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Thoughts on an "Initiative Strategy" for the Comprehensive Management of North Korea

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The denuclearization of North Korea is of great interest to the international community and is a key premise of international policies toward North Korea and the discussion of reunification of the Republic of Korea. Unfortunately, efforts by the international community to resolve North Korea's nuclear issue have not produced visible results and, as discussed below, the nuclear issue is only one component of the larger problem of North Korea.

Although the ROK and the United States are attempting a two-track approach that includes dialogue as well as sanctions to deal with North Korea's nuclear program,[1] the resolution of the problem does not seem easy. North Korea will attempt to use nuclear materials as leverage to receive compromises from the U.S. in negotiation processes. This is in line with past negotiation strategies and recent developments. However, neither the Lee Myung-bak administration of the ROK nor the Obama administration of the U.S. is moving in accordance with North Korea's plans. In particular, the U.S., given its principle to lead the reduction in global nuclear weapons,[2] is not in a position to compromise in its first task on this front, the North Korean nuclear issue. On the other hand, it will be difficult for North Korea to abandon the development of nuclear weapons, given that it is the ultimate trump card guaranteeing the security of the Kim Jong-il regime.

Therefore, for the time being, it is more likely for North Korea to engage in intentional local provocations and negotiating tactics, creating a recurring unstable situation with a certain level of tension, rather than for North Korea to start an all-out invasion or for a contingency to break out following a collapse of the regime. The question is whether the ROK and U.S. governments are sufficiently prepared for such a long-term situation. The ROK and U.S. have had ample discussions in order to prepare for an all-out war on the Korean Peninsula or a contingency in North Korea. In addition, coordination of North Korea policy regarding short-term issues is also effective. However, there are some doubts as to whether there is enough cooperation regarding long-term North Korea policy initiatives, or the reunification of the Korean Peninsula taking into account the recurring unstable situations surrounding the North Korean nuclear issue. The ROK and the U.S. must coordinate closely so that North Korea does not subsist in the long-term by creating various crises, and they must seek a course of action that would ultimately contribute to peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

In addition, there must be a change in the impetus behind ROK and U.S. policies toward North Korea. Until now, North Korea policy involved the ROK and the U.S. providing responses to North Korea's proposals and actions. It is a responsive approach of sorts, but this ultimately resulted in not exercising initiative over North Korea, and instead the two allies were led by North Korea. A more successful North Korea policy will require Seoul and Washington to actively seize the initiative against the North, through which we can induce fundamental changes in North Korea and establish a strategy with which to manage the North Korean threat.

Based on these concerns, this essay will examine North Korea's actual military threat and its external policies, diagnose the North Korea policies espoused by the ROK and the U.S., and discuss the necessity and desired direction of an "Initiative Strategy" as a better mid- to long-term North Korea policy.

II. Real North Korea military threats on the Korean Peninsula

North Korea is a militarized state with 1.19 million active duty and 7.70 million reserve military personnel,[3] and the charter of the ruling "Workers Party of [North] Korea" indicates that its objective is hostile unification with the ROK. North Korea, to achieve the objective, espouses a blitz strategy, whereby it would execute a surprise attack and end any war before U.S. reinforcements arrive. As a result, North Korea is focused on the cultivation of special operations forces that will support the main offensive and disrupt the rear area.[4]

Given such a strategy, North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are the greatest threat to the ROK. Given its internal political, military and economic situation, the strength of the ROK-U.S. Military Alliance and the buildup of the ROK's own forces, the North cannot rely upon superiority in conventional forces—hence its fixation on WMDs. Furthermore, the ROK features high population density around its capital region, which would presumably result in serious casualties and loss of property should a WMD be used. In fact, we cannot discount the possibility of actual WMD use early in a war as a means to achieve its military objectives and defeat Korea's willingness to continue fighting. Finally, North Korea's possession of WMDs alone has a huge psychological effect on the Korean public even during armistice times.

By far the greatest threat among North Korea's WMD arsenal is its nuclear weapons. In 1962, North Korea developed a nuclear energy research complex in Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, beginning its nuclear development in earnest.[5] Since it joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1974, North Korea has created many conflicts in regards to nuclear inspections, and ultimately conducted two nuclear explosions.[6] Despite unending economic hardship and international sanctions such as UN Security Council Resolution 1874, North Korea is still putting all its efforts into developing its nuclear arsenal.

In the past year, North Korea also admitted to the development of highly-enriched uranium (HEU), something it had denied in the past.[7] North Korea's HEU development, which was revealed after the world discovered that North Korea had imported high-strength aluminum—with which it could manufacture centrifuges—from Russia,[8] is judged to have made substantial progress. Although the HEU facilities and the amount in possession have not been discovered, and even though HEU issues have not been discussed in agreements regarding North Korea's nuclear issues,[9] it is a threat we cannot afford to take lightly.

Although it is difficult to evaluate the capabilities of North Korea's nuclear weapons, North Korea is assessed to be making its nuclear weapons smaller and lighter in order to load them on missiles. In fact, North Korea's nuclear development is closely linked to its long-range ballistic missile development. That the Taepodong missile body was first identified in 1994, at the height of the first nuclear crisis with North Korea, and that missile experiments disguised as long-range rocket launches were conducted immediately before the

nuclear experiments in 2006 and 2009 can be seen as evidence. Sources say that North Korea is placing a lot of effort in enhancing not only its long-range delivery capabilities[10] but also its warhead accuracy.

Lastly, North Korea's biochemical weapon threats remain as issues of concern. Although its capabilities have been overshadowed by nuclear weapon developments, North Korea retains superb biochemical weapons capabilities. By the 1950s, it had already established a germ lab under its Defense Science Institute, developing its biological weapons, producing 13 types of germs since the 1990s. Furthermore, North Korea had begun mass production of chemical weapons since the 1970s, and is judged to have approximately 2,500 - 5,000 tons of chemical reactants in storage.[11] It is presumed that North Korea is developing a more stable delivery platform for its biochemical weapons.

III. Deadlock in negotiations with the North

1. North Korea's external strategy – consistent and skilled

North Korea has continued to try to intimidate the ROK through such measures as threats of a new war on the Korean Peninsula, occasional but intentional local provocations, and WMD development including nuclear weapons, all the while ignoring international demands for denuclearization. North Korea believes nuclear armament is the most important means through which the Kim Jong-il regime can survive, and as such it would have a difficult time accepting the complete dismantling of its nuclear development capabilities. The North is merely showing a façade that it would give up nuclear arms once it receives ample foreign support.

From an external strategy perspective, North Korea has pushed to strengthen revolutionary capabilities, in both international society and the ROK, in order to assure the survival of the Kim Jong-il regime. The objective of strengthening international revolutionary capabilities is to create favorable international conditions through the normalization of its relations with the U.S. and Japan, the strengthening of its relations with China and Russia; this objective is the basis for the North's token proposal for a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War. The objective of strengthening revolutionary capabilities in the ROK, however, is to cause internal conflicts by encouraging pro-North forces in Korea and among Koreans living abroad, hence creating favorable conditions for a hostile unification.

From a negotiation tactics perspective, it retains a duality of stances, with dovish approaches aimed at acquiring economic support to overcome economic hardship, followed by hawkish stances entailing nuclear development and repeated formation of tensions.[12] Through it all, North Korea has focused on pursuing its strategic interests with the U.S. through direct talks, and on acquiring economic aid from the ROK through exchange and cooperation. The same is true for nuclear negotiations. Regarding the recent movements to reconvene the Six-Party Talks, North Korea has recently made numerous proposals to maximize its interests. It is arguing that a) the current armistice structure must switch to a peace structure, b) double standards for powerful nuclear states vs. other states must be abolished, and c) the entire Korean Peninsula must be subject to denuclearization in order for nuclear negotiations to bear results.[13] Furthermore, it has requested a) a peace treaty among North Korea, China and the U.S. (but not the ROK), b) bilateral consultation with the U.S. regarding security, and c) the removal of sanctions against North Korea as conditions for reconvening the Six-Party Talks.[14]

From a mid- to long-term perspective, as long as the distorted political and economic situation under the Kim Jong-il regime persists, there is little chance for change in North Korea's external strategy. Economic reform and openness can spell the collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime, and would serve only to contradict its policy principle of the "Unfinished Revolution" it has exhorted since the Korean War. Furthermore, North Korea is used to a strategy of deterring internal challenges by making internal factors of conflict seem like external factors. Changing such policy principles would be a challenge to the legitimacy of the Kim Jong-il regime, which the regime would likely undertake under only the most dire circumstances.

2. The North Korea policy of the Lee Myung-bak administration

Since its inauguration in 2008, the Lee Myung-bak administration has proposed a "Policy of Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity" as the centerpiece of its North Korea policy. A policy of co-existence and co-prosperity, at its core, it seeks to build a substantial foundation for peaceful reunification by establishing a community of peace, economy and happiness.[15]

The Policy of Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity began as a realistic perception regarding the pros and cons of previous North Korea policy. Since the South-North Summit Talks on June 15, 2000, the Korean government has continued an engagement policy toward the North. The premise of such policy was that by solving the easier problems first, North Korea could be induced to undergo a fundamental change. However, an engagement policy has not induced changes in North Korea, instead allowing two nuclear experiments. The Policy of Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity was brought forth with a focus on substantial changes in the North and qualitative improvements in inter-Korean relations given that an engagement policy still resulted in insufficient changes in the North Korean system, little qualitative deepening of inter-Korean relations despite visible growth of the same, and the continued mistrust and confrontation in political-military spheres.[16]

Meanwhile, the Lee Myung-bak administration has proposed the Grand Bargain as a negotiation method for the denuclearization of North Korea, which outlines a wholesale approach to the issue by assuring security and strengthening international aid upon the dismantling of core components of North Korea's nuclear program.[17] The difference between the Grand Bargain and previous nuclear negotiation approaches is that it links denuclearization with economic aid, vastly reducing the level of economic aid and actively participating in international sanctions against North Korea prior to denuclearization, and that it enhances the ROK's stature as a relevant party in the denuclearization issue.[18]

Currently, North Korea responds to the policy of co-existence and co-prosperity, along with the Grand Bargain, as policies adopted by the ROK to induce the collapse of the North Korean regime.[19] As a result, inter-Korean relations remain very frosty. The ROK government maintains the possibility of pursuing a flexible North Korea policy but is focused on coordination with the international community. Some media outlets have raised attention to the possibility of a South-North Summit Talks. As a matter of fact, the ROK government retains the option to hold such talks to push for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, if it upholds the principle of pursuing such talks upon close prior coordination with the U.S.[20]

3. The North Korea policy of the Obama administration

Upon the emergence of the Obama administration in 2009, many experts projected that its North Korea policy would be one of embrace, similar to that pursued by the Clinton administration.[21] Despite these predictions, the Obama administration's North Korea policy clearly holds the principle of not rewarding bad behavior. That is, North Korea must abandon its nuclear weapons programs, and that it must engage in unconditional talks towards this end. Based on this perception, the Obama administration proposed a comprehensive package approach to the North.[22]

The comprehensive package takes a wholesale approach whereby a holistic agreement over all factors necessary for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue are made and all actions required for the complete dismantling of nuclear capabilities are taken collectively. As for the sequence of execution, North Korea would first agree comprehensively to all steps required for denuclearization—the fundamental resolution to the nuclear issue—and the U.S. would provide attractive rewards to the North as it undergoes different stages of executions. On the other hand, violation of the agreement would result in stronger sanctions.[23] This is an attempt to break from the vicious repetitive cycle of provocations followed by weak sanctions, which are in turn followed by reopening of talks, new rewards, new provocations and new dialogue.

The U.S. has followed a relatively consistent North Korea policy since presenting the Comprehensive Package, and this has yielded visible results as well.[24] However, a groundbreaking visit to Pyongyang by Stephen Bosworth, the State Department's Special Envoy for North Korea Policy, in early December of 2009 ended without any significant achievements,[25] and North Korea has not yet returned to the Six-Party Talks. As a result, some media outlets evaluate that the U.S. could modify its previous principles to bring North Korea back to the talks,[26] and several sources have reported that the U.S. is considering linking the peace structure debate with the denuclearization issue should North Korea return to the talks. It is a little early, however, for such projections.

IV. Necessity for a new North Korea strategy

1. Limits of existing North Korea policies

In actuality, the recent drifting of negotiations over the North Korea nuclear issue was reasonably predictable given the internal situation and the external strategies of the North. Without a fundamental change in perception regarding the internal and external situations, as well as political and economic costs and benefits, it is difficult to expect a change in North Korea's projected external strategy. Of course there are variables such as the magnitude of economic hardship as well as Kim Jong-il's health and political instability related to succession schemes, but the possibility of North Korea changing on its own under a low-intensity pressure situation such as the present is very low.

Serious shock will be required for the Kim Jong-il regime to change on its own, but previous economic sanctions most likely will not achieve their original goals because China is not cooperating actively.[27] China agrees to the principle of a nuclear-free North Korea, but seems to be adopting different options from the ROK or the U.S. in order to maintain its influence over Northeast Asia and North Korea. The problem with this is that if the current situation persists, or develops in North Korea's favor, we run the risk of playing into North Korea's negotiation tactics.

Traditionally, North Korea had maximized its benefits by biding time until holding conferences and using the salami-slicing tactic to pursue its objectives once said conferences begin. Right before Ambassador Bosworth's visit to North Korea last December, for example, North Korea bought time by mentioning its possible return to the Six-Party Talks. Even then, North Korea acted as though once Bosworth makes the visit, i.e. North Korea talks directly with the U.S., that a way to solve the nuclear issue would be found. After the visit, however, it did not return to the Six-Party Talks, instead raising new conditions such as the relief of economic sanctions and the discussion for a peace treaty. At this point, after Bosworth's visit, North Korea has not shown any change in stance, instead seeking to relieve economic sanctions through aid from China.[28] Given this process, it is reasonable to predict that North Korea would continue to buy time through the so-called salami-slicing tactic even after the Six-Party Talks reopen.

The Korean Peninsula peace structure is the topic most likely to be used by the North to buy time. That is, it would argue for discussing the peace structure—or, a formal end to the 1950-1953 Korean War—along with denuclearization within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. It would be natural for the relevant parties to discuss the peace structure after making some progress in denuclearization; discussed in tandem, however, it would provide North Korea with a variety of bargaining chips. These would include bringing any debate to a standstill by taking various stances on the parties involved in the Six-Party Talks or the withdrawal of United States Forces Korea (USFK) from bases in the Republic of Korea. If the negotiations grind to a halt, North Korea can then claim that its security concerns are not relieved because the state of war still exists on the Korean Peninsula and, therefore, there is no basis for North Korea to discuss denuclearization.

North Korea could use this linkage of denuclearization and the peace structure to buy considerable time even after the Six-Party Talks are reconvened. Even if an agreement is reached through additional rewards, the freezing and confirmation of the North's declaration of its nuclear facilities would take time, during which the ROK and the U.S. would be facing election season in 2012. North Korea would then try to extort even more concessions from the next administrations in Seoul and Washington. If the ROK and the U.S. allow the North's time-delaying tactics to continue indefinitely, denuclearization and reunification will surely become pipe dreams.

2. The need for a more resolute North Korea policy

For a more efficient North Korea policy, it is important to reflect on the current problems and improve upon them. By recognizing the Kim Jong-il regime's obsession with nuclear weapons for what it is and seeing through its negotiation strategy, a new North Korea policy can be established.

Personally, I think that the greatest error in North Korea policies of the two previous Korean administrations was the adoption of a soft stance in order to induce the North to negotiate. Although the nature of the Kim Jong-il regime could be well understood, a policy of embrace was adopted based on the hope that the regime could be persuaded. Simultaneously, any possibility of a hard stance took a back seat under the fear that it could provoke the North.

In addition, the ROK and the U.S. did not engage each other in earnest conversations about their respective North Korea policies, and often did not make efforts to understand each other's policies. Statements that policies were being coordinated rang hollow in many aspects; some American officials even complained that they learned about the ROK's North Korea policy through the news media. South Korea was concerned about direct talks between the North and the U.S., just as the U.S. was concerned about South's unilateral aid to the North. Therefore, a new start for an ROK-U.S. coordination must begin with an earnest exchange of opinions between our two nations.

Furthermore, a North Korea strategy that overcomes an obsession with short-term achievements, manages the North Korea threat and focuses on the resolution of fundamental issues in the mid- to long-term, based on the basic tenets of a vision for unification, must be established. The overall North Korea issue must be resolved as an extension of denuclearization, the settling of peace and the reunification vision. Serious thought about the future of the Korean Peninsula in the mid- to long-term, along with the policies required to bring about substantial changes in North Korea, must precede such policy.

From a long-term perspective, denuclearization and the opening of the North Korean system should not be ends in and of themselves, but are merely major issues on the road to reunification. We must not mistake the resolution of the denuclearization issue to be the resolution of the fundamental issue on the Korean Peninsula. If there is a way to replace the Kim Jong-il regime, the dissolution of the North Korean regime in general and/or a switch to a free, democratic, market-economy-based North, we need the courage to boldly push for such changes. Otherwise, the current division and antagonism on the Korean Peninsula will remain.

V. Thoughts on an Initiative Strategy toward North Korea

The essence of the "Initiative Strategy" proposed by this essay lies in the thought that lasting peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia will be possible once North Korea has been changed in whatever way that would allow for a reunification of the Korean Peninsula under the values of free democracy and market economy. This would entail managing the current North Korea situation while deterring provocations, inducing changes under consistent principles, maximizing North Korea's weaknesses should changes fail or are rejected in order to induce denuclearization in the North, and pushing towards the replacement of the Kim Jong-il regime and the dissolution of the North Korean regime. The end state would be changing North Korea's system to one of free democracy and market economy, and then achieving reunification in the Korean Peninsula. The ROK and the U.S. should let North Korea duly recognize the fact that if North Korea does not respect the international order, the ROK and the U.S. will adopt a policy of dissolution of the North Korean regime and actually execute such measures.

The process can be divided into four stages. Among them, the key stage is Stage 2, as it would allow for Stages 3 and 4. In the interest of logical progression, I have outlined four stages, but they are tasks that must be pursued simultaneously:

- Stage 1 would entail situational management of North Korea to pursue an Initiative Strategy;
- Stage 2 would entail pushing for the replacement of the Kim Jong-il regime;
- Stage 3 would entail inducing the decline and dissolution of the North Korean regime;
- And Stage 4 would be the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under a system of free democracy and market economy.

Stage 1: Situational management of North Korea to pursue an Initiative Strategy

Before pursuing an Initiative Strategy in earnest, protests and threats from the North must be managed comprehensively. For this, we need meticulous preparations against all threats that could emanate from North Korea. In addition, the preparation must encompass political, economic and diplomatic spheres in addition to military responses.

Some of the predictable threats that North Korea may provoke include threats of an all-out war, local conflicts and sudden changes. The threat of an all-out war can be conceived as a method to ensure survival of the regime and benefit certain parties. As examined earlier, North Korea maintains considerable military forces. Of course, given the current ROK-U.S. combined defense posture, we have been able to deter an all-out invasion in the past, and will be able to do so in the future. Should North Korea actually go through with such an act, although the ROK would have to incur serious damage from prolonged warfare, it would nevertheless prove to be a suicidal move by the North Korean regime. Should North Korea possess a nuclear arsenal, however, the threat of an all-out war, even if rhetorical, can be perceived by the Korean people as a serious problem.

The threat of local conflicts is realistically more probable and we can consider various scenarios. Among the most probable forms are land, air or sea provocations around the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West Sea or the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and such military provocations would be disguised as accidental conflicts to avoid responsibility. In addition, we cannot discount the possibility of conflicts relevant to WMD movement in the maritime and air space of the Korean Peninsula, along with violations on the inter-Korean sea routes and conflicts arising from subsequent inspections.

North Korea's domestic situation, which requires international intervention, is also a threat. Its characteristic economic hardship, mass starvation, and internal conflicts surrounding succession scheme are generating increasing numbers of refugees, and possible humanitarian crises such as genocide can become new threat factors. In addition, we can presume a hostage situation involving Koreans and foreigners staying in North Korea in the midst of political instability. Such situations are not classified as traditional North Korean threat factors, but can be developed to threaten the ROK or neighboring nations.

The threat of an all-out war by North Korea can be deterred and handled by a strong ROK-U.S. Alliance. I will take this time, however, to emphasize that should an all-out war break out, the ROK must be prepared to achieve a military reunification. Also, because all-out war remains possible, the ROK-U.S. combined defense system must continue to be developed even after the transfer of wartime operational control of ROK forces to an ROK commander, which is currently planned for 2012.

The threat of a local conflict is a useful tool for the North that it can wield as necessary, so it will be important to maintain a response structure that the ROK military leads and the U.S. military supports. As long as we maintain a solid military readiness posture under the spirit of "Ready to Fight Tonight," we shall be able to stably manage any local conflict or incident provoked by the North.

Threats arising from a sudden change within North Korea and their ripple effects can be minimized with thorough preparation. This will require adhering to three principles: 1) basing any response to sudden change on ROK-U.S. coordination, 2) cooperation with neighboring nations, and 3) the ROK leads the effort. A meticulous response based on ROK-U.S. coordination will be required to assess the situation and determine whether to intervene, and to identify the issues must be handled with the cooperation of the international community and cooperation with neighboring nations. However, the ROK must take the lead in any intervention and there must be an agreement between Seoul and Washington that guarantees the reunification of Korea.

These various threats will continue on under the monotonous pattern of "provocationà negotiationà rewardà violationà renegotiationà additional rewards" surrounding North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Consistent and firm measures that do not reward any bad behavior will be key to resolution. By thoroughly managing the North Korean threat through the pursuit of a patient policy, a foundation for an Initiative Strategy can be created.

Stage 2: Replacing the Kim Jong-il regime

In the long-term, socialist systems like the Kim Jong-il regime inevitably crumble. History proves that undemocratic governments with closed economies and repeated failures, such as the one in the North, will always fall. Therefore, the initial objective of the Initiative Strategy lies in the replacement of the Kim Jong-il regime.

The collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime will still occur even if the impending succession of power occurs in a stable manner. While the regime may be able to sustain itself by suppressing its people in the short-term, it will not be able to do so in the long-term given the changes in the international environment and the qualitative growth of China, which has been supporting the North. The international community continues to place greater value on human rights, and there will be increased intervention against countries that suppress them. China, also, cannot neglect its role as a leader in the international community as it grows into a global power. It will not be able to take a protective posture in regards to North Korea's closed politics and economy, along with its human rights violations, forever. Taking a big-picture view of the situation, the feudal dynasty of Kim Jong-il can be said to be in the process of extinction.

Given this assessment, the mid- to long-term direction for North Korea policy is clear: policy toward North Korea must exclude any measure that can contribute to the extension of the regime's longevity. At the same time, capabilities to deter military provocations from the North must be ready, and North Korea must be made to recognize that any provocation will end in defeat.

Regarding the negotiations over North Korea's nuclear materials that we are currently facing, the North must learn that it cannot avoid the collapse of its regime, no matter what stage the technology may be in, if it doesn't give up its nuclear materials. This is especially true if there are no solid guarantees that the regime will give up its nuclear ambitions. Rather than partially accepting or conceding to North Korea's unreasonable demands in order to maintain a conference, we can consider waiting with patience, attempting a Grand Bargain with a post-Kim Jong-il regime that is more conducive to change, and inducing Pyongyang to make more productive strategic decisions such as the abandonment of nuclear weapons. Therefore, focus should be placed on stably managing the nuclear issue by blocking any nuclear proliferation or enhancement of nuclear capabilities, and minimizing the use of bargaining chips. North Korea's preconditions for negotiations should not be accepted nor should similar rewards be given in order to reconvene the Six-Party Talks. Furthermore, a larger framework of nuclear abandonment must be agreed upon before reopening the Six-Party Talks so that we can prevent merely "holding a meeting for the sake of another meeting."^[29]

Meanwhile, such processes will require thorough ROK-U.S. coordination, and an understanding that the ROK would play the leading role. If the ROK and the U.S. can lead the North Korea policy of the international community through systematic ROK-U.S. coordination, unnecessary policy wastes can be prevented and implementation of such policies from the resolution of the nuclear issue to the creation of a peace structure will be done in a more efficient manner.

In order to achieve this leadership, a specific division of roles is required to prevent discord between the ROK and the U.S. As noted above, the ROK needs to play a leading role. This can contribute to eliminating North Korea's attempts to talk to the U.S. while cutting off the ROK, and the subordination of the inter-Korean relations to the U.S.-North relations, can be prevented. Neither of these trends is conducive to resolving the overall problem on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, a U.S.-led effort may evince protests from neighboring nations, and includes the possibility of a reversion to the ROK-U.S. vs. North Korea-China conflict structure that characterized the Korean War and Cold War. Finally, ROK leadership would be helpful in fostering ethnic solidarity and minimizing the possible antipathy and antagonism of the North Korean people through, especially considering the difficulties faced in conducting civil operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it would be best for the ROK to play the leading role and be supported, while the U.S. plays a supporting role.

If such a policy continues consistently for several years, the Kim Jong-il regime will reach the end of its life. In particular, once it is proven to the North Korean people that the regime's claims of constructing a "strong and prosperous state" by 2012^[30] is false, the Kim Jong-il regime's support base will be rapidly weakened. I would like to emphasize once again that given Kim Jong-il's age and health condition, any hasty aid to the North will only strengthen the resilience of the Kim Jong-il regime; all economic aid other than humanitarian aid must be minimized.

Stage 3. Decline and dissolution of North Korea's regime

It is important to note that during the process of the decline and fall of North Korea's regime, the process of replacing the Kim Jong-il regime will cause the succeeding regime to take on a new character and policy direction. The replacement of the Kim Jong-il regime may lead directly to the fall of the North Korean regime, but it could also lead to the rise, decline and fall of forces that attempt to replace Kim Jong-il. The nature of the fall of the Kim Jong-il regime can provide clues to predict the policy of the succeeding regime.

Assuming that there is a very low probability of Kim Jong-il losing power before he dies, Kim Jong-il's period of death, the state of the economy at the time, and developments in nuclear negotiations will affect the succession of power. Kim Jong-il's sudden death can bring about political uncertainty to the power elites, and the possibility of a sudden change cannot be discounted in this case. However, if Kim Jong-il does not die suddenly, and if the economic situation has improved or North Korea is leading the nuclear negotiations at the time of his death, his heir will smoothly succeed the current regime. In particular, if power is transferred to Kim Jong-il's son, changes in external policy will be further delayed given the feudal dynastic "rule by legacy"^[31] characteristic unique to North Korea. Given Kim Jong-il's own precedent, we can only presume that Kim Jong-il's policy principles will last for a long time should his son succeed him.

No matter who the successor is, however, his stature or external negotiating powers will pale next to Kim Jong-il, who was groomed for succession in earnest starting in the 1970s, and has practically ruled North Korea since the 1980s for 30 years.^[32] The new leader would not have such experience. Even if power is transferred to Kim's third son, Kim Jong-un, who recently has been reported to have been confirmed as the heir, he will not have as much time as Kim Jong-il to solidify his power base. Unlike Kim Jong-il, who remained untouched despite any change in North Korea's politics or economy, the new leader will not be free from such changes. As long as the ROK and the U.S. consistently implement the aforementioned tasks for an Initiative Strategy, therefore, North Korea will have to abandon nuclear weapons to preserve its regime or go down a path of decline and extinction.

Stage 4. Reunification of the Korean Peninsula under a free democracy and a market economy

We can never give up the notion of creating a unified nation on the Korean Peninsula, with free democracy and market economy as its basic values. The existence of the "Workers Party of [North] Korea" and planned economy can be tacitly approved in the process, but North Korea as a partner in reunification must ultimately accept both a free democracy and a market economy. In order to manage North Korea realistically, there must be a clear distinction between recognizing North Korea's regime or system and North Korea in the process of unification. In terms of the form of unification, only a unification that results in a single nation would be in line with the history of the Korean Peninsula and the will of the people. Therefore, no compromise can be made about a "one nationality, one nation, one system" form of unification.^[33]

The Korean government's unification plans of the past assumed a one-on-one integration with the North, taking a three-step process of reconciliation and cooperation, federation, and eventually unification. However, other than the ambiguous method that has already been publicized, preparations must be made for a feasible plan for reunification.^[34] The ROK and the U.S. must continue to coordinate together in these details, sharing specific plans and making preparations.

An understanding between the ROK and the U.S. is essential for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Unification plans for Korea must be developed upon close consultation with the U.S., and through such efforts, the two nations must expand their mutual understanding. The U.S. must also prepare its stance regarding the reunification, perhaps even at a level greater than its preparations for WMD removal. Comprehensive deliberations that exceed the signing of a peace treaty, which would switch from an armistice structure to a peace structure, would be required. However, there has been no word of the U.S.'s detailed stance regarding the peace structure or unification in the Korean Peninsula.^[35] This is an area that both the ROK and the U.S. can improve upon and coordinate with each other.

In order to manage North Korea effectively throughout the decline and fall of its regime and realize unification, cooperation of the neighboring states is essential. Key among response strategies to our neighbors is that toward China, which must be made to understand that the unification of Korea would benefit China as well. For this, China must be made to recognize that the future of the Korean Peninsula lies in Korea, and aiding the unification would be favorable to China's future Korean Peninsula policies. In order to gain China's cooperation, we must explain thoroughly to China that China need a stable Korean Peninsula, that a nuclear North Korea weakens the nonproliferation regime and runs counter to China's interests, and that a unified Korea can contribute to stability in Northeast Asia and prosperity in China.

VI. Conclusion

The idea that "We make progress if, and only if, we are prepared to learn from our mistakes," often attributed to the philosopher Karl Popper, can serve as a useful theme in developing the Initiative Strategy toward North Korea. We must look back to see if we have not committed any mistake stemming from not understanding North Korea's intent. If there was such a mistake, a new North Korea policy would begin with recognizing it. It is assessed that the Kim Jong-il regime has no intention to give up its nuclear arms at this point. It is merely continuing its acts of strategic and tactical deception in the interest of its survival. From this new understanding, we can also understand that reconvening the Six-Party Talks in accordance with North Korea's wishes or discussing denuclearization along with a peace treaty would only prolong the regime's life.

And now is the time to bring about fundamental and bold changes in our North Korea policies in order to bring about substantial changes in North Korea. From a longer-term perspective, a consistent Initiative Strategy that realizes denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula and actively pursues unification is required.

When North Korea is managed comprehensively, based on the aforementioned Initiative Strategy, Kim Jong-il's regime is bound to fall in the end. In this sense, an Initiative Strategy is the shortcut to ultimately changing North Korea into a free democracy and a market economy, bringing about unification in the Korean Peninsula and peace and stability in Northeast Asia. In the meantime, by stably managing the various threats that can arise in the process of implementing the Initiative Strategy, we must create the foundation that would allow such strategy to last for a long time in a stable manner.

Once again, ROK-U.S. coordination in the specific construction and implementation of the Initiative Strategy is vital. ROK-U.S. coordination has been emphasized so much in the past that it is almost cliché. However, the essence of a successful North Korea policy is close cooperation of the parties involved in the ROK-U.S. Alliance. North Korea policy must be led and other nations must be persuaded based on this. Adjacent nations must also feel that this would bring about lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize again that the specific implementation of an Initiative Strategy would be the result of systematic participation and strategic actions of all spheres of the nation, including the government, international organizations, the private sector, the people and the military. Like a well-organized orchestra, a North Korea policy that is well tuned from a holistic perspective would allow an Initiative Strategy to shine.

[1] Over time, the ROK and U.S. governments, along with many academics, have argued for a North Korea policy that espouses both hawkish and dovish stances. For example, Prof. Victor Cha of Georgetown University argued for a policy that includes both 'sanctions + diplomatic isolation' along with 'sanctions + intervention.' Victor Cha, "Engagement and Preventive Defense on Korean Peninsula," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No.1 (2002), pp.43-44.

[2] George Perkovich, "Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: Why the United States Should Lead," *Foreign Policy for the Next President* (Carnegie Endowment, 2008), see <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=view&id=22297>.

[3] ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND), *2008 Defense White Paper*, pp.26-40.

[4] It is estimated that North Korea has approximately 180,000 special forces. *Ibid.*, p.33.

[5] Federation of American Scientists (FAS), "Nuclear Weapons Program – North Korea," see <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nuke/index.html>.

[6] North Korea is estimated to possess approximately 「34Kg - ∞」 of weapons-grade plutonium. 34 kg is the total amount that subtracts the estimated 2.1 kg used during the first nuclear experiment and 2.0 kg lost from the 38.5 kg declared by North Korea's nuclear agency on June 25, 2008, and ∞ is the amount used during the second nuclear experiment on May 25, 2009. Cho, Sung-Ryul, *Resolving the North Korea Nuclear Issue and Ways for International Coordination* (2010), p.1.

[7] Statement by the Spokesman of North Korea's Foreign Affairs Department, *Yonhap News* (June 13, 2009).

[8] "North Korean Nuclear Weapons: CIA Estimate for Congress, November 19, 2002," Unclassified CIA Report 2002 from FAS website, see <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nuke/cia111902.html>.

[9] On April 8, 2008, U.S. envoy Christopher Hill and North Korean vice foreign minister Kim Gye Kwan agreed tacitly in Singapore to resolve the uranium question with further explanations without inspection. See 최원기, "백악관. 싱가포르 미-북 잠정 합의 수용 배경과 전망," *Voice of America*, April 16, 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/Korean/archive/2008-04/2008-04-16-voa6.cfm?moddate=2008-04-16>.

[10] It is estimated to possess 600+ SCUD missiles that range over 300km, 300+ Nodong missiles that range around 1,300km and 30+ mid-range missiles that range up to 3,000km. MND, *supra* note 3, pp.38-39.

[11] *Ibid.*, p.39.

[12] While North Korea's defense committee harshly criticized the ROK government's action plan against sudden changes, CONPLAN 5029, as a provocative act, it still propagandized to solve ethnic issues on our own to improve the inter-Korean relations. See *North Korea Central News Agency* (January 15, 2010), see also North Korea *Uriminjokkiri* (January 17, 2010).

[13] These arguments were put forth by the North Korean delegation that attended a conference hosted by the UK's International Institute for Strategic Studies. IISS & Korean Foundation, "Fostering International Dialogue and Korean Security," (November 29, 2009, Held in IISS, London).

[14] This has been revealed during talks between the Permanent Chairman of the North Korea Supreme People's Council Kim Yong Nam and an Italian diplomat; see *Yonhap News* (January 21, 2010). Excluding the Republic of Korea from the peace treaty debate is intended to make Korea restless, gaining leverage for the North in negotiations. The argument for bilateral talks with the U.S. for a peace treaty or security can be construed as an effort to deflect international pressures against a nuclear North Korea. Furthermore, demanding nuclear inspections on the ROK and U.S. forces in Korea (USFK) during the denuclearization process more or less speaks to North Korea's intent to evade inspections. Even if conditions such as the relief of economic sanctions are accepted, North Korea is likely to delay the process with different conditions. Furthermore, its request to be recognized as a nuclear state cannot be accepted by the ROK or the U.S. North Korea's rash demands mask its intentions to possess nuclear arms.

[15] The peace community seeks denuclearization and a new peace structure, the economic community seeks North Korea's development and mutually beneficial inter-Korean economic cooperation, and the community of happiness seeks the happiness of the 70 million Koreans in the North and the South. ROK Ministry of Unification, *Policy of Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity* (2008). See, <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pname=LIBpublications>.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] For a transcript of President Lee's speech, see "Meeting with His Excellency Lee Myung-bak," Council on Foreign Relations, September 21, 2009; http://www.cfr.org/publication/20255/meeting_with_his_excellency_lee_myungbak.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fpublication_list%3Fgroupby%3D3%26type%3Dtranscript%26filter%3D2009%26page%3D3.

[18] "Grand Bargain," *Korea Times* (September 22, 2009). See, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2009/09/137_52267.html.

[19] Regarding the Grand Bargain, North Korea criticized that "without withdrawal of the U.S.'s anti-North Korea policy, discussing our abandonment of nuclear materials is merely a pipe dream." *North Korea Central New Agency* (September 30, 2009).

[20] President Lee re-emphasized the principle oriented North Korea Policy on his speech for the March 1st ceremony recently. *Yonhap New Agency* (March 1, 2010).

[21] Bae Jung-Ho and Abraham Denmark (eds.), *The U.S. – ROK Alliance in the 21st Century*, Korea Institute of National Unification, Seoul: 2010, p.118; <http://www.cnas.org/node/4229>.

[22] For a brief description of the comprehensive package, see Kurt M. Campbell, "Roundtable with Korean Journalists," U.S. Department of State, February 5, 2010; <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2010/02/136574.htm>.

[23] Kim Su-young, "Comprehensive Package for NK in Initial Stages," *Korea Times*, July 20, 2009; http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/07/113_48757.html.

[24] It has been reported through an expert interview on Voice of America that although North Korea exports about 20-60 million dollars per annum, weapons export in 2009 had decreased by more than 90%. See <http://www.voanews.com/korean/2010-01-22-voa13.cfm?rss=topstories>.

[25] After his visit, Ambassador Bosworth stated that he reached a common stance on reconvening the Six-Party Talks, and confirmed North Korea's commitment to the implementation of the September 19 joint declaration. However, this took on the visage of being used by the North without confirming future debates for the conference, and the results fall short of expectations. A visit by Bosworth to China and ROK late February 2010 had the same result.

[26] It has been reported that the proposal of simultaneously realizing denuclearization, signing of the peace treaty and economic aid for the North is under review. *Yomiuri Shimbun* (January 15, 2010).

[27] Radio Free Asia has reported that the UN North Korea Sanctions Committee's expert monitor group "could not effectively implement UN SCR #1874 because China is not cooperating actively on sanctions against North Korea." See 김진국, "중 비협조로 유엔 대북제재 실효 못거뉘," Radio Free Asia, November 23, 2009; http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/nk_nuclear_talks/un_sanction-11232009164530.html.

[28] During Wen Jiabao's visit to the North on October 5, 2009, China reportedly promised billions of dollars of economic aid (*Asahi Shimbun*, October 17, 2009), and in February 2010 North Korea reportedly acquired investments from China. See 노정민, "100억 달러 투자, 북-중 이해 합의," Radio Free Asia, February 16, 2010; http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/nk_invest-02162010173650.html.

[29] The following are examples of goals (left column) and policy directions (right column) relevant to nuclear negotiations.

North Korea's unconditional return to the 6PT	No recognition of North Korea as a nuclear state; Continue economic sanctions
Retain policy of first abandoning nuclear materials in the 6PT	Wholesale resolution of the denuclearization process; Denuclearization first, followed by peace treaty; Exclude discussions regarding USFK; Economic sanctions cannot be lifted before denuclearization is completed
Observe principles throughout denuclearization process	Unconditional nuclear certification and inspections in all areas of North Korea

Observe principle of minimizing economic aid to the North prior to resolution of nuclear issue	<p>Governments, int'l organizations and private sector limit activities that can provide large cashflow into Kim Jong-il regime;</p> <p>In expanding the Kaesong complex and restarting Kaesong and Mt. Kungang tourism, switch to commensurate food and materiel support rather than direct cash support;</p> <p>Acquire control tower function to oversee international organizations' support for North Korea, pursue systematic aid for North Korea</p>
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[30] North Korea's motto of a "strong and prosperous state (*gang-seong-dae-guk*)" refers to its aim to establish an ideologically, militarily and economically powerful nation. Among these, ideological and military prowess are said to have been completed and economic prowess is predicted to be completed by 2012, but recently there has been a decrease in the expression "2012." This seems to reflect North Korea's concerns about the economic situation.

[31] "Rule by legacy" refers to upholding the philosophies or guidance of the deceased predecessor in ruling a nation. After Kim Il-sung's death in 1995, Kim Jong-il did not attend official events or succeed the official title in the government for a while, claiming to rule the nation by the teachings of the late Kim Il-sung.

[32] See generally, Korea Education and Culture Institute, *Kim Jong-il and successors* (2008).

[33] From this perspective, an ambiguous, interim stance such as "a low-level confederation" in the past are mistaken.

[34] Jonathan D. Pollack and Lee Chung-Min, *Preparing for Korean Unification: Scenarios and Implications* (Rand Corporation, 1999); see also, David Coghlan, *Prospects from Korean Reunification* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB859.pdf>.

[35] There have been lively academic debates about this up till recent times. See generally, Edward A. Olsen, *Korea, The Divided Nation*, Westport (2005); Samuel S. Kim, "The Mirage of a United Korea," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (November 2006); Abraham Kim, "The Challenges of Peacefully Reunifying the Korean Peninsula," in *Inter-Korean Relations: Problems and Prospects*, Samuel S. Kim (ed.), (2004), etc.