

# **Coevolution Strategy for North Korea: Diplomacy**

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### I. Introduction

After the Cold War ended and the former Soviet bloc broke down, North Korea's rival, South Korea, established diplomatic relations with the former Soviet Union and China, which put North Korea on a difficult journey for survival. Witnessing long-standing communist regimes that had worked alongside Pyongyang to construct socialism helplessly collapse or change over from communism under external pressure or pressure by the people, North Korea found itself in a desperately dangerous situation in which it had to sustain its socialist system and regime, and worry about not just a transition but an absorbed unification by the South.

With the fall of the socialist bloc, the U.S.-led liberal democratic bloc's development accelerated even further. In the post-Cold War environment, not only the new structure of power but also the development of the massive trends of globalization, information proliferation, and democratization confirmed socialism to be a system lacking the open, democratic, and creative qualities it needed to cope with these changes. In addition, liberal democracy developed in tandem with a market economy. At the same time, as the United States, who was the longtime adversary of North Korea, built an unrivaled hegemony with unprecedented qualities of leadership, North Korea felt ever more threatened.

The Kim Il-sung regime, which was searching for a survival strategy throughout 1991 and 1992, stirred up the first nuclear crisis in 1993, and the Kim Jong-il regime that followed in 1994 tried to escape its post-Cold War crisis by freezing its nuclear program but firmly promoting military-first politics. In the process, North Korea focused on aligning its internal system and strove to provide an opportunity for economic development, on



the one hand, while concentrating on creating a diplomatic environment in which North Korea could survive on a long-term basis, on the other. On the basis of its bilateral diplomatic relationship with the United States that was arranged after the first North Korean nuclear crisis, North Korea tried to put an end to the so-called “United States’ hostile policy toward North Korea” while it sought to strengthen its self-defense capacity based on military power that revolved around military-first politics. In regards to South Korea, Pyongyang, while keeping itself from an absorbed unification, utilized Seoul’s engagement policy to secure practical interests for the sake of future regime development.

Also, by improving relations with neighboring states such as China, Russia, and Japan, North Korea attempted to maximize economic and diplomatic support from them. At the same time, it established diplomatic relations with non-Asian states, including those in Europe, and pursued a practical diplomatic doctrine that could have economic and diplomatic benefits, even if only partially.

However, facing a more conservative U.S. foreign policy and the anti-terrorism campaign after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, North Korea found itself in a much more unfavorable diplomatic situation. Eventually, in October 2002, the outbreak of the second North Korean nuclear crisis signaled that North Korea was reverting back to the rigid nuclear military-first diplomacy centered on its nuclear program and nuclear weapons. Within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, sporadic attempts to discuss North Korean abandonment of its nuclear program with accompanying economic aid continued, but North Korea did not have the strategic option of abandoning its nuclear program. Its neighbor states’ security guarantees failed to satisfy its insecurities, and thus the North Korean problem based on the nuclear weapons issue is still going in circles without much progress.

The North Korean nuclear program is not a nuclear weapons issue but a question of the survival of North Korea as a political entity. North Korean nuclear weapons diplomacy is also not about nuclear weapons but about its survival and the overall political system based on military-first priorities. As long as North Korea’s nuclear military-first diplomacy and military-first political system interact reciprocally, the individual evolution of North Korean diplomacy is impossible. And if North Korea’s politics, economy, military, society, and other areas do not evolve in tandem, neither will its diplomacy.

Furthermore, North Korea’s evolution without outside support cannot fulfill the goals that are desired. Neighboring states’ foreign policy toward Pyongyang must also evolve at the same time to support and strengthen North Korea’s domestic forces that advocate for such advancement. North Korea and its neighboring countries’ coevolution will alleviate North Korea’s political concerns and, in the long run, create diplomatic agreements on and action plans for North Korea’s role in Northeast Asia.



This working paper predicts that if North Korea pursues nuclear military-first diplomacy in order to support its “strong and prosperous state” policy, it cannot survive as a normal and developed state in the international community. North Korea must make a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program and revive as a truly developed state, meeting twenty-first-century global standards. In order to achieve this status, the evolution of both North Korea’s political system and its diplomacy must work simultaneously. Moreover, North Korea’s evolution should be supported by the evolution of neighboring states’ North Korea policy. I first examine the development of North Korean diplomacy, and analyze why North Korea’s military-first diplomacy will inevitably fail. Then, I introduce the three steps of diplomatic evolution for North Korea, and through a discussion of the coevolution process of it and its neighboring states, explore the possibility of whether its overall system can lead to a normal and developed future.

## **II. Components and Evaluation of Diplomatic Strategy in the Military-First Era**

### **1. Components of Diplomatic Strategy**

Diplomacy in the military-first era has the strategic goal of serving the strategic purpose of military-first politics. Military-first politics, which has made the military the most important pillar of the regime while it promoted the militarization of the overall society, is a method to maintain and further strengthen the survival capacity of the North Korean socialist regime after the end of the Cold War. Therefore, diplomacy in the military-first era, or, in other words, military-first diplomacy, aims to guarantee the survival of North Korea’s “Great Leader”-centered socialist regime and focuses on creating a diplomatic environment in which North Korea can eventually become a “strong and prosperous state.” As the authority and power of the military have been reinforced, the status and influence of the military in the decision-making process of foreign policy have only increased. Pyongyang, in deciding on its method of enforcing foreign policy, has frequently resorted to military action. Its decision to develop nuclear weapons to use them as an important diplomatic tool can also be understood as one product of the military-first political system.

This argument about North Korea’s military-first politics is closely related to its evaluation of the situation of the international community and the direction of future foreign policy. In other words, this discussion analyzes the environment of military-first politics



while finding the “fundamental questions arising in today’s world” from the international political environment. North Korea proclaims the goal of its foreign policy as “protecting and adhering to *Juche* [Self-reliant] socialism, the bastion of global socialism, from the allied forces of imperialism, and completing *Juche* achievements.” (Kang 2002, 7-8) Additional explanations of this statement read “as long as imperialism exists on the face of the Earth and the schemes of aggression by imperialists continue, we cannot submit to such forces. The ultimate triumph of *Juche* achievements can only be accomplished by unremitting fights. Also, the fundamental spirit of military-first ideology is to fully invoke military, political and economic power to fight to the end against the imperialists who try to crush *Juche* ideology. Through this process, we shall independently build a new peaceful society based on the dynamic spirit of military-first ideology.” (Kang 2002, 15) Such statements show the direction of North Korea’s diplomatic strategy.

Military-first diplomacy more specifically comprises (1) securing a survival environment through strengthening military deterrence and negotiations with the United States, (2) practical diplomacy for acquiring economic resources, and (3) diplomacy with South Korea in which North Korea, in the name of unification strategy, acquires the necessary diplomatic resources to secure economic aid and an environment in which it can survive. On this survival environment, North Korea asserts that “only a strong military response to the hostile imperialist forces, that only pursue wars of aggression, can lead to peace.” It also states that “it is military-first politics that will provide the peaceful environment necessary for our nation’s unification.” (Kang 2002, 268) Moreover, on acquiring economic aid, it explains that “when our republic suffered an unprecedented food crisis and energy shortage that damaged our overall economy because of U.S. economic sanctions and their schemes using military pressure, military-first politics was the force that drove the military to be the primary actor that vitalized the overall economy.” It also explains that there is a need to “make the military the main force and mightily construct overarching socialism.” (Chun 2004, 32) On its strategy toward South Korea, it argues that “military-first politics is the strongest measure of unification our generation can use to realize our nation’s long-cherished wish for unification.” It further states that “military-first politics finds its meaning in that it hinders the United States’ attempts at wars of aggression and thus provides the fundamental setting for a peaceful environment for our nation’s unification.” It asserts that “this is all because military-first politics is a political method that provides deterrence [in] preventing war on the Korean Peninsula.”

Such military-first politics is also implied in the revised constitution of North Korea. In the Eighth Constitution revised on September 5, 1998, the expression “Marxism-Leninism” in Article 4 of the Seventh Revised Constitution was deleted. The phrase “repel



foreign powers on a national scale” of Article 5 was deleted as well. Moreover, in the Eighth Revised Constitution, Article 17, “autonomy, peace, amity” were set as the goals of foreign policy and at the same time, the diplomatic stance was based on “our own version of socialism and strengthening of international solidarity based on autonomy.” The fundamental direction of North Korean diplomacy has thus shifted from (1) revolutionary diplomacy to practical diplomacy, (2) from diplomacy focused on “liberating the South” to a protectionist diplomacy to maintain the North Korean socialist regime, (3) from encampment diplomacy to nonalignment diplomacy in the short run and to open diplomacy in the long run, and (4) from a self-reliant diplomacy between China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War to inducement diplomacy due to Sino-Soviet détente.

Such fundamental diplomatic orientations of Pyongyang clearly differ from its diplomatic strategies during the Cold War period. The Korean Workers’ Party code and the former socialist constitution stipulate that “the immediate purpose of [the] Korean Workers’ Party is to achieve complete socialist victory in the Northern part of the Republic and [finish] national liberation and the historic task of the people’s democracy revolution on a national scale. The ultimate goal is to penetrate *Juche* ideology across the entire society and [construct] a communist society” (Preamble of the code). For this goal, North Korea adopted a platform to strengthen the three main revolution capabilities and increase diplomatic relations within the socialist bloc and the Third World through strong ties to the Soviet Union. The one continuity is that amid the lack of evidence that North Korea has given up on communist unification, it has not given up the political intention to put the entire Korean Peninsula under its influence by measures other than war. As Hak Soon Paik has pointed out, “In the historical, psychological, and substantial space of the ‘Korean Peninsula,’ the essence of North Korea’s strategy, to win the competition between the two Koreas and secure a monopolized authority over the entire peninsula to build a unified nation, has not changed.” (Paik 2003, 150)

The core goal of military-first diplomacy was diplomatic relations with the United States. Immediately after the end of the Cold War, North Korea focused on negotiating with the United States, and between December 1988 and December 1992, it pushed forward advisor-level diplomatic contacts in Beijing twenty-eight times (Kim 2002, 149-151). However, as North Korea realized that the required factors for its survival were increasingly lacking, it decided on walking the path of military-first diplomacy and then launched the first nuclear crisis in March 1993. Afterward, by agreeing to freeze its nuclear program in the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework between Washington and Pyongyang, North Korea tried to make diplomatic room for its survival for the time being. After going through the first nuclear crisis and signing the Agreed Framework, the bilateral relationship between the United



States and North Korea began, and until the DPRK-U.S. Joint Communiqué under the Clinton administration in 2000, desperate efforts to improve U.S.-DPRK relations, known as the “Geneva Agreed Framework system,” continued for eight years. This relationship then experienced a year-long lull after the Bush administration came into office. In 2002, with the outbreak of the second nuclear crisis, this bilateral relationship entered the era of the Six-Party Talks, but without an effective breakthrough, it stagnated.

North Korea, based on its nuclear program, proceeded with its military-first diplomacy while trying to sign a peace treaty with the United States and to create the military and diplomatic environment necessary for its survival. After the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework, U.S.-DPRK relations showed partial progress. On January 12, 1995, the U.S. State Department announced that it would ease the sanctions on North Korea, allow business and travel between the United States and the DPRK, grant permission to North Koreans to use U.S. finance institutions, and engage in the importation of magnesite from North Korea. During this process, North Korea continually emphasized the signing of a U.S.-DPRK peace treaty. While demanding the conclusion of a peace treaty, North Korea took measures such as expelling the delegation of the Czech Republic in 1993, establishing Panmunjom representatives of the Korean People's Army in 1994, and pulling out North Korean representatives from the Panmunjom Military Armistice Commission, to jeopardize the armistice system. The Four-Party Talks were held in March 1997, but after six talks ending in June 1998, the Four-Party Talks ceased due to North Korea's refusal to participate. This was the result of North Korea's repeated argument that the U.S.-DPRK peace treaty must be signed first.

North Korea promoted a diplomatic policy based on its nuclear program to fortify the requirements for its survival and to develop a “strong and prosperous state” by signing a peace treaty with the United States. The North asserted that securing the peace of the Korean Peninsula was important because first, a treaty would “make the peace of the Korean Peninsula serve our nation's unification, second, [realize] peace through dialogue and negotiation, third, completely [withdraw] the U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula, and fourth, strictly [denounce] the increase in military power and defense expenditure of South Korea.” (Eom and Yun 2006, 120) Then North Korea further elaborates clearly on the peace treaty. “The military contest between the Republic and the United States ... end the hostile relations and based on reciprocal trust, conduct talks and contacts, and end the disreputable past ... the first step is no other than a DPRK-U.S. Nonaggression Pact.” For these reasons, it argues that “first, as long as the U.S. military threat is not eliminated, North-South Korean relations cannot normally improve ... a Nonaggression Pact must be signed before the distrust and hostility between the DPRK and [the] United States can





alleviate and guarantee each other's security... talks must take place ...[would be] practical and meaningful." "Second, the signing of this pact will be [a] turning point in ultimately solving the problem of the Korean Peninsula. It will nullify the justification for stationing U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula and will play the decisive role of opening the new phase of our nation's independent and peaceful unification by providing the objective guidelines for the withdrawal of U.S. troops." (Eom and Yun 2006, 227-233)

Such efforts reached a peak in 2000. In October 2000, Jo Myung Rok, North Korea's first Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission, visited the United States and agreed on ending the hostile relationship, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang and discussed improving U.S.-DPRK relations. In addition, the United States made basic agreements for the signing of the peace treaty and in return, it clearly stated in the agreement the banning of launching missiles. The Joint Communiqué states, "Through historical highest-level talks, the DPRK and the United States agree that the circumstances of the Korean Peninsula have changed and for the strengthening of the peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region, the two states decided to take measures to fundamentally improve the bilateral relationship. With this understanding, both parties will relieve the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, change the 1953 armistice to a stable peace-guarantee system and both acknowledge that there are many ways, such as the Four Party Talks, to officially end the Korean War." (Korean Central News Agency 2000) Such discussions continued into the second Bush administration. "To resolve the rigid situation of the Korean Peninsula, we [North Korea] believe that signing a DPRK-U.S. Nonaggression Pact is a reasonable and realistic method for solving the nuclear problem. Through the Pact, if the United States legally promises nonaggression, including the use of nuclear weapons, we also have intentions to alleviate U.S. security concerns. For a small country such as ours, the criterion for all problem-solving is the elimination of threats to our sovereignty and survival." Such statements show that diplomatic relations with the United States are at the core of North Korean military-first diplomacy (Statement by the Spokesperson of North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002).

With the launching of the Bush administration and the strengthening of U.S. nonproliferation and counterterrorism policies after 9/11, DPRK-U.S. relations have been going steadily downhill. North Korea describes the international situation of the 2000s, particularly relations with the United States, as stated below. "To secure peace on the Korean Peninsula and to achieve an independent unification, we must oppose invasion, war schemes and eliminate threats of war. Under the justification of counterterrorism, U.S. and South Korean aggressive reactionaries are arousing tensions on the Korean Peninsula with anti-Republic and anti-unification schemes. In the international circumstances of



increasing threats of a new war, we cannot think of our nation's peace and unification.” (Rodong Sinmun 2002) Also, after the launching of the Bush administration, the United States has pegged us as the ‘Axis of Evil’ and has declared it national policy to reject our system, and by designating us as a target of preliminary nuclear attack, it has publicly declared a nuclear war on us. The United States was already deliberately violating the Agreed Framework and in the meanwhile, it has accused us of new ‘suspected nuclear development’ and suspended heavy fuel oil aid, thus undisputedly violat[ing] the agreement. In response to our sincere proposals and serious negotiation efforts, the United States has responded with threats of ‘blockades’ and ‘military response,’ and has shown an arrogant attitude by insisting [on] ‘talks but no negotiations.’ ” (Government Statement of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 2003)

As a result, North Korea reverted back to its military-first diplomacy, based on nuclear weapons, in dealing with the United States, and after the second nuclear crisis broke out in 2002, U.S.-DPRK relations faced a stalemate. North Korea’s nuclear military-first diplomacy has in fact strengthened, and as it has conducted its first and second nuclear testing, its diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions have been intensified.

If diplomacy with the United States is one axis of military-first diplomacy for securing survival, the other axis is practical diplomacy that seeks to maintain the economy and find sources of development. North Korea’s attempts at practical diplomacy can be seen in its one-directional diplomatic relations. DPRK-Chinese relations have temporarily cooled after the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China. However, continuous exchanges have taken place, including the signing of the DPRK-China Economic Technology Cooperation Agreement in 1995, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly Kim Yong-nam’s visit to China in June 1999, and the Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China Tang Jia Xuan’s visit to North Korea in October 1999. Particularly, North Korea normalized relations with China after Kim Yong-nam’s visit to China in June 1999, and starting with Kim Jong-il’s unofficial visit to China in May 2000, Kim Jong-il visited Shanghai in January 2001, and Premier Jiang Zemin visited North Korea. Through such summit diplomacy, North Korea strived to improve the relations between the two countries.

In tandem, Russo-DPRK relations also developed. As the Russo-DPRK Treaty of Friendship expired in 1995, North Korea, in the process of negotiating the new Russo-DPRK Treaty of 1997, deleted the automatic military intervention clause and support for the Korea Federalist system clause. After the initial signing in March 1999, North Korea signed the “Russo-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbor, and Cooperation Agreement.” Afterward, the two countries entered a new phase in their relationship, and as seen



in Putin's visit to North Korea in July 2000 and Kim Jong-il's visit to Moscow in July-August 2001, they increased their efforts to strengthen their cooperation.

DPRK-Japanese relations have also changed according to DPRK-U.S. relations and general changes in circumstances. Both North Korea and Japan have seen fluctuations in their relationship in response to issues of history, reparations as an economic problem, nuclear weapons and missiles, on-going problems of abductions and food aid, and zainichi (residing in Japan) Koreans. In its diplomatic policy toward Japan, North Korea has said that it is hard to improve relations because of the perception that Japan follows the United States, that Japan discriminates between North and South Korea, and emphasizes the problem of discrimination against the zainichi Koreans, the perception that North Korea needs Japan's capital and technology for North Korea to have an economic breakthrough, that North Korea can use DPRK-Japan negotiations to improve DPRK-U.S. relations, and that it can earn loans somewhat like compensations through establishing diplomatic relations with Japan.

From January 1991 to November 1992, North Korea and Japan held talks to discuss normalization of their relationship eight times, and after the Geneva Agreed Framework, the labor party of North Korea and the coalition government of Japan had agreed in March 1995 to resume talks for normalization. However, as North Korea tested its missiles in August 1998, its relations with Japan rapidly cooled, and in August 1999, North Korea asserted improvement in its relations with Japan and called for reparations for historical grievances. After the DPRK-U.S. Berlin Agreement in September 1999, the two countries resumed normalization talks on December 3, 1999, and on December 19, the two countries came to an agreement on issues such as the third visit to Japan, through Red Cross talks, of Japanese women living in North Korea.

North Korea also sought improved relations with South East Asian countries. In July 2000, it joined the ASEAN Regional Forum, reinstated relations with Australia (May 2000), and established diplomatic relations with the Philippines (July 2000), New Zealand (March 2001), and so on.

Improvement in relations with the European Union is a typical example that shows North Korea's practical diplomacy. After the mid-1990s, the relationship between North Korea and the EU expanded, and the EU supported North Korea with food aid, technical assistance, and medical support for flood relief in 1995. Also, the EU paid 75 million euros to KEDO business by the end of 2000. People-to-people exchanges were also expanded as an EU delegation visited the Rajin-Sunbong economic trade zone in May 1998 and as a European Parliament delegation visited Pyongyang in December. After North Korea started the first political talks in December 1998, with the establishment of diplo-



matic relations with Italy in January 2000, it did the same with most of the European countries. With countries such as the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Luxemburg, and Greece, it built normal diplomatic relations (The Korean Association of North Korean Studies 2006).

The aspect that shows the results of North Korea's practical diplomacy is the amount of aid it has received. From 1995 to 1999, the total amount of supplies that South Korea and the international community provided to North Korea at no cost was 1,483,390,000 dollars (1.5 billion), which averaged 300 million dollars a year. Just looking at the year 1999, the total amount that North Korea received as aid was 624,990,000 (625 million) dollars, which equaled 5 percent of North Korea's 1998 GDP of 12.6 billion dollars, 43 percent of total volume of trade at 1.45 billion, and 112 percent of export volume at 560 million dollars (Kim 2002, 149-151).

## 2. Evaluation of the Diplomatic Strategy

The post-Cold War diplomacy of North Korea can be characterized as a combination of realism and principle-oriented justification, which can be assessed under the framework of domestic politics and foreign policy. While its external relations exhibit both moralistic and idealist notions of socialism, North Korea's arguments against imperialism are closer to a moral rejection based on the ideals of self-rule, peace, dignity, and survival. Since such a framework is intertwined with the ideological basis buttressing internal legitimacy, it can be understood as a conjoining of both external justification and internal realism as well. This is most visible in the regime's policy toward the United States, where continued vigilance and rejection against the United States have been the underlying principled approach.

However, there are also signs of transformation in North Korea's external policy that can be understood as a change toward a more realist approach from an ideological orientation. For instance, despite how the regime had been criticizing U.S. policy toward North Korea, remarks from the October 2000 Joint Communiqué that expressed its preference for "negotiation over deterrence," recognition of improving ties as a "natural goal," reaffirmation of relations with the United States to be "based on the principles of respect for each other's sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs," and noting "the value of regular diplomatic contacts, bilaterally and in broader fora," seem to suggest that new change is inevitable. In that sense, North Korean diplomacy can be assessed as a realist alignment by the regime, seeking to adapt to the changing international environment based on the premises of reducing unfair treatment such as U.S. intentions toward regime collapse, preemptive nuclear strike capabilities, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), and so on.



In practice, this move toward a combined approach is realized under the framework of temporary pragmatism. Whether the statement of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) constitution that reads "the WPK shall accomplish the nation's independent peaceful reunification, get rid of our people's mortal enemy, the U.S. imperialists, from South Korea, reject Japanese militarism, overthrow the puppet state that is ruled by landlords, comprador capitalists and the reactionary bureaucracy, support the South Korean people's anti-U.S. and anti-puppet regime efforts, and complete the revolutionary struggle in South Korea," is still to be believed at face value is a debatable topic. The fact that North Korea took a pragmatic approach with respect to its external relations amid an unfavorable post-Cold War environment but continues to seek self-oriented socialism, independent alignment, independence under globalization, and reunification after recovering its national power or following its achievement of status as a strong and prosperous nation are suggestive in this direction.

In that sense, North Korea's efforts regarding diplomatic normalization with the United States or a peace treaty are temporary in nature, while their goals are distanced from the ultimate purpose of North Korea's advancement. The August 2001 Moscow Declaration, which addressed the removal of the U.S. military presence in South Korea as "an urgent issue that cannot be postponed in order to assure the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asian region" with an ex-press understanding from Russia, suggests that the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the "peace" of the Peninsula are still regarded as important issues for North Korea.

Likewise, North Korea's assessment of the post-Cold War era and the new international environment of the twenty-first century constitute a limited approach under partial pragmatism while largely failing to overcome the old world order. In the North Korean analysis, the twenty-first century marks a period where the willingness to engage in anti-imperialist struggle determines a people's fate as seen in the two contrasting examples of Cuba and Iraq. Under the notion that states "the nature of imperialism never changes," this dichotomous worldview points to the problems emanating from reliance on Western powers while asserting respect for independence, noninterference, and so on. While considering the United Nations an important institution, North Korea is also critical of its degeneration into a legalizing tool for a certain country to realize its strategic interests.

The current determinant for North Korea's diplomacy can be summarized as an all-out effort to establish an international environment that can sustain its military-first system. Under this framework, North Korea will strongly commit itself to a nuclear diplomacy that can guarantee its nuclear self-defense capability against the U.S. military threat, while the military-first doctrine is unlikely to be changed until the regime can sufficiently secure physical assurances of its survival from the United States and other neighboring



powers. As the succession process continues and the era of a new leader under the strong and prosperous nation looms ahead, North Korea will work hard to lay down the foundations for this new age on the diplomatic front as well. In doing so, North Korea will (1) strengthen its nuclear self-defense capability in order to safeguard its state and regime integrity, and control external relations in order to secure its nuclear capability, especially vis-à-vis the United States, and win favorable grounds for its diplomatic standing as a nuclear power. Also, North Korea will (2) commence diplomatic projects that seek to stabilize the regime under the new leadership after Kim Jong-il, conduct nuclear state diplomacy to guarantee state and regime security, and carry out regional diplomacy in light of economic and national development.

The problem is that if North Korea continues to maintain its military-first diplomacy, the regime will face increased alienation and economic sanctions from its neighbors along the way. In that sense, how long can North Korea maintain its military-first rule? Especially, how durable is the economy in such a system? Will the burden of sanctions be unequally reflected in the people's economy, which could lead to political problems such as violent protests? In other words, can North Korea's military-first diplomacy continue to function in the face of long-term sanctions?

If North Korea continues to conduct its diplomacy in order to maintain and strengthen its military-first rule, its path will diverge from a twenty-first-century mode of development and it will re-main a backward state. In light of a diplomatic strategy that seeks to maintain North Korea's military-first rule, the current goal sets the year 2012 as the first period when the foundation of a strong and prosperous nation will be established. In order to achieve this objective, weakening the external security threats and gaining assurances for the survival of the state, regime, and the leadership are considered to be the most important diplomatic challenges for North Korea. That said, different scenarios under a three-stage transition can be considered as in the following.

The first stage denotes the period when the nuclear program is used as an exploitable resource for North Korea to conduct military-first diplomacy. Here, North Korea will be able to consider three alternatives; obtaining recognition as a nuclear state, continuing its brinkmanship diplomacy, or completely abandoning its nuclear program. The second stage is in line with the conditions following the chosen nuclear strategy during the first stage, where regime strengthening and economic development become the primary concern. The development of the second stage will be drastically different, depending on what decisions have been made for the nuclear question. The third stage indicates a substantive materialization of the choices made during the previous stages. In this stage, the difference between the decisions of an increased backwardness that leads to greater diffi-



culties in regime survivability and a strategic determination leading toward improved conditions will be in clear contrast.

At present, North Korea continues to use its nuclear program as an important diplomatic tool to gain security assurances from the United States and other neighboring democratic countries in the midst of a post-Cold War unipolar system led by the United States and also the unstable international environment in Northeast Asia. This situation will only allow North Korea to continue its nuclear diplomacy and its brinkmanship tactics under a limited structural environment.

For North Korea, the most favorable outcome of its nuclear diplomacy will be to achieve nuclear power status along with security guarantees and economic aid. While continuing to develop its nuclear weapons and missile capabilities, North Korea may be calculating the gains from its brinkmanship diplomacy that can bring about a de facto recognition of its nuclear power status and increase its international standing by participating in security and nuclear arms reduction talks, so that the regime can gain nuclear deterrence along with the prestige of a nuclear power state and the economic and diplomatic security benefits thereof. As such, the nuclear power status and the framework of a strong and prosperous nation will provide support for the consolidation of the post-Kim Jong-il era in North Korea. Given the fact that the new leadership will lack political and diplomatic footing for a while, inheriting North Korea's nuclear status will provide a much needed tool for the military-first rule that can sustain external diplomatic pressure. Also, the prestige of being a nuclear power state and the potential economic benefits from nuclear arms reduction talks will help to increase the effectiveness of the successor regime domestically.

If North Korea succeeds in its nuclear diplomacy and wins physical security assurances, the regime will move forward to the second stage by focusing on political and economic development of the strong and prosperous nation, and diplomatic strategies will unfold in a corresponding manner. Fast-paced reform measures and the opening of the economy will undoubtedly threaten the North Korean regime, and it will have no other choice than to maintain the *suryong* (Dear Leader)-based controlled economy for some time. Opening up its economy and implementing internal market mechanisms in order to improve the economic efficiency of North Korea can undermine this system. Thus, North Korea would only be able to rely on selective liberalization and limited reforms for a significant amount of time. Even today, the regime is suffering from numerous problems arising from a dual economy where unofficial transactions and corrupt schemes are rampant. Even though its nuclear diplomacy succeeds, the structural limits of North Korea will lead to continued suffering from such difficulties unless there is systematic institutional reform. Moreover, the new leadership of the post-Kim Jong-il era will find itself



faced by a dual challenge of strengthening internal control and increasing economic efficiency to sustain its internal legitimacy with a much weaker political standing. Therefore, the new leadership will have to oppress the unofficial sectors and increase the control of the economy while also improving its efficiency. Without reforms and liberalization, however, such goals will be extremely difficult to achieve.

During this second stage, if North Korea obtains the status of a nuclear power state, there are possibilities for the regime to extract external support by utilizing nuclear arms reduction diplomacy. However, the mix between military-first diplomacy and internal economic development will continue to pose a threat to the outside world while the amount and characteristics of the economic gains projected from potential arms reduction talks will remain limited, and the regime will find itself once more in difficulties. If North Korea abandons its nuclear programs, it will be dependent upon external humanitarian support. Nonetheless, this will ultimately diminish the regime's internal legitimacy. Therefore the new challenge for North Korea's economic development in the aftermath of a military-first, nuclear diplomacy will be contingent upon how boldly the regime can move toward reform and openness. Going through such a transition may risk the sustainability of the *suryong*-based system for either Kim Jong-il or his successor. This will call for a change in the military-first rule to become an economy-first rule where the regime's diplomatic efforts should focus on adopting several aspects of capitalism and adhering to international norms with respect to its diplomatic strategies.

The final stage can be identified as a period when substantial changes occur in North Korea as a result of the decisions made in the previous two stages. If the regime succeeds in making a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program in the first stage, or decides to follow the path of reform and open economy under the premise of dismantling its nuclear capabilities during the second stage, it will be able to push ahead with a diplomatic strategy tuned for advancement, albeit under different timing. This possibility will be discussed further in the next section. However, if North Korea decides to maintain its nuclear power status or continue to engage in brinkmanship diplomacy while conducting limited economic reforms, the regime will ultimately find itself unable to sustain its current structure. With its nuclear capabilities, North Korea will find more hard-line stances in diplomatic relations with its neighbors and the international community. The past sixteen years of North Korean nuclear crisis have persistently followed a pattern of extracting economic aid from the concerned parties that has contributed to regime survival while North Korea has simultaneously continued the development of its nuclear program. In between the cycle of intervention and sanctions, neighboring countries have sought both to persuade and to punish North Korea while its nuclear capabilities have continually increased. At the current stage, there





has been a broad understanding among these countries that intervention toward North Korea cannot follow the form of acquiescence under the premise that the regime's nuclear development will reach an unacceptable level. Even China and Russia are approaching a fundamental judgment that intervention in North Korea cannot be maintained under continued nuclear development. Therefore, if North Korea continues to seek economic aid and internal stability from its nuclear diplomacy, there will be less opportunity for the regime to benefit from the old patterns in the distant future.

Under the status quo, little improvement in the economy will pressure Kim Jong-il or a possibly weaker successor regime of his to accept a rapidly closing window of diplomatic alternatives. Although North Korea will seek fragmented economic benefits and strengthen internal security by economically relying on China and making friendly gestures toward South Korea, the possibility of obtaining economic efficiency and garnering continued loyalty from the people, and maintaining political support from the core ruling elites including the military, will gradually decrease. At the same time, the possibility of worsening countrywide poverty, alienation from its people and subsequent defections, and the likelihood of an anti-regime movement as well as disagreement and resistance among the ruling elite toward the regime's national strategy, or even signs of revolt, will increase.

As a consequence, if North Korea follows the three stages aligned with military-first rule, the opportunities for subsequent military-first diplomacy will be highly limited while its purported national objective of establishing a strong and prosperous nation will become increasingly unobtainable unless efforts are made toward adopting an economy-first, advanced diplomacy.



[Table 1 North Korea's Diplomatic Alternatives and Following Developments]

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
<b>Diplomatic alternatives of North Korea</b>	Strategic abandonment of the nuclear program	Reform and opening of the regime	Push for an economy-first, advanced diplomacy
	Continued brinkmanship diplomacy	Diplomacy toward economic aid	Reiteration of an unstable diplomacy
	Acquisition of a nuclear power status	Winning concessions through nuclear arms reduction diplomacy	Hard-line diplomacy for greater concessions
<b>Corresponding developments</b>	Fundamental change in military-first diplomacy	Expansion of economic aid and favorable grounds for economic opening and reform	Approach the path of North Korean advancement
	Prolonged economic sanctions	Regularized sanctions and increased economic hardship	Increased regime destabilization and a failure of diplomacy
	Impossibility of gaining de jure nuclear status	Regularized sanctions and increased economic hardship	Extreme economic hardship

### III. Gradual Decline and Search for an Exit

How would North Korea's diplomatic inclinations change as the regime decides to forgo its currently continuing strategy of military-first rule? If North Korea conducts a new type of diplomacy attuned to a normal, modern, and advanced national strategy, what would its subsequent stages and their outcomes look like? In order to achieve its goals under the norms of the international community, North Korea will have to find itself in a situation where the regime can ultimately change regardless of its temporary continuation, embrace new reforms and openings in all aspects of society, including political, economic, military, and socio-cultural sectors, and adopt an appropriate diplomatic strategy that can support other functions as well.



In a broad sense, the transition from a military-first diplomacy to an advanced, economy-first and people-first diplomacy can be understood in three phases. The first phase constitutes the period from the present to the year 2012, when North Korea fully experiences and recognizes the problems of its nuclear diplomacy and decides to abandon its nuclear program completely so that the door toward openness and reform can be unlocked. The second phase marks the gradual beginning of exchange and cooperation with the international community under limited conditions following the resolution of the nuclear issue along with normalized external relations and the procurement of necessary support toward regime transformation. At this stage, cooperation with South Korea will become more vibrant along various dimensions and issue areas. The third phase will mark the effective settlement of North Korea's advancement as the regime goes through a substantive transformation triggered by new changes in the respective sectors. In other words, this phase can be defined as a stage where North Korea seeks to become a developed country under political democratization and a properly functioning market economy and become fully incorporated into the international community. It is also the phase where the two Koreas can completely settle their hostile relations and be engaged in close exchange and cooperation toward political integration so that the prospects of a real reunification become visible. This final phase also signifies the achievement of North Korea's full diplomatic relations with the international community and its transition toward a normalized modern state in Northeast Asia.

Going back to the first phase, it is crucial for North Korea to make a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program by gaining full assurance for the stability of the regime and the political leadership under diplomatic resolutions and having confrontational sentiments and diplomatic conflicts sufficiently resolved. This will necessitate changes in other aspects of North Korea, especially in its national strategy. The current direction toward a strong and prosperous nation under continued military-first rule considers the nuclear program an important tool to deter external security threats and gain nuclear power status at the most or at least maximize the extraction of economic aid using brinksmanship tactics in the diplomatic sector. As mentioned in the previous section, such a diplomatic alternative will essentially lead to regularized sanctions, deterioration of the economy, and weakened political legitimacy of North Korea's *surjong* system. Thus, North Korea faces a situation where it needs to presume a realistic level of security assurances that can be addressed within the modern international arena, and maximize its functional mechanisms under the strategic decision to abandon the regime's nuclear program altogether.

As of early 2010, North Korea has been realigning its internal regime structure to establish the power succession system at an earlier pace while focusing on economic develop-



ments in order to establish a strong and prosperous nation by 2012. To gain the practical benefits necessary for the new leadership to settle in the international environment as well as in the economy, North Korea is trying to lift the imposed economic sanctions while simultaneously seeking maximum economic support by effectively utilizing the nuclear issue as a means to gain diplomatic accomplishments. In retrospect, North Korea initiated the third Kim Jong-il era through the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) on April 9, 2009, when it simultaneously expanded its military committee in anticipation of the succession process and increased state control. As part of the first phase, the launching of the long-range rocket and the subsequent nuclear test during this period would have consolidated North Korea's domestic political leadership. It seems that North Korea has started to seek negotiations in various ways because it reckons there has been a sufficient degree of internal realignment.

During the inter-Korean talks on April 21 and June 11, 2009, at the Gaesung Industrial Complex, North Korea seems to have shown its overall willingness to negotiate, despite its appearance of pressuring South Korea. The following massive mobilization campaigns such as the "150 day battle" and the "100 day battle" in 2009 and the November 30 currency reform suggest that the regime is pursuing its own schedule for a national strategy toward the establishment of a strong and prosperous nation. Appearances of Kim Jong-il also increased; it has been reported that there were 154 publicized events in 2009, up to December 18. This is a 77 percent increase compared with the same period in the previous year of 87 reported appearances, and also marks the highest level since the first Kim Jong-il era. On the other hand, North Korea has been attempting to change the ambiance surrounding its relationship with the United States in anticipation of the resumption of talks, while seeking economic benefits through negotiations with South Korea. It can be said that the North Korean regime will seek a consolidating diplomacy by seeking bilateral negotiations with the Obama administration as well as practical benefits in the Six-Party framework, as a means to accomplish its goals to bring about the strong and prosperous nation of 2012.

Since 2010, North Korea has been exhibiting a large external strategy framework that includes both domestic policies and the nuclear program. The 2010 New Year's joint editorial pointed out that the current key issue of North Korea is to accomplish a "critical transition in people's livelihood." In order to do so, the editorial emphasizes the importance of putting a national effort into light industry and the agricultural sector. This can be understood as an effort to "increase the people's standard of living" by assigning an exceptional national priority to the development of light industry, which is reflected by its domestic circumstances in need of an increased supply of daily necessities. This is in line with the reasoning behind the effects of the currency reform, which is to boost North Korea's official economic sector by suppressing market activities where an insufficient amount of increase



in the production and supply of light industry products can cause serious inflation and a revitalization of unofficial market activities (Korea Institute for National Unification 2010).

In order to solve such domestic economic hardships, nurturing a favorable international environment is critical. In the inter-Korean relations section of the 2010 New Year's joint editorial, it is stated that "opening the path to improved North-South relations is necessary. Our position to pursue better North-South relations and open up the path toward national reunification based on the historic June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Declaration is firm. . . . [We must] seek reconciliation by putting the common interest of our people in the front seat and push for cooperative projects through exchange and contacts between different sectors of our societies. All legal and institutional hindrances need to be abolished in front of projects that serve the common public interests of the people, and free discussions and activities regarding the issue of reunification must be guaranteed at a broader level. A united people provide the critical assurance for national reunification. The Korean people in the North, the South, and overseas must unite together and form a common solidarity to advance the movement of national reunification. Facing the ten-year anniversary of the release of the June 15 Joint Declaration and the thirty-year anniversary since the proposal of forming a Confederal Republic of Koryo, the mood of reconciliation, cooperation, unity and independent reunification must be heightened at the pan-national scope."

With regard to international issues, including U.S.-DPRK relations, North Korea's approach has been mainly focused on negotiations. The 2010 joint editorial states, "[t]he fundamental problem before the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and its surrounding regions lies within the issue of ending the hostile relationship between the DPRK and the United States. Our position remains consistent in the direction of dialogue and negotiations that can establish a firm system of peace in the Chosun peninsula and bring about denuclearization. Our party and the government shall vigorously push forward to advance good-neighborliness ripple [in a] wave of independence throughout the world, under the banner of independence, peace, and friendship."

Along with the Six-Party Talks, North Korea started to make use of a diplomatic strategy in pursuit of a peace treaty. On January 11, 2010, the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the need to have a confidence-building measure between the United States and North Korea and a peace treaty in conjunction with the Six-Party Talks, following a U.S.-DPRK dialogue: "Having gone through frustration and failure, the Six-Party Talks process points out that problems cannot be solved without mutual trust among the related actors. It is our conclusion that it is necessary to pay primary attention to building confidence between the DPRK and the United States, the parties chiefly responsible for the nuclear issue, in order to bring back the process for the denuclearization



of the Korean Peninsula on track. In order to build confidence between the DPRK and the United States, there needs to be a peace treaty that can end the ongoing status of war which is the original source of hostile relations. Had there been a firm peace structure in the Korean Peninsula earlier, the nuclear problem would not have emerged. Learning from the failure of the Six-Party Talks, the sequence with respect to the issue of signing the peace treaty mentioned in the September 2005 Joint Statement of Principles can be put forward as a practical demand. The DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs respectfully proposes holding talks among the parties directly involved in the Armistice treaty to move toward a peace treaty in this sixtieth-year anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War. As mentioned in the Joint Statement, the meeting can be held under a separate framework or also held within the boundaries of the Six-Party Talks for the denuclearization of the Peninsula, like the current DPRK-U.S. talks that are in progress.”

Put together, the strategy sought by North Korea in the current first phase can be summarized follows. First, accelerate internal reforms to resolve the economic hardship while consolidating the succession process. Second, maximize material support from neighboring countries through reconciliatory policies. Third, improve the relationship with the United States by using the nuclear program as a bargaining chip while ameliorating sanctions and breaking away from diplomatic isolation. Fourth, nurture an environment that can provide maximum diplomatic and economic concessions from China and South Korea while participating in the Six-Party Talks.

The core issue during this phase is whether North Korea can make a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program and seek opening and reform under the assumption that the political leadership can be maintained, or to continue seeking nuclear power status while trying to extract as much benefit as it can, given a peace treaty that can provide substantive conditions for the withdrawal of hostile U.S. policy, and, if so, under what specific conditions. Meanwhile, North Korea may also attempt to minimize the denuclearization efforts at the Six-Party Talks by linking the peace treaty issue with the nuclear negotiations and putting forward unreasonable demands in the latter so that the entire process can be stalled. In this case, the peace treaty will lose ground in terms of gaining a common understanding while the denuclearization process is left without progress, resulting in a standstill of the status quo.

So far, North Korea has been arguing for the need for a peace treaty as a precondition toward denuclearization, emphasizing its confidence-building function vis-à-vis the United States. First, the Six Parties had shared a common understanding of the need for a peace treaty. That is, they have promised that “[t]he directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula in an appropriate separate form.” Following the



U.S. visit by North Korea's Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok, the October 12, 2000, U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué suggests how North Korea had been previously materializing such an effort. The Communiqué states that “the two sides agreed there are a variety of available means, including Four Party talks, to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula and formally end the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with permanent peace arrangements,” and “[a]s a crucial first step, the two sides stated that neither government would have hostile intent toward the other and confirmed the commitment of both governments to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free from past enmity ... the two sides reaffirmed that their relations should be based on the principles of respect for each other's sovereignty and noninterference in each other's internal affairs, and noted the value of regular diplomatic contacts, bilaterally and in broader fora ... agreed that resolution of the missile issue would make an essential contribution to a fundamentally improved relationship between them and to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.”

On July 22, 2005, the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided a similar comment by the spokesperson under the title, “DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson's remark on the argument for the United States to change its policy to maintain the armistice regime into a policy toward the establishment of a peace regime.” It states, “The transition from a cease-fire situation into a peace regime will eliminate the U.S. hostile policy toward the DPRK and its nuclear threat and lead naturally toward the realization of denuclearization. As a result, the establishment of a peace regime constitutes an absolutely necessary step to achieve the goal of denuclearization in the Peninsula. The transition from an unstable armistice regime into a firm peace regime will turn out to be a peaceful process to resolve the problems of the Peninsula. Therefore the process regarding the establishment of a peace regime must be carried out in a way that contributes to the nurturing of an environment that contributes to the realization of the peaceful coexistence between the DPRK and the United States, and the peaceful reunification between the North and the South. The successful initiation of the peace process in the Peninsula will not only contribute to the peace and security of the Korean people, the Northeast Asian region and the world, but also become a critical impetus to resolve the nuclear problem in the forthcoming Six-Party Talks.”

Such remarks indicate that North Korea's concern over U.S. hostilities is consistent and that it considers the peace treaty to be a prerequisite for denuclearization. If so, in order to induce North Korea's decision to abandon its nuclear program in the first phase, questions such as how to solve the problems regarding the peace treaty, the issue of North Korean stability, and denuclearization need to be addressed.

The foremost goal for North Korea is to lead the Six-Party Talks in a way that is closest to the objectives of its national strategy, and to secure as many preconditions as possible.



Although there are observations that North Korea has already made its strategic decision to become a nuclear power state, there is no certain indicator to accurately assess the change in its strategy regarding dismantlement. For now, it would be more precise to say that whether Kim Jong-il is only seeking practical benefits such as economic support, breakaway from diplomatic isolation, and lifting sanctions while leaving behind the nuclear issue to his successor is largely unknown. The transference of the nuclear issue under an uncertain environment where his successor's domestic-political and external-strategic capabilities are untested and also without knowing whether the military and government elites will support the succession process despite sanctions is a highly sensitive issue. Therefore, from Kim Jong-il's perspective, it can be hypothesized that nuclear dismantlement is a considerable possibility if the U.S. hostilities are eliminated entirely, along with guarantees for the succession regime to enjoy diplomatic and military assurances against security threats.

Regardless of the strategic decision to become a nuclear power or to consider dismantlement depending on the negotiation results with the United States, North Korea will try to gain as many diplomatic and economic benefits as possible through its relations with China and South Korea. Toward China, Pyongyang will seek to provide a detailed explanation of the regime's current position, and gain understanding for its recalcitrance over the nuclear issue as a result of hostile U.S. policies or any passive approach thereof. Accordingly, the regime will attempt to secure its position to be able to receive economic aid from China even though the process of dismantlement is delayed. Even when the Six-Party Talks resume, North Korea will consider the possibility where China would stress its function as a diplomatic intermediary as an impartial party while keeping the regime under its sphere of influence, as problems arise within U.S. policy toward the North.

As for South Korea, it is likely that North Korea would take a reconciliatory approach by emphasizing inter-Korean economic cooperation, while restraining its diplomatic and military voices in either the Six-Party Talks or the peace treaty dialogue. If the regime focuses on maximizing practical benefits while providing little recognition of South Korea's position, there will be little to lose for North Korea even if the Six-Party Talks fall apart once more. Such reasoning should be seen as North Korea's intention to acquire favorable grounds at the peace treaty negotiations by increasing prerequisites and raising the entry barrier for South Korea.

It is useful to consider the implications of North Korea's intentions with respect to its nuclear program as being both aggressive, such as building the strong and prosperous nation, and defensive, such as strengthening its deterrence and creating an environment that can bring about economic development. In the latter case, North Korea will ultimately give up its nuclear program as it fails to gain recognition as a nuclear power state, by win-





ning satisfactory concessions for its regime security and simultaneously gaining large-scale support for economic development.

In doing so, it is important for North Korea to gain an acceptable amount of material security guarantees. This is in line with North Korea's desire to have specific physical and institutional guarantees that can back up promises that the United States and its allies, South Korea and Japan, will not engage in any kind of threatening actions. In this respect, the United States' deliberation on North Korea's demands and assurances, including the signing of the peace treaty and withdrawal of U.S. troops in South Korea, the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula along with U.S.-DPRK mutual inspections, and even the withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear bases from the entire Northeast Asian region will be an important factor. However, such forms of security assurance will be nearly impossible to provide, given U.S. global strategy and interests that relate to the Korean Peninsula as well as to Northeast Asia. Therefore, only by accommodating the United States with respect to security assurances or by increasing the level of confidence between the United States and North Korea through close bilateral talks, will it be possible to reach an agreement that is mutually satisfactory.

Under a modern international political system that is organized under the basis of anarchy, and while security assurance mechanisms consist of physical and institutional aspects, the United States will be able to provide North Korea with common interests, a rightful position in Northeast Asia, and confidence building. Being entangled with fragmented security assurance measures can be thought of as providing a simplistic response to the current complex international political arena. Instead, North Korea should assess how much of its interests are aligned with its neighbors, build more confident relations by winning over cooperative groups, and improve its diplomatic strategy so that neighboring countries realize North Korea's existence can bring benefits to Northeast Asia.

Domestically, there should be coexisting or conflicting voices between aggressive and defensive nuclear strategy, or between camps that strategize a military-first, strong and prosperous nation with nuclear capabilities and that consider a strategic decision to abandon the nation's nuclear programs and transition into an economy-first era. In order to induce North Korea to make the strategic decision to relinquish its nuclear program and adopt a different diplomatic alignment, it is necessary to send various delicate signals to those who are in support of the idea in North Korea that the political leadership and the regime will be preserved in doing so, while this transformation will also be helpful for the development of North Korea. While being too upfront with a promise of regime security might easily gain criticism from hard liners in neighboring countries, being anxious about North Korea's aggressive responses and devising an overly conservative approach in North



Korean policy is also problematic. Instead, it is necessary to continue to present the direction of North Korea's advanced diplomacy while providing assurances for the willingness to carry out relevant actions through multiple channels.

Ultimately, the objective that must be accomplished along with North Korea's national and diplomatic strategies is the coevolution of neighboring countries' strategy toward North Korea. That is, both internal and external diplomatic coevolution is needed. In doing so, it will be important to get over the existing perspective that considers North Korea's nuclear program as an issue of proliferation that can essentially be resolved through a regime change, and recognize that it is directly connected to the issue of the regime's political survival. Solving the nuclear program necessitates a comprehensive approach to the issues revolving around North Korea, which requires an understanding of not just one's own North Korean policy but also the North's broader Northeast Asian policy in tandem, expanding to issues such as the North Korean anxiety over regime survival and the future positioning of North Korea in the regional setting to come.

## **IV. Coevolution Strategy for an Advanced North Korean Diplomacy**

### **1. Implementation and Reform**

#### **(1) North Korea**

Once the security problems are resolved, North Korea's progress to the second stage marks a period of transition for the regime. While receiving external support, North Korea's military-first rule will gradually transform into an economy-first system, and the regime will seek coexistence with the international community. During this process, North Korea will accomplish an overall change in its domestic settings, including political, economic, and social conditions thereof.

An important operational objective would be to support this process diplomatically and create a virtuous circle that draws North Korea's national strategy toward an economy-first and people-first agenda as external relations improve. During the transition process, North Korea will need external economic support in order to achieve an economy-first system, while the issue of securing assurances for regime stability during the transition will also come to the fore.



The imminent task for North Korea would be to establish normal diplomatic relations with its neighboring countries and sign security and peace assurance treaties to bring about a system of peace, based on nuclear dismantlement and improved external relations. Based on the subsequent accomplishments of dismantlement, it would be desirable for North Korea to rejoin WMD (weapons of mass destruction)-related international regimes such as the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). Once it is free from its neighbors and the international community's suspicions regarding illicit production and export of WMD, North Korea will be able to substantially alleviate concerns regarding potential redirecting of its acquired large-scale economic support into illicit external activities. Afterward, it would be favorable for North Korea to accept strict inspections and monitoring from the international community and to adhere to international norms faithfully.

At the same time, neighboring countries also need to work together in order to relieve North Korea's diplomatic and political anxieties following denuclearization. In due course, there will be a sufficient amount of compensation through the energy supply as well as a sequenced lifting of sanctions related to WMD, in response to nuclear abandonment. Acquiring a diplomatic status that allows for full-scale economic support would follow accordingly.

Once dismantlement is complete and the peace process in Northeast Asia takes off, North Korea will find the opportunity to guarantee its regime survival and development through diplomatic relations. Instead of unlikely requests that North Korea would make in order to establish a peace system, including but not limited to the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in South Korea and a mutual inter-Korean inspections regime, all the relevant parties would come together and build an international control regime that can prevent any violent confrontational behavior on the Korean Peninsula, based on political and military confidence building. To the extent that the diplomatic latitude of the Korean Peninsula is unharmed, this is linked to a Northeast Asian multilateral security cooperation mechanism that will ultimately guarantee the North Korea's regime security.

During this process, North Korea will be able to further its relations with traditional allies and friendly countries such as China and Russia, while simultaneously normalizing diplomatic relations with the United States, Japan, and other countries. Although the continuance of North Korea's alliance with China is a matter to be determined through bilateral discussions, the fact is that the probability of a continued cooperative relationship between the United States and China exists, and once the risk of having another war on the Korean Peninsula is eliminated, the DPRK-China alliance will be reconfigured into a strategic partnership that can guarantee regional security around the Korean Peninsula. This is on the same track of expanding the function of the ROK-U.S. and U.S.-Japan al-



liances to a regional role. The fact that twenty-first-century alliances are no longer adhering to a traditional framework that defined a certain enemy or a security threat, and instead are transforming into a cooperative system that expands to mutual joint responses against transnational and human security issues, the bilateral relationship between North Korea and China is likely to transform into a new functional role. Russia is also considering opportunities in economic and energy cooperation with North Korea, such as oil, gas, and railways, which can serve its own as well as the North's and the entire peninsular interests once the nuclear issue is resolved, suggesting that there will be an accelerated economic cooperation between the two.

The most significant issue during this stage is the normalization of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the United States. Once hostile relations cease to exist under the peace process following North Korea's denuclearization during the early phase of the second stage, normal diplomatic relations can come about in a shorter period of time. This critical improvement would allow U.S. investments to flow into North Korea by various social entrepreneurs and companies, and their social and cultural activities will rapidly reduce the sense of the U.S. threat while also contributing to the furthering of their bilateral relationship. North Korea will also be able to actively participate in the creation of a regional peace regime including Northeast Asia, while DPRK-Japan diplomatic relations can be brought about as well.

Following diplomatic normalizations, it is possible to expect that a gradual intensification of economic interdependence would follow. Through consultations, issues such as the Japanese reparations payments and the abduction cases can be resolved and the DPRK-Japan relationship can develop in a new dimension as Japan actively invests in North Korea. For Japan, strengthening the relationship with North Korea will serve its strategic interest in reaching out into the Asian continent under a growing recognition of the need to develop a more active Northeast Asian policy, added to the cooperative relationship with the United States as its diplomatic strategy.

As North Korea's external relations normalize, and pressures such as the economic sanctions are alleviated, it will be desirable for the regime to fully enter the path of opening and reform. However, the North Korean political leadership may try to control the content and the pace of these developments as they fear they may become a threat. Concurrently, North Korea will also feel the need to increase the regime's economic efficiency as the process continues. While helping North Korea to effectively combine these two seemingly confrontational tasks by strengthening economic aid and support, neighboring countries need to be cautious about criticism and intervention in North Korea's political system so that it can maintain its integrity and continuity.



Not only would North Korea receive bilateral support from its neighboring countries, but it will also be able to enjoy greater multilateral support from international organizations or consortia in its support. To open up and reform the system, North Korea should embrace capital investments, join international organizations, and bring about a fundamental change in the financial, infrastructure, and education sectors that are critical for implementing a market economy. At the same time, North Korea's diplomatic efforts in international fora need to be more active as well.

Likewise, North Korea will be integrated into the Northeast Asian system as a normal state in the second stage, with a steadily growing economy that is not threatening to its neighbors. Such a change will incur significant political and economic changes, which creates a risk that the existing order under the *suryong* system will collapse. Therefore North Korea should try to maximize international support for a reformist *suryong* system through diplomatic endeavors and work toward gaining diplomatic and economic support to strengthen its regime. A broad recognition that it will be better for both North Korea and its neighbors for the regime to go through a gradual transition from the current *suryong* system to a reformed, economy-first system than going through sudden changes owing to rapid economic restructuring as well as political confusion is important. As market factors develop and social and cultural exchanges with neighboring countries expand, North Korea will need to retain as much of its personnel, economic, and cultural resources as possible so that it can mature into an advanced country in Northeast Asia.

The role of nonstate actors will rapidly become more important during the economic reforms in North Korea. As seen in socialist transition countries such as China and Vietnam, the role of companies, individuals, and other economic interest groups will become important while market factors gradually expand. Such a change will also bring much change to the diplomatic landscape, which will trigger the transition into network-based diplomatic relations that can connect many actors in between state to state or government to government relationships. Therefore, even though the government controls the overall diplomatic process, it will be better to adopt a diplomatic strategy that fosters the connectivity of various actors throughout the network so that it can contribute to the long-term development of North Korea.

Inter-Korean relations will also become a key factor in North Korea's economic development and political stability. South Korea obviously has the largest interest and stake in North Korea's economic development, with a strong willingness to invest in the country. As North Korea, being confident about its political system, furthers inter-Korean exchange, South Korea should also get rid of aggressive North Korean strategies, such as absorption-based reunification, and adopt a strategic mindset to promote long-term peace-



ful coexistence and economic and socio-cultural cooperation with the North. As North Korea gradually changes by opening up and taking reform measures, investment, trade, and personnel exchanges between the two Koreas will expand further while the commonality between the two peoples will naturally increase. It would be best for North Korea to have its transitional system naturally coexist with South Korea's market economy by controlling its speed and promoting contact and exchange between the two societies.

## (2) South Korea and the International Community

In order for North Korea to become an advanced modernized state through opening up and gradual reform that is in line with the current direction of the international community, a parallel effort must be made by its surrounding neighbors under the notion of coevolution. In doing so, North Korea needs to make a strategic decision to abandon its nuclear program and implement policies that are necessary for its execution, while other countries work together to bring an end to the North Korean nuclear crisis so that external economic support can be expanded along with the signing of the peace treaty for the Korean Peninsula that can improve the regime's relations vis-à-vis its neighbors. It is true that the current Six-Party framework has a functional limit in its institutional structure, which seeks for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis. Therefore it is necessary for North Korea to actively participate in building a network of dialogues to settle the crisis and ultimately overcome the nuclear issue through various multilateral talks along with bilateral talks with the United States as well as with South Korea.

In an effort to accelerate North Korea's economic cooperation backed by diplomatic relations with influential countries in the early part of the twenty-first century in Northeast Asia, the United States and Japan both need to work toward normalization of relations, invigoration of trade and investment, and promotion of personnel as well as material exchanges vis-à-vis North Korea. The leading members of the regime and its people need to establish political and economic institutions as well as an ideological framework that will be in keeping with global standards by actively visiting neighboring countries, which can be facilitated through various exchange programs, track-two strategic dialogues, and educational programs for youth.

During the process, it will be important to carefully avoid jeopardizing the North Korean regime and not to incite factions that can bring about a contingency under hasty reforms and opening up. It would not be beneficial for North Korea as well as its neighbors to face a situation where the process toward change leads to political instability and greater security risks. There can be many trials and errors along North Korea's transition to a



market economy. Thus, it will be necessary to support North Korea's switch to an economy-first system under a reformist *suryong* structure that is conducive to stable economic development. That is why neighboring countries adopting market economy and free democracy need to provide various educational programs that can help North Korea's economic actors to quickly learn about their operational mechanisms and promote them through policy implementation.

International support would also be an important factor to induce reform and opening of North Korea. Given the fact that the regime lacks basic infrastructure in areas such as energy, finance, education, and social welfare, providing a suitable economic platform will not be an easy task. Thus, it is desirable to develop a program such as the forming of a transition support team that will center international organizations to facilitate North Korea's reform and opening up while stabilizing its economy in the short run.

The strategic dialogue on dismantlement and the resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue is bound to converge in a Northeast Asian regional strategy that sits at the forefront of North Korea strategies of the neighboring countries as well as North Korea's position in the region. Having said that, North Korea will require new diplomatic strategy and philosophy conducive to agenda development as well as international leadership within the Northeast Asian framework that can be channeled through the dialogues on the nuclear issue. In doing so, North Korea can look into its record of diplomacy and actively develop values that can be accepted by the current and future international regimes and form an aggressive strategy that can contribute to peace on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. During the process, various forms of peace regimes can be brought about and relations with neighboring countries can improve so that a momentum for economic development can also be spurred through opportunities such as the Japanese reparations fund. International financial support, personnel training and education necessary for economic development, and other forms of assistance can be provided as well.

South Korea should also avoid a strategy that seeks reunification by absorption that could occur if the government attempts to excessively intervene in the reform and opening up process in North Korea. That fact that the negative consequences of a rapid reunification process can be prevented should not be overlooked, whereby improving inter-Korean relations and establishing a network connection throughout the Korean Peninsula can be realized by North Korea's self-controlled transition to an economy-first system. Hence, South Korea should establish a clear vision for the future governance system of the Korean Peninsula prior to the transition into the second stage, and succeed in its coevolution strategy that is compatible with North Korea's evolution.



## 2. Transformation

### (1) North Korea

In the third stage, North Korean diplomacy should complete the virtuous circle that is beneficial for its neighbors as well as for the region and the entire world in conjunction with its effort to maximize national capacity. A successful switch from military-first to economy-first rule will bring about qualitative differences in all aspects of North Korean society, including politics, the economy, socio-cultural aspects, human rights, and so on. When the process of democratization and the transition toward a market economy inclusive of the global system occur and the socio-cultural as well as the human rights situation advance gradually, North Korean diplomacy will function as a vehicle for such changes while also acting as a gravitational force that leads the transition.

As a result, North Korea will be re-born as a middle-sized Northeast Asian state with a population of about 30 million. Despite its past record of bearing negative labels such as an evasive state or an “axis of evil,” and suffering from the hardships stemming from its military-first politics, the new North Korean state will have the reputation of a case where the regime took an independent track toward democracy and economic development through a successful transformation of its institutions. During this process North Korea would not only be able to achieve an effective democracy and market economy, but also be able to conduct its diplomacy in a way that can contribute to a peaceful transition against the uncertainties revolving around the region by strengthening strategic bilateral developments with countries such as the United States and China, within the Northeast Asian international political environment. It can also be expected that North Korea can become an exemplary state for third world and even the impoverished fourth world countries with respect to its development model, and expand its sphere of influence by establishing ties with them.

North Korea will be able to break away from its defensive posture in this stage and conduct a more aggressive and active diplomacy that is beneficial for itself as well as for its neighboring countries based on its newly acquired capacities. While leading its peace regime vis-à-vis other countries in the military security area, North Korea will be able to project its own diplomatic strategy and also enjoy a greater opportunity to participate in various subject matters such as human security or a comprehensive security regime. In cooperative multilateral regimes in Northeast Asia as well as in East Asia, North Korea will also be able to function as a middleman between China, Russia, South Korea, and Japan, while consolidating its position through strategic relations with nearby powers.

Through close cooperation, North Korea will be able to play a more active role in





promoting gradual integration by overcoming the divided status of the Korea Peninsula. In the unpredictable regional environment of Northeast Asia that can be addressed by either a balance or a conflict of power, North Korea will also find possibilities to contribute to the settlement of peace in the region. At this stage, North Korean civil society will also enjoy much development so that inter-Korean relations can deepen by personnel and cultural exchange through a civil society network between the two Koreas. If the growth of civil society in North Korea can converge to global standards, the regime's model of economic development and political democratization can be exported globally to other regions beyond Northeast Asia.

In the economic sector, North Korea's diplomacy can deepen mutual interdependence with its neighboring countries and form a complex free trade regime, moving forward to an integrated Northeast Asian economy that connects each country including the United States, South Korea, China, Japan, and Taiwan. Such an economic integration will provide an important foundation for the regional integration of Northeast Asia, whereby its success can induce an inter-Korean integration process that is not threatening to North Korea. The regime will be able to rid itself of its former position as a weak economic state and devise its own development model to conduct active exchanges with the third world based on post-communist transition and the transformation from an evasive state to a normal state, and conduct a contributing diplomacy to its partners in the process.

North Korea's change in the third stage can be helpful to bring about liberal transformations in Northeast Asia, such as democratic peace, peace through markets, institutional peace, and so on. Although such liberal aspects do not automatically guarantee peace, the likelihood of having a transnational civil society through democratization, expanded regional public sectors, and an information-knowledge-based community will increase. Mutual close economic integration will likely occur through market mechanisms such as the deepening of free trade regimes, financial cooperation, and mutual investment relationships. In that sense, North Korea's effort toward advancement will contribute to the creation of a multilateral regional cooperative structure that will manage a peaceful transition of power in Northeast Asia.

Such directions for North Korea's diplomacy will assist the changing power composition in Northeast Asia of the early twenty-first century in an orderly, institutionalized manner. Also, North Korea will be able to conduct a mediating role that will help prevent excessive competition between regional powers and promote multilateral cooperation as a medium power in Northeast Asia.



## (2) South Korea and the International Community

Along with North Korea's transformation, its neighbors will also be able to work toward coevolution in ways that can provide support for the regime's integration in the region as well as in the world. By establishing its legitimate status in Northeast Asia, North Korea's economic and socio-cultural influence will expand beyond the region. It will be able to strengthen its global influence by proposing a North Korean success model marked by a transformation from a failed state to a successful state and from a modern communist totalitarian state to a twenty-first-century advanced state.

As the process of transformation unfolds, the United States will be able to establish a strategic cooperative relationship with North Korea and discuss future stability in the military and security aspects of Northeast Asia together, while simultaneously forming closer mutual interdependence between the two economies. By actively participating in the procedures within international organizations and the U.S. effort to resolve global issues such as terrorism, the environment, and the illegal drug trade, North Korea will be able to overcome its past evasive conduct and provide its services to global human security issues as well. Regional countries and international organizations should support such efforts by North Korea to reconfigure its role in the international community. Relations with China can also advance into a twenty-first-century alliance that can provide practical benefits to North Korea under dual strategic relations vis-à-vis the United States and China. Of course, the changing U.S.-China relations toward the mid-twenty-first century will be an important subject for not only North Korea but for other countries as well.

During this process, North Korea will be able to establish its relations with regional neighbors that are conducive to multiple strategic cooperation structures, while neighboring countries will also need to recognize North Korea's active role in the region and work toward establishing relations vis-à-vis North Korea.

Inter-Korean relations will also be an important variable. At this point, there will be much less need for South Korea to assert the goal of formal reunification with North Korea, because the two institutions will already be extensively harmonized. If the two Koreas can form a *de facto* economic and socio-cultural community, political integration can be initiated from a long-term perspective and recognition of that as a natural process. At the same time, if the two Koreas can participate together in the regional integration process as the movement emerges, both will be able to form a multidimensional, multi-issued, network-based cooperation that can lead to a new future cooperative system of governance on the Korean Peninsula. In this respect, the two Koreas need to work together to develop and promote such a cooperative relationship with each other. ■



[Table 2 North Korea's Diplomatic Alternatives and Following Developments]

	North Korea's Diplomatic Strategy	Coevolution Strategy of Neighboring Countries
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Phase of Advancement</b>	<p>Strategic decision on nuclear disarmament</p> <p>Diplomacy for the regime security guarantee</p> <p>Increase in economic aid and diplomatic normalization</p>	<p>Diplomacy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue by urging the abandonment of the nuclear program</p> <p>Diplomacy to guarantee the stability of the North Korean system and regime</p>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of Advancement</b>	<p>Transformational diplomacy to economy-first system, based on security guarantee</p> <p>Deepening of economic interdependence with states in Northeast Asia and diplomacy for sustainable reformist <i>Suryong</i> regime</p> <p>Diplomacy to expand a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia</p>	<p>Diplomacy to support North Korea's transformation to an economy-first system and reformative <i>Suryong</i> system</p> <p>Diplomacy connecting peace on the Korean Peninsula, stability in the region, and the transformational diplomacy of North Korea</p>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Phase of Advancement</b>	<p>Securing North Korea's status in Northeast Asia and in the international community</p> <p>Diplomacy to increase Pyongyang's influence by actively participating in democracy, market economy, and institutional peace in Northeast Asia</p>	<p>Diplomacy to pursue active relations with North Korea so that Pyongyang could transform from a failed state into an advanced state in the twenty-first century</p>



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