-il's being aware of the policy's imminent failure, a lack of alternatives is forcing him to hold on to it. Insistence on this strategy will foster not the construction of a strong and prosperous state, but both external and internal ineffectiveness, weakening both the regime and the state, and eventually bring them down. On the other hand, if the current strategy is abandoned and North Korea makes new strategic decisions, its chances of survival will be greater and it will certainly be able to become a normal state in the international community.

This paper points out the structural problems that North Korea's military-first policy entails, and proposes a new direction for development in a so-called coevolution strategy.



Pyongyang could adopt it by modifying the military sector, aiming to transform North Korea from both the inside and the outside. The North Korean issue is not one which can be solved simply by changing the international community or the South Korean government's North Korea policy. The problem with President Lee Myung-bak's Grand Bargain or the Obama administration's "Comprehensive Package" is that they lack programs that would transform the North Korean state itself. Meanwhile, due to the current domestic situation and the political environment on the Korean Peninsula, the possibility of the problem's being successfully resolved by North Korea's leadership by promoting a different autonomous reform program in the Chinese or Vietnamese style is rather low. In the beginning stages of reform there would be heightened socioeconomic instability due to the loosened grip on internal politics, and the leaders would feel increasingly threatened by their relative weakness compared to their strong South Korean neighbor. Therefore for the successful survival of North Korea, there must be a coevolution strategy consisting of giving up its nuclear weapons and promoting an autonomous reform program, while its neighboring states simultaneously ensure and support its safety.

The strategy proposed in this paper is not a completely new concept. Despite certain defects, former President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy" and President Lee Myung-bak's "Denuclearization-Openness-3,000 Initiative" both aim for internal change in North Korea and simultaneous support from the international community. The discussions on the Korean Peninsula's peace system during the Six-Party Talks follow the same context, aiming to shape North Korea's strategy by changing the security environment of the Peninsula. However with the absence of mutual trust, such an approach is bound to take on a limited form, and a more fundamental strategy that satisfies both sides is required.

Advocating both guaranteeing the system and the giving up nuclear weapons may seem reckless and unrealistic, but the current environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula is actually quite favorable for resolving the North Korean issue. This situation becomes clearer if we understand that North Korea is facing a three-fold problem of nuclear weapons, economic crisis, and the succession of its leader. It also requires a fundamental reform in all other sectors, including politics, international relations, the economy, and the socio-cultural realm (Chun 2009). In order to achieve fundamental reform, the military-first policy must be abandoned and a new strategy needs to be devised. But given North Korea's political situation, unless change in the political structure comes first, there is a very low chance that nuclear weapons will be given up and economic reforms will be carried out. In this context, a coevolution strategy aims to make North Korea decide its strategy regarding nuclear weapons and economic reforms during its process of achieving a stable succession. Such a strategy aims for an eventual shift from a "military-first policy"



to an “economy-first policy.”

Coevolution strategy in the military sector aims to resolve the problem of “excess security” and excess caused by the military-first policy, the essence of which is giving up nuclear weapons. Just as in other sectors, it is composed of three stages. The first stage consists of North Korea declaring the shutdown of its nuclear weapons program in the process of the succession while the international community ensures external and internal security. The second stage is North Korea actually carrying out what it has promised and shaking off the security dilemma by moving from a “military-first policy” to an “economy-first policy.” The final stage results in the reduction of armaments of both South and North Korea, the latter participating in East Asian multilateral security cooperation after having adopted an entirely new approach to becoming a strong and prosperous state.

II. Understanding and Evaluating Military Strategy in the Military-First Era

1. Military Strategy in the Military-First Era

Kim Jong-il’s military-first policy can be interpreted as having succeeded and developed Kim Il-sung’s idea of prioritizing the military and applying this to national strategy during the era of armed struggle (Kang 2002, 17). Kim Jong-il said that “safeguarding and persisting in our socialism and completing the great achievement of revolution by using force is our Party’s unwavering will and conviction.” He added that he was not willing to pursue any changes, emphasizing that he had “reached a firm decision to overcome any hardship by relying on the strength of the gun.” (Jeon 2004, 15-16) However, it is said that Kim Jong-il’s policy is different from Kim Il-sung’s strategy to a certain extent, because there was formerly no party, state, or formal military during the process of nation-building and Kim Il-sung was mostly dependent on the proletariat class when conducting warfare against the Japanese. On the other hand, in a situation in which both a party and a state exist, Kim Jong-il’s military-first strategy insists on relying on strong military power represented by the North Korean People’s Army to protect socialism and face the international community’s hostile policies (Jeon 2004, 16-17).

This aspect is made evident in the “military before labor (先軍後勞)” terminology emphasized by the “military-first policy.” It is based on the notion that in the fulfillment of socialism the proletariat force can carry out its role only with the support of strong mili-



tary power because even the proletariat force, which is the spearhead of the struggle for socialism, cannot escape the fate of getting enslaved if there is no strong military (Kang 2002, 22-30). Thus this perspective places more importance on the revolutionary spirit of the military rather than on that of the proletariat class, and regards the military not as a means but as the leading force of politics. This reflects how, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of socialism, North Korea's internal and external security dilemma has intensified and the proportion that the military sector takes in national strategy has increased accordingly.

In the end, there are two types of military-first policies: the "political strategy placing the military as the top priority of national affairs" and the "political strategy having the military as the core and main force." (Jeon 2004, 19; Kang 2002, 19-22; Eom and Yun 2006, 150-151) In the perspective of military strategy, the former is for foreign security and the latter for internal stability of the regime.

(1) Military Strategy of the Military-First Era Aiming for External Security

North Korea claims that military-first policy is the "political strategy placing the military as the top priority in national affairs." (Jeon 2004, 20-26) Because, it says, the international community, including the United States, is menacing its right to exist, it is inevitable that the North Korean military sector be treated as of the utmost importance in order to be able to defend the state's other duties in areas such as politics, economics, and culture. The existing traditional socialist theory was perceived to be based on a materialist view of history aiming to construct socialism with improvements in the economic sector such as in production, followed by the strengthening of the military sector. In other words, the military was thought to be reliant on the economic sector. North Korea asserts that a military-first policy works based on creative principles that differ from traditional socialist theory because it proposes first and foremost the strengthening of the military based on *juche* ideology (Jeon 2004, 21-23).

Because the military is perceived as the most important factor, the military-first policy devotes itself primarily to strengthening national defense. For this purpose, it is especially important to focus on developing the industrial sector of national defense because it is essential for establishing a defense system entirely for the people and the state, which would thus increase national defense capabilities. In addition North Korea emphasizes that unlike imperialism and an arms race, this type of politics aims to contain war and attain peace, and not to threaten the other states. Its goal is to become an invincible military power that is able to secure the state's and nation's rights to life and sovereignty, and



guarantee the construction of a strong and prosperous state (Eom and Yun 2006, 156-167).

North Korea's external security and military strategy can be interpreted as so-called military-first pacifism (Hwang 2009, 119-120). It is the claim that North Korea, by becoming a strong and prosperous state through its military-first policy, gains deterrent power against the United States, and consequently maintains peace in regions surrounding the Korean Peninsula. This holds the basic underlying assumption that the main source of threat in the Peninsula is not itself but the United States. Especially on the issue of nuclear weapons, North Korea maintains that the problem originated not from North Korea's nuclear weapons program but from the United States' nuclear policy, which brought the weapon to the Peninsula in the first place, and the hostile attitude toward the North during the Cold War.¹ Thus it is most important for North Korea to acquire a balance of power against the American threat and end antagonistic policies to ensure its safety. The North Korean belief that military power is the only possible way to attain external security and prevent war is in line with the realism in international relations theory, which states that a balance of power may contain war and make peace possible (Woo 2007).

Thus military-first policy requires the production and possession of missiles and nuclear weapons, because North Korea sees these as the most effective way of national self-defense against the American threat. It accepts the so-called "balance of terror", that there has been no war between nuclear powers (Eom and Yun 2006, 160).

(2) Strategy of the Military-First Era Aiming for Internal Stability of the Regime

The reason why North Korea defines "military-first policy" as "a way of placing the military as the core and driving force of politics" is to pursue the stability of the system by emphasizing the military sector, which is most essential for the maintenance of the regime (Jeon 2004, 26-33). In addition, it simultaneously attempts to expand the attributes of the military sector, which is almost the only systematized and efficient part of North Korea, to the other fields.

In order to carry out a socialist revolution, there must exist a leading force, and the existing ideology has appointed the proletariat class to take on such a role. However, the military-first policy is a political measure that sees the military as the core of this revolution, since its power and spirit are considered superior to those of any other group in the state. The military is thought to be a successful materialization of the socialist collectivist nature not only due to its strong sense of revolution but also for being well organized and unified under strict discipline. This aspect is well reflected in the Party-military relationship. North Korea's stance is that "if the People's Army is strong it is possible to recon-



struct the Party even if it were to fall apart, but if the Army is weak it is not possible to sustain the Party and furthermore, the whole country may collapse.” (Eom and Yun 2006, 150-151) By indicating that the military is the foundation for the maintenance of both the Party and the state, there is an attempt to use its leading role as a means to solve the complex and difficult problems the country faces. In other words by putting forward the military as a model to follow, the military-first policy aims to make other sectors of society unite in a similar way to exhibit a high degree of political capacity and thus ultimately attain system stability.

North Korea explains that military-first politics realizes the principle of “developing a military for a long period of time in order to use it for every aspect of national affairs (養兵天日, 用兵萬事).” Previously, it was “developing a military for a long period of time in order to use it for the most crucial moment (養兵天日, 用兵一時).” However in the military-first era the military is perceived as taking on the leading role not only in external security but in all sectors necessary for constructing a socialist paradise. By emphasizing the importance of the military in internal issues as well, the policy intends to control the military in an efficient manner and stabilize the regime. Such complex objectives reflect the reality that ever since the 1990s there have been limitations to attaining political stability solely through the North Korean people’s voluntary support (Jeong 2009, 59-64).

2. Evaluation of Military Strategy in the Military-First Era

The “military-first policy” aims to achieve external and internal security, but despite these goals its military strategy contains complicated structural drawbacks. North Korea’s attempts to gain external security are instead further threatening it, for these efforts intensify the security dilemma around the Korean Peninsula. Similarly its attempts to gain internal security obstruct the efficient allocation of resources and thus make the normalization of the economy, which is the key factor for regime stability, impossible. Such instability may ultimately result in the weakening of the regime and the state, and present a challenge to power.

(1) Security Dilemmas of Military Strategy in the Military-First Era

The military strategy of a military-first policy is making neighboring states feel threatened and react accordingly, thus worsening North Korea’s security rather than improving it.² Although North Korea claims that its policy protects its autonomy and right to life, restrains war and promotes peace, and that it does not intend to undertake an arms race with other states or threaten them, it is producing the opposite result. Its military buildup



is causing an arms race in Northeast Asia, which in turn becomes a boomerang that strikes North Korea. Consequently Pyongyang has entered the vicious circle of security dilemmas and cannot help but continue to build up its hard power.

In addition, North Korea employs a peculiar reasoning that its production of nuclear weapons and missiles safeguards not only its own security but that of the Korean Peninsula and the entire Northeast Asia region from the American threat (Eom and Yun 2006, 164-165). Its stance is that without its military-first policy, war would have broken out multiple times, but due to nuclear weapons the possibility of arms conflict on the Peninsula has decreased and peace has been assured. North Korea also claims that due to the creation of a communal nuclear umbrella over Korea, its “military-first policy” benefits the public and the security of South Korea (*Yonhap News* October 23, 2006). From North Korea’s point of view, the Korean people’s power against the United States derives from the North’s possession of nuclear weapons, and, further, the North believes that these would be of great help even after unification (Eom and Yun 2006, 167). Such weapons, however, in fact place the Korean Peninsula at risk of nuclear war, make South Koreans feel increasingly threatened, destabilize the security order of Northeast Asia by increasing the probability of a nuclear chain reaction, and become a menace to the international nonproliferation regime. Caught in a vicious circle, these circumstances in turn, all increase North Korea’s insecurity.

In conclusion, the strategy of the military-first era is bringing about a security dilemma and preventing the state from resolving its problem of excessive military and security efforts. North Korea’s military buildup and nuclear armaments foster an arms race of greater intensity surrounding the Korean Peninsula and also the American nuclear umbrella; therefore it eventually works as a great menace to the stability of the North Korean regime itself. While such a strategy may function to solidify North Korea’s ego and maintain temporary security through the theory of balance of power, it does not help in dissolving the Cold War composition on the Korean Peninsula. On the contrary, it is intensifying competition and collision, and becoming a huge obstacle for the signing of a peace treaty with the United States that Pyongyang so desires.

(2) National Political Dilemma of Military Strategy in the Military-First Era

In the mid-1990s, after the “Arduous March,” the North Korean state system was not functioning adequately, which was an inevitable result of the military’s insertion in national politics. It is true that the military took on a critical role while the economy as a whole suffered from food shortages and energy scarcity (Jeon 2004, 32). Kim Jong-il him-



self congratulated the People's Army, saying that its mobilization enabled the country to overcome the famine and open up the path for the construction of a strong and prosperous state (Jeon 2004, 168).

But despite aiming for full control of the military and accelerating the construction of a strong and prosperous state by putting forward the military in both external and internal affairs, the military strategy of the military-first era hinders economic construction, the most crucial sector.³ It is true that during a serious national catastrophe like the Arduous March, the mobilizing of the relatively well organized and efficient military is helpful for bringing about social stability and reconstructing the impoverished economy. However, structural problems cannot be avoided once military strategy imposes the absolute priority of military logic in everyday politics and overpowers economic logic even in the construction of a strong and prosperous state. Such military strategy has become a burden to the state economy by causing excessive security concerns, and internally it has caused ineffective allocation of resources since they all are inordinately focused on the military. Instead of becoming a strong and prosperous state North Korea is now a so-called wartime economy that impedes sound economic development.

This strategy's structural problems are revealed especially by the primary emphasis on the industrial sector of national defense in order to strengthen the military. Kim Jong-il claims that this focus is the lifeline for the construction of a strong and prosperous state, and that otherwise such an objective would be impossible to accomplish (Kang 2002, 70-71). North Korea is in disaccord with the traditional view regarding the military as a consumer of the economic sector, and states that peaceful conditions for economic development are only possible with a strong military. However, directing all units of economic construction for securing the factors of production for the national defense industrial sector distorts the distribution of state resources and hinders production in other fields. For Pyongyang, investments are allocated first to the defense industry, production from the military industry is given top priority in the production index and even in setting the national budget, and defense industry takes precedence. The military-first era's military strategy thus does not allow the economic structure to support an increase in factors of production like capital and labor; does not support improving production efficiency; and furthermore does not provide space for new investment and production, since a smooth production-consumption-investment cycle is necessary for sound economic development.

Ultimately, this military strategy's emphasis on the industrial sector of national defense can be perceived as having political objectives rather than economic ones. This creates a dilemma that makes sound economic development impossible and hinders the construction of a strong and prosperous state; the logic of the military overpowers eco-



conomic logic even in economic construction. Table 1 shows North Korea's internal dilemma through its low economic growth rates. Considering that a significant amount of capital was invested for about ten years after 1998 through South Korean aid and inter-Korean economic cooperation, it is possible to observe that the North Korean economy is facing a structural dilemma due to its military-first policy. Furthermore there is a high possibility that it will face greater problems and more regime instability in the future.

Table1. North Korea's Economic Growth Rate, 1997–2008

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Economic growth rate (%)	-6.3	-1.1	6.2	1.3	3.7	1.2
Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Economic growth rate (%)	1.8	2.2	3.8	-1.1	-2.3	3.7

*Source: Bank of Korea

Thus both in its external and in its internal aspects the military strategy of the military-first era has failed, since it has not been able to meet the goals that were originally set. Its main contents and structural problems can be summed up as follows.

Table2. Main Contents and Structural Problems of Military Strategy in the Military-First era

Military-first Policy	Military Strategic Significance	Structural Problem
Political strategy placing the military as top priority in national affairs	Strategy for maintenance of external security	Aggravation of the security dilemma
Political strategy placing the military as core and main force	Strategy for internal system stability	Aggravation of national political dilemma



III. Gradual Decline and Seeking to Escape

Military strategy during the military-first era is facing dual problems of sustainability and durability. North Korea under its current ruling paradigm has two structural problems: it can neither give up its military-first strategy right away nor keep it indefinitely.

From the perspective of external military security, the military strategy of the military-first era aimed at the structure of a virtuous circle, so the state could build itself into a military power and achieve security for North Korea; however, in reality, a military buildup caused too much military growth and excessive security concerns, and ultimately an intensified security dilemma. As a result, North Korea entered into a long-term vicious circle, worsening its insecurity. From the perspective of domestic politics, the military strategy of the military-first era aimed for the virtuous circle that achieves an independent economy based on the organizational power and the efficiency of the army, and promotes national development and the pacification desired by the regime. Nevertheless, with economic deterioration, the domestic political dilemma has increased the possibility of regime crisis. Ultimately, military strategy in the military-first era unintentionally aggravated insecurity, and weakened the basis of the regime, rather than accelerating its efforts to develop into a strong and prosperous state, the original goal of Pyongyang.

Thus North Korea will not be able to resolve its deep-rooted problems and be assured of the survival of the regime and the state over the long term, if it maintains its strategy of the current military-first era. In order to escape from its current foreign and domestic dilemmas, a correct decision by the Party's leadership is essential, and this should begin with the process of succession under way. The problems that North Korea has been facing can be classified into three: nuclear weapons, economy, and succession. The current problems of North Korea should be approached from a general perspective, not separately. The first step will be the new leadership's abandonment of nuclear weapons, and strategic decisions that include changing from military-first politics to economy-first politics. It would be a most desirable solution for the current leadership of North Korea to make these strategic decisions on its own. We can imagine that Kim Jong-il might seek changes to some degree to lessen his son's burden, but it is almost impossible to expect him to do so in reality while he is in power today. Hence, such strategic decisions have to be accomplished in the process of succession.

Meanwhile, it has been difficult to assume that North Korea would make the strategic decision of abandoning its nuclear weapons program, considering its stance in the Six-Party Talks. Far from fundamentally resolving the overall North Korean nuclear issue, the process of the talks is inadequate. Making the decision to abandon its nuclear weapons



and choose an economy-first strategy in the process of succession would be a desirable way for North Korea to proceed. However, even if the successor is not determined to give up nuclear weapons, North Korea will not be able to overcome the dilemma deepened by the military strategy of the military-first era. Unless North Korea stops repeating the cycle of cooperation and betrayal as it has used during the Six-Party Talks and the bilateral talks with the United States, the contradictions between its domestic and foreign policies will be aggravated, and the fundamental solution will be lost. Without the abandonment of its nuclear weapons, it will be difficult for Pyongyang to expect full-scale international aid, which is vital for its survival, and its crisis will be exacerbated. Taking a firm stand on military-first politics will do nothing desirable for North Korea, but only hasten its decline.

Eventually, North Korea needs to make a strategic decision to give up its military strategy of the military-first era in order to resolve its problems in a fundamental way. The abandonment of the military strategy of the military-first era indicates the abandonment of nuclear weapons and the transition toward economy-first politics, which means resolving the dilemmas both in domestic politics and in foreign relations. Of course, immediate abandonment of the military strategy of the military-first era is neither realistic nor desirable. In consideration of the current situation of North Korea, immediate abandonment is likely to rapidly destabilize its domestic politics, and weaken the perception of threat to the other states. Though the implementation would be conducted gradually, it is crucial for Pyongyang to abandon military-first politics and nuclear weapons, and choose economy-first politics. For successful results, North Korea should strive to lessen military threats to the United States, South Korea, and the international community through negotiations on nuclear weapons and missiles, and at the same time, the international community also needs to make efforts to ease the sanctions previously imposed on North Korea. Also, it should work to establish a stable environment on the Korean Peninsula over the long term through the bilateral talks between North Korea and the other members of the Six-Party Talks, and the multilateral talks, such as the Six-Party Talks, and make greater efforts to solve security dilemmas.

(1) Policy Direction of North Korea

In preparation for the transformation of military-first politics into economy-first politics, North Korea has to drastically reduce its armaments and army, and start putting efforts to resolve its excessive security concerns. It should hold disarmament talks with South Korea and while maintaining its nuclear weapons, make a progressive effort at demilitarization that would transfer national resources concentrated in the army to the sector of the econ-



omy. Of course, such a strategic decision should begin with North Korea's declaration that it will abandon its nuclear weapons. Maintaining nuclear weapons will prevent North Korea from emerging from the strategy of the military-first era, and maintaining such military strategy will do the same for over-militarization. In the end, under the situation where every sector of the state revolves around the army, it is impossible to establish a long-term national development strategy. The renouncement of the military strategy of the military-first era becomes a prerequisite for persuading the international community to help North Korea's development in the future. It is a new approach for North Korea to transform into a strong and prosperous state.

During such a confidence-building process, North Korea will be able to fulfill its promise to abandon its nuclear weapons through the Six-Party Talks and the bilateral talks. Since the existing Six-Party agreements have taken place without the full trust of North Korea, there has been a significant problem in implementation. Thus it is difficult to consider how North Korea's participation in the Six-Party Talks will directly lead to its strategic decision on the abandonment of its nuclear weapons. The effect of several agreements that the Six-Party Talks have made are limited to inducing North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear weapons. It is why the Six-Party Talks could stop the nuclear weapon program of North Korea, but failed to make further progress in the basic stages of investigation and shutdown. Not building up trust with the other states, North Korea vowed to retain nuclear weapons, and the efforts of nuclear abandonment fell through.

Therefore, the leadership of North Korea has to decide to abandon the military strategy of the military-first era. The leaders will not be able to pursue a complete economy-first system during the initial escape stage, but the reform and open-door policy should be carried forward. It is a more realistic way of persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons strategically in the process of confidence-building with other states and gradually carry out its decision, rather than resolving it all at once. In reality, the complete abandonment of nuclear weapons should be attained in the next stage toward economy-first politics and reform. Thus the stage of escape, although the nuclear problem and economic problem will not be fundamentally resolved and some of the military strategy during the military-first era will still exist, becomes a basis for fulfilling the next full-scale implementation and reform since the North Korean government will have already made a strategic determination. Such movement will lighten the load of the new leadership of North Korea to a certain degree, and help it to put promises like implementation and reform into action in the next phase.

In the stage of escape, full-scale disarmament specifically requires confidence-building measures in the military sector as a precondition. Building confidence between



North and South Korea has been discussed for a long time, but ended without substantive achievement. Article 3 of the October 4 Declaration from the Second Inter-Korean Summit Meeting in 2007 announced that the two Koreas will end their hostile relations, mitigate military tensions between them, and settle disputes through communication and negotiation. Furthermore, it specified the non-aggression duty, saying, “South and North Korea are opposed to any kind of war, and determined to firmly abide by the non-aggression duty.” However, the situation that Pyongyang and Seoul do not trust each other devalued such a promise to an ostensible declaration. Meanwhile, North Korea insisted that the accomplishment of the North Korea-U.S. peace negotiation will naturally lead to an actual disarmament of the two Koreas, and that military confidence will be earned with the withdrawal of the U.S. Forces in Korea (Ha 2000). However, examples from other regions, such as Europe, show military confidence building should take precedence in order to attain de facto disarmament (Han 2004). South Korea already made several suggestions in the UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1988; the confidence-building process, included the first stage of building political confidence, the second of building military confidence, and the final goal of actual disarmament (Cho 2007). This confidence-building process should be fulfilled through mutual agreement between North and South Korea.

In this respect, with the abandonment of its nuclear weapons, North Korea’s strategic decision should be transformed into a defensive military structure as part of its military strategy. Its military strategy is based on offensive strategies, such as total war, preemptive strike, mixed war, and swift strategy (Seo 2009). It is expected that North Korea will dominate a future situation by an early blitz attack and a mixed war of a regular and an irregular army, and then expand to a war with powerful weaponry and mechanized units (Ministry of National Defense 2008). To put this plan into action, North Korea placed about 70 percent of its ground force south of Pyongyang and Wonsan and has developed offensive military structures to ambush enemy forces through overwhelming strength in the early phase of a war. Thus, in order to seek escape and fulfill de facto disarmament, North Korea should transform its offensive military strategy to a defensive one first. It also needs to relocate its offensive weapons system, start disarmament before the others do, and come up with measures regulating production and the import of offensive weapons.

(2) The Roles of South Korea and the International Community

It will of course be hard for the North Korean government to trust promises that the international community will guarantee the security of its regime and provide grant aid in return for the abandonment of its nuclear weapons. From the realists’ point of view, a



country cannot trust another in the state of anarchy (Waltz 1979). This perspective explains the argument of North Korea that it cannot renounce its nuclear weapons because it does not believe the reassurances of the United States and South Korea. Thus, building mutual confidence with Pyongyang is the most important element in working toward a strategic decision. Until now, Washington and Seoul have framed their policies toward North Korea from the viewpoint of the hawks. But they need to understand the affairs surrounding the Korean Peninsula from the viewpoint of North Korea in order to dispel its worries about hostile U.S. policy and its perception of external threats in general. How to encourage North Korea to trust the international community also needs study from the viewpoint of North Korea. Both the Sunshine Policy and the policy promising North Korea's GDP of 3,000 U.S. dollars in return for the abandonment of nuclear weapons ended in failure. Both guaranteed full-scale aid and reform, but could not be the fundamental solution to the North Korean issue because they did not have a practical plan to draw North Korea's strategic decision.

The international community, including the United States and South Korea, should guarantee the security of North Korea in the early phase of transformation from military-first politics into economy-first politics in order to build confidence. This guarantee assumes not only resolving external threats to North Korea but also maintaining North Korean domestic security during the leadership succession process. Signing the North Korea-U.S. peace treaty that North Korea is demanding in return for the abandonment of its nuclear weapons and the non-aggression pact by the United States and South Korea can be considered as ways to guarantee the security of North Korea. In addition, establishment of liaison offices could lay the groundwork for normalization of North Korea-U.S. and North Korea-Japan relations. Most important, establishing American liaison offices in North Korea has been discussed several times, the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework being the most representative case. Improvements in North Korea-U.S. and North Korea-Japan relations are required to resolve problems related to excessive security and excessive military concerns. However, since North Korea cannot rely on U.S. extended deterrence as South Korea does, it should be able to reduce its perception of external menace by improving its relations with the United States. Such a measure might be insufficient to eliminate all Pyongyang's suspicions, but can effectively help build mutual confidence.

China's active guarantee of the security of North Korea is one of the daring ways to resolve North Korea's perception of its external threats. After the early 1990s, North Korea's fear of external threats has rapidly increased since the former Soviet Union collapsed and Communist China lost its status as a security patron to North Korea in the process of systemic transformation. North Korea at that time lost the option of external balancing,



namely alliances, so it devoted all its strength to internal balancing, through armaments, in order to deal with the collapse of the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula.⁴ Thus, it is important that a rising China actively secure the current North Korean regime under negotiations with the United States and South Korea. Considering Sino-U.S. or Sino-South Korea relations, China will hardly decide to provide extended deterrence to North Korea, but the improvement of Sino-North Korea security ties will be a great help in easing the fears that North Korea has, and also matches the strategic interests of China.

IV. A Coevolution Strategy for the Advancement of the North Korean Military

1. Stage of Implementation and Reform

(1) North Korea

The coevolution strategy of the North Korean military will begin when the regime decides to abandon its nuclear weapons first, passes the stage of escape, and enters the stage of transition and reform. Ultimately, the full shutdown of the nuclear weapons program should take place in the middle or ending phase of transition and reform. In this stage, a new leader of North Korea would look like an enlightened dictator. He will ultimately concentrate on reform and an open-door policy for a market economy for the North Korean economy in order to resolve dilemmas in security and domestic politics. In this transition stage, the military-first and the economy-first governments will initially coexist. Thus, domestically, the powers of the military-first and the economy-first governments will form a balance of power, and the enlightened dictator should act as a balancer. Although neither the abandonment of nuclear weapons nor disarmament will have been completed yet, he has to fulfill them. The phase is important as the dilemma in security and domestic politics will only be resolved as national defense expenditures are reduced after renouncing military-first politics. In this stage, gradual transition and reform will be accomplished through a process of de-militarization with strategic changes in North Korea, and this transition will be completed at least by 2020, if not earlier.

North Korea should therefore undertake its disarmament in earnest. Drawing on military confidence built in the former stage, a detailed plan needs to be carried out. Most of



all, before the Korean Peninsula becomes fully free from the conditions of the ceasefire, the mutual deterrence system needs to be maintained between the two Koreas while they still keep their military powers in balance toward the goal of disarmament. To put disarmament into practice, a mutual balance in military power should be maintained, with an application of the principle of mutual possession in equilibrium. It can be suggested that the one possessing more armed force reduce first to the level of the other, and then both sides start reducing to the same amount (Ha 2000). During this process, objections can be raised about the method of evaluating the levels of military power; however, such problems can be resolved by spot inspections and mutual observation by negotiation between Pyongyang and Seoul. North Korea has suggested that South Korea reduce both sides' troops to less than 100,000 and cut military facilities, but such a rapid disarmament is likely to exacerbate security conditions on the Korean Peninsula.

(2) South Korea and International Community

Coevolutionary strategy emphasizes that such change should be encouraged not only in North Korea but also in other states, including South Korea and the United States, and finally should achieve harmony between the domestic and foreign situations of North Korea. If North Korea decides to abandon its nuclear weapons and military-first politics, the international community should welcome its decision and help it move toward a strategic transformation to economy-first politics. In the United States, there has been a suggestion and support for a "Grand Bargain," meaning that the international community should guarantee the security of the North Korean regime and provide full-scale economic aid to North Korea while North Korea in turn makes progress in abandoning its nuclear weapons and reducing its conventional weapons (O'Hanlon and Mochizuki 2003). Also, in the former stage, peace negotiations and a declaration of nonaggression between North Korea and the United States should be signed first. Then, the pledge can be implemented by the international community's support for the normalization of North Korea-U.S. and North Korea-Japan relations. Then there will be an expansion of full-scale economic support toward North Korea in the stage of transformation and reform. In the aftermath of the Cold War, North and South Koreas should have had serious disarmament negotiations and mutual disarmament as Europe did. These steps require the efforts of other states such as the United States, China, Japan and Russia, to continuously try to improve their relations with North Korea and create a condition in which the two Koreas can start mutual disarmament. Disarmament of conventional weapons and a cut in military strength on the Korean Peninsula will help to resolve most of the perception of inter-Korean mili-



tary threat toward each other.

By all means, regular maintenance for and investment in the North Korean military is required in the process of transformation from military-first politics to economy-first politics since the transformation of national strategy has not been completed yet, and military-first politics and economy-first politics are still in balance. However, compared with former military-first politics, there will be more emphasis on the non-military sector, where more national resources should be concentrated. Without efforts to resolve the problems of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, and disarm conventional weapons and troops, the imbalance between military and economy will not improve. It is impossible for North Korea to make a new long-term national strategy without dissolving the excessive military emphasis of the military-first era. Consequently, the international community should support disarmament on the Korean Peninsula throughout the changing security environment, and further guide North Korea in transforming from military-first politics into economy-first politics.

From the perspective of achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula and in East Asia, reform in the North Korean army and change in military relations between the two Koreas in the stage of transition and reform are destined to go through a transitional period. This circumstance reflects the distinctive military condition of the Korean Peninsula, which has been divided in tension for more than sixty years since the end of the Second World War and even after the Cold War, which ended in the 1980s. In consideration of the international order surrounding the Korean Peninsula, planning at a low level and gradual changes are more realistic than aiming for an idealistic peace. In such a transition stage, the international community should approach the reform of the North Korean military with an incomplete and passive approach, with more realistic conceptions of what peace will gradually look like, rather than applying a complete, rapid, and active plan for peace on the Korean Peninsula.

For example, in the stage of transition and reform, it is appropriate to plan for a new security condition on the Korean Peninsula from the viewpoint of “negative peace,” rather than that of “positive peace” supported by Johan Galtung (Galtung 1996). Galtung has asserted that people should aim for a positive peace, in which elements of indirect and structural violence have militarily, politically, economically, and culturally disappeared and a mutual equilibrium is achieved, rather than a passive peace, which is the order that comes from the process of preventing a war and managing troubles. Kenneth Boulding classified peace into stable ones and unstable ones (Boulding 1979); the stable peace is the condition of peace that does not have the possibility of war and is without the need to prepare for a war, and the unstable peace has the possibility of war, but is in a state of pre-



venting a war through deterrence by power and regulation by negotiation. On the Korean Peninsula, positive and stable peace should be promoted in the long term, and the conditions ensuring permanent peace should also be aimed for. In the stage of transition and reform, the institutionalization process is the goal in order to manage the security dilemma. In other words, it is necessary to reduce the security dilemma in order to maintain current military strengths distributed around the Korean Peninsula, and ultimately to move to the institutionalization process of a security regime, preventing disputes and managing peace (Jervis 1983).

An international regime reflects the common expectation of agents on current issues in international relations.⁵ A security regime is the process of institutionalization that states use to escape from security dilemmas in which no mutual confidence exists. For example, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) that the United States and the Soviet Union promoted was the means of mitigating the mutual arms race during the Cold War. In addition, the Nonproliferation Treaty can be evaluated as the nonproliferation security regime that effectively controlled the nuclear flow from the end of the Second World War to the 1960s. Coevolution strategy on the Korean Peninsula should be constructed as an institutionalization process for a transition period that ultimately makes progress in disarmament, reduces perception of threat, and resolves security dilemmas. Such formulation of a security regime is a relatively negative and unstable process, but it is more realistic in the militarily unstable security environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula.⁶

Nevertheless, the stage of transition and reform is just a period of transition, and a process toward ultimate transformation. It will be difficult for North Korea to become a normal state and survive in the international community should it keep staying in the stage of transition and reform in which not only does it make strategic decisions and pushes ahead with reform, and the military-first and the Sun-Kyung strategies coexist. For the survival and development of the state, Pyongyang must shed its military-first politics completely, rule the state based on the rule of law and institutions, not by the dictatorship of the *suryong* or the Dear Leader, and substitute a planned economy with a market economy. In the military sector, the two Koreas should move beyond a negative and unstable peace through disarmament, settle into a positive and stable peace on the Korean Peninsula, and keep their military strength at a level that takes the security environment in Northeast Asia into consideration.

2. Transformation Stage

The last stage of the coevolution strategy includes a positive and stable peace, based on



the full transformation of the North Korean military, on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. This transformation stage is likely to happen between 2020 and 2030, and this period is the time when the domestic and foreign transformation of North Korea will be completed with full-scale changes in national strategy from military-first politics to economy-first politics.

Thus the institutionalization process of military security that has been promoted from the stage of transition and reform will be completed, and a stable peace will be settled on the Korean Peninsula. Such a development means not only the disappearance of the possibility of inter-Korean war but also a condition in which conflicts in Northeast Asia also disappear and preparation for a war is not necessary. In addition, it indicates that the security environment on the Korean Peninsula will promote peace in Northeast Asia, and will be more secure in the process of developing peace in Northeast Asia. Such an image of the future suggests the concept of a security community in which the possibility of war among states almost vanishes in perception of an integrated community and adequate institutions and customs are established as in Europe after the end of the Cold War (Adler and Barnett 1998; Deutsch 1968). For example, European states founded various conferences, including summit meetings and cabinet meetings, in order to deal with the changes in the international political environment and new security menaces. Through a series of institutionalization processes, leaders created the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1995. In Northeast Asia, in the stage where multilateral security cooperation is institutionalized, security problems like building up military confidence and realizing disarmament could be stably resolved under the common recognition of the states.

In the stage of transition, North Korea will be a normal state which follows global standards. In such a situation, there would be almost no concern about security threats, so at this stage the measures implemented in the stage of transition and reform can be completed. Nuclear nonproliferation will be achieved by full-scale abandonment of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, and finally denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula will be attained. North Korea, which will have completely resolved its tension with the United States, Japan, and South Korea, will participate in multilateral institutions in a positive way. Therefore, North Korea will enjoy a security environment that is free of the security insurance offered by China or the United States' non-aggression pact, and implementation of disarmament by the two Koreas lets both of them keep their military at minimum. Economically developing North Korea would maintain its necessary army at a minimum, but its power would be limited to defense and not expected to threaten security on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia.



Hence, security guarantees on North Korea will not depend on military strength, but on diplomacy and Northeast Asian multilateral security institutions. Of course, the Northeast Asian security environment and multilateral institutions can be fluid, relying on Sino-U.S. or Sino-Japan relations. However, it is certain that peace in Northeast Asia will be promoted when the North Korean issue does not threaten the Korean Peninsula and the security of Northeast Asia. ■

Table3. Coevolution Strategy for North Korea's Military

Stage	Escape from Crisis (First stage)	Transition and Reform (Second stage)	Transformation (Third stage)
Strategy of North Korea	-Declaration of abandoning military-first politics and nuclear weapons	-The coexistence of military-first and the economy-first politics -Complete shut-down of nuclear weapons program -Efforts of the two Koreas for disarmament	-Defensive army -Security achieved by diplomacy
Measures of the International Community	-Guaranteeing security of the regime, and the succession -Promising the normalization of North Korea-U.S. and North Korea-Japan relations	-Supporting disarmament of the two Koreas -Trying to institutionalize security	-Completing disarmament by the two Koreas -Establishing a security institution



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Endnotes

¹ Refer to the New Year's Address by Kim Il-sung (January 1, 1994). To emphasize the U.S. responsibility on the nuclear issue, North Korea does not use the expression 'North Korean nuclear issue,' but 'nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.'

² Refer to Jervis (1978) on security dilemma.

³ North Korea describes the strong and prosperous state as a military power, political ideology power, and cultural power. (Kang 2002, 74)

⁴ Refer to Waltz (1979, 168) and Morrow (1993, 208) on the relation between external balancing and internal balancing in balancing policy.

⁵ International regime is defined as "a set of explicit or implicit principles, norms, rules, and decision making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area." (Krasner 1983, 2)

⁶ Refer to Jihwan Hwang (2009) on the necessity to institutionalize the peace regime on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia based on the concept of passive and unstable peace.



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