

The DPRK Nuclear Challenge in Context

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, engagement with North Korea by the United States and the rest of the world has waxed and waned. This vacillation is evident even just in the past year or so, in which the Six-Party Talks process has produced both optimistic progress toward disabling Korea's nuclear facilities and negotiation stagnation combined with new North Korean threats to resume missile tests and/or nuclear weapons development.

This essay places the seesawing conflict over North Korea's nuclear ambitions into wider context to consider its implications for broader East Asian relations. After a review of the basic developments in the country's nuclear program, the essay summarizes three categories of wider consequences. The essay then sketches an initial theoretical framework offering tools to transcend overly simplistic assumptions concerning both DPRK motivations and policy response options. Finally, the essay takes up the question of how the Six-Party Talks process may contribute to reducing nuclear threats and enhancing security cooperation in the region more broadly, and what role Canada and other states or non-governmental actors might constructively play to promote positive outcomes at both levels.

North Korea's Nuclear Program

North Korea's nuclear aspirations have been problematic since it first joined the NPT in 1985. The country is believed to have been accumulating plutonium since 1986, principally utilizing its 5 megawatt-electric reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear site. The nearby plutonium separation plant is thought to have separated up to 10 kilograms of plutonium prior to 1992.

Discharge of the reactor's core in 1994, witnessed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), provided almost 8,000 irradiated fuel rods containing an estimated 27-29 kg of plutonium. This action helped escalate confrontation over the inability of the IAEA to reconcile evidence of past North Korean activities with its NPT obligations. The crisis culminated in the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework. Under this agreement, North Korea shut down the Yongbyon nuclear and its nearby plutonium separation plant, and stored the fuel rods in sealed canisters monitored by the IAEA.

The Agreed Framework did successfully freeze North Korea's plutonium-based nuclear program, but it never succeeded in resolving discrepancies of past North Korean activities or in removing known spent fuel from the country as ultimately intended. Hence, North Korea was able to restart this program when, in October 2002, charges that the country was undertaking a second, uranium-based nuclear effort led to the collapse of the Agreed Framework and to North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT and ejection of the IAEA.

In early 2003 North Korea restarted the Yongbyon reactor and began reprocessing the plutonium stored at the Yongbyon site. North Korea is now believed to have reprocessed most of the 8,000 fuel rods, yielding between 20 and 28 kg of weapons-usable plutonium. In April 2005 North Korea again shut down the Yongbyon reactor to collect a new supply of spent fuel, reprocessing of which likely provided up to 15 kilograms more of weapons-usable plutonium.

The number of nuclear weapons this stock could produce depends on the amount used for each device, which depends on the desired yield of the explosion and the technological competence to use the material efficiently. If North Korea is assumed to have only low technological capability,

equivalent to the US at the creation of its first nuclear weapons, and further assumed to be developing a relatively larger number of lower-yield devices, its current stock of separated plutonium is enough for about 4 to 13 weapons.¹

Plutonium Reprocessing

Plutonium Produced		Plutonium Reprocessed	
When	Amount (kg)	When	Amount (kg)
Before 1990	1-10	1989-1992	0-10
1994	27-29	2003-2004	20-28
Spring 2005	0-15	2005-2006	0-15
Total	28-54		20-53

Nuclear Devices (low tech requirements)

Desired Yield (kilotons)	1	5	10	20
Required Plutonium (kilograms)	3	4	5	6
Maximum NK Nuclear Devices	5-17	4-13	3-10	2-8

In September 2005, negotiations in the Six Party Talks aiming to curtail North Korea’s re-emergent nuclear program reached agreement on a joint Statement of Principles, articulating consensus addressing both goals and means.² North Korea committed itself to end efforts to produce nuclear weapons, give up its “existing nuclear weapons,” rejoin “at an early date” the NPT, and resubmit to IAEA safeguards, including readmission of international inspectors to its nuclear facilities. The statement also included a US affirmation that it had no intention of attacking the DPRK and no longer had nuclear weapons deployed in the ROK.³

The Statement of Principles, however, fudged language concerning trenchant practical differences. Within hours, divergent US and North Korean national statements exposed continuing deep divisions on several issues (particularly concerning North Korean retention of civilian nuclear facilities). This divisiveness enabled US hard-liners to push for new pressure tactics, including US sanctions curtailing Pyongyang’s access to overseas bank assets that particularly fueled animosities. In this stalemated climate, North Korea on July 5, 2006, undertook a series of missile tests triggering widespread alarm and a UN Security Council

¹ David Albright and Paul Brannan, “The North Korean Plutonium Stock Mid-2006,” Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), June 26, 2006 <<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/dprk/dprkplutonium.pdf>>; Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, “North Korea’s nuclear program, 2005,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 61:3, May/June 2005 <http://www.thebulletin.org/article_nn.php?art_ofn=mj05norris>.

² United States Department of State, “Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2005” <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm>>.

³ This was the first-ever formal US statement that it had no nuclear weapons deployed on the Korean Peninsula, marking one of the few significant exceptions to the US policy to “neither confirm nor deny” specific nuclear weapons deployments. Personal correspondence with Hans M. Kristensen; c.f. Kristensen, “The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy: Nuclear Diplomacy At Work,” working paper, August 2004 <<http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/NCND.pdf>>. Security assurances to North Korea are salient given the history of US nuclear threat-making, up to and including naming North Korea in the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). The classified review was soon obtained by news media; substantial excerpts are available at <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>>.

condemnation; and then on October 9, 2006, test-exploded a nuclear device, bringing the situation to a new nadir and eliciting the strongest UN Security Council action against North Korea in half a century.

Before testing its nuclear device, North Korea gave China about 20 minutes warning, and reportedly indicated the yield would be about four kilotons. While this is small by historical “first test” standards, it is consistent with estimates of the likely size of the devices North Korea would fashion.

But preliminary estimates of the explosion's actual yield from seismic monitoring ranged from 0.5 to 0.8 kilotons, suggesting that the test was not entirely successful – a fizzle. Speculation that it was not a nuclear test at all was never well grounded – why simulate a failure? Subsequently, air samples collected a few days later detected radioactive debris, confirming the explosion was nuclear.

A more likely explanation for the low yield is that North Korean technicians did not achieve the precise timing needed for triggering the implosion-type design required for plutonium detonation. Or, North Korea may not have wanted to use up too much of its limited plutonium supply (4 kg could be up to twenty percent of its stocks). Technicians may also have had concerns about the test site successfully containing a larger explosion.

Parameters of the Test

Attempted Yield (purported)	4 kilotons
Plutonium Utilized (est.)	4 kg (~8-20%)
Actual Yield (est.)	<1 kiloton

Previous First Tests (Plutonium)

Country	Date	Yield (kt)
U.S.	July 16, 1945	21
USSR	Aug. 29, 1949	22
Britain	Oct. 3, 1952	25
France	Feb. 13, 1960	60
India	May 11, 1998	12

Crucially, all parties to the Six-Party Talks recognized that the nuclear test did not dramatically alter the basic situation, enabling a tactical consensus around a measured reaction to the test that in turn supported the otherwise surprising early resumption of progress in the negotiations. That progress produced the implementing agreement of February 13, 2007, restoring momentum toward the negotiated solution to Korean Peninsula nuclear conflicts outlined in the September 2005 Statement of Principles.

The terms include the shut down of the research reactor at the Yongbyon site in exchange for shipments of fuel oil, similar to the provisions of the Agreed Framework. Eventually North Korea is to verifiably dismantle all nuclear weapons capabilities, receiving further energy aid, release from economic sanctions and normalization of political relations.

But the deal doesn't replace the 1994 Agreed Framework, which mapped a never-completed course to complete denuclearization of North Korea. The new deal does not reverse North Korea's NPT withdrawal and does not immediately deal with the existing stockpile of reprocessed plutonium. It leaves those developments to future – and undoubtedly difficult – negotiations.

Whereas the Agreed Framework was mainly a bilateral accord, the new deal involves commitments by North Korea's key regional neighbors included in the Six Party Talks – China, Japan, South Korea and Russia. But implementation of the Agreed Framework energy provisions was vested in the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which enlisted the active support of South Korea and Japan; its Executive Board also included the European Union, and nine other countries (including Canada) joined as members. At the diplomatic level, the Six Party Talks is a more genuinely multilateral process. But the Bush administration at times hid behind this multilateralism to avoid direct negotiations with North Korea – despite support for such direct dealings by the other four parties. Indeed, the US-DPRK bilateral meeting in Berlin in January 2007, separate from the Six Party Talks process in Beijing, was a key encounter that set the stage for resuming the current process. So while in some respects the new arrangement is more inclusive, in others it does not return the situation even to where it was in 2002.

Consequences

The collapse of the Agreed Framework in 2002 was a watershed. From 1994 to 2002, North Korea's plutonium-based nuclear program was contained. By most public accounts, the suspected uranium-based program was (and remains) not nearly as close to producing usable fissile material. After 2003 there were no direct restraints on North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and its current plutonium stocks remain in Pyongyang's hands.

In short, with the unleashing North Korea's plutonium-based nuclear program, a critical threshold was crossed, shifting the status quo fundamentally. Since 2003, all of the implications of a nuclear North Korea have been at hand. The 2006 nuclear test aggravated, but did not create, these consequences.

Ramifications of North Korea's nuclear acquisitions to date can be organized into three categories:

Nuclear Proliferation A major concern is that North Korea's reinvigorated nuclear program gives it the potential to export fissile materials, nuclear weapons development technologies and expertise, or even completed operational weapons. This is the consequence of a nuclear North Korea that many in the world take most seriously. The Bush Administration long emphasized this concern; it was perhaps that administration's most genuine "red line," and a central impetus for its launching the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Nuclear transfers is a very real concern, especially given North Korea's history of using its military resources & other illicit activities as revenue streams. But North Korea does not have commitments to external groups or a history of supporting independent terrorist activities. To the extent that the country lacks an ideological motivation to proliferate, the regime will probably take credible warnings seriously. Moreover, proliferation is a poor instrument for coercive diplomacy (discussed below), providing neither visible nor immediate impact.

Regional Security In the Northeast Asia region, a steadily (if slowly) growing arsenal of nuclear weapons in North Korea will aggravate tensions and uncertainties. Most gravely, North Korea's actions could trigger a nuclear acquisition "domino effect." Some worry particularly that North Korea might spur Japan to obtain nuclear weapons of its own.

But Japan may be less prone to soon pursue nuclear weapons than it appears, and is unlikely to make such a decision so long as US security guarantees are credible.⁴ The same goes for South Korea & Taiwan, albeit for different reasons. So the North Korean nuclear test is not necessarily going to topple other East Asian proliferation dominos.

More broadly, though, this fear increases regional security tensions and uncertainties. So the implications are high. But, perversely, North Korea's actions bolster support for regional security postures which often have wider purposes. Missile defense cooperation between the United States and Japan is one example. This is why expressions of concern from some corners for this dimension of consequences have been at times ambivalent.

The Nonproliferation Regime North Korea is the first state ever to withdraw from the NPT. North Korea has also released itself from the 1992 agreement with South Korea to keep the Korean peninsula nuclear free.

If North Korea remains outside the NPT and suffers no serious consequences, the precedent will erode current NPT compliance norms. But making a "special deal" to gain North Korea's re-accession to the NPT would also set a precedent inducing other NPT parties to bend the rules in hopes of additional benefits. Hence, there are no good options to mitigate the impact of North Korea's NPT withdrawal.

The Bush Administration rarely expressed worries over potential impacts of North Korea's NPT withdrawal on the viability of the treaty or the health of the nonproliferation regime more broadly. Instead, it supported a growing body of critics charging that developments in North Korea and Iran signify the failure of the NPT regime itself.

In fact, the NPT regime remains highly effective in most of the world. Moreover, the erosion of the regime is itself a medium through which Korean Peninsula developments drive other nuclear acquisition dangers – such as Iran's ambitions. The NPT did not prevent North Korea (and several other countries) from developing nuclear weapons, but it remains one of our strongest tools to contain these ambitions and to mitigate their wider impact. Dismissing this vital ongoing role will only make matters worse.

North Korea's 2006 nuclear test did not create all these implications. It did aggravate them somewhat, in the short-run. But, ironically, the test also alleviated them to some degree: it provided outside analysts with important forensic data about North Korea's program, and probably demonstrated that the program is not as advanced as many fear.

More broadly, the nuclear test, and North Korea's nuclear program to date more generally, have not had as deleterious an impact as there might have been in any of the above three areas of consequence – at least not yet. There are several reasons for this, including skepticism North Korea has been able to fashion a usable nuclear warhead, its recommitment to a non-nuclear future in the context of current negotiations, the apparent credibility of deterrent threats in all but the most extreme contingencies, and the exceptionalism from the outset of North Korea's relationship with the global nonproliferation regime. Most of these variables, however, may yet shift; and even if North Korea's nuclear programs progress no further than the current status quo, these capabilities will continue to threaten and corrode in all three areas.

⁴ In 1995 the Japanese Defense Agency compiled a 31-page secret report reaffirming previous government studies' conclusions that developing nuclear weapons would damage Japan's national and regional security interests. The existence of the report was disclosed by the *Asahi Shimbun* on 20 February 2003 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/japan/nuke.htm>>. Cf. Mataka Kamiya, "Nuclear Japan: Oxymoron or Coming Soon?" *Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 63-75.

DPRK Motivations

To react wisely to these developments, we must understand North Korean motivations as best we can. What are the sources of North Korea's nuclear ambitions? There are no pat answers.

Virtually all analysts conclude that at some foundational level the Pyongyang regime is motivated by "regime survival." But there's ambiguity in what this means exactly. And this impulse is not alone fully determinative of the regime's postures.

Some analysts suggest that repeated North Korean provocations are merely an effort to "get attention" from the United States and other principals. Such explanations imply an understanding of Kim Jong-il as a spoiled adolescent in need of a good spanking – an image reinforced by media attention to the Dear Leader's reportedly salacious lifestyle.

This simplistic assessment is almost certainly wrong. Rather, North Korea's provocative actions probably flow from a calculated strategy of coercive diplomacy. This strategy anticipates positive effects beyond the short-term rise in tensions and animosity such actions elicit. This strategy has met with success in the past. The renewed positive negotiating environment with the United States following its 1998 missile test, leading to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang two years later, is one example. More recently, the 2006 missile and nuclear tests led rather directly to renewed negotiations and the February 2007 agreement.

But to understand North Korea's provocative actions as an effort in coercive diplomacy still leaves the question: to what end? Here lays the most basic question regarding Pyongyang's motivations: is the regime prepared to reach an agreement entailing surrender of its nuclear capability, or not? Engagement advocates tend to answer "yes;" North Korean belligerence is mainly maneuvering for bargaining position. Confrontation advocates usually answer "no;" North Korean accommodation is merely a tactic to assuage neighbors and buy time.

Much debate over North Korea policy is defined by these two opposing prescriptions – engagement vs. confrontation – and so also by the two opposing assumptions about North Korea's motivations underlying the prescriptions. The problem is that both approaches may be wrong:

- Most fundamentally, the choice is too simple. In fact, it may be the case that North Korea's leadership pursues its nuclear program for multiple and evolving reasons, and has not made up its mind whether it will ultimately surrender it. A lot may depend on not only the terms of any ultimate deal, but the contextual situation at the time.
- Moreover, the Pyongyang regime, although highly centralized and monolithic, has its internal factions and divided interests which will bear on Kim Jong-il's decision-making. If rumors of Kim's ill health and diminishing leadership are accurate, these divisions are likely to increase in importance and volatility.
- Finally, there is the problem of uncertainty: given the opacity of the regime, no single assumption about North Korean motivations can be shown to be definitively right.

Given these problems, it makes little sense to base policy solely on one set of assumptions. A sturdier approach is to first consider how North Korea actually acts, and then consider the range of factors, domestic and international, that might be influencing these actions. Policy responses should take into account the potential influence of as many of these factors as possible. The goal is to develop effective responses regardless of which sets of assumptions about motivations may actually be correct.

To illustrate this approach, following are three simple profiles illustrating differing imagined combinations and weights of the many factors that may influence North Korean decision-making.

The three profiles roughly follow Scott Sagan's three models of nuclear proliferation motivations: external security circumstances, domestic politics and institutions, and the influence of ideas and norms.⁵ Each of these generic categories can be tailored to incorporate DPRK-specific national factors,⁶ producing three archetypical DPRK profiles:

- **National Unity:** emphasizes leadership and ideational drivers, like ideology and nationalism. The regime exhibits very strong solidarity with visionary behavioral traits.
- **Regime Power** Emphasizes power capabilities, external circumstances and regime survival. The regime exhibits strong or moderate solidarity and behaves as a classic rational actor.
- **Domestic Factions** Emphasizes internal characteristics, including economic and political. The regime exhibits weak or moderate solidarity and behaves with bounded rationality.

No single profile is "right." The point is not to choose among them. There are elements of the actual regime in each profile; reality combines elements of all of them. Rather, the profiles are abstractions, intentionally flexible and adaptable. Their purpose is to provide insight and stimulate new viewpoints; their utility is measured by their plausibility, not their accuracy. Utilizing the profiles entails envisioning how decision-making and behavior are generated in each of them, and ideally to find points of convergence among their implications. The profiles can then be applied to developing policy responses.

Policy Response Patterns

Despite the escalation of the nuclear crisis, most debate about North Korea policy remains defined by the same dichotomy mentioned earlier: *engagement* versus *confrontation*.

However, since the early 1990s, North Korea has shown that it neither dependably reciprocates accommodation, as engagement advocates hope, nor routinely cowers to intimidation, as confrontation advocates expect. Rather, North Korea's most consistent behavior has been to exercise coercive diplomacy to disrupt unsatisfactory circumstances and provoke action by interlocutors. Policy success has been most forthcoming when the US and other principals simply have been attentive to its full implementation; i.e., when prioritizing *interaction* over *neglect*.

The distinction between engagement and interaction in this context is important. Engagement means adopting certain assumptions about Pyongyang's willingness to reach deals and work to solve its internal crises through reform. Interaction means that Korean peninsula issues stay at the forefront of attention and lines of communication remain open even during periods of heightened tension.

Interaction versus neglect was a driving dynamic in the ebb and flow of post-1994 US-North Korean relations. Under the Clinton administration, waning interaction often undermined overarching engagement intentions. North Korean provocations often rekindled direct attention as well as new action – sometimes engaged, sometimes confrontational, but typically settling down the situation.

In its first two years, the Bush Administration's lack of interaction as much as its confrontational posture contributed to escalating tensions. Following the collapse of the Agreed Framework, the Bush Administration became marginally both more interactive and engaged, as policy was bedeviled by internal divisions and overshadowed by the war in Iraq. Personnel changes at the

⁵ Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21/3 (Winter 1996/97).

⁶ A non-exhaustive list of DPRK-specific factors includes: International imperatives; Regime survival; Juche philosophy/ideology; History and nationalism; Economy; Leadership; Military role in society.

beginning of President Bush's second term elicited more genuine engagement, leading to the September 2005 Statement of Principles. But acrimony over vying interpretations of its provisions helped the administration's hard-line factions reassert control of North Korea policy, contributing to a downward spiral culminating in North Korea's 2006 nuclear test.⁷

In the waning years of the administration, a commitment to the negotiating process was sustained over time. But indications that by this time the embattled administration's main motivation was to gain a foreign policy "win" suggest that its engagement was more tactical than fulsome, and drive the impression that it was willing to sacrifice prospects for eventual DPRK nuclear disarmament to staunch immediate proliferation activities. The administration may have abandoned the hope of "regime change" but not its reticence to abide Pyongyang as a sovereign interlocutor, defaulting to an apparent strategy to contain and tolerate the DPRK while allowing a nuclear resolution to await more naturally induced regime transformation. In terms of the two dimensions noted above, the Bush administration became significantly more *interactive* with North Korea over time, accounting for a dampening in the volatility of the situation; but its *engagement* remained grudging, contributing to the painstakingly incremental pace of progress.

The Obama administration thus enters the scene at a time both degraded and opportune. North Korea, predictably, is acting restlessly, particularly in the wake of South Korea's cessation of unconditional aid. Key allies Japan and South Korea, while uncomfortable with much of the Bush administration's direct dealings with North Korea, warily await indications of what form the Obama administration's ethos of engagement will take in Northeast Asia. The painstaking and less than satisfying progress of the Six-Party Talks in the past two years could easily unravel, but could also be built upon. In terms of the two dimensions noted above, the new administration is very likely to be more *engaged* – and more committed to the principle of engagement – than its predecessor. But how *interactive* its diplomacy will be in the context of so many other competing absolute priorities – i.e., how much energy and attention the administration will actually be able to devote to the Korean nuclear conundrums – remains to be seen.

Framing policy responses in terms of both these dimensions, rather than the simple dichotomy of engagement and confrontation, illuminates consideration of future policy options. This framework may be further enhanced by casting them across the DPRK profiles presented above (rather than static assumptions of DPRK motivations).

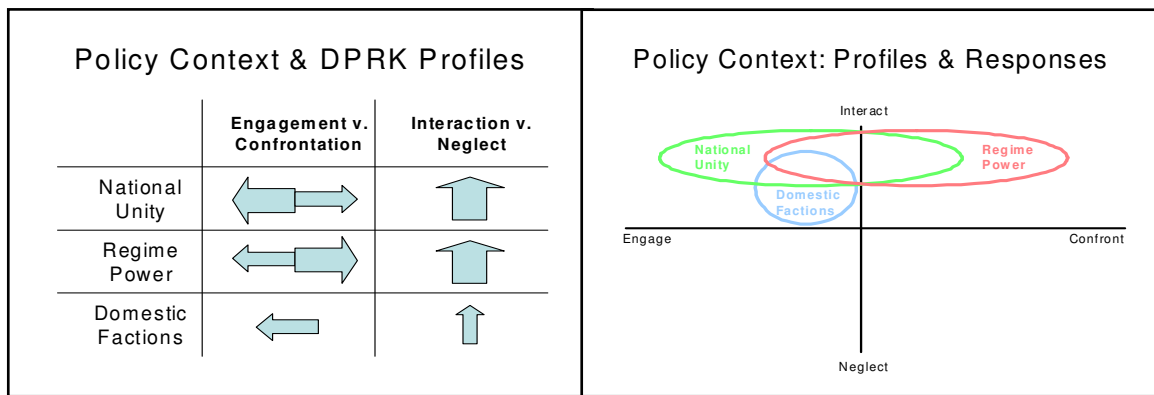
- In the **National Unity** profile, interaction is highly commended, and would best include a mix of engagement and confrontation. This is the profile under which US hostility most serves to positively reinforce the regime. Thus, a relative emphasis on engagement is both less costly and more effective from the US point of view. The US role is prominent, but negatively; there are fewer ways for the US to satisfy DPRK needs. Hence, deals are feasible but difficult; the prospect of the DPRK fulfilling its obligations is qualified, impinging confidence in agreements. An overt "breakout" from obligations might be planned, especially as an end move to a crisis precipitated for that purpose.
- In the **Regime Power** profile, interaction is highly commended, and again would best include a mix of engagement and confrontation. But a balance tilting more toward confrontation is probably advisable: this is the profile under which the regime is playing hardball diplomacy, and is probably most sensitive to credible threats. Deals are possible and the prospect of the country fulfilling its obligations is more likely, because the regime has deal-making power

⁷ See Wade L. Huntley, "U.S. Policy toward North Korea in Strategic Context: Tempting Goliath's Fate," *Asian Survey* 47:3 (May/June 2007); and "Ostrich Engagement: The Bush Administration and the North Korea Nuclear Crisis," *The Nonproliferation Review* 11:2 (Summer 2004).

and confidence, and because the regime is sensitive to international context, providing more ways for the US to satisfy its needs.

- In the **Domestic Factions** profile, engaged interaction is commended, but not strongly. This is the profile in which the US influence is smallest, because North Korea is least responsive to outside forces. Too heavy a hand could create problems of its own – almost any action is likely to provoke one or another faction. Internal constituencies and internal controls are important, lending a certain momentum to the status quo. Here, deals would be elusive, but the regime’s breach of obligations in place is not strongly motivated; defection would be reactive to proximate causes. These conditions hold unless internal turmoil reaches a degree of disintegration fundamentally disrupting policy control.

The policy implications of these profiles can tabulated in terms of the two main axes of *engagement v. confrontation* and *interaction v. neglect*, and mapped onto these policy axes to show the areas of most likely policy success.



Several overarching policy implications emerge:

- First, we notice the space where all three policy profiles overlap. This is probably the orientation which, over the long-run, will be most successful.
- Second, the widely recommended approach of combining engagement and confrontation – “carrots and sticks” – is inadequate unless girded by sustained interaction.
- Because factors fluctuate in influence on Pyongyang’s decision-making, policy must embody flexibility in this consistency. At any given time, the most effective policy could be anywhere in these three spaces.
- Finally, factors influencing Pyongyang’s decision-making are opaque. The country does not always respond similarly in similar circumstances. Hence, rather than acting or responding in a “tit-for-tat” manner, policy should be oriented consistently toward shaping environment to which Pyongyang’s decision-making responds, so far as is possible.

Looking at the profiles individually, a few other observations emerge.

First, prospects for “good” outcomes not correlated with regime solidarity. The Regime Power profile offers the best prospects, but here the regime is only moderately stable, at the midpoint between the other two profiles. This complicates setting policy goals sensitive to regime stability.

Second, prospects for engagement not necessarily correlated to DPRK disruptive behavior. In some circumstances, the regime’s motivations for engagement & for confrontation are both simultaneously heightened or lowered. These observations highlight the utility of conceiving “interaction” to be an orthogonal axis and the need for policy-making perceptiveness.

Thirdly, and ironically, the profile under which “good” outcomes are most imaginable – Regime Power – is also the profile under which a tilt toward confrontation is advised. The implication here is quite provocative: that the US should be more accommodating when North Korea appears to be least responsive to it, but firmer when North Korea seems more ready to reach an accord. This is a counterintuitive observation – almost the opposite of “tit-for-tat.” But there is an underlying logic: one should be cautious in the face of volatility, but once at the negotiating table one bargains hard. This in fact somewhat reflects the North Korean diplomatic approach of the past decade, albeit in the context of its penchant for coercive diplomacy & brinksmanship.

Finally, assessment through the profiles underscores the already evident conclusion that successful policy must be built on a strategic consensus among the United States, China, and the other principal interested powers (South Korea, Japan and Russia) as to long-term goals. The need for carefully crafted policy, incorporating elements of both engagement and confrontation and sensitive to disparate results that might emerge from small policy differences, can hardly be satisfied without such a coordinated consensus.

The Regional Security Imperative

As observed earlier, the collapse of the Agreed Framework at the end of 2002 marked the critical threshold past which North Korea was decidedly on the road to becoming nuclear armed. The regime’s subsequent declaration that it requires nuclear weapons for its security and its subsequent nuclear test all evince how far it has now moved down that road.

Achieving a non-nuclear Korean peninsula now requires rolling back an existing capacity. Although North Korea still has very far to go before it is a full-fledged nuclear power, no country has ever given up a publicly demonstrated nuclear weapons capability. There are only two known cases of rollback in which operational nuclear arsenals existed: South Africa and the former Soviet republics. Both these cases involved governments that had not embraced nuclear weapons in their security policies. And, both rollbacks were involved dramatic regime change.

Presently, North Korea’s government has recommitted itself to eventually eliminating all its nuclear arms. That rollback goal should never be surrendered. But, given the heightened challenge, strategies to curtail North Korea’s nuclear weapons development focusing only on that issue in isolation may no longer be up to task.

Two implications follow. First, the international community should also be taking measures to mitigate all categories of consequence of North Korea’s nuclear activities so long as the situation remains unresolved. This objective requires building better cooperation among key interested parties. Such efforts should be aimed not merely at eliciting unity in responding to Korean actions but also at building an environment of cooperative security throughout the Northeast Asian region as insulation against the ongoing corrosiveness of North Korea’s posture.

The second implication, therefore, is that the promise at the backdrop of the Six Party Talks – to negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula formally ending the over half-century old state of war and mapping the road to eventual Korean reunification – should move to the forefront. The Six Party Talks have long been considered a potential precursor to a wider East Asian cooperative security regime. Now, however, progress in building broader cooperative mechanisms is also increasingly important to peaceful achievement of a non-nuclear Korean peninsula.

Anticipation of a broader political settlement was a key component of the 2005 Statement of Principles. Both the United States and North Korea agreed “to respect each other’s sovereignty, exist peacefully together and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies.” This provision echoes similar intentions in the 1994 Agreed Framework –

lack of progress on which may have been more disappointing in Pyongyang than delays on the material side of the deal. The September 2005 agreement also promises that “the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum,” resolving the suspended state of war defined by the terms of the armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953. The agreement thus directly linked resolution of the nuclear crisis to the creation of an overarching regional security accommodation.

The potential for the Six-Party Talks process to contribute to reducing nuclear threats and enhancing security cooperation in the region more broadly may be realized in two distinct manners.

First, the Six-Party Talks process, whose specific aim is to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, can contribute to reducing nuclear weapons capabilities and nuclear threat reliance in the region more widely. Most directly, a peacefully denuclearized Korean peninsula would reduce proliferation pressures on Japan and other neighboring countries, and could help relax regional dependence on nuclear deterrence by the United States and China. More ambitiously, a denuclearized Korean peninsula could be a catalyst to the long sought development of an East Asian Nuclear Weapons Freeze Zone.

The second avenue for a wider contribution from the Six-Party Talks process is in facilitating the development of security cooperation mechanisms. To the extent that “Regime Power” dynamics drive DPRK motivations, US pledges to normalize relations and provide negative security assurances should carry great weight. Much would need to be worked out over the nature and limits of US negative security guarantees, but the costs of early and significant US moves toward normalizing relations are relatively cheap compared to the potential benefits that could accrue in smoothing negotiations over more contentious tangible matters.

Moreover, those provisions would necessarily entail remodeling related security arrangements. Through this mechanism, generating a permanent peace settlement for the Korean peninsula would contribute powerfully to the building a regional security cooperation framework among the principle powers of East Asia. Many models for such a framework already exist. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) already provides an incipient basis for dialogue, albeit with a limited mandate. The Conference for Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) offers an example of institutionalized regional security cooperation some have thought might be adapted to fit particular East Asian needs.

These two paths are related. Just as resolving nuclear tensions on the Korean peninsula can facilitate a broader Korean peace settlement, so might reducing nuclear threat reliance in the region more widely contribute to the development of mechanisms for security cooperation among the region’s major powers. Thus, the disposition of North Korea’s nuclear weapons ambitions is linked directly to prospects of region-wide security cooperation through two routes.

Additionally, realizing this wider potential of the processes set up to deal with North Korea’s nuclear ambitions is increasingly instrumental to that nearer-term imperative as well. While it has long been anticipated and hoped that progress toward resolving Korea-specific issues could contribute positively to progress at the wider regional level, relatively less attention has been paid to the potential for improved regional security cooperation to facilitate solutions in Korea. But, as the years have passed, this second potential has become at least as important as the original.

The reason for the increasing importance of this return effect is that the Korean nuclear situation has degraded. Compared to the situation a decade ago, North Korea’s nuclear weapons capabilities have advanced considerably. As noted earlier, the Pyongyang government likely now controls some four times as much reprocessed plutonium, enough for a half dozen or more nuclear explosive devices, it has conducted a nuclear test, and it has effected its withdrawal from

the NPT with relatively little consequence. Recent progress in negotiations, while much welcomed, has yet to begin reversing that situation. This is why the potential contribution of progress in reducing nuclear threats and building cooperative security mechanisms at the regional level has become much more important to resolving the Korea-specific nuclear conflicts.

It is to be welcomed that North Korea's nuclear advancement has not precipitated new nuclear weapons initiatives among its neighbors, dramatically unsettled regional security stability, opened proliferation floodgates or fatally undermined the nonproliferation regime. But the price of "learning to live with" a nuclear North Korea, beyond the lingering possibility of highly disruptive future actions, is to embed nuclear threat reliance even deeper into regional security relations. This is why the potential contribution of progress in reducing nuclear threats and building cooperative security mechanisms at the regional level has become much more important to resolving the Korea-specific nuclear conflicts. Indeed, a peaceful and complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula may now depend upon such wider progress.

7th-Party Contributions

What can parties outside the Six-Party Talks process do to facilitate progress both in this wider context and within the process specifically? The question can pertain both to other interested governments and to non-governmental civil society organizations. The following discussion develops a typology of potential contributions using illustrative Canadian possibilities.

Canada's relationship with the DPRK in this decade has tracked the ebb and flow of diplomatic engagement by the United States and other principal actors. Canada established diplomatic relations with the DPRK in February 2001, in hopes of promoting improved governance and human rights in the country. This occurred at a high point in engagement of North Korea; US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had visited Pyongyang the previous year, and a visit by President Clinton had nearly come to pass. With the deterioration of the US-DPRK relationship under the Bush administration, culminating in the collapse of the Agreed Framework at the end of 2002, Canada placed bilateral relations on a "not business as usual" footing, precluding formalized senior-level meetings or other intensification of the relationship.

Following the breakthrough joint Statement of Principles in 2005, Canada adjusted its policy to allow for "small-scale, grassroots-level capacity-building and training initiatives." This adjustment was suspended following the 2006 missile and nuclear tests, but turned again with renewed progress following the February 2007 agreement. At this stage, Canada readjusted policy to allow greater engagement which would "promote full denuclearization and advance long-term goals such as political reform, improved human rights and regional security." Nevertheless, the scope of this engagement remains explicitly "contingent on the continuing progress in resolving the nuclear crisis" through the Six-Party Talks process.⁸

Importantly, Canadian policy toward the DPRK evinces a focus on the conditions of the North Korean people, expressed through both human security and human rights outlooks. Canada has provided both food and non-food humanitarian assistance since 1997, and has maintained this minimum support even when all other forms of engagement are suspended. In October 2008, Canada responded to a World Food Program appeal with \$2 million in food supplies to individual North Koreans.⁹ With its policy focus on general conditions of livelihood, Canada would in the

⁸ "Bilateral Relations: Canada - Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Government of Canada (ND) <http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/geo/dprc-bb-en.aspx>

⁹ "Canada Provides Emergency Food Aid to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Canadian International Development Agency (October 2008) <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/FRA-1010145244-Q5Z>. Nevertheless, in March 2009 the WFP is providing only 15 percent of the food assistance desired, reaching only two million of the 6.2 million

future prioritize development assistance; however, such increased engagement is by stipulation contingent on progress toward resolving nuclear contestations.

Canadian policy strongly supports the Six-Party Talks process as a non-participant; it does not seek or see value in a more direct role, recognizing that few if any purposes would be served by expanding the participation in the Six-Party talks process itself. However, Canada has in the past shown its readiness to contribute directly to Korean de-nuclearization efforts, joining KEDO in 1995, shortly after its inception. Canada would likely be prepared to take an active role in any new KEDO-like organization and/or cooperative activities under other auspices. For example, Canada has been a primary participant in the G8 Global Partnership, which at its 2008 summit agreed to undertake activities outside Russia on a case-by-case basis and when consistent with serving its founding purposes.¹⁰ An active Global Partnership role to support dismantlement of North Korean nuclear facilities would be fully consistent with its mandate and offer a distinct organizational identity potentially smoothing the path to DPRK concurrence.

Beyond these specific prospects, Canada could also contribute productively in a facilitative role. Such a role would take into account its unique relationship to the United States, characterized by both intimate civil and military cooperation and defiance on certain key security policy questions. This history leaves Canada at once familiar and independent, providing both a capacity and a measure of credibility. In such a facilitative role, Canada could productively operate in two modes: as a *convening force* and an *innovation source*.

To operate as a convening force means to provide the venue and forum within which the principal agents may better advance their engagement. It does not mean to be a “mediator” (which would be a direct rather than facilitative role). It may mean a literal venue and forum, as in providing a nurturing environment for low-key meetings or other expert exchanges at either official or track-II levels. But operating as a convening force can be less direct as well; for example, in pursuing independent engagement with North Korea, Canada might prioritize initiatives that would also enable a US role (perhaps more remotely, perhaps not immediately) or at least have Canada-US counterpart initiatives. Such a focus would be especially useful in areas in which direct US-DPRK engagement outside the Six-Party Talks process remains most problematic.

A less direct means to operate as a convening force would be to focus on the challenges of nuclear threat reliance and cooperative security construction at the regional level. With a broader scope than the effort to forge a permanent Korean peace called for in the current Six-Party Talks agreements, such regional-level efforts can be undertaken independently of the Korean nuclear diplomacy. Yet, given the increased importance of the regional level environment to the Korean negotiations (described in the preceding section), such independent efforts could prove to provide powerful contributions.

Canada can be an innovation source with respect to facilitating North Korean engagement in a number of ways. One is to take a lead role in initiatives outside the core nuclear program contentions but vital to its ultimate resolution. Such initiatives can focus on development and capacity-building efforts; for example, activities to familiarize technical elites in North Korea

people targeted, having received only US\$22.7 million of the US\$504 million budget (4.5%) for the emergency operation plan adopted in 2008. “The country is soon to enter the critical ‘lean season’ when food stocks from last year’s harvest run low. In certain parts of North Korea, particularly in the Northeast, high levels of malnutrition are anticipated.” “WFP Does What Little It Can For North Koreans,” World Food Program (March 5, 2009) <http://www.wfp.org/stories/forced-scale-back-wfp-focuses-most-vulnerable-north-koreans>

¹⁰ “Report on the G8 Global Partnership,” Government of Canada (2008) http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/g8/summit-sommet/2008/g8_global_partnership-partenariat_mondial_g8.aspx?lang=eng

with economic, commercial and social standards and approaches in the international community.¹¹ While the timing and modalities of direct government-sponsored involvements must be coordinated with principal parties, Canada can also proactively facilitate a host of non-governmental support activities more distant from the nuclear diplomacy.

Another means of innovative contribution is through synthesizing the perspectives these encounters garner into a dynamic assessment of the ongoing state of engagement prospects in general. Developing a process to draw on civil and commercial as well as diplomatic contacts, this analysis could generate perspectives invisible to the United States and other Six-Party Talks participants. This analysis would seek to build insights into North Korea's current dispositions – i.e. reduce the uncertainty driving the utility of the three regime profiles introduced above – and develop specific proposals for enhancing future engagement.

Canada's success in serving a facilitative role, in either of these modes, would depend in part on all the main parties positively reinforcing that role. But such a role could be fulfilled through the accumulated activities of a host of agents – such as companies, universities and NGOs – operating in independent capacities. Positive reinforcement could come more in the aggregate of these activities than from a singular Canadian government posture. Many forums and innovations could also have independent impact, while sensitivity to the feedback from the efforts would be further data to building lines of communication and understanding.

The Six-Party Talks process is a dialogue among the governments, necessarily expressing the security priorities of those governments. Most serious discussions of potential wider regional security frameworks taking place between governments or at non-governmental “Track Two” forums similarly premise that the principal parties are the region's governments themselves. This approach to the issue manifests security outlooks defined in terms of the relationships of sovereign nation states; i.e. national security.

The agenda of such an approach by definition diverges from the weight Canadian policy places on human security and human rights concerns, which have played a formative role in Canadian foreign policy outlooks and continue to drive the emphasis on collaboration and development support in most current Canadian international roles. The preceding section described why efforts to build a Korean peace settlement and regional cooperative security are more vital than ever to resolving the nuclear challenge. By extension, progress on the national security and human security agendas are equally co-dependent, especially with respect to addressing the “human conditions crisis” in North Korea. This interdependence is recognized in the agreement between Canadian and South Korean interlocutors on the importance (if not the precise means) of promoting humane governance conditions both with respect to North Korea and on a wider regional and global basis.¹²

Progress toward peaceful conflict resolution and cooperative security dialog will serve human security needs. But the specific objectives of the Six-Party talks and the broader regional cooperative and human security agendas are not identical. Other interested parties can contribute most effectively to supporting the narrower process by clearly identifying where those agendas overlap while remaining attentive to where they do not. In defining those parameters with precision, these parties can better delineate their own roles from that of merely cheer-leading the principal governments. The important point is that, where those roles prioritize the desire to address directly North Korea's human conditions crisis, such efforts will largely reinforce rather than impede solutions to the nuclear confrontation.

¹¹ “Defining a Forward-Looking Partnership Between Korea and Canada,” Conference Report of the 6th Meeting of the Canada-Korea Forum, Millennium Seoul Hilton Hotel, Seoul, South Korea, 7-9 September, 2008 <<http://www.asiapacific.ca/en/conference/the-6th-meeting-canada-korea-forum>>

¹² “Defining a Forward-Looking Partnership Between Korea and Canada.”

This perspective should also inform outside parties' disposition toward the evolving state of the Six-Party process, especially with respect to the relationship between that process and the broader objectives of building North Korean civil viability and regional cooperative security mechanisms. Pursuit of these broader objectives by countries outside the Six-Party Talks should not be tied too closely to the vagaries of progress in the Six-Party Talks themselves. Other governments, and especially non-governmental actors, often take significant progress in this process as a light at the end of the tunnel and source of motivation, while reacting to setbacks in that process with their own retrenchment. Too frequently, these tendencies are overreactions.

Taking a broader view, it is easy to see that the vacillating pattern of progress and regress in the negotiation process is part of the process itself. Opportunities and obstacles in the pursuit of broader developmental and regional objectives are at least partly independent of whatever the current disposition of the core negotiations happens to be. Indeed, because progress on these broader objectives may now be a necessary catalyst rather than merely a hoped for consequence of Korean peninsula denuclearization, setbacks within the core negotiating process may now actually present stronger opportunities—and stronger needs—for pursuing objectives at the broader levels. Having delineated the differences in the agendas, it also becomes possible to realize and measure success independent of the outcomes of the inter-governmental processes.

Conclusion

For too long debate over how to deal with North Korea has been little more than an argument over “carrots” versus “sticks.” A few analysts have long called for a “bold initiative” for dealing with North Korea that would combine engagement and confrontation, a direction captured by the emphasis in the preceding analysis on the need for sustained *interaction*. The preceding analytical frameworks for coping with uncertainty over DPRK motivations offer further basis for transcending that initial dichotomy.

But with North Korea still as close as it has ever been to possessing a full-fledged (if fledgling) nuclear arsenal, anticipating broader regional security cooperation as an outgrowth of the Six-Party Talks process is no longer sufficient. Peaceful and permanent de-nuclearization of the DPRK requires a “bold initiative” reaching beyond Korea itself, setting as a forefront goal creation of a sturdy East Asian security community. This effort also requires appreciating the integral role that alleviating North Korea's human conditions crisis must also play.

Satellite images of Northeast Asia at night show swaths of lights separated by the darkness of the seas. One readily recognizes the contours of Japan to the east. To the west, a mass of lights reveals the populated eastern coast of China. In between is another island of lights. But this is not an island – it is South Korea. Then one notices what's missing: North Korea is dark. The image graphically depicts North Korea's energy crisis. But the image even more powerfully conveys how North Korea, quite literally, is missing from the world.

Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions are a dire international security threat. But the desperate conditions of North Korea's political culture, economy and society constitute as grave a human crisis as we face anywhere in the world. In the globalizing world of the early twenty-first century, these are challenges for all of us.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once embraced the principle, articulated earlier by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, that “if a problem cannot be solved, enlarge it.” James Goodby has applied this adage to the Korean confrontation:

The nuclear issue can only be resolved within a framework that is as large as the strategic issue of which it is a part. ... In parallel with [the six-party] talks, or independently if the talks are not resumed, [the parties] should work out a mandate for a permanent mechanism to promote security

and cooperation in Northeast Asia. ... The mandate for a security community should be as broad as that of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.¹³

A minimalist beginning in this direction, oriented around a realistic problem-solving approach, is feasible, and the initial parameters of such security cooperation are straightforward. Regarding Korea conundrums, the United States and China could find common ground on both the impracticality of “regime change” and the importance of an active role for the UN Security Council, forging the Sino-American concord needed for a lasting solution. But reaching that convergence would require the United States and China to build a more collaborative strategic relationship regarding Northeast Asia more broadly and to involve the region’s other principal parties – constituting a “small m” multilateralism along the lines of the early nineteenth century European “Concert of Powers.”¹⁴

Unlike with the hard details of the nuclear confrontation, other governments and non-governmental civil society initiatives can contribute vitally by nurturing the innovative ideas and supportive climate necessary to such broader political progress. Economic and social engagements can produce tangible results and also promote broader momentum. There are also areas more directly related to security where these other actors can make a difference. Ongoing advocacy of Northeast Asian nuclear weapons free zone proposals, for example, can (and should) help contribute to the broader goal of political engagement as well as to refining and implementing the concept itself.

There is a clear linkage between North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and the nature of Pyongyang’s regime. But this linkage is not unique to North Korea – it merely evokes the pernicious bond between reliance on nuclear threat-making and inadequate governance conditions that finds expression in Northeast Asia generally – and at the global level as well. A peaceful and permanent nonproliferation solution in Korea cannot be isolated from the necessity of restoring sufficient and sustainable economic, social and political governance conditions within the country. But a level of regional security stability is a precondition of all these non-nuclear objectives. And neither a peaceful non-nuclear solution on the Korean peninsula nor the full embrace of North Korea within the global community of nations are achievable through confrontation. Peace and human security within states is rarely achieved through means that widen the divides between states. These goals require simultaneously engaging the Pyongyang regime while also grappling with the complex tensions involved in Northeast Asia’s own encounter with today’s globalization and the systemic dynamics of nuclear proliferation of the post-Cold War world.

¹³ James Goodby, “Enlarge the North Korean problem,” *International Herald Tribune*, Tuesday, June 21, 2005. C.f. Huntley, “Ostrich Engagement.”

¹⁴ Paul Evans, “Constructing Multilateralism in an Anti-Region: From Six Party Talks to a Regional Security Framework in Northeast Asia?,” conference on Cross Currents: Regionalism and Nationalism in Northeast Asia, Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Centre, Stanford University, May 11-12, 2006; revised July 8, 2006; see also David Capie and Paul Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp. 77-81.