

“Democratic Inconsistency” in the North Korean Nuclear Crisis

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On August 5, 1993, U.S. assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs Robert Gallucci presented a tempting proposal to North Korea—a “presidential guarantee” to provide light water reactors to replace the Yongbyon nuclear facility. Officially, the North Korean delegation complained that the presidential letter was “only a promise.” Off the record, they “took great notice.” After the initial enthusiasm subsided, however, one North Korean diplomat at the negotiation began to wonder. “What would happen if a Republican president took office?” (Wit et al., 2004: 272-274). In his question, the negotiator recognized the uncertainty built into a democratic system of government. The regular change of power typical of a democracy means frequent review, revision, and even reversal of earlier policies.

Democracy is said to have many advantages. Democracy is better because it “avoids tyranny,” “guarantees more freedom,” “brings more economic growth,” and so on (Dahl, 1998: 44-61). The advantage of democracy goes beyond domestic politics because it brings “peace” in foreign relations. The so-called democratic peace theory has been warmly embraced by politicians. According to President Bill Clinton, for instance, a key to global peace is to spread democracy, because “democracies don’t attack each other” (*Economist*, April 1, 1995). President George W. Bush emphasized the importance of a stable democracy in Iraq, because “democracies don’t go to war with each other.”¹ Likewise, President Barack Obama argues that “we benefit from the expansion of democracy” because democracies are “nations with which we share our deepest values” (*Washington Post*, March 2, 2008).

One of the core elements of the democratic peace theory is that negotiations made with democracies are “durable” because of their institutional arrangements. A contract with a democracy, especially when ratified by the legislature or supported by public opi-



nion, acquires “law-like” qualities that become difficult to change in a short period of time. Compared with “fickle” dictators (e.g., Hitler’s surprise abrogation of the Nazi-Soviet Pact), democracies are less likely to engage in sudden changes of policies. As a result, democracies are more “consistent”—thus more “reliable”—partners.

From this point of view, however, the North Korean nuclear crisis presents an interesting puzzle. For the past seventeen years, the United States has been inconsistent in its policy regarding the North Korean nuclear crisis. While the Clinton administration was willing to “buy out” the North Korean nuclear program through the 1994 Agreed Framework, the George W. Bush administration reversed Clinton’s policies and refused even to negotiate with the “axis of evil.” During the administration’s later years, however, it reversed its own policy, reviving an “updated” version of the 1994 agreement. Moreover, such “democratic inconsistency” is not an isolated incident. South Korea—another democracy—has engaged in similar policy zigzagging during the same period. By analyzing these “zigzag” moments, this paper questions one of the core arguments of democratic peace theory: the consistency of democracies. Instead, it analyzes the North Korean nuclear crisis from the viewpoint of democratic inconsistency.

It is *not* argued here that the United States has been more responsible for the collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework than has North Korea. The ongoing North Korean nuclear crisis can be persuasively analyzed from the viewpoint of “dictatorial inconsistency” as well. Instead, the goal of this article is to theorize about the phenomenon of “democratic inconsistency” in order to understand *when* and *why* a democracy becomes inconsistent in its foreign policy, and then to apply our findings to the North Korean case so that we can better understand the ongoing crisis.

I. Why Democracies *Can* be Inconsistent

The idea of “democratic peace”—that is, that there is a strong tendency among democracies not to fight among themselves—has evolved with significant theoretical revisions over the years. The democratic peace theory has been strongly supported (Dixon, 1994; Doyle, 1983; Lake, 1992; Lipson, 2003; Maoz and Russett, 1993; Morgan and Campbell, 1991; Morgan and Schwebach, 1992; Owen, 1994; Russett, 1993; Schweller, 1992; Snyder, 1991; Weart, 1998) and hotly disputed at the same time in academia (Bremer, 1992; Chan, 1984; Farber and Gowa, 1997; Garnham, 1986; Gates et al., 1996; Layne, 1994; Maoz and Abdolali, 1989; Rasler and Thompson, 2005; Rosato, 2003; Small and Singer, 1976; Spiro,



1994; Thompson, 1996; Ward et al., 2007; Weede, 1984).

One of the interesting arguments of “democratic peace” is the idea that a democracy is more consistent in its foreign policies because of its institutional arrangements. According to Charles Lipson, for instance, democracies can guarantee “long-term commitments” in their foreign policies because “their constitutions are designed to make some policies very difficult to reverse.” A contract with a democracy, especially when ratified by Congress or supported by strong public opinion, acquires “law-like” qualities that become difficult to change. Unlike authoritarian systems, democracies are less likely to engage in sudden changes of policies. As a result, democracies are more “consistent”—thus more “reliable”—partners (Lipson, 2003: 6-15).

The often-cited example to support such an argument is the surprise abrogation by Hitler of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In 1939, Hitler shocked the world by making a deal with Stalin to avoid a dual-front war. With the pact, Hitler could focus on Western Europe. When his western project was finished, Hitler then turned to the east, launching Operation Barbarossa. As a result, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was merely “an updated version of Germany’s Schlieffen Plan” (Lipson, 2003: 97). In this way, Stalin was caught off guard when Nazi soldiers began to march toward Moscow. Ronald Suny comments that Stalin was so shocked that he looked like a living corpse for a few days (Suny, 1998: 310).

But although the Nazi-Soviet Pact is often used to illustrate the “fickle” nature of dictatorships, there was nothing fickle about it. Hitler began planning for the invasion even before the ink on the pact was dry (Weinberg, 1994: 179-90). As a result, there was no sudden change of heart on Hitler’s part. Rather, Hitler was skilled at hiding his real thoughts and at misrepresenting his genuine preferences. What Hitler’s famous betrayal illustrates is the importance of *unknown intention*, not his alleged fickleness. When a country makes a contract with another country, it cannot divine the intention of its partner “with 100 percent certainty” (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31).

Realism has long emphasized the importance of unknown intention in international politics. Robert Jervis argues, for instance, that countries cannot be sure of others’ intentions because “minds can be changed, new leaders can come to power, [and] new opportunities and dangers can arise” (Jervis, 1978: 168). It is these three factors, or types, of unknown intention—change of mind, new leaders, and new circumstances—that constitute the sources of inconsistency in foreign policy.

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| Type I | Inconsistency due to “change of mind” or “new preferences” |
| Type II | Inconsistency due to “new leaders coming to power” |
| Type III | Inconsistency due to “new circumstances” |



Of these three sources, the last one—Type III Inconsistency (New Circumstances)—prompt any country, whether it is a democracy or a dictatorship, to revise or reverse its prior policies. As a result, democracies *and* dictatorships will be inconsistent as they try to exploit new opportunities or avoid new dangers in the face of changing environments. Instead, major differences between the two forms of government are found in the “change of mind” or “new leaders” categories. The first one—Type I Inconsistency (Change of Mind)—is what democratic peace theorists focus on to illustrate the changeable nature of dictatorships. When a country makes a deal with a dictatorship, whether or not the agreement will be respected is subject to the will of the dictator, who may change his mind at any moment. By contrast, when a democracy signs a treaty, its promise “come[s] from institutions that transcend individual leaders” and acquires “law-like” qualities. Put simply, a democracy has “the constitutional capacity to make enduring commitments” (Lipson, 2003: 12). As a result, contracts with a democracy are “more likely to be carried out initially [and] harder to reverse” later (Lipson, 2003: 77). That is, contracts with a democracy are more consistent because its institutional arrangements decrease the chances that the agreement will deteriorate because of a Type I Inconsistency (Change of Mind).

Although democratic leaders are more bound by institutional arrangements and public opinion, the importance of these constraints should not be exaggerated, especially in foreign policy. First, although treaties ratified by Congress or another legislative body acquire durable qualities, many agreements are not presented for ratification, such as joint communiqués, protocols, frameworks, and so on. Reneging on these sub-legal agreements is much easier. Second, even when a treaty is ratified, regular elections mean that the legislature may change its decision later. In the United States, for instance, a congressional election every two years brings a different distribution of seats with periodic revisions of policies. (Even though U.S. senators, who approve treaties in the United States, are elected for six years, a number of senators are up for reelection in every two-year period.) Finally, the relationship between public opinion and political leaders is not one-sided. As much as politicians are influenced by public opinion, they can also shape public opinion, especially when foreign policies are presented in an “us *versus* them” light. For instance, Stalin was initially portrayed as a horrible dictator, then as “Uncle Joe” when America allied with him against Hitler, and back to a communist dictator when the Cold War began (Ambrose, 1997: 150). For these reasons, we should expect much less difference between democracies and dictatorships when it comes to the Type I Inconsistency (Change of Mind).

Finally, there is the last element of unknown intention—new leaders coming to pow-



er. It is the Type II Inconsistency (New Leaders) that highlights the biggest difference between democracy and dictatorship, because in a democracy, there is a regular change of power. This aspect of democracy, however, is often ignored by democratic peace theorists. Or, when it is discussed, they produce counter-intuitive arguments:

The limitations [on a reversal of previous policies] are strongest when parties regularly rotate in power. ... Rotation is important because it gives each party strong incentives to respect prior decisions. ... Paradoxically, the rotation of national leadership ... gives the party in power real incentives to uphold the precedent that “our country keeps its bargains.” ... Current leaders gain from strengthening the presumption that their own bargains will stand through future governments. ... As long as both parties expect to share power and have a long time horizon, they can sustain an equilibrium in which they respect foreign commitments already in place. (Lipson, 2003: 80 & 101. Emphasis added)

The paradox Lipson refers to is questionable. When there is a frequent rotation of power, it raises (rather than lowers) the possibility of review, revision, or reversal of previous policies, because the new leader comes with new ideas, new visions, new agendas, and so on. For instance, when a country is dominated by one party for several decades (as Japan was under the rule of the Liberal Democratic Party from 1955 to 1993), one should expect more consistency in its policies, compared with cases where two political parties with different ideological orientations compete for power (as in the United States), because in the latter case, there is a regular change of ruling philosophy. When a second-term presidency is prohibited (as in South Korea), new leaders come even more frequently, with greater potential for inconsistent policies from the viewpoint of foreign partners.

Regular elections are the hallmark of democracy. They allow a peaceful transfer of power to those who think differently if they have the support of the majority. Regular elections are also the institutional element of democracy that tests different policies, ideas, and philosophies. After all, if opposition leaders advocate the same policies of the incumbent, why should people vote for the opposition? Democracy in fact has a built-in bias toward inconsistency as the “outs” have a strong incentive to differentiate themselves from the incumbent party, especially if the latter does not enjoy widespread public support. Both a dictatorship and a democracy may have inconsistent policies because minds can change (Type I Inconsistency) or new opportunities and dangers can arise (Type III Inconsistency). In addition, a democracy has one more element of inconsistency: “new leaders” coming to power on a regular basis (Type II Inconsistency). Democracy may have many advantages. Consistency does not seem to be one of them.



II. The North Korean Nuclear Crisis

For North Korea and the United States, the path to the 1994 Agreed Framework was anything but consistent, as each side tried to push different proposals in order to test what the other side was willing to accept. As a result, the test of consistency should be over what each side has done *after* the agreement has been signed. The main goal of this section is to demonstrate that “democratic consistency” is nowhere to be found in the position taken by the Clinton administration, the initial Bush policy (“regime change”), and the eventual Bush position—that is, going back to *his* version of the Agreed Framework. Indeed, the most remarkable aspect of U.S. foreign policy over the North Korean nuclear issue has been its *lack* of consistency.

1. Clinton Administration: The 1994 Agreed Framework

On June 11, 1993, Kang Sok-ju, the head of the North Korean delegation, asked a question that would torment Washington for years to come. “Was the United States more interested in finding out what nuclear activities had been conducted in the past or in preventing future nuclear activities?” (Wit, et al., 2004: 60). At that time, there were two schools of thought in the Clinton administration. According to the first school (History First), the U.S. priority should be to find out how many nuclear weapons North Korea had manufactured in the past. By contrast, the second school (Freeze First) emphasized the immediate freeze of the Yongbyon facility so that Pyongyang could not manufacture more nuclear weapons. Although the History First approach prevailed initially, the trend was reversed by Robert Gallucci and his “blunt March 9 memo” (Wit, et al., 2004: 139-43). As a result, freezing first and then finding out about past nuclear activities became the basic principle of the 1994 Agreed Framework.

According to the 1994 agreement, North Korea would “freeze” its Yongbyon nuclear reactor. In return, the United States would provide “a LWR [light-water reactor] project” with 2003 as a “target date.” In the meantime, Washington would annually provide 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil to “offset the energy foregone due to the freeze” of the Yongbyon reactor. After “a significant portion of the LWR project is completed,” North Korea should come into “full compliance” with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over past nuclear activities. In return, the United States would provide a “formal assurance against the threat or use of nuclear weapons.” Also, the two countries would



work “toward full normalization.”²

Initial responses to the Agreed Framework were negative as critics called it a “concession” to a horrible tyrant (*New York Times*, October 19, 1994; *Washington Post* October 19, 1994). The Clinton administration tried to reach prominent Republicans, such as Colin Powell, James Baker, Caspar Weinberger, Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger, and John McCain for support. The sales pitch, however, failed. In an increasingly bipartisan environment, “supporting the Framework would have been tantamount to Republican suicide” (Wit, et al., 2004: 337-39). Moreover, Republicans believed that the agreement rewarded “bad behavior” (Pritchard, 2007: 3-4). Robert Dole, for instance, complained that “the North Koreans are having their carrot cake and eating it too” (Reuters, February 2, 1994). John McCain accused the Clinton administration of “appeasement” (Wit, et al., 2004: 336-39). Likewise, James Schlesinger called the agreement “a negotiated surrender” (*New York Times*, October 24, 1994). As the Republican objections to the 1994 agreement became clear, the seeds of its eventual collapse were planted in 1994. It would take six more years for the seeds to bear fruit when George W. Bush won the presidential election.

2. The Bush Administration

“Pyongyang would have had a significant shock had any Republican succeeded President Bill Clinton” (Pritchard, 2007: 1). What happened under George W. Bush, however, shocked even those familiar with Washington politics. From 2001 to 2007, the Bush administration put forward at least four different North Korean policies. First, it introduced new requirements to “improve” the 1994 Agreed Framework. It was the 1994 agreement on steroids, because the Republicans regarded the original one as “too soft.” Second, the Bush administration designated North Korea a member of the world’s “axis of evil” that needed to be removed; the administration implied that regime change was needed. Third, the Bush administration took a step back to the Bold Approach in 2002. When new information surfaced regarding the North Korean secret uranium program, however, the Bold Approach became stillborn. Washington then pursued Six-Party Talks in which it negotiated with North Korea only on a multilateral basis. Finally, this policy was changed in late 2006 when the Bush administration went back to its version of the 1994 agreement. As a result, “democratic consistency” was the last thing to be found in the North Korean policy of the Bush administration.



(1) 1994 Agreement “on Steroids” – Type II Inconsistency (New Leaders)

As Americans went to the polls to choose their next president, North Korea issued a statement indicating that it hoped that the new president would pick up where the Clinton administration had left off:

Multi-faceted contacts and dialogues have been under way between the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] and the U.S. in recent years. ... [On 10 October 2000], a historic joint communiqué reflecting both sides’ will to make concerted efforts for the improvement of the DPRK-U.S. relations was issued. The document has not only an informative value but international legal validity. Accordingly, the DPRK and the U.S. are committed to implement the communiqué. The improved relations between the two countries are in line with the desire and interests of the two peoples. (KCNA, November 7, 2000)

Something was lost in translation because, in the original Korean statement, the last sentence contained an even stronger appeal: “We are hoping for the earliest normalization between North Korea and the U.S. We believe that Americans feel the same way (*Chomigwan’gyega harippalli chöngsanghwadodgirül chinsimüro parago itta. Migugindülüi maümdo kat’ülgöside*).” Ironically, North Korea also made one of the favorite arguments of the Democratic Peace Theory, that the joint communiqué had “legal validity.” The message of North Korea was clear. As Lee Gun, North Korea’s deputy permanent representative to the UN, said, “We hope the Bush administration maintains the engagement policy” of the Clinton era (*Chosun Ilbo*, February 8, 2001). North Korea was in for a big surprise.

Initially, President Bush did not seem interested in North Korea. At one point, he even asked, “Why should I care about North Korea?” (Woodward, 2006: 14). As far as foreign policy was concerned, the president-elect was “in over his head” (DeYoung, 2006: 286). Sometime between late 2000 and early 2001, however, Bush developed a new “hatred of North Korea” (Pritchard, 2007: 71). This newfound hatred was evident when South Korean president Kim Dae-jung visited the White House (Wit, et al., 2004: 377). When Kim sought a guarantee that the new administration would pick up where Clinton had left off, Bush “really lit into Kim Dae-jung,” saying that he would not continue Clinton-like policies (*New York Times*, March 8, 2001). Kim Dae-jung left humiliated and indignant (*Chosun Ilbo*, March 9, 2001). The spark-filled summit was the beginning of deepening troubles between the two allies, who became like “a king and queen who live separate lives within their marriage but still make public appearances on the balcony” (*Joongang Ilbo*, March 1, 2006).

In the meantime, the Bush administration conducted a policy review of the North Korean nuclear crisis. It was reported that hard-liners at the Vice President’s office and in



the Pentagon were pitted against moderates at the State Department (*New York Times*, June 7, 2001). On the one hand, hard-liners or “neocons” included Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Robert Armitage, and Robert Joseph. From their viewpoint, the 1994 agreement was “exhibit A in what was wrong with American policy.” John Bolton felt that the agreement needed to be scrapped (Chinoy, 2008: 61-69). While preferring to operate “in the shadows,” Vice President Cheney also took a tough stance (Mann, 2004: 97). Robert Joseph too “hated the Agreed Framework.” In his view, it was “the worst piece of diplomatic trash.” Accordingly, his goal was “to kill the Agreed Framework” (Chinoy, 2008: 44-47). On the other hand, officials at the State Department, such as Robert Carlin, Thomas Hubbard, and Charles Pritchard, held the moderate view that the 1994 agreement had been a positive step. Leading the moderates, Colin Powell was “mistrustful of people with strong ... ideologies” (Mann, 2004: 721). He considered the neocons “just short of the loony fringes of the Republican Party” (DeYoung, 2006: 179). Under such “divided” circumstances, Charles Pritchard noted with irony that he was “described both as being hard-nosed toward North Korea during the Clinton administration and as being a dove during the Bush administration” (Pritchard, 2007: ix).

The original policy review was much harsher on North Korea, reflecting the views of neocons. At this point, however, “fatherly advice” came from the senior Bush, the former president, who suggested a more flexible approach (*New York Times*, June 10, 2001). After this intervention, the final policy review announced on June 6, 2001, was “a bureaucratic compromise” between the hard-liners and the moderates. Instead of scrapping the 1994 agreement, President Bush demanded its “improved implementation” (Wit, et al., 2004: 377-78). In particular, the United States sought more accelerated inspections to discover how many nuclear weapons North Korea had produced in the past. For the Clinton administration, freezing first and then addressing past activities were the main principles of the 1994 agreement. By contrast, the Bush administration unilaterally revised the original agreement, placing “freeze” and “history” on equal footing. In addition, the “improved” framework should include a ban on the North Korean missile program—a new demand not mentioned in the 1994 agreement. Finally, it required North Korea to take a “less threatening conventional military posture,” another new demand. In this way, the Bush administration was injecting steroids into the “weak” 1994 agreement. Moreover, President Bush refused to affirm the 2000 joint communiqué that promised “no hostile intent” (*New York Times*, July 3, 2001).

There was no possibility that North Korea would accept the “improved” agreement. From its viewpoint, the new requirements were not something that Washington could simply add without penalty. On June 18, 2001, North Korea issued a statement calling the



new policy “an attempt to disarm the DPRK through negotiations.” In spite of promises by the Clinton administration, the relationship between the two countries was deteriorating because of “U.S. hostile policy.” To reverse this trend, Pyongyang wanted the Bush administration to go back to the 1994 framework “as agreed upon” (KCNA, June 18, 2001). Pyongyang wanted “a blanket commitment” that President Bush would pick up where the Clinton administration had left off. For those in the Bush administration with their “ABC (Anything But Clinton)” mentality, however, the nostalgic reference to the Clinton administration was “like waving a red flag in front of an angry bull” (Pritchard, 2007: 12-15).

This initial policy of the Bush administration—the 1994 agreement on steroids—is important, because it captures the essence of a democracy’s “Type II Inconsistency (New Leaders).” The new policy was not a response to a dramatic change or a “new environment” in international politics. After all, 9/11 was still several months away. Nor was the policy shift a response to changing behavior by North Korea. The critical information regarding its highly enriched uranium (HEU) program would not surface until mid-2002: that is, a year *after* the initial policy review. As officials in the State Department noted, “North Korea had not done anything different” (Chinoy, 2008: 49). Instead, the new policy was the result of politics in Washington. The Republicans won the election and they did not like the deal that the Democratic administration had made. The crux of the deepening crisis in early 2001 was that the band—now with a Republican conductor—had changed its tune, but the dancer, North Korea, did not like the new tune. It was a typical case of “democratic inconsistency” caused by “new leaders coming to power”—that is, Type II Inconsistency.

(2) “Regime Change”: Type III Inconsistency (New Circumstances)

The 9/11 attacks shocked the world with the tragic loss of almost 3,000 innocent lives. Immediately after 9/11, North Korea issued a statement describing it as a “very regretful and tragic incident,” adding that “the DPRK is opposed to all forms of terrorism” (KCNA, September 12, 2001). In addition to the official statement, North Korea passed a private message of condolence to the United States. Also, North Korea signed several international protocols on terrorism (Associated Press, November 29, 2001). The message was clear. It did not want to be associated with 9/11. Again, North Korea was in for a surprise.

In early 2002, President Bush identified North Korea as a part of the “axis of evil.”³ In the subsequently announced National Security Strategy, the Bush administration argued that the main threat to America was “global terrorism” by “the embittered few.” Against these terrorists, the traditional strategy of deterrence would not work, because the “so-called soldiers” of terrorism sought “martyrdom in death.” As a result, the Bush adminis-



tration would not “hesitate to act alone”; that is, the United States would launch “preemptive” attacks against “terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them.”⁴ Senior officials soon talked about “regime change” as a needed response to the “axis of evil.”

It was David Frum, President Bush’s speech writer, who came up with the expression “axis of hatred.” Michael Gerson changed it to “axis of evil” to echo the catchphrase of Ronald Reagan, “the evil empire.” The initial draft of the presidential address did not include North Korea in the “axis of evil.” When National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice read it, however, she added North Korea “to avoid focusing solely on Iraq” (*Newsweek*, February 19, 2007). That is, North Korea was added so that President Bush would not sound anti-Islamic. Although the *Newsweek* report revealed an interesting back story, it would be naïve to believe that North Korea was added solely for “political correctness”—an issue the Bush administration was not known for caring much about. Rather, North Korea was added because it fit the main characteristics of the “axis of evil” (Woodward, 2006: 339-40).

As if the “Bush doctrine” were not threatening enough, a secret Pentagon document was leaked, revealing a potential U.S. plan to use nuclear weapons against North Korea (Wit, et al., 2004: 378). In addition, the Bush administration declared that North Korea had violated the 1994 Agreed Framework. While briefing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage testified that North Korea was not fulfilling the 1994 agreement. When the committee chairman Richard Lugar (Republican) asked for evidence, Armitage admitted that he “did not have evidence of cheating.” Nonetheless, he “did not have confidence Pyongyang was going to comply.” In disbelief, the ranking Democrat senator, Joseph Biden, asked, “Is this a doctrine of preemptive breach of the contract? You expect they’re going to violate it and therefore we’re going to stop certifying now?” (Chinoy, 2008: 77-78). The lack of evidence, however, did not stop the Bush administration from declaring on March 20, 2002, that Pyongyang was in violation of the Agreed Framework.

The beginning of the Iraq War and its initial success intensified the aggressive approach of the Bush administration. For a moment, the controversial doctrine of “preemptive war” and “regime change” seemed to be working. When the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled, John Bolton urged the members of the “axis of evil” to draw “the appropriate lesson.” Likewise, a senior Bush administration official said, “This is just the beginning. I would not rule out the same consequence of events for Iran and North Korea” (*New York Times*, March 23, 2003).

Pyongyang did not draw “the appropriate lesson.” Instead, it regarded the Bush doc-



trine as “little short of a declaration of war” against North Korea as “the second target of anti-terrorism war” (*KCNA*, February 2, 2002). Although “it is quite understandable that the U.S. cannot sleep in peace, terror-stricken by Al Qaeda,” it’s “unreasonably linking the DPRK to such an organization is an expression of total ignorance” (*KCNA*, April 19, 2004). In addition, Pyongyang argued that the “regime change” policy was invented by “the Bush group keen on ... spread[ing] the Afghan war to the Korean peninsula.” If “the U.S. nuclear forces strong enough to destroy the world scores of times are deterrent forces,” how was it that “the DPRK’s forces” posed a “threat [of] terrorism”? Such arguments by the Bush administration reflected “a gangster-like logic of a typical rogue and a kingpin of terrorism” (*KCNA*, February 23, 2002). As Kang Sok-ju argued, “If we disarm ourselves because of U.S. pressure, then we will become like ... Afghanistan’s Taliban, to be beaten to death” (Pritchard, 2007: 25). North Korea was not going to be another Iraq or Afghanistan.

During their first summit, President Kim Dae-jung had been caught off guard by President Bush’s newfound hatred of North Korea. Kim had been told by Secretary Powell a day before that President Bush would “pick up where President Clinton and his administration [had] left off” (*Washington Post*, March 7, 2001). For their second summit a year later, however, President Kim was ready:

You can have dialogue even with evil if it is necessary. ... It’s not for making friends; it’s for pursuing your national interests. ... Three Republican presidents—Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan—had conducted dialogue with hated communist adversaries. Even as President Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire, he also had dialogue. ... So then, why not North Korea? ... At the time, North Korea was consistently asking for dialogue with the United States. So why can you not have that option of dialogue?” (Chinoy, 2008: 74)

Considering that Kim built his legacy on a “sunshine policy” toward North Korea (the South Korean version of President Clinton’s “engagement”), what was noteworthy about Kim’s remarks was that they were practically a conversation between the Clinton administration and the Bush administration. Kim’s words demonstrated how far the Bush approach had “digressed”—from the viewpoint of President Kim—or “evolved”—from the viewpoint of President Bush—from the Clinton policy of engagement. Whether it was a digression or an evolution, the new policy of the “axis of evil” and “regime change” revealed another moment of democratic inconsistency. In particular, it was a classic case of the “Type III Inconsistency (New Circumstances),” in which the Bush administration introduced a major policy shift in the traumatic post-9/11 environment.



(3) Killing the Agreed Framework: Type III Inconsistency (New Circumstances)

After months of harsh talk, President Bush took a step back in mid-2002, signaling “a less confrontational approach” (Wit, et al., 2004: 378). Washington offered a security guarantee and economic aid, known as the Bold Approach, if Pyongyang would dismantle its nuclear program (*Washington Post*, January 15, 2003). The Bold Approach revealed yet another moment of inconsistency, because North Korea was not behaving any differently at the time. Instead, there was a “change of heart” at the White House. The Bold Approach was an example of the “Type I Inconsistency (Change of Mind)” due to preference changes. President Bush, persuaded by Secretary Powell, revealed his “gut feeling” that it was time to go for a “bold approach.” Other than its name, however, nothing was forthcoming about the new policy. Instead, officials were told, “Think creatively; we’ll know it when we see it” (Pritchard, 2007: 25). When completed, the Bold Approach was similar to the earlier 1994 agreement on steroids but with an emphasis that Pyongyang should “go first” (Chinoy, 2008: 92).

While officials at the State Department were busy polishing the details of the Bold Approach, new information about a secret North Korean uranium program surfaced. The new information would eventually torpedo not only the Bold Approach but the 1994 agreement itself. The period from the initial halt of the Bold Approach to the eventual collapse of the 1994 agreement in late 2002 illustrated the “Type III Inconsistency (New Circumstances),” because from the viewpoint of Washington, the new information about the secret HEU (highly enriched uranium) program changed the fundamental matrix of the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Earlier, there had been some suspicion that the visit of Pakistan’s Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to Pyongyang in 1993 initiated the North Korea–Pakistan nuclear-missile exchange program (Corera, 2006: 87). “Disturbing signs” also appeared around 1997–1998 (Wit, et al., 2004: 378–79). All these suspicions, however, remained sketchy until 2002, when “the key alert” came from “the rarest of assets—an agent inside North Korea.” According to journalist Mike Chinoy, four senior U.S. officials separately confirmed the existence of the mysterious agent (Chinoy, 2008: 84). When prior data were reanalyzed given the new information from the secret agent, a new picture of the HEU program emerged. A North Korean plot was also revealed in 2002 to import “214 ultra-strong aluminum tubes” for reprocessing uranium (*Washington Post*, August 15, 2003). By mid-2002, the CIA was confident that North Korea had an updated model of “Pakistan’s older centrifuges” (Tenet, 2007: 283–84). When the CIA briefed the White House, “you could see the light-bulbs going on around the room” (Chinoy, 2008: 101–02).



Much has been written about what followed after the White House briefing, especially the visit to Pyongyang by the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, James Kelly, during which Kang Sok-ju allegedly admitted the existence of the covert HEU program. For hard-liners, the “admission” was a moment of vindication. As John Bolton argued, the 1994 agreement was “a snare and an illusion, giving us the impression of security when in fact the North Koreans were undoubtedly screwing us.” As a result, it was time to consider other options, including “military and other contingency plans” (Bolton, 2007: 107-08). Indeed, the Bush administration soon scrapped the 1994 agreement. In the words of a senior official, the framework was “dead” (*New York Times*, October 20, 2002). When Secretary Powell refused to use “the four-letter word [‘dead’]” (*Washington Post*, October 25, 2002), another senior official emphasized that Powell did “not represent the administration view” (*Washington Post*, October 26, 2002).

Although caught off-guard by the Kelly visit, North Korea soon rebounded. After criticizing the “high-handed and arrogant attitude” of Kelly (*KCNA*, October 7, 2002), North Korea emphasized that the United States had long lost “its right to talk about the implementation of the framework” because it had not fulfilled its obligations. For example, “only a big hole [had been] dug at the LWR construction site after eight years,” the Bush administration “pursued [a] hostile policy” instead of “full normalization,” and it listed North Korea “as a target of its preemptive nuclear attack.” Simply put, the United States “observed none ... of the framework” (*KCNA*, October 25, 2002). Although North Korea had “kept its nuclear facility frozen for the last eight years” (*KCNA*, November 26, 2002), Washington now suspended its heavy oil supply, “the only one of the four articles of the framework that [had] been observed” (*KCNA*, November 22, 2002). As a result, there was a “total collapse of the Agreed Framework” (*KCNA*, November 25, 2002).

There has been a great deal of second-guessing regarding the covert HEU program. First, despite Kang’s “admission,” the U.S. delegation reported that “at no point did [he] explicitly confirm the allegations” (Chinoy, 2008: 119-21). Second, some pointed out that the 1994 agreement “did not explicitly refer to uranium enrichment, much less prohibit it” (Wit, et al., 2004: 379). In that sense, North Korea might have violated “the spirit of the Agreed Framework” but not the agreement itself (Pritchard, 2007: 44). Finally, there were questions regarding U.S. intelligence. When the U.S. briefed Chinese officials about the HEU program, “the Chinese were not impressed.” In fact, one of the U.S. officials who presented the case “found it less than compelling” (Chinoy, 2008: 222-23).

Yet in spite of lingering questions, there were many reasons to suspect that a clandestine uranium program existed. First, although he did not flatly admit its existence, Kang Sok-ju presented his argument in such a way that all eight members of the U.S. delegation



came to a consensus that Kang had “defiantly admitted to having an HEU program” (Pritchard, 2007: 38). Second, although the 1994 agreement did not explicitly mention uranium enrichment, it confirmed the 1991 North-South Denuclearization Declaration banning uranium enrichment (Wit, et al., 2004: 379). Moreover, if an HEU program was not covered by the 1994 agreement, why was North Korea pursuing it covertly? The clandestine nature of the operation revealed that Pyongyang was well aware of its violation. Finally, it was estimated that North Korea began its secret program around 1997-1998. The timing was ominous, because Pyongyang made angry accusations at the time that America was not fulfilling its obligations. For instance, Pyongyang accused Washington of violating the 1994 agreement by “threatening the use of nuclear weapons” (KCNA, February 7, 1997; April 14, 1997; November 9, 1997; March 15, 1998; May 11, 1998), not working toward a “peace agreement” (KCNA, August 9, 1997; August 16, 1997; August 23, 1997; September 4, 1997; September 24, 1997; December 3, 1997; March 31, 1998; May 9, 1998), making “no progress in the LWR construction” (KCNA, March 6, 1998; March 15, 1998; March 30, 1998; May 8, 1998; July 18, 1998; August 13, 1998; September 12, 1998; October 13, 1998), and “not providing heavy fuel oil on promised schedules” (KCNA, May 8, 1998; August 13, 1998; September 12, 1998; September 13, 1998; October 2, 1998). As a result, North Korea suspected that the 1994 agreement was “a Trojan wooden horse” (KCNA, October 13, 1998). That is, Pyongyang wondered “whether [the United States] had [the] willingness to implement the framework ... *or* put a signature to it without sincerity, calculating that the DPRK would collapse” (KCNA, October 25, 2002). “If the United States does not intend to keep its commitment,” however, “we have no [intention] of keeping up our nuclear freeze” (KCNA, February 7, 1997). As these official statements indicated, 1997-1998 seemed to be a time when North Korea might have reconsidered its commitment to the Agreed Framework.

Questions, suspicions, or second-guessing over the HEU program lingered for several years. When the UN condemned the second North Korean nuclear test in 2009, however, North Korea finally confirmed its HEU program. In response to UN Resolution 1874, North Korea threatened to restart its uranium enrichment process. In its own words, “enough success has been made in developing uranium enrichment technology to provide nuclear fuel to allow the experimental procedure” (KCNA, June 13, 2009). As it turned out, North Korea had been caught “red-handed” in 2002, although it took seven years to confess its crime (Reiss and Gallucci, 2005: 142-45). With the official admission, there were no more lingering doubts about the secret HEU program. What was still unclear, however, was the intention of North Korea. Did it plan to cheat all along? If so, it would be a classic case of an “untrustworthy” dictatorship, the North Korean version of



Hitler. Or, was it the case of “dictatorial inconsistency” due to a change of mind? That is, after signing the 1994 agreement in good faith, North Korea might have had second thoughts over concerns about the U.S. commitment. The answer for now is unknown.

(4) Back to the Future: Bush Version

“We will take this path and it will not be good for you” (Pritchard, 2007: 37). After this warning, Pyongyang expelled International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, withdrew from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and re-processed about 8,000 spent fuel rods (Wit, et al., 2004: 379). For the next four years, the Bush administration pursued Six-Party Talks (with the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and both Koreas) with no real progress (DeYoung, 2006: 474). There were two stumbling blocks. First, Washington insisted that North Korea dismantle its nuclear facilities before the United States would reciprocate; that is, “take” should come first whereas “give” might come later. Moreover, “what to give” was never specified whereas the list of “what to take” was long. As one official put it, “we’re not going to paint ... [a] road map” (*Washington Post*, February 16, 2004). According to Pyongyang, however, such demands were “very abnormal.” If it disarmed first before negotiations, Pyongyang would be “empty-handed” (*KCNA*, October 25, 2002). To accept such demands would be to “surrender” (*KCNA*, August 30, 2003; August 24, 2004). Second, the Bush administration refused to hold bilateral negotiations. Considering the North Korean emphasis on bilateralism, the exclusively multilateral approach of the Six-Party Talks meant that they were doomed (Pritchard, 2007: 57). As North Korea pointed out, it was “like asking a third person to eat a porridge which we two have made” (*KCNA*, May 2, 2005). Washington became so rigid that when Pyongyang announced its imminent nuclear test, officials delivered stern warnings “on the phone” to avoid bilateral contact (Chinoy, 2008: 291). The Bush administration seemed preoccupied with form over substance (Wit, et al., 2004: 397).

While the Six-Party Talks were going nowhere, Pyongyang warned that it would “use this time 100 percent effectively to strengthen our nuclear deterrence” (*Newsweek*, May 17, 2004). By 2005, North Korea was in “rapid, extensive preparations for a nuclear weapons test” (*New York Times*, May 6, 2005). On June 1, 2006, North Korea then “kindly ... invite[d] the head of the U.S. delegation ... to visit Pyongyang” (*KCNA*, June 2, 2006). The “kind” invitation was the last gesture for negotiations. On October 3, 2006, North Korea delivered the bombshell that its nuclear test was imminent (*KCNA*, October 4, 2006). Six days later, it “conducted an underground nuclear test” (*KCNA*, October 10,



2006), while alluding to the possibility of negotiations because “Kim Il-sung’s last instruction” on his deathbed was “the denuclearization of the entire peninsula” (KCNA, October 12, 2006).

With the nuclear test by North Korea, the failure of the Bush policy became clear. When President Clinton signed the 1994 agreement, North Korea was estimated to have one or two nuclear bombs. The estimation did not change when President Bush took office six years later. While the Bush administration was pursuing the fruitless Six-Party Talks that often degenerated into a childish fight of “You go first ... No, you go first,” North Korea declared itself a nuclear power (KCNA, February 1, 2005), warned of its coming nuclear test, and detonated its nuclear bomb. “By any objective evaluation, the Bush administration’s stated goal of halting North Korea’s nuclear weapons program [had] not been achieved” (Pritchard, 2007: 161). At best, it was “amateurish” (*New York Times*, January 21, 2004). At worst, it was an “utter failure” (Chinoy, 2008: 293). President Bush defined his presidency with the “axis of evil” speech. Six years into his administration, however, one of the “axes of evil” conducted a nuclear test. “That’s quite a legacy for a president sworn to keep the world’s most dangerous weapons out of the hands of the world’s most dangerous regimes” (*New York Times*, September 2, 2006).

The North Korean nuclear test put the ball in Washington’s court. There were, however, other balls to deal with—especially, the Iraq War. By 2006, the United States was bogged down, with no end in sight. As initial public support for the war waned, the confident voices of the neocons disappeared. On November 7, 2006, the Bush administration suffered a severe blow as the Democrats gained control of both houses of Congress. Within days, defense secretary Rumsfeld resigned. The influence of Vice President Cheney declined. When it became clear that the “Democratic” Senate would not confirm his appointment, John Bolton stepped down from his UN ambassador post. Discouraged by these developments, Robert Joseph, who was under secretary of state for arms control and international security, planned to resign. As a result, the influence of neocons “rapidly diminished” (Pritchard, 2007: 158).

Under such circumstances, President Bush reversed his policy in both form and substance. As far as “substance” was concerned, he decided to revive the 1994 agreement. As far as “form” was concerned, he agreed to bilateral negotiations. After years of deadlock, “in just two days of bilateral meetings,” a deal came into view (Chinoy, 2008: 320). The final outcome was designated the “Initial Actions” on February 13, 2007, followed by the “Second-phase Actions” on October 3, 2007. During the “initial phase,” North Korea would “shut down and seal”—or “freeze,” in the terminology of the 1994 agreement—the Yongbyon facility. In return, the United States would arrange the delivery of “50,000 tons



of heavy fuel oil” to compensate for the energy loss to North Korea.⁵ During the “second phase,” North Korea would provide a “complete and correct” list of its nuclear programs, including “the uranium issue.” Also, “facilities at Yongbyon ... [were] to be disabled” with the eventual dismantlement of “all existing nuclear facilities.” In return, the United States should remove North Korea from the list of states sponsoring terrorism, a step “toward full diplomatic relations.” Finally, Washington would arrange the delivery of 100,000 tons of heavy fuel oil.⁶

The 2007 February/October agreement was a complicated example of “democratic inconsistency.” First, the new agreement became possible because the neocons had been replaced by those with more moderate views at the White House after the defeat of the Republicans in the 2006 November elections. As a result, there were many “new leaders” within the Bush administration who began to voice different ideas from its previous policy (Type II Inconsistency). Second, there were “new circumstances” in late 2006, such as the North Korean nuclear test, a major bog down in Iraq, the crushing defeat at the November polls, and so on (Type III Inconsistency). Finally, under these circumstances, President Bush began to have second thoughts or a “change of mind” about his policy regarding the North Korean nuclear crisis (Type I Inconsistency). As a result, the 2007 agreement by the Bush administration revealed all three different sources of “democratic inconsistency.”

There were “striking similarities” between the new 2007 agreement and the old 1994 agreement—a point Democrats and Republicans were both quick to make (*Washington Post*, February 13, 2007). Democratic senator Joseph Biden noted that the “new” deal would “take us back to the future” (*New York Times*, February 14, 2007). Likewise, the conservative magazine *National Review* asked why the Bush administration “agree[d] to the same framework” which it had killed earlier (*National Review*, February 14, 2007). When pressed by reporters about the similarity between the two deals in a press conference, White House spokesman Tony Snow said the new deal was “stronger” because the United States was not the only other party to sign it (*New York Times*, February 13, 2007). Apparently, it was the same deal with six signatures instead of two.

Exactly how far the Bush administration strayed from the “axis of evil” approach, the “regime change” policy, or even the multilateral principle of Six-Party Talks was best illustrated by criticism from the architects of those earlier policies; that is, the neocons who were “very mad” about the new deal (*Washington Post*, April 26, 2008). In particular, John Bolton wrote a series of scathing criticisms. Calling the new agreement “a charade” and “a hollow agreement” (*New York Times*, February 13, 2007), Bolton argued that it “contradict[ed] fundamental premises of the president’s policy ... for the past six years”



(*Washington Post*, February 13, 2007). Moreover, it would send “the wrong signal to would-be proliferators” such as Iran—that is, “if we hold out long enough ... eventually [we will] get rewarded” (*New York Times*, February 13, 2007). As a result, the 2007 agreement was “what Powell would have loved” (Bolton, 2007: 311). Or, it was “something out of Bill Clinton’s or Jimmy Carter’s playbook” (*Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2008).

As many critics—whether Democrat or Republican—pointed out, the 2007 agreement was the “Bush version” of the 1994 Agreed Framework. The irony is that it had taken six years for President Bush to return to practically the same deal that had existed when he first took office. During the “detour,” there were many “inconsistent” moments, such as the initial policy review that produced the Agreed Framework “on steroids,” the “axis of evil” approach that produced the policy of “regime change,” the emphasis on the multilateral principle of the Six-Party Talks that produced nothing, and finally the decision to go back to the “Bush version” of the original agreement. During the detour, North Korea continued to develop its nuclear arsenal and even tested a nuclear bomb. Much has been written about the “failure” of the Bush administration in this respect. It is now time to talk about “democratic inconsistency” as well.

III. Toward Democratic Consistency: Policy Recommendations

Critics may argue that the Bush era is a poor choice for drawing conclusions about “democratic inconsistency.” After all, it was called the “Bush Revolution”—a unique period in U.S. foreign policy in which the White House, influenced by the neocons, operated in the traumatic post-9/11 environment (Gordon, 2006: 75). As a result, critics could point out that the Bush case does not really *prove* “democratic inconsistency.” But such proof has not been the intention here. Rather, the Bush case is used to demonstrate why a democratic government *can* be inconsistent in its foreign policy. Indeed, debating, proving, or rejecting the proposed theory should wait for a series of “large-N” studies that will, one can hope, follow. This paper is the beginning of such a long process, not its end.

Inconsistency is not necessarily bad. In some cases, “democratic inconsistency” may be a side effect of democratic regimes trying different ideas and policies, especially when their previous approaches have not yielded desired outcomes. That is, inconsistency may be an inevitable part of “system flexibility” when a democracy goes through a trial-and-error process in the face of an ever-changing uncertainty. In the long term, however, in-



consistent policies can be damaging for several reasons. From the viewpoint of U.S. partners, for example, inconsistent policies of the United States can be confusing as partners receive different signals and messages from Washington over time. As a result, it becomes more difficult for them to make a long-term commitment when Washington zigzags in its major policies. Moreover, frequent policy shifts can incur a high “reputation cost” for the United States. According to “hegemonic stability theory,” the hegemon is supposed to be the “stabilizer” of the system, anchoring at the center of its hegemonic order (Gilpin, 1987, Kindleberger, 1986). Frequent changes in major foreign policies, however, force other countries to periodically engage in guess-work regarding what the U.S. position might be in future. It is as if the sun goes out of its orbit, thus causing other planets in the solar system to get confused about their orbits as well.

As argued earlier, there are three reasons why a democratic regime becomes inconsistent in its foreign policy: Type I (“change of mind”), Type II (“new leaders”), and Type III (“new circumstances”). Among these three scenarios, Type III Inconsistency is not problematic to any significant degree because any country, regardless of its regime type, will review, revise, or reverse its earlier approaches in order to cope with new circumstances, trying to avoid new dangers or exploit new opportunities. In the North Korean nuclear crisis, for example, the Bush administration tried to navigate a new environment in international politics after the traumatic experience of 9/11, eventually adopting the new policy of the “axis of evil” and the necessity of “regime change.” Under similar circumstances, any country would have engaged in Type III Inconsistency in the face of the new circumstances after 9/11. As a result, the controversy should not be whether the Bush administration should have made a policy change after 9/11. Rather, the debate should be whether or not its new policy was an appropriate one to deal with the North Korean nuclear crisis.

By contrast, the most problematic is Type I Inconsistency due to “change of mind” or “new preferences” without major changes in the international environment. Such a policy shift is problematic in that it makes the democracy less predictable and reliable in the eyes of its partners. In the North Korean nuclear crisis, the Bold Approach in mid-2002 was a good example of Type I Inconsistency due to a “change of heart” at the White House. Just months after the dramatic announcement of the “axis of evil” and the need for a “regime change,” President Bush was persuaded by Secretary of State Powell to pursue a “bold” approach to the North Korean nuclear crisis even though Pyongyang was not doing anything different at the time. What is particularly troubling is that the Bold Approach was practically identical to the initial policy of the Bush administration: that is, the 1994 agreement “on steroids.” Such a radical shift due to a “change of heart” should be avoided



on major issues, because it is the most serious aspect of democratic inconsistency; it is not only confusing to its partners but also makes the hegemon unreliable in the long run with a high reputation cost.

Finally, Type II Inconsistency (“new leaders”) is probably the most regular aspect of democratic inconsistency. It goes without saying that non-democracies are not immune to Type II Inconsistency, because, when there is a change of power in non-democratic regimes, they often adopt new approaches to various foreign policy issues. In the 1980s, for instance, the world was shocked to witness the “Gorbachev revolution” that was radically different from the traditional Soviet approach to foreign policy (Brown, 1996; D’Agostino, 1998; Grachev, 2008). As a result, radical policy shifts due to “new leaders” are not unique to democracy. What is unique to democracy, however, is that such shifts happen on a regular basis due to election schedules. Thus, what makes a democracy democratic also make it more susceptible to Type II Inconsistency. In this sense, democracy has a built-in bias for inconsistency.

In order to reduce its built-in Type II Inconsistency, a democratic regime needs to adopt a bipartisan approach to major foreign policy issues so that its “current” policy will be less vulnerable to future election outcomes. Instead of pursuing “Republican” or “Democratic” preferences, it is necessary to incorporate the ruling philosophy of the non-majority party so that the final policy can reflect their shared, common, and mutually agreed preferences despite partisan differences. In the North Korean nuclear crisis, for instance, it would have been difficult for practical reasons to organize a bipartisan U.S. delegation to sit at a negotiating table with North Korea. It would have been wiser, however, for the Bush administration to consult closely with the leaders of the Democratic Party both before and after its negotiations with North Korea, instead of leaving future leaders outside the loop. By doing so, the Republican administration only increased the chance of its own policy being reversed when Democrats occupied the White House. Likewise, the current Obama administration needs to work closely with leaders of the Republican Party in formulating major policies regarding the North Korean nuclear crisis. Otherwise, there is a good chance that its policy will be regarded as an “Obama” policy that reflects the views of the Democrats—a clear target for the Republicans to shoot down when they occupy the White House in the future. In order to avoid a future zigzag, a sincere effort at a bipartisan approach is essential in the current Obama administration over major foreign policy issues.

In addition to a bipartisan approach, the Obama administration needs to consider a “nested negotiation strategy”: that is, a bilateral negotiation *within* the multilateral framework of the Six-Party Talks. On the one hand, the exclusively multilateral approach



of the Six-Party Talks—the policy preference of the Bush administration from 2003 to 2006—does not have a good track record. For the past seventeen years, there have been two agreements between the United States and North Korea on the nuclear crisis. On both occasions, a mutual agreement was reached through a direct bilateral negotiation. As a result, a multilateral approach that excludes a bilateral negotiation seems unwise, especially when we consider that North Korea has never embraced such an option. On the other hand, an exclusively bilateral approach without the Six-Party Talks—which North Korea seems to prefer—needs to be avoided because a bilateral agreement is more susceptible to democratic (or dictatorial) inconsistency. When the United States makes a bilateral agreement with North Korea that then is sanctioned by the members of the Six-Party Talks, the agreement becomes less susceptible to democratic (or dictatorial) inconsistency because there is a multilateral commitment to it. A multilateral “wrapping” of a bilateral agreement can have a binding effect on the two signing countries. In this respect, a “nested negotiation strategy”—a bilateral negotiation *within* a multilateral framework—may be very attractive, even to North Korea. It is well known that Pyongyang has been reluctant to take part in the Six-Party Talks because it sees a multilateral setting as a “trap” in which North Korea can be cornered by other members of the talks. Pyongyang fears that it might have less room to maneuver in a multilateral environment compared with direct negotiations with Washington. The other side of the story that North Korea seems to miss, however, is that a multilateral setting can have a “binding” effect on the United States as well. When a bilateral agreement is further endorsed by the Six-Party Talks, the United States is putting itself in a “self-binding” position in which there is less danger of “democratic inconsistency” because there is a multilateral commitment to the bilateral agreement. As a result, the Obama administration needs to deliver a message to North Korea that the so-called trap of the Six-Party Talks binds not only Pyongyang but also Washington. Perhaps the message would be even more convincing if it could be delivered by someone whom Pyongyang can trust: namely, China.

Finally, for partners of the United States in the North Korean nuclear crisis such as South Korea, a long-term solution to deal with “democratic inconsistency” is to diversify human networks between the two allies. The main focus of the South Korean government has been to strengthen personal ties with high-ranking officials in the U.S. administration. A good example is the recent scramble in Seoul to find people with “Chicago connections” after the election of President Obama. Although strong personal ties at the administration level are very effective, such an approach is susceptible to “democratic inconsistency” because “new sheriffs” will keep on arriving in a democratically elected government. For consistent policy coordination over time, it is necessary to broaden human networks be-



tween the two countries on two levels. First, it is important to establish personal ties with “future leaders” in Washington. Since future leaders—whether Republican or Democrat—often emerge from their political parties, it would be wise for the South Korean government to establish close networks with party leaders in Congress. In other words, South Korea needs to cultivate personal ties with current leaders in the administration and “future leaders” in the legislative body at the same time. Second, even when there is a change of power in Washington, it is possible to avoid democratic inconsistency as long as “new leaders” share the ideas, values, beliefs, and policy preferences of their predecessors. As a result, a good way to avoid democratic inconsistency in the long run is to establish thick “idea networks” between the two countries so that a regular change of power in either country would mean just periodic personnel change without fundamental policy shifts. Since policy ideas often originate from research institutes and think tanks, it would be wise to establish “idea networks” among policy experts at various research institutes and think tanks in the two countries. As politicians are often influenced by policy experts, dense “idea networks” in which policy experts constantly exchange their views across the Pacific could significantly reduce the danger of policy zigzags over the North Korean nuclear crisis in the long run. ■

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Endnotes

¹ See <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041112-5.html>.

² See www.kedo.org/pdfs/AgreedFramework.pdf.

³ See <http://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html>.

⁴ See www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html.

⁵ See <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/07013Statement.html>.



⁶ See <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/07075JointStatementUS.html>.

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