

Washington on a New Watershed in Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula: Rethinking Its Strategies toward North Korea's Nuclear Development*

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I . Introduction

Tension around North Korea's nuclear development on the Korean Peninsula, which seems to endlessly escalate, faces a new watershed. The growing North Korean nuclear arsenal¹⁾ and the acute sense of crisis escalated by threats and upped the saber-rattling that U.S. President Trump and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un traded had brought the tension to the brink of waging war during last year²⁾. In this circumstance, the first inter-Korean summit in ten years brings spring to the Peninsula as well as to the long standoff around the nuclear issue on North Korea, as the two leaders of the South and North Korea mentioned in the inter-Korean summit in April 2017.

Although the inter-Korean summit raises more questions than it answers because of the lack of clear agreements on the concepts of denuclearization and specific steps for the denuclearization³⁾, it is also the case that the 'Panmunjom Declaration' adopted during the summit has an undoubted significance in two ways. Firstly, the Summit pauses last year's atmosphere of crisis and keeps the situation around the Korean peninsula peaceful.⁴⁾ Unlike to the previous two declarations between two Koreas, the '4.19. declaration in 2000' and the '10.4. declaration in 2007', the 'Panmunjom declaration' reconfirms the North Korea leader's resolve to end the Korean war and to denuclearize its nuclear weapons for peace on the Peninsula. Second, the inter-Korean Summit not only breaks the ten-year standoff and disconnection on the

1) According to the data from Statement before the House committee by Victor Cha (2018), Pyongyang has accelerated its ambitions for nuclear weapons by conducting 4 nuclear tests and 85 missiles tests, including one hydrogen bomb test in September 2017, since North Korean leader Kim Jong-un took power in 2011.

2) Bruce Klingner, "The Korean Peninsula: On the Knife's Edge of a Crisis", *The Hill* (2017).

3) Victor Cha, "Peace in Korea? What You Need to Know About the Koreas Summit and the Trump-Kim Summit", *CSIS* (2018). "Views on Historic Meeting Between Two Koreas and the Panmunjom Declaration", *The Straits Times*, April 28, 2018.

4) Chung-In Moon, "A Real Path to Peace on the Korean Peninsula", *Foreign Affairs* (2018)

North Korean nuclear development issue since the termination of the six rounds of the Six Party Talks in 2007. It but also provides the countries involved with a new chance to resolve the long dispute.⁵⁾ In other words, South Korea reopens a diplomatic window to resolve the decades-conflict on the Peninsula. Furthermore, the Summit laid the groundwork for the first Summit between Washington and Pyongyang in history that is supposed to occur in June in order to unravel the complicated problem. Given the short time in preparing the summit and the ongoing UNSC sanctions against the North, even if the 'Panmunjom Declaration' has limited outcomes, the fact that it presents a foothold to solve the complicated problem is itself significant at this moment.⁶⁾

Yet, there remain difficulties, which are considerable, in order to transform the long-standing Korean conflict into a lasting peace.⁷⁾ Reducing military tensions, building trust, and finding agreement on denuclearization are challenging tasks, especially for two anniversaries, the United States and the North.⁸⁾ As the two and half-decade history demonstrates, moreover, the current spring could easily turn over into severe winter. In the history, there have been some agreements among the two Koreas and the United States after times of crisis. Although the previous diplomacy among the countries involved has looked very promising and then the situation has spiraled back downward. The current situation seems very familiar with the historical pattern, as shall be seen in the next chapter. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that the turnaround recently has been astonishing, but things could deteriorate with equal speed or more. The failure of the next foreign policy could cause a longer standoff or dangerous situation like military conflicts.⁹⁾

5) Chung-In Moon (2018).

6) Victor Cha (2018).

7) "The Panmunjom Declaration did not Touch Its Core Points", *Chosun Ilbo*, April 28, 2018.

8) Chung-In Moon (2018), p.5.

9) Victor Cha (2018), p.5.

At this moment, the only different efforts from the past can make the current similar situation different. Washington is standing on a new watershed in determining whether the tragic historical cycle will be repeat again or will be ended following the inter-Korean Summit. To end the long and dismal historical cycle, to not repeat the mistake of past U.S. leaders in dealing with North Korea, as the President Trump said¹⁰⁾, the United States starts by deepening its assessment on its past strategies. Then, how can Washington do? Although the historical record mentioned above proves the failure of the past U.S. foreign policy, the history also gives lessons to review the flaws that the previous policies had. Thus, this paper aims to assess the causes of the previous U.S. foreign strategies' failures through historical and theoretical analysis.

The historical lessons on the causes of its strategies failure that this paper found are threefold: a) failure of understanding on Pyongyang's comprehensive motives for its nuclear development; b) External complexity around North Korean issue, a so-called as N-player problem; and c) Credible commitment problem resulting from the deepened distrust between Washington and Pyongyang. Based on these lessons, the conclusion in this paper will briefly suggest strategy to break the tragic historical cycle.

II . Historical Cycle

North Korea's nuclear development has been one of long-unsolved issues for the United States. Since the early 1980s, when North Korea's nuclear program was detected for the first time by United States intelligence, the North Korean nuclear ambitions have posed challenges to Washington's core interests for two and half decades.¹¹⁾ The major

10) "Trump Vows Not to Repeat Mistakes of Past U.S. Leaders in Dealing with North Korea", *Reuters*, April 27, 2018.

11) The CRS report in 2016 views that the nuclear development by North Korea threaten its interests: Maintaining world peace through Nonproliferation of nuclear weapons in

historical aspect around the issue is repeatability of a pattern—crisis escalations and de-escalations.¹²⁾ There has been throughout the past decades crisis between the North and the United States. However, the heightened crisis comes to be abated by North Korea's acceptances or suggestions of negotiations with the U.S. and South Korea at the very gate of military conflicts. North Korea, however, resumes its nuclear development covertly and the temporary peaceful mood between the United States and North Korea are broken and enters a new crisis cycle. The pattern has repeated for two and half decades and is being repeated at this moment, as seen in Figure 1.

The North Korean regime seems to begin its nuclear development because of the security concerns that the regime faced since the Korean War. Because the Korean War was halted in 1953 by an armistice agreement, security concerns henceforth remained a top priority for the South and North Korea. For South Korea, the United States deployed its troops and tactical nuclear bombs in South Korea to deter the North's attack.¹³⁾ The fact that North Korea confronts against the United States with the most powerful military capabilities made the regime turn to interests in developing nuclear weapons. Hence, North Korea covertly started out a nuclear program with the Soviet Union's assistance from 1956.¹⁴⁾

Changes in the regional circumstance in the Post-Cold War period accelerated Pyongyang's desires for nuclear development. The collapses of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and China's market-opening to the global capitalism, which had served as primary supporters for Pyongyang, intensified North Korea's isolation from international

general; and securing the U.S. and its allies' security in specific, narrow aspects.

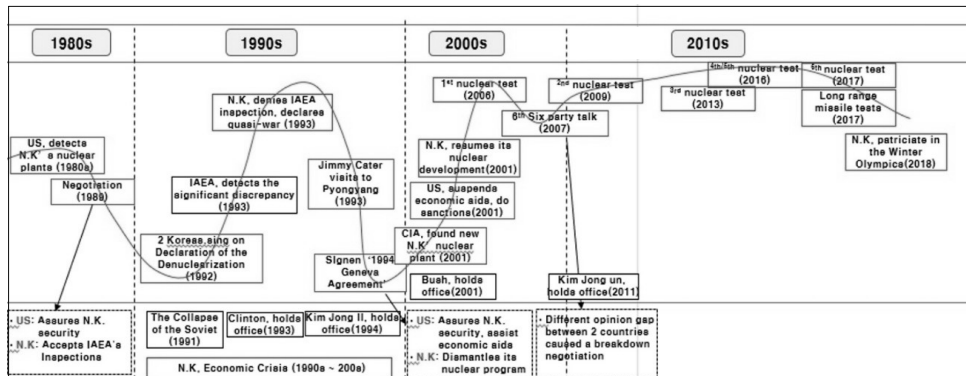
12) Mike Mullen, Sam Nunn, Adam Mount, and Anya Schmemmann. "A Sharper Choice on North Korea." *Council on Foreign Relations* (2016)

13) CRS (2016), p.5.

14) "North Korea's Nuclear Test: Motivations, Implications, and U.S. Options", Congressional Report Services, September 2016.

community. In addition, the confrontation against the United States and South Korea with significant military superiority, makes the threatened state to be dependent on nuclear weapons for its self-defense.¹⁵⁾

〈Figure 1〉 Cycle in the History¹⁶⁾



The first cycle in the history started from the 1980s by the detection that the U.S. intelligence found nuclear plants in Youngbyon and high explosives tests.¹⁷⁾ The nuclear development of North Korea, which ratified IAEA, surfaced into an international security concerns in terms of the proliferation of nuclear arms. The first strategy of the U.S. with South Korea to North Korean nuclear development was an appeasement.¹⁸⁾ The response was based on a perception that Pyongyang's motives for nuclear program results from its security concerns after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, their main strategy was to remove security concerns that Pyongyang had.¹⁹⁾ On North Korean side, the United

15) David Kang, "Threatening, but Deterrence Works", *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (Columbia University Press, 2013), pp.41-69.

16) The data from Korea Institute for National Unification (2014) is used to schematize the Figure 1. See "The Diary of North Korea's Nuclear Development", *KINU* (2014) for the details.

17) *KINU* (2014), p.17.

18) L. Kudláčová, "Analysis of the US Foreign Policy Towards North Korea: Comparison of the Post-Cold War Presidents", *Asian Study* (2014), pp.34-57.

19) After the joint U.S.-South Korea meeting in 1990 to discuss the North Korean issue, two

States withdrew their tactical nuclear bombs from South Korea in 1991 and canceled the annual joint military exercises of 1992—the Joint U.S.-ROK Team Spirit exercise, as known as Key Resolve exercise today. As a consequence of these efforts, two Koreas bear some fruitful results. They signed the “1992 Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula”, agreeing on not producing, reserving and testing nuclear weapons for peace on the Peninsula. With the agreement, North Korea began to get IAEA’s safeguards inspections in the late 1992 and to dismantle the nuclear program.

In spite of the agreement, North Korea concealed its nuclear facilities. During IAEA’s inspections conducted in 1993, the IAEA found significant discrepancy that North Korea is concealing two unreported nuclear facilities. Pyongyang’s refusal to acceptance to additional inspections and its aggressive actions²⁰⁾ precipitated the second cycle, as also known as the ‘First North Korean nuclear crisis’. While the tension was escalated during the Clinton administration considered operating military options—‘Osirak Option’—after failures of conciliation strategies, a break in the escalated crisis in a tinderbox came from a meeting in Pyongyang between the former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and North Korean leader Kim Il-sung.²¹⁾ After the meeting, the United States and North Korea signed the ‘Geneva agreement’ in October 1994. The agreement froze activities at North Korea’s nuclear facility in return for the United States’ commitment to construct alternate light-water nuclear reactors (LWRs) and provisions of heavy fuel oil and foods in order to assist to overcome the regime’s economic stagnation. The primary

allied states announced that “The United States and South Korea affirm that they are not threats to North Korean security and we seek to improved relations with that country”.

20) The regime shown aggressive reactions such as declaring a quasi-state of war against the United States urging to take IAEA’s inspection and conducting test of intermediate-range missiles, Rodong-1, in May 1993.

21) KINU (2014), p.21.

perception of Washington and Seoul stems from an assumption that Pyongyang has a shared interest—economic growth, given the country’s severe economic crisis.²²⁾ Decision makers, in particular in Seoul, consider that the common interest on economics could enhance the economic cooperation with Pyongyang, usher, further, the North Korean regime into international community, and make the country abandon its nuclear ambitions.²³⁾ Thus, South Korea had propelled a huge-size of humanitarian aids to North Korea, known as “the sunshine policy” for a decade, from 1998 through 2008.

The mitigated tensions by the Agreement Framework faced the third cycle because of commitment problems and the change in foreign policy strategy of Washington following its shift in administrations. Firstly, two states—the United States and the North—faced commitment problems in the mid-1990s.²⁴⁾ For the Clinton administration, the U.S. Congress failed to agree to pass a bill to provide appropriate funds for key provisions of the pact, causing the United States to fall behind in its commitments almost from the beginning, because of its hawk’s opposition to the Agreed Framework. North Korea also conducted actions casting doubts on Pyongyang’s by conducting missiles tests in 1998 following its power transition from Kim Il-sung into his son, Kim Jong-Il. In addition, another detection by U.S. intelligences in the late 1980s that North Korea’s nuclear development in progress covertly also intensified Washington’s suspicion on the North’s commitment.²⁵⁾

Secondly, the shift into the Bush administration also caused the third

22) J. Stangton, Lee S. Y. and Bruce Klinger, “Getting Tough on North Korea”, *Foreign Affairs* (2017).

23) Sigal(1999) and Baek (2014).

24) S.S. Hecker, “Lessons Learned from the North Korean Nuclear Crises”. *Daedalus* (2010), pp.44-56.

25) An unclassified working paper on North Korea’s nuclear weapons and uranium enrichment, made by the CIA in 2002, estimated that North Korea “is constructing a new nuclear plant that could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for two or more nuclear weapons per year”

cycle of the North Korean nuclear issue.²⁶⁾ The new Bush administration that adamantly opposed to the Agreed Framework made significant changes in its foreign policy toward North Korean nuclear development into more coercive ways. The United States immediately suspended their aids to North Korea and exerted much harder diplomatic tools. Hence, the Agreed Framework based on interaction and cooperation quickly turned into accusations of non-compliance by both parties.

However, the Bush administration's coercive foreign strategies faced significant challenges. First, Bush's strategy does not draw collective actions from other major states involved—China and, at times, South Korea.²⁷⁾ For example, China continuously and covertly offered economic aids and maintained the trade with North Korea because of its security concerns with related to North Korea, although Washington struggled to impose pressures against Pyongyang. Beijing's core security concerns with respect to North Korea lies in the increasing U.S. leverage over the Korean Peninsula²⁸⁾ and the border instability and refugee's problem in China's northeastern border that could happen if a war broke out on the Peninsula.²⁹⁾ For these reason, China has attempted to prevent North Korea's collapse. The Bush administration's coercive policy doesn't also attract a coherent action from South Korea. While Washington was pressing on North Korea, Seoul, though paced with American's strategy, had maintained 'the Sunshine Policy'. Critics of the policy argue that the sunshine policy provided Kim's regime came just in time to rescue him from a spiraling economic crisis.³⁰⁾

26) Kudlacova (2014), p.30.

27) Stangton, Lee & Klingner (2017).

28) R. D. Kamphausen, "China's strategic interests and future role", *International Journal of Korean Studies at Colombia University* (2013). G. G. Chang, "Will China allow North Korea to collapse?" *International Journal of Korean Studies at Colombia University* (2016).

29) Pundits like Kamphausen (2014) and Chang (2016) argue that the cost of managing the huge North Korean refugees and potential instability of China's northeaster border seem to impact the Chinese growing economics, so that China pursues to stabilize North Korea and tries to prevent the regime's collapse.

The second challenge that the Bush administration faced was its domestic political disputes over the North Korean issue between hawks and doves. The United States put more coercive economic pressures against the regime in Pyongyang, such as freezing illegal funds which North Koreans had managed through small international banks like Banco Delta Asia. While facing Pyongyang's refusal to participate in the negotiation table, many proponents of engagement criticized the Bush's coercive policy. Thus, Washington changed its strategy into removing the sanctions following the Pyongyang's first nuclear test in October 2006. Even if the strategic change succeeded in making Pyongyang reenter the multilateral meeting, the Six Part Talks, the Bush administration's ambivalence on North Korea sent a mixed message to the regime and it widened distrust between two countries.³¹⁾

After the mitigated sanctions by the United States, the Six Party Talks bear a fruitful agreement that North Korea pledges to dismantle its nuclear program again. However, the moderated tension reentered to the standoff due to the continued different stance on denuclearization between Washington and Pyongyang because of distrust. Whereas Washington demanded to first abandon its nuclear bombs Pyongyang already had in November 2008, Pyongyang argued that they first halt its nuclear facilities in exchange for international aids and abandoning its nuclear weapons will be discussed after then. The distrust results in the long stalemate on the issue and deterioration of the tensions on the Peninsula. During the two shifts in the administration, the United States has adhered to the coercive diplomacy and intensified its extent of coercion to date. Pyongyang has also accelerated its nuclear development.

The remaining question is that how can break the historical cycle? While the historical record presented above demonstrates the failure of the past U.S. foreign policy toward North Korea's nuclear program, the

30) Stangton, Lee & Klingner (2017).

31) R. Litwak, "Preventing North Korea's Nuclear Breakout", *Wilson Center* (2017).

repeated political behavior that Pyongyang has conducted to date gives lessons to help breaking the tragic historical cycle. This paper argues that following three causes has led to U.S. political strategies' failures.

III. Lessons Learned from the History: Causes of Its Foreign Policy Failure

1. The First Cause: The Lack of Comprehensive Understanding on North Korean Regime's Nuclear Motivations

One often assumes that an event or result has one cause. However, this is rarely true in a complex system. Rather, it is easy to find out that the assumption misdirects one's responding behavior and produces unintended outcomes. Unfortunately, the previous U.S. administrations failed to understand the complexity and unique features of North Korean political decision process.

Political decision makers in the United States, since the World War II, have mainly adopted two political grand perspectives—security-oriented approach and economy-oriented approach.³²⁾ The two theoretical frameworks have also served as main basic perspectives for the U.S. strategies toward North Korea's nuclear threats.³³⁾ However, the diagnoses from these two grand perspectives are insufficient and inadequate to understand accurately the nuclear motives that Pyongyang has. Hence, the prescriptions, the U.S. strategies, toward North Korean nuclear development are ineffective to stimulate North Korea's core wants and fears and failed to induce or coerce the Pyongyang's regime to abandon its nuclear program.

32) G. John. Ikenberry, "America's imperial ambition", *Foreign Affairs* (2002), p.47.

33) Y. Kim & Y. Yi, "Security dilemmas and signaling during the North Korean nuclear standoff", *Asian perspective* (2005), pp.73-97

A. Security-Oriented Approach: Insufficient Interpretation

Security-oriented perspective, adopted by the U.S. administrations, is necessary but insufficient to understand accurately diverse and changing nuclear motives that the North Korean regime has. Based on Structural or Neo Realism, there are common assumptions that the approach has. Firstly, the security-oriented approach posits that the international structure—anarchy system—makes a state put its national security as a top priority, so that states pursue means of self-defense for its own national security.³⁴⁾ Second, the perspective also assumes that a state, a main actor, in international relations select its best option through Rational decision process in order to achieve its goals, security.³⁵⁾ With these assumptions, Structural realists postulate that under the anarchy system, states are undifferentiated and sameness in terms of the goals and function. All state has same ultimate goal, ensuring their security, and functions, calculating options through Rational Choice Model to maximize their interest goals.³⁶⁾

From the security-oriented approach, many literatures have analyzed that North Korea's nuclear development has been motivated by its security, threatened by changes in international structure and isolations.³⁷⁾

34) Structural-Realism posits that a structural level of analysis primarily affects interaction of units in international affairs, so ignores domestic factors' influences on states' decision-making process. Realists characterize that the international structure is anarchic system, which mean there is no central legitimate governance to mediate and control disputes within the international system. Under the anarchic system, there exists uncertainty of. No state can be sure that another state will not use its military capability to attack the first state to control conflicts in international relations. See "Theory of international politics" by Waltz (2010) for the details.

35) See "International relations theory" by Viotti & Kauppi (2012) for the details.

37) J. S. Levy, "When do deterrent threats work?", *British Journal of Political Science* (1988), pp.485-512. J. J. Mearsheimer, "The tragedy of great power politics" (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2001), p.37.

38) Kang (2003); T. Roehrig, "North Korea's nuclear weapons program Motivations, strategy, and doctrine. Strategy in The Second Nuclear Age", Policy Brief, Project on Managing the Atom, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School (2002). pp.81-98.

For examples, Kim Jong-Un argues in his speech in 2017 New year address that “North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic programs capable of reaching the United States are meant to establish “equilibrium” with U.S. forces and means to deter the United States from attacking the country”. The theorists argue that in Kim’s eyes, the nuclear option is a necessary means for their survival. Hence, the regime become to rely on developing nuclear weapons as a deterrence strategy to secure its national security.³⁸⁾ However, the interpretation from the security-oriented approach is insufficient to understand North Korea’s nuclear development motivations, has a logical inconsistency and U.S. strategies based on the approach are ineffective.

First and foremost, the simplification, that Structural-realism with one level of analysis has, is insufficient to explain the historical pattern. The security-oriented approach attempts to simplify and formulize by omitting deliberately domestic factors, which affect the states’ decisions, to explain international issues. Hence, the theory considers that states are undifferentiated and sameness in terms of its goals and function, noted above. Even if the formulization presents decision makers with a simple and clear model to understand international affairs, however, foreign policy is not too simple as many pundits point to.³⁹⁾ The foreign policy system is composed of diverse issues and agendas which have a close link with and affect. It also has a close connection between domestic and international agendas. The domestic-international connection, at times, puts a state in a circumstance which prefers domestic interests like its economics to international interests during their decision-making process.⁴⁰⁾ The North Korean regime’s foreign policy-decision making

39) Kang (2003) argues that given the regime’s inferiority power in both military and economics, deterrence theorists also posit that the motives of Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons development are derived from the security concerns and their survival

40) Hudson (2013) points out in his book ‘Foreign Policy Analysis’ that a state’s foreign policy decision making process cannot be understand with only structure level of analysis because of its complexity.

process is also no exception.

As seen in the repeated behavior cycle in the history, Pyongyang's motives for nuclear development are not limited to only its security. North Korean has periodically shown interests in economic aids as well as security concerns in their behavior pattern in the history. On negotiation table, Pyongyang has asked mainly two things: elimination of its security threats; and economic aids. In addition to its diverse motives, the regime's motives on the pursuit of the nuclear weapons are not fixed, but has changed according to the circumstance that North Korea faces as seen in its repeated historical cycle.⁴¹⁾ For example, the regime begun to build the nuclear weapons because of the external security threats. While Pyongyang faces the severe economic stagnation, however, the regime's priority moves into economic interests. Moreover, when the authoritarian regime faces domestic challenge to the legitimacy of Kim's family ruling, the regime utilizes the nuclear development as means to consolidate their domestic leverage.⁴²⁾ However, the theoretical rigidity of Security-oriented approach is inadequate to elucidate the changes in the regime's interests as well as its diversity.

Secondly, the analysis, which is preoccupied with security motive, also has a logical inconsistency. The theoretical logic of the security-oriented approaches is supported by Rational. One of main logics of the approach, noted above, is that a state makes a choice through rational decision-process for its goals—security. However, in the same vein with the above first argument, a state could take a rational decision which is affected by other factors than security at times. From the security-oriented lens, for rational actors who know the catastrophic cost of nuclear wars, the aims of developing nuclear capabilities is not to use it,

41) R. Axelrod & R. O. Keohane, "Achieving cooperation under anarchy: Strategies and institutions", *World politics*, Volume 38(1) (1985), pp.226-254.

42) A. T. Little & T. Zeitzoff, "A bargaining theory of conflict with evolutionary preferences". *International Organization*, Volume 71 (2017) pp.523-557.

43) Hecker (2010), p.21.

but to threaten opponents, and not to go war, but to maintain the stability in status quo for ensuring its national security.⁴³⁾ In this regard, Pyongyang's strategic objectives of developing nuclear weapons lies in deterring Washington from attacking the regime and in ensuring its security and survival. However, this logic is empirically inaccurate, given the fact that Pyongyang launched long-range missiles over Japan and dropping near the U.S. State of Hawaii in 2017 and exaggerated its security situation. Even if the credible threat is necessary for deterrence strategy,⁴⁴⁾ the actions conducted by Pyongyang is not a threat and deterrence, but of using force.⁴⁵⁾ In the circumstance that the security-oriented approach faces the contradiction between the regime's violent actions and the approaches' logic based on Rational Model, the theorists from the approach cannot help but regarding the regime as irrational to protect their theoretical logics.⁴⁶⁾

Lastly, the U.S. political strategies from the security-oriented approaches are also ineffective because its failure of interpreting accurately Pyongyang's interests. If the country's motives for nuclear weapons derived by only its national security, then the conclusion of negotiations or methods to resolve the nuclear problem should be reasonably straightforward because the best way would be to eliminate security concerns that Pyongyang perceives, particularly, at the initial phase of the issue which dispute was not deepened.⁴⁷⁾ As the history record shown, however, the efforts to eliminat the security concerns of Pyongyang by the H.W. Bush administration failed.

Another policy, deterrence, is also not ineffective because of the

44) See articles by Roehrig (2012) and Kang (2003) for the details.

45) Classical deterrence theory argues that deterrence strategy is required to have credible threats and power in order to deter opponents. See Quackenbush (2011) for details.

46) Schelling (2008) argues that a determinant of a success of deterrence is in not using its power.

47) Stangton, Lee & Klingner (2017).

48) B. Habib, "North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and the maintenance of the Songun system", *The Pacific Review*(2011), pp.43-64.

deliberate exclusion of domestic traits by the approach. In other words, the strategy, which overlooks the institutional characteristics that the authoritarian regime, results in negative, or opposite, results: Promoting Pyongyang's nuclear tests. Pyongyang's principal ruling ideology is *Juche-Sasang* (self-reliance), which means exclude foreign power and build its own power. With the ideology, the regime utilizes American deterrence as means to consolidate its domestic leverage and possibly to support their authoritarian ruling. Thus, the pursuit of nuclear capability to responds to its external threats helps to lift up tensions at home and distract people's attention from their daily grievances and the failures of the regime.⁴⁸⁾

B. Economy-Oriented Approach: Interpretation from outside Perspective

Another mainstream of the study trend on the North Korean nuclear foreign policy is the approach focusing on the country's economy and economic cooperation, based on Neo-liberalism. Whereas the economics-oriented approach takes into account more diverse motives on the regime's nuclear development than the former, the theoretical framework based on democratic economic integrations does not offer inside perspective so that fails to understand the North Korean regime's authoritarian institutional characteristics. In other words, the understanding in the western ways fails to figure out the regime's political preference coming from its authoritarian characteristics.

While the theory shares main preconditions of the Structural-Realism, the anarchic structural system and the rationality of states, the economy-oriented approach considers that political decisions of states are motivated by their economics as well as security. Neo-liberalists note

50) For example, since power transition into Kim Jong-un, who had no political experience and faced severe economic stagnation, the regime seems to need to consolidate his domestic power. For this reason, pundits like Klingner (2014) and Port (2016) argue that Kim Jong-un aggressively confronted against the United States by expressing the regime's security threats from Washington and excessively conducted nuclear weapons development.

that although the anarchy system hamper to cooperate among states, but often bind themselves to the cooperative actions with other states in international relations in order to have absolute gains from common interests.⁴⁹⁾ They contend that given the deepened interdependence, common interests, and the lengthened the shadow of the future by iterated play, states can get absolute gains that benefits all actors through cooperation under the anarchy structure.⁵⁰⁾

From the theoretical approach, pundits focus North Korean nuclear motives on its economics. Namely, they argue that economics is one of interests that Pyongyang's regime has, given the state of the country's economic stagnation.⁵¹⁾ By the 1970s, North Korean economics began to stagnate and eventually collapse because of the combined impact of the Soviet Union's collapse, economic mismanagement, natural disasters—drought, and the decline of its modest export market during the global recession in the mid-1970s.⁵²⁾ Hence, Neo-liberalists argue that the country's deteriorating economic situation is very key determinants of Pyongyang's political decision to put their nuclear weapons program on the negotiation table. Proponents from the approach assert that the United States can induce the enclosed regime into opening the door to the world through shared interests and perceived gains from economic aids and economic integration with North Korea.⁵³⁾

However, Economy-oriented approach also have limitations—in that the approach presents inadequate interpretations on North Korean nuclear motives; and offers ineffective prescriptions to the US policy makers. Firstly, the theoretical approaches based on the western view

51) Axelrod & Keohane (1985)

52) K. A. Oye, "Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies", *World politics* (1985), pp.1-24

53) L.V. Sigal, "Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea", Princeton University Press (1999).

54) Synder (2010), p.11.

55) See Signal (1998) and Van Jackson, "Preventing Nuclear War with North Korea." *Foreign Affairs* (2018) for the details.

fail to reflect the unique authoritarian regime's characteristics. Thus, the perspective doesn't explain accurately the regime's repeated behavior pattern: Cheating and aggressive actions after cooperative agreements.

Authoritarian regimes have different political institutions, and, thereby, have different political preferences from that of Western states. Their political institutions are usually based on undemocratic political systems. The political ruling groups also put their preferences on maintaining their power, rather than on enhancing their people's well-being or life quality.⁵⁴⁾ Understanding the differences is significant in making policy decision for a state. However, the Neo-liberalist perspectives seem to overlook the disparity of the institutional traits.

Given economic crisis, it is reasonable that the North Korean regime needs economic cooperation from international community. However, considering the above authoritarian regime traits, the failure of evolution for economic cooperation is inevitable because the cooperative actions in economics is a double-edge for the Pyongyang's regime.⁵⁵⁾ In other words, although the deepening economic crisis necessitates the economic cooperation with democratic states to preserve the regime, but the fear that significant changes by democratic economic capitalism—economic liberalization—could undermine its political control and the Kim regime's persistence prevents the regime from accepting economic cooperation with outside, as seen in the case of the 'Arab Spring' which was a revolutionary wave against authoritarian regimes for requiring a more democratic political system and a brighter economic future in the North Africa and the Middle East. For this reason, the regime's interests in terms of economics has been not in economic cooperation, but in only economic aids from outside in order to build its own economic capability for their self-reliance.⁵⁶⁾

56) Hecker (2010), p.27.

57) Chang (2016), p.15.

58) For example, there had been throughout the decades various attempts to make

Secondly, thus the prescriptions from the economics-oriented approaches is ineffective. From such Neo-liberalist perspectives, the political prescriptions are primarily twofold: Cooperative economic aids in the Clinton administration; and the economic negative sanctions conducted since the Bush administration, which impose economic restriction against the North Korean regime. The cooperative economic aids, as noted before, failed to convince the North Korean regime to abandon the nuclear ambitions with its market-openness to the worlds, because the economic cooperation is not the regime's wants.

Another strategy—economic negative sanctions—is also ineffective because the policy also has been implemented with the lack of understanding on Pyongyang's authoritarian traits. While there have many studies on why the sanctions against North Korea are ineffective, most of them put their focus on China's noncooperative actions.⁵⁷⁾ They argue that Beijing's continued aids make North Korea to breath and prolong their life. Although, of course, China's uncooperative attitude has a negative impact on the effectiveness of economic sanctions, it is not sufficient to say that North Korea can prolong their life for about two decades due to only Beijing's aids. Namely, the sanctions against North Korea have not only been mild. It is also not fit into the authoritarian regime's traits.⁵⁸⁾ The key to sanctions' success is to generate political costs for the target regime's wining coalition. However, different institutions have different size of wining coalition.⁵⁹⁾ While

Pyongyang's communist system more flexible. Kim Jong-il, the former leader in North Korea had struggled to overcome the rampant economic stagnation through economic reform polices like the five-year national economic plans and building the industrial complex in Gaseong by Seoul's assistances. However, they have all eventually failed because there was no sustained commitment to conduct it.

59) A. Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea", *Washington Quarterly* (2005), pp.35-48.

60) S. Haggard & M. Noland, "Sanctioning North Korea: The Political Economy of Denuclearization and Proliferation", *Asian Survey* (2010), pp.539-568

61) Mark Souva & D. Lektzian, "An Institutional Theory of Sanctions Onset and Success", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2007), pp.848-871.

broad sanctions that impose high economic costs on the population are more likely to produce a policy change for democracy which the winning coalition is large,⁶⁰⁾ for the nondemocratic countries which have small size of ruling class, sanctioning broad population within the countries is not effective because most people in the country are not part of the autocratic leader's winning coalition and have no voice to influence the policy decision makers. For this reason, the sanctions that the previous U.S. leaders conducted was ineffective to coerce the regime to abandon its nuclear weapons.

This chapter has examined the problem of analysis on Pyongyang's nuclear motives. However, the previous problem seems to be still revolving now. After the abrupt changes in Pyongyang's nuclear policy after Kim's new year address in 2018, there have been many analyses on why North Korea abruptly change in the direction of its nuclear policy. The main arguments from the analyses lie is the security and economy-oriented approaches,⁶¹⁾ as the previous literatures did. However, the narrow view point will hamper to understand the regime's overall strategy, as the past did. Washington must seek to understand the regime's motives in the comprehensive way in order to break the historical cycle.

2. Second Cause: External Complexity Around the Peninsula (N-Player Game Problem)

As many pundits point to the difficulty of N-player game in international relations,⁶²⁾ the previous U.S. strategies also fail to produce the expected outcome because of the complexity on the N-player situation around

62) Because the broad population have voices to affect political decision makers, sanctioning population is effective way which can influence the opponent states' leadership calculus.

63) For the detail, see the News article, "What Does Kim Jong-un Want? U.S. Fears Answer Is 'Give a Little, Gain a Lot'", The New York Times, April 2, 2018.

64) Oye (1985), p.7. N-player game is defined that allow for any number of players in a game, by contrast to standard 2-player games that are only specified for two players.

the North Korean issue. Pyongyang's nuclear program issue at the initial stage begun with four states—Two Koreas, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Since the disassembly of the Soviet Union, North Korea's pivot of the foreign policy has transformed into China. These multiple actors around the North Korean issues have played mostly negative role in the effectiveness of U.S. strategies for some reasons.

First of all, N-player game in international relations increases uncertainty of intentions that opponents have.⁶³⁾ As mentioned above, states have their own goals, motives, and options to achieve the goals. However, the interaction among states changes their incentives and makes it more difficult to assume the others' political intentions and calculations. Hence, the increase in the number of players rises costs and values of information and transactions in bargaining process, and reduces the possibility to negotiate because of the increased uncertainty. In foreign policy, the problem of uncertainty is often brought up. Structural realism concerns that the uncertainty leads to miscalculations of states and unintended conflicts. Neo-liberalists also view that uncertainty hampers to conduct corporations in international relations.⁶⁴⁾

Secondly, the complexity of N-player game lowers the leverage of a state and get the state's strategies to have little impacts on its target states. In the similar vein with the first reason, N-player game makes options and incentives of states broaden through the interactions among players. The wider ranges of choices make states' leverage on its target states diminished because the target states gain interests and wants from interactions with other states. A state can also reduce damages from opponents' strategies by connecting with other states involved in a bargaining process.

The complexity of multiple players that the North Korean issue has also affects negatively the United States who has little leverage on North

65) *Ibid.*, p.8

66) Jervis (1978). Keohane (1984). Oye (1985)

Korea. Washington has had inherently uncertainty of Pyongyang's calculations and little leverage on the regime because of its little ties with North Korea in terms of all fields including political and economic trades. The little ties have resulted in the deficiency of valid information to analyze North Korea's motivations, intentions, and political calculations. It also causes the little economic leverage on North Korea. The problem of N-player situation makes them worse. In particular, China's role has made it more difficult for the United States to identify the Pyongyang's calculations and decreased Washington's leverage on North Korea, as seen in the history. Furthermore, with China's considerable growth in economics and military powers, Beijing's influences on North Korea have extended. On the other hand, the impact of Washington's strategies considerably diminished.

The N-player game problem is also repeating now. Just before big summits with Seoul and Washington, Kim Jong-Un visited Beijing to meet the President Xi-Jinping. Although there is no clear negotiation between the two allies, it is clear that the recently troubled relations between them is getting better and the game is getting complicated. During the two unofficial meetings, Xi would offer what he can do and can not do for Kim Jong-un before the Summitry between Kim-Trump.⁶⁵⁾ Furthermore, Kim would evaluate his strategy of using North Korea's nuclear arsenal by seeing Xi's treatment as an equal state.

3. Third Cause: Credible Commitment Problem

The last cause of its failure is the credible commitment problems. As Pundits argues, the credible commitment problem resulting from uncertainty on and distrust in whether each other uphold promise prevent states from bargaining.⁶⁶⁾ Hence, Bargaining theory argues that the credible

67) Victor Cha and Mr. & Sue Mi Terry, "Mrs. Kim Go to Beijing", CSIS (2018)

68) J. D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War", *International organization* (1995)

commitment problem in bargaining process is one of major causes of failure of negotiating and make states go to wars in international affairs. For the North Korean issue, the distrust between the United States and North Korea has increased throughout the history and thus the credible commitment problem become a severe obstacle to resolve the standoff over time. Although many hard liners in Washington argues that the distrust results from the rogue states' violent actions like breaching on agreement, it is not fault by one side, but result by both sides' faults.

Firstly, the U.S. domestic disputes over North Korea, resulting from the difference in theoretical perspectives, makes Pyongyang distrust in the credibility of the U.S. commitment. For example, the Clinton and Bush administration shown non-persistence political actions toward North Korea, because of domestic disputes between hard liners and soft liners over North Korea.

In addition, the changes in the bottom-line of the U.S. foreign policy toward North Korea exaggerates the distrust when the power transition occurs in the U.S. government. For example, since the President Bush took office, his administration changed its foreign policy toward North Korea into the coercive ways, suspending economic aids which were agreed in 'the 1994 Geneva Agreement'. As a result, with the excuse pointing to the U.S. commitment problem, North Korea persisted to develop tests on nuclear and long-range missiles. For these reasons, it is argued that the alternative options for Washington should include means to recovery the credible commitment problems.

IV. Conclusion: Strategy for the Future

With the historical lessons, this concluding chapter suggests strategies for the United States. Firstly, the strategy in the future should build on a

comprehensive understanding of how Kim's regime thinks, what it values, and how it judges its options. The comprehensive understanding not only helps Washington not to sway by changes in Pyongyang's minor tactics, but also promote Washington's policy to produce its sustainability and effectiveness. Secondly, the United States has to conduct multilateral diplomacy with China and South Korea in order to make up for its little leverage and credible commitment problem.

The United State has little bargaining leverage on and distrust from North Korea. It seems to be not easy for Washington to increase the leverage and restore its credibility, considered the interruption of diplomatic relations and economic ties. Beijing, by contrast, has significant, though limited, influence over North Korea, in many respects. Beijing has considerable economic influences on Pyongyang because the North Korean trades heavily depend on China.⁶⁷⁾ When it comes to its political influence, the recent Kim's visiting to Beijing proves that China still has significant influence on Pyongyang because China is a continued channel to the world as well as a shield deterring the United States' aggressive actions against North Korea. With high leverage and credibility, China could play significant role in resolving the credible commitment problems and little leverage that Washington has.

The United States also should reinforce the relations with the rest major actor in the complexity of the issue, South Korea. Washington should not only tighten the relations, it has to support the improving South Korean roles in the North Korea issue. With these diplomacy in Seoul, the United States would lead to positive results in overcoming credibility commitment problem with North Korea and persuasion China to deter North Korean regime. South Korea can be a vital mediator among the four countries because of its unique and close ties with the rest three countries.

69) According to the data from ROK Central Bank in 2016, China accounts for 90% of North Korean trade.

Firstly, South Korea shares nationalism with North Korea, which is called as the Korean people. The national sensitive as one nation, sharing long history, culture, language and so forth, has not be split by geopolitics and the historical war, but makes it possible for two Koreas to maintain their connection for the long time. Secondly, improving Seoul's role in the issue would help to induce China into the U.S. strategies. The deepening economic trade between Seoul and Beijing and strong Korean culture power, like K-pop, on China help promote China to follow the United States' foreign policy toward North Korea.

Lastly, it is no doubt that South Korea has a strong tie with the United States. The two countries have shared many common interests and a strong ally to each other. In this regard, for the United States, Seoul could be another vital channel between the United States and North Korea that offset and makes up for the commitment problem as well as the relations between the United States and China.

Given the complicated international relations, it is difficulty to resolve the complicated international issue by the United States alone. The clever power state should go forward with others in order to achieve its goals, denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

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Abstract

한반도 비핵화의 분수령에 선 미국 : 미 대북핵 정책에 대한 재고(再考)

임지영*

1980년대 북 핵개발을 처음 발견 이후, 미국은 북한의 비핵화라는 정책목적달성을 위해 다양한 정책을 사용해 왔지만 현재까지 실패하였다. 미국의 대북 정책 실패의 결과는 북핵 문제의 고착화 속에서, 평양의 핵무기 개발 가속화 야기로 한반도 및 미국을 핵위협 속에 놓이게 하였다. 특히, 지난 해, 북미간의 가열된 공격적 수사와 행동에 의한 한반도 위기설은 절정에 달하였다. 해결의 실마리가 보이지 않던 한반도의 갈등 및 위기는, 지난 4월에 열린 남북 정상회담을 통해 25년간의 핵위협의 굴레를 벗어날 기회를 다시 한번 맞이하게 되었다.

남북 정상회담 이후 이어질 북미 정상회담 등 향후 미국의 정책은 한반도 비핵화를 위한 중요한 분수령에 다시 한번 서있다. 하지만, 과거의 25년간의 역사는 다시 맞이한 '한반도의 봄'에 대한 낙관적 희망만을 주지 않는다. 과거, 양자적, 다자적 협상을 이룸에도 불구하고, 북핵 문제는 다시 위기에 접어드는 반복된 패턴과 사이클 속에 악화 되어 왔기 때문이다. 비핵화의 분수령에 있는 미 정부는 다시 한번 과거의 정책을 뒤돌아 보고, 남북 정상회담을 통해 어렵게 맞이한 기회를 결실로 이룰 수 있도록 어느 때 보다 신중한 노력이 필요하다. 최근 몇 달간 북핵 문제는 경이로운 속도로 진전을 보였지만, 한순간의 정책의 실패는 최근 보여진 진전의 속도 이상의 속도로 문제를 악화 시킬 수 있으며, 그 결과는 작년 여름과 겨울의 위기보다 더욱 심각 할 수 있음을 명심해야 한다.

이러한 점에서 이 보고서는 과거의 역사 및 이론적 분석을 통해 과거 미국의 북핵정책 실패 원인을 분석하고 정책을 제언하는데 그 목적이 있다. 과거 미 북핵 실패의 원인은 크게 3가지로 보인다. 먼저, 포괄적인 그리고 북한 정권의 특성에서 비롯된 북핵 개발의 모티브를 정확히 이해하는데 실패하여, 북한의 정책적 계산을 변화 시키는데 실패 하였

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다. 둘째, 북한 문제를 둘러싼 외부적 복잡성이 미북핵 정책실패를 야기하였다. 한반도 문제는 과거부터 다양한 국가들의 이해관계에 둘러 싸여 왔다. 북핵 문제도 남북 및 미국을 비롯 중국 등 주변국의 복잡성이 불확실성을 가중시켜 문제를 더욱 복잡하게 하였으며, 미국의 대북 협상의 영향력을 약화 시켰다. 셋째, 과거 누적된 두 국가간의 불신은 협상 이후 상대의 신뢰 있는 이행에 대한 불신을 야기하여 미국의 정책의 효과성을 저해하였다.

미국은 북핵 개발 모티브에 대한 포괄적 이해와 한국 및 중국과의 다자외교로 과거의 실패를 극복하고 25년간의 북핵문제의 고리를 끊어야 할 것이다.

핵심어: 한반도 정세, 북핵 문제, 미 대북 정책

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