

**NORTH KOREA AS A NUCLEAR STATE
BETWEEN THE U.S. AND CHINA:
THE 2009 CRISIS AND BEYOND**

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Executive Summary

1. North Korea's second nuclear test on 25 May 2009 was not totally unexpected. Earlier in 2009, Pyongyang reiterated that it is a nuclear weapons state and ratcheted up tension through a missile launch a month before its nuclear test.
2. North Korea's nuclear test seems to have many objectives including the rallying of domestic unity at the time of Kim Jong Il's failing health and the transferring of power to his youngest son Kim Jong Un.
3. However, the main objectives were to demonstrate its capability as a nuclear weapons state, to be taken seriously by the U.S., and to strike a direct bargain with Washington.
4. Sanctions introduced by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874 (adopted in June 2009) had been toothless. The Resolution imposed financial sanctions on North Korean assets but not the interdiction and inspection of suspicious vessels in the high seas.
5. Sanctions against North Korea will not work if there is no Chinese support. China supports the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and international cooperation toward this end. But Beijing is more interested in mediating differences between Pyongyang and Washington rather than in pressuring and punishing its Korean ally.
6. State Councilor Dai Bingguo's and Premier Wen Jiabao's meetings with Kim Jong Il contributed to North Korea's conditional acceptance of the return to the Six-Party Talks: coming back to the multilateral talks after observing the outcome of the U.S.-DPRK talks.
7. The U.S. attitude and approach — not to mention those of North Korea — are crucial factors for progress and success of the bilateral and multilateral talks.

8. U.S. State Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton in November 2009 mentioned normalization, peace treaty, and economic assistance — the most-wanted items for North Korea — in exchange for its denuclearization. Indeed these issues were discussed at the U.S. envoy Stephen Bosworth's visit to Pyongyang in December. But the key point lies in how the two sides compromise with each other about the sequence of *quid pro quo*.
9. As to the North Korean nuclear issue, the next three years will probably be most critical. In Pyongyang, no successor to Kim Jong Il will be able to exercise power as Kim does, particularly in dealing with external affairs. And Kim's failing health, if it further deteriorates, will probably interfere with a major shift in the country's strategic position.

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DPRK's Second Nuclear Test

- 1.1 North Korea conducted its second underground nuclear test on May 25, 2009, making it the 2,054th nuclear test in the world.¹ North Korea did not provide any direct indication before the test; however, in view of intractable North Korean behavior earlier in the year, the nuclear test was a fairly predictable one.
- 1.2 With the nuclear test, North Korea ratcheted up tension, “pushed the envelope” and tested the tolerance limit of its neighbors and the U.S. On 13 January 2009, the spokesperson of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue in the context of nuclear disarmament on the Korean peninsula (which implicitly includes U.S. forces too).²
- 1.3 To Director of Asia Program of the Center for International Policy Selig Harrison who visited Pyongyang, North Korean officials told him that they already “weaponized” the extracted plutonium for four to five atomic bombs.³ Also, North Koreans were quoted as saying that their country would not give

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¹ Peter Hays and Scott Bruce, “Winning, not Playing the Nuclear Game with North Korea,” Napsnet Policy Forum Online, June 2, 2009.

² Cheon Seong-hoon, “Pukhan ui Choson pando pihaekhwa e ottoke taeunghal gosinga?” [How to Deal with North Korean Version of Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula], KINU Online Series, CO 09-15, 2009.

³ Choe Sang-hoon, “North Korea Says It Has ‘Weaponized’ Plutonium,” *New York Times*, January 18, 2009.

up its status of a *nuclear weapons state* as a result of nuclear talks.⁴ North Korea herewith intended to be treated seriously and respected as a nuclear weapons state by the United States and to have direct U.S.-DPRK nuclear talks.

- 1.4 The prelude of the nuclear test was a rocket firing using ballistic missile system on 5 April. In early February, it was known that Pyongyang would possibly conduct a ballistic missile test. Despite objections from neighboring countries, North Korea finally launched a three-stage rocket, which used the engine and technical system of Taepodong 2, a recently developed ballistic missile with a range that could reach the mainland of the United States.⁵
- 1.5 North Korea proclaimed that it launched the rocket for a peaceful use of space and declared that the satellite successfully entered into orbit and was sending messages and songs to the headquarters; however, the North American Aerospace Defense Command reported that “no object entered orbit” at the time that North Korea claimed.⁶
- 1.6 It is noteworthy that as opposed to the initial assessment of the launch as failure, it was proved later that the rocket flew 3,200 km and succeeded in separating the third stage from the second-stage body. The rocket launching was followed by UN Security Council’s adoption of the Presidential Statement on April 13. The Statement condemned the North Korean act as “in contravention of UNSC Resolution 1718,” which had been issued at North Korea’s first nuclear test in October 2006.
- 1.7 North Korea, while strongly protesting the UNSC Presidential Statement, made use of this newly escalating tension for the second nuclear test on May

⁴ Michael Richardson, “North Korean Crisis Heating Up,” *Japan Times*, January 27, 2009; “North Korea’s Aims,” Editorial, *Japan Times*, February 2, 2009.

⁵ Bae Jung-ho, “Pukhan ui tando missile sujun kwa changgori rocket palsa ui chollyakjok uido” [North Korean Missile Technology and the Intentions of the Launching of the Long Range Missile], KINU Online Series, CO 09-28, 2009.

⁶ “Rocket’s Third, Second Stages Split in Flight,” *Japan Times*, April 10, 2009.

25. The nuclear test was immediately accompanied by short-range missile firings (three on that day and three on the following day) and a declaration of restarting its nuclear program.

Do Sanctions Work?

- 2.1 The nuclear test contributed to the close cooperation between the United States, South Korea, and Japan, a situation that was hardly seen in the past decade, particularly in the presidency of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea (Republic of Korea: ROK). The Obama administration in Washington and the Aso cabinet in Tokyo started deliberation of a punitive resolution at the UNSC, and the conservative Lee Myong-bak administration in Seoul supported the move. Also, the Lee administration immediately declared its participation in the U.S.-led Proliferation Strategic Initiative (PSI), in which about ninety countries, including Japan, were already members; South Korea's previous administration opposed to the country's participation.⁷
- 2.2 It is noteworthy that the Chinese government made a swift response to the second nuclear test. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated that China is "resolutely opposed" to the nuclear test and continuously supports the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. At the same time, the statement requested, in a nuanced tone, for related countries' calm response and peaceful resolution.⁸
- 2.3 The UNSC Resolution 1874, adopted on June 12 in relation to North Korea's second nuclear test, was one of the strongest punitive measures that the UNSC has taken. The scope and means of sanction was an extension of the UNSC Resolution 1718, which was adopted over North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006. The Resolution 1874 includes the elements of the U.S.-led PSI that stipulates international cooperation for interdicting vessels on suspicion of transporting WMDs or WMD-related materials. Also, the Resolution prevents

⁷ *Chosun Ilbo*, May 26, 2009.

⁸ "Chinese Government 'resolutely Opposes' DPRK Nuclear Test," *People's Daily Online*, May 25, 2009.

North Korea's all arms-related trade, as well as all training and assistance related to it; this proviso was included to prevent North Korea's further cooperation with Iran and Syria.⁹

- 2.4 Moreover, the Resolution authorized the financial sanctions on North Korean entities in order to block money flow related to the development of WMD programs in North Korea and transfer of materials and technology to other countries. North Korea's first nuclear test was provoked by the U.S. sanctions on the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) in Macau in 2006, and North Korea returned to the Six-Party Talks in February the following year with the U.S. lifting the sanction on the BDA. The BDA case evidences North Korea's concern about the financial sanction, and the United States has exactly attempted to use this tool to press North Korea and induce it to the negotiation table.
- 2.5 The inclusion of the mandate of financial sanctions in the Resolution 1874 was a product of U.S. efforts. As with the adoption of the Resolution, the United States appointed Philip S. Goldberg to be the coordinator in charge of implementing the Resolution; in this capacity, Goldberg visited in early July Kuala Lumpur and Beijing to identify and list North Korea's fund sources related to strengthening or exporting missile and nuclear programs.¹⁰
- 2.6 North Korean organizations identified in the listing are Hong Kong Electronics in Iran's Kish Island, Namchongang Trading Corporation, Korea Hyoksinm Trading Corporation, the General Bureau of Atomic Agency, and Korean Tangun Trading Corporation; the sanctioned individuals are Yun Ho-jin, director of Namchongang Trading, Ri Je-son, director of the atomic energy bureau, Hwang Sokhwa, chief of science at the bureau, Ri Hong-sop, former director of Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center, and Han Yu-ro, head of another trading company involved in the missile program.¹¹

⁹ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "What to Do about North Korea: Will Sanctions Work?" Op-ed in *Oriental Economist*, July 3, 2009.

¹⁰ Choe Sang-hun, "South Korea Says Freighter from North Turns Back," *New York Times*, July 7, 2009.

¹¹ "U.S. Pursues Firms with Ties to North Korea," *New York Times*, July 1, 2009; Neil

- 2.7 However, whether or not the UNSC Resolution 1874 has real transformative effect on North Korean behavior, particularly in curbing illicit transferring of prohibited materials and technology, was questioned from the beginning. Inasmuch as the Resolution was a result of a compromise between the U.S. and Japan's harsh stance and Chinese moderate stance on North Korea, the Resolution did not contain the proviso of military action stipulated in Article 42 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- 2.8 The exclusion of that proviso has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, the Resolution has prevented the possibility of military conflict between UN member countries and North Korea, the latter of which maintained the adoption of the Resolution is an "act of war";¹² on the other, the Resolution without the proviso of use of force has weakened its effectiveness in interdicting and inspecting vessels of allegedly transporting suspicious materials.
- 2.9 Furthermore, the Resolution "calls upon" but does not mandate UN member countries to inspect North Korean vessels in either high seas or their territories. What makes the inspection of the vessels difficult even in their own territories of the UN member countries is the condition of having "information that provides reasonable grounds." Furthermore, the Resolution stipulates "consent of flag state" as a precondition for inspecting the vessels in the high seas and for directing them to a convenient port of the required inspection. Therefore, there is ample room for member countries not to actively participate in the enforcement of the Resolution.

MacFarquhar, "U.N. Penalizes 5 North Korean Companies and Officials," *New York Times*, July 17, 2009.

¹² In accordance with the argument, North Korea has continued missile tests after the second nuclear test on May 25, 2009: seven Scud and Rodong missiles on July 4 and five short-range missiles on October 12. And North Korea declared on November 3 that it has completed reprocessing the 8,000 spent-fuel rods. These actions are intended to both demonstrate its military technology to prospective buyers and call for international attention. "Pyongyang Makes Plutonium Threat," *Japan Times*, June 13, 2009; "North Korea Fires 5 Short-range Missiles off Its East Coast," *Japan Times*, October 13, 2009; Choe Sang-hoon, "N. Korea Says It Has More Bomb Plutonium," *New York Times*, November 4, 2009.

- 2.10 The result was a limited success at best. When Kangnam 1, a North Korean ship allegedly carrying small arms, embarked on June 17 supposedly for Myanmar, the international society considered it a test of whether UN sanctions have some “teeth.”¹³ Since the United States already had information that the ship made a number of visits to near Yangon, it sent its naval ship to chase and watch over the route of Kangnam 1.¹⁴ As Kangnam 1 turned its head at the East China Sea and returned to a North Korean port on July 6, the UNSC Resolution seemed to prove a certain effect, even if limited, to discourage North Korean activities of transferring arms.
- 2.11 But there are some factors that undercut the effect of the UNSC Resolution in particular and the sanctions in general. First, it is highly probable that North Korea is using planes rather than vessels, and North Korea is increasingly offering technology transfers and licensing deals to interested countries. As it is becoming more difficult to detect these activities, the effectiveness of the sanction through the UNSC Resolution is questioned.¹⁵
- 2.12 Second, North Korea’s long history of survival over U.S. sanctions evidences that the sanction may foster the rally-around-flag phenomena, centered on anti-imperialism and military-first politics, rather than bring any intolerable impact on the ruling circle.¹⁶ Third and more importantly, Beijing’s position on the UNSC Resolution in particular and on China-DPRK relations in general contributes to watering down the punitive effect, as discussed in the following section.

¹³ David Sanger, “Second Thoughts on North Korea’s Inscrutable Ship,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2009.

¹⁴ Michael Richardson, “Tough to Thwart North Korean Arms Exports,” *Japan Times*, July 1, 2009.

¹⁵ The hypothesis of North Korea’s expanded use of planes was partly evidenced by an incident in December 2009 whereby the Thai police seized a cargo plane carrying heavy weapons from Pyongyang. *Times Online*, December 13, 2009.

¹⁶ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, “Sanctioning North Korea: The Political Economy of Denuclearization and Proliferation,” Working Paper Series 09-4, Peterson Institute for International Economics, July 2009.

The Chinese Role

- 3.1 The relationship between China and North Korea has changed from that of the Cold War period, so Chinese influence is limited.¹⁷ North Korea, particularly estranged by and angered with the China-ROK normalization, suspended China-DPRK top-level talks for seven years after Chinese State President Yang Shangkun's 1992 visit to Pyongyang, a situation that had never happened previously between the two countries. The bilateral relationship has improved since the end of 1990s, but their relations are never quite the same as before.¹⁸
- 3.2 To the two nuclear tests conducted by North Korea in 2006 and 2009, the Chinese response was always swift and determined. China joined other UNSC members in introducing punitive measures against North Korea. In both cases, China refused to accept quoting Article 42 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter that stipulates the use of force; China, however, supported unprecedented punitive provisions.
- 3.3 It is apparent that a rising China favors international cooperation rather than maintaining the Cold War alliance with North Korea. Chinese strategic interest lies more in restraining North Korean belligerence than in defending it. A poll result in *Shijie Ribao* (Global Times) proves the changed attitude of the Chinese: half of the twenty Chinese specialists supported sanctions against North Korea, and some of them do not care about risking the regime collapse in the country.¹⁹

¹⁷ When Cold War tension thawed in the early 1990s, the ROK, a sworn enemy of North Korea, normalized relations with the former Soviet Union and China, while North Korea failed to normalize relations with Japan and the United States. This asymmetry in power dynamics in Northeast Asia forced North Korea to accept "two Koreas" scheme through North-South simultaneous entry in the United Nations in 1992.

¹⁸ Sung Chull Kim, "North Korea's Relationship with China: From Alignment to Active Independence," Lam Peng Er and N. Ganesan, eds., *Facing a Rising China* (Seoul: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009 forthcoming).

¹⁹ Scott Snyder, "What's Driving Pyongyang?" Napsnet Policy Forum Online, July 7, 2009.

- 3.4 However, it is unfair to expect China to be always stern to North Korea. Of many reasons, Chinese economic engagement in North Korea has been expanded, registering soaring total trade volume in the 2000s: from US\$0.7 billion in 2001 to about US\$2 billion in 2007.²⁰ Because of the huge difference in the size of the two economies, the soaring trade volume, tailed by increasing share of North Korean trade with China, results in the North's increased economic reliance on China.
- 3.5 It is also noteworthy that two-thirds of the Chinese trade with the North, in terms of volume, is conducted by private and foreign-invested enterprises. That is, the trend of increasing trade between China and North Korea is not attributed to government-led initiatives but to the vibrant private entrepreneurship of the Chinese. Chinese economic engagement in North Korea is becoming more visible in the mining industries, particularly for development-related raw materials like iron ore, gold, copper, coal, etc.²¹
- 3.6 The Chinese government is not likely to discourage the expanding involvement of its private enterprises, both in trade and investment, in North Korea. Also the Chinese government's effort, if any, to cut off economic exchanges for the sake of security reasons will not be as successful as in the old times when the state controlled everything.
- 3.7 Probably China's role may be more positively appraised in engagement than sanctions in relation to the North Korea issue. The United States has tried to deal with North Korea not directly but mostly through Chinese intermediation. As a rising power, China is willing to play the intermediary role, and this is particularly true in this honeymoon period in China-U.S. relations.
- 3.8 As shall be discussed later, the high officials' visits to Pyongyang and their meetings with Kim Jong Il have produced positive signals that North Korea

²⁰ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Sanctioning North Korea".

²¹ Li Dunqiu, "DPRK's Reform and Sino-DPRK Economic Cooperation," Napsnet Policy Online Forum, August 24, 2006; Chong Ui Jun, "Choegun Chungguk ui taebuktuja tonghyang punsok" [Analysis of the Trend of the Chinese Investment in North Korea], Issues of Northeast Asian Economy, Korea Development Bank Research Institute, April 2, 2007.

may return to U.S.-DPRK talks and multilateral talks rather than remain continuously provocative. But there is also a limitation. Just as the North Korean issue is not in the list of top U.S. foreign policy agenda, it is also not in China's top priority list to deal with the issue.

- 3.9 The China-U.S. coordination is “overloaded” by many global and bilateral issues: to name a few, greenhouse gas emission, Iran's uranium enrichment program, global economic recession, and bilateral trade deficit.²² With an overloaded U.S.-China coordination and increased Chinese stake in the North, the U.S. solicitation of Chinese cooperation only partially works in inducing North Korean cooperation, and is much more limited in sanctioning the North.

Efforts to Jump-start the Negotiations

- 4.1 North Korea maintained that the Six-Party Talks was dead, but it signaled that progress in U.S.-DPRK talks is a precondition for its return to multilateral talks. In this frame created by North Korea's coercive tactics, Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. envoy in charge of the North Korean nuclear issue, visited Pyongyang on 8 December.
- 4.2 Notably, just as it took three months for North Korean negotiator Kim Gye-gwan to meet with his U.S. counterpart Christopher R. Hill in Berlin after the first nuclear test in October 2006, it was roughly three months after the second nuclear test in May 2009 that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il met former president Bill Clinton in Pyongyang from 4 to 5 August.
- 4.3 The Kim-Clinton meeting, which was never realized in the latter's presidency in spite of the former's wishes, was arranged through a backdoor channel between the two countries.²³ Clinton himself and the Obama administration persistently insisted that the former president's trip was a humanitarian

²² Scott Snyder, “What's Driving Pyongyang?”

²³ What should be noted is that Bill Clinton sent Kim a letter of condolence on the death of his father Kim Il Sung in 1994. Mark Landler and Peter Baker, “In Release of Journalists, Both Clintons Had Key Roles,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2009.

mission to bring back the two American journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, who were detained for the charge of crossing the China-DPRK border in March 2009 and sentenced to twelve years of hard labor.

- 4.4 North Koreans' preference for Clinton in this mission shows that Pyongyang was intending to use his profile for initiating direct negotiations with Washington.²⁴ In response, Washington not only brought the journalists back home but also made a gesture of *face-saving* for Pyongyang that is under international criticism as well as UNSC-led sanctions. Therefore, Clinton's trip conspicuously contributed to creating a mood for direct U.S.-DPRK talks.
- 4.5 The Chinese intermediation further facilitated North Korea's move. State Councilor Dai Bingguo visited Pyongyang to meet Kim Jong Il on 18 September 2009, and he returned with Kim's message that the DPRK hopes to resolve the nuclear issue through either bilateral dialogue, apparently meaning U.S.-DPRK talks, or multilateral talks.
- 4.6 The Chinese efforts to induce the North to the negotiation table reached its culmination at Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Pyongyang on 5 October; Wen called for the United States and the DPRK to engage in a "conscientious and constructive dialogue." At the second China-Japan-ROK trilateral summit held in Beijing on 10 October, the Chinese premier noticed that North Korea expressed its intention of *conditional* return, that is, return to multilateral talks including the Six-Party Talks after observing the outcome of the U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks.²⁵
- 4.7 Meanwhile, the ROK government proposed the so-called Grand Bargaining to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The Grand Bargaining states that as

²⁴ Of many candidates with high profiles like former vice president Al Gore, former president Jimmy Carter, former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, and New Mexico governor Bill Richardson as well as former president Bill Clinton, it is said that North Korea chose Clinton. Tong Kim, "The Significance of Clinton's Visit to North Korea," Napsnet Policy Forum Online, August 11, 2009.

²⁵ Choe Sang-hoon, "North Korea May Be Open to Talks," *New York Times*, October 6, 2009; David Barboza, "Chinese Premier Calls for Dialogue between U.S. and North Korea," *New York Times*, October 11, 2009.

soon as North Korea dismantles core parts of the nuclear weapons program, South Korea and the international society will guarantee the security of North Korea and launch massive economic assistance to rebuild the crippling economy in the North.

4.8 The origin of the Grand Bargaining scheme can be traced back to the Obama-Lee summit on 16 June 2009 in which the two leaders first discussed the comprehensive approach to resolving the nuclear issue, and the idea was later sounded by Assistant Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell who called it a comprehensive package deal. A more substantial framework of the Grand Bargaining was presented at President Lee's UN speech on 23 September 2009.²⁶

4.9 The Grand Bargaining has little attraction to North Korea. This was partly because of North Korea's antagonistic attitude toward the South ever since the launch of the Lee administration in 2008. The more compelling reason lies in the logic of exchange: the dismantlement of core parts of the nuclear program must be irreversible, whereas the security guarantee and economic assistance appear reversible. There is no incentive for North Korea to join this *asymmetrical* game.

Observations

5.1 The core requirement for success in the U.S.-DPRK talks, in the short term, and in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, in the long run, will depend on how much the United States is willing to incorporate North Korea's top *security concerns* in the negotiation process—such as the transformation from the existing Armistice Agreement to a peace treaty and Japan-DPRK and U.S.-DPRK normalizations.

²⁶ Cho Min, "Pukhaek ilgwol t'agyal pang'an: uiui mit chujin panghyong" [Grand Bargain: Implications and Its Launching Guideline], and Park Young-ho, "Pukhaek haegyol ul wihan kukje konjo chujin panghyong: Grand Bargain u chujin ul wihae" [International Cooperation for the Resolution of the North Korean Nuclear Issue: For the Launching of Grand Bargain], Proceedings of the Conference on Grand Bargaining and Its Launching Guideline, sponsored by Korea Institute for National Unification, Seoul, November 2, 2009.

- 5.2 Simply put, Pyongyang wants diplomatic recognition from Washington and no U.S.-instigated attempts at regime change. Indeed, economic assistance or compensation is only secondary and supplementary. The nuclear negotiation, both bilateral and multilateral, will undergo ups and downs.
- 5.3 Furthermore, North Korea will try to remain and strengthen the status of a nuclear weapons state until its concerns for regime security are met. In a sense, Pyongyang's nuclear weapons development is a bargaining chip with its protagonists.
- 5.4 There is a noticeable change in the U.S. attitude, after Bill Clinton's August trip. Specifically, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a speech in Kabul on 19 November, mentioned normalization, peace treaty, and economic assistance, which are the most-wanted items for North Korea in exchange for its denuclearization. Indeed these issues were discussed at the U.S. envoy Stephen Bosworth's visit to Pyongyang in December.
- 5.5 This change is an important turn for the United States in dealing with a nuclear North Korea: from the nonproliferation perspective of dealing with rogue states, to the peace-building perspective of considering the particular situation on the Korean peninsula. The key point, however, lies in how the two sides compromise with each other about the sequence of *quid pro quo*.
- 5.6 The U.S.-DPRK talks should develop along parallel tracks with the Six-Party Talks. The revival of the multilateral talks is necessary because it is basically an engagement mechanism which promises the future of the North in particular and Northeast Asia in general. Along with the U.S. exchange of a "peace regime" with denuclearization, the multilateral mechanism may anchor and accommodate the stakes of all six participants.
- 5.7 Japan-DPRK normalization and ensuring peace on the peninsula are the last remaining issues for eliminating the Cold War legacy in the region. Inasmuch as the stakes are linked to success of the Six-Party Talks, all the countries are willing to pay the price for achieving the denuclearization of the Korean

peninsula. This is true even if these countries show differing views and positions particularly in adopting punitive measures.

- 5.8 As to the North Korean nuclear issue, three years from now will probably be the most important period. In North Korea, no successor to Kim Jong Il will be able to exercise power as Kim does, particularly in dealing with external affairs, and Kim's failing health, if it deteriorates, will probably interfere with a major shift in the country's strategic position.²⁷ To North Korea, the Obama administration in its first term will be the most favored partner for negotiations especially when compared to the more hawkish Bush administration.

²⁷ Joel S. Wit (principal author), "U.S. Strategy towards North Korea: Rebuilding Dialogue and Engagement," A Report by the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS and the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University, October 2009.