

Security Competition and Denuclearization: The North Korean Nuclear Crisis and International Strategic Choices

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Abstract

Differing approaches by key stakeholders to the North Korean nuclear issue is a manifestation of the security competition among some of them, especially the two Koreas, the United States, and China. These major players have competing visions of national security objectives and priorities, including regional peace, regime stability, alliance relationship, security assurance, and denuclearization. Some objectives are overlapping, while others might be conflicting. For some countries, the pursuit of some objectives might be contradictory to the pursuit of other objectives. In past nuclear crises, these players tended to have different hierarchies of preferences, and pursued different and at least partially contradictory approaches to realize them. However, closer exploration of the previous nuclear crises find that it is possible for these key players to curb their competition, so as to reach security cooperation and avoid a transformation from security competition to security dilemma. In achieving that goal, it is imperative for the key players to build mutual trust, to moderate their security competition, and to resume multilateral negotiation based on a combination of coercive means and pertinent incentives. It is also necessary for the key players in the nuclear issue, especially the United States and China, to initiate discussion on how to cooperate and respond to potential future unexpected scenarios.

I. Introduction

Contemporary policymakers and analysts alike are generally frustrated by DPRK's repeated missile launches and nuclear tests and the international community's inability to take effective measures to prevent this hermit-like country from conducting provocative actions. Currently, there remains a stalemate over allegedly mutually unwillingness to negotiate on the Six Party Talks table from which North Korea withdrew in April 2009, with its demands for the lift of UN sanctions and DPRK's persistence of its proclaimed legal rights of retaining nuclear capabilities on the one hand, and the U.S.-ROK-Japan camp insisting on the resumption of talks only when North Korea commits to a tangible and irreversible road to denuclearization on the other.

Why has the effort to inhibit the DPRK's pursuit of nuclear weapons become one of the most difficult and least successful sagas in the international security and non-proliferation policy in the past two decades? To be more specific, what's wrong with the strategic response by international community? What can we do to avoid a

repeated circle of the nuclear crisis and move to a direction of denuclearization in the future? Many international relations scholars have advanced explanations for why the international community fails to reach the final goal of denuclearization. For most western policy analysts, North Korea's policy itself is the biggest obstacle. There are numerous literatures that see the North Korean regime as fundamentally aggressive, unpredictable, and motivated by internal factors, thus requiring the pursuit of relentless deterrence and isolation as the most effective way to deal with it.¹ Recently, a growing number of western policy observers attribute the deadlock of the nuclear crisis to the illogic, and somehow self-defeating, of the Chinese position in that they lodge a complaint of China's reluctance to cooperate with America and its allies to impose strict sanction on DPRK and use its leverage to rein in Pyongyang's risky behaviors.² To be sure, DPRK's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability has provoked heated debates among policy makers and researchers in U.S., ROK and China about the ways to engage with DPRK in attempt to negotiate DPRK's denuclearization. Many scholars have been rethinking U.S. and South Korean policy toward the nuclear crisis and found some fatal drawbacks in addressing this issue. Among these critics, some favor a political and economic incentives approach, while others stress the importance of constraints and preventions. Still, others criticize the inconsistency of one approach by the U.S. government or between U.S. and its allies' policy approaches.³

While these comments can partially explain why the international community fails to reach the final goal of denuclearization, they are insufficient because they just stop at somewhere to attribute all the failure to some actors but miss the possible faults made by others. The fact that we are in a state of action-reaction circle requires us to take different views of key players into consideration and develop an overarching argument to explain the complicated problems herein. In this paper, I introduce the "hypothesis of security competition" in explaining why it is difficult for the key players in the nuclear crisis to cooperate on denuclearization. In the meanwhile, I examine whether a state of security competition provide opportunities for key players to manage the nuclear crisis and fulfill the final goal of denuclearization.⁴

¹ David Kang, "They Think They Are Normal, Enduring Questions and New Research on North Korea," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 143-144.

² You Ji, "Dealing with the 'North Korea Dilemma': China's Strategic Choices," RSIS Working Paper, 21 June 2011; Ralph A Cossa and Brad Glosserman, "The 'illogic' of China's North Korea policy," available at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/NE19Ad02.html>

³ Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*, Princeton University Press, 1998; Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies*, Columbia University Press, 2003; and Joel Wit et al., *U.S. Strategy Towards North Korea: Rebuilding Dialogue and Engagement*, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, U.S.-Korea Institute, October 2009; Jonathan D. Pollack, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development: Implications for Future Policy," *Proliferation Papers*, No. 33, Spring 2010.

⁴ The phase of "security competition" is first put forward by Stephen Van Evera and was once elaborated by Robert Art. See Stephen Van Evera, "Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't: American Grand Strategy After the Cold War," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (June 1990) 13:11; Robert Art, "Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NAOT," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.111, No. 1, 1996.

Essentially, this paper argues that the competing vision of national security and the existence of “security competition” by major players in Northeast Asia under the particular international structure provide both constraints and opportunities for the formation of this re-emerged stalemate and the potential resolution of the nuclear crisis. Failure to moderate security competition among the four key players, i.e., DPRK, ROK, China and the U.S., is the real reason that leads to the deadlock. A closer exploration of the past rounds of nuclear crises could find that there were usually critical words and behaviors taken by one or more key players that put the other key players’ major security interest at high risk at different stages of a crisis.

In the next section, this paper will highlight the competing visions of security by the four key players in addressing the nuclear crisis. I will identify their visions of major security interest from two dimensions: international and domestic. I then introduce the hypothesis of “security competition” that has direct impact on the key players’ calculation on their response to the nuclear crisis. In the fourth section, I will apply the hypothesis of security competition to explain the North Korean Nuclear Crisis in the past. The fifth section will evaluate future three highly probable scenarios under the circumstance of the prevalence of security competition, following an exploration of the ways for those key players to take so as to avert a worsen scenario. Finally, this paper will conclude with an evaluation of my analysis and policy implications.

II. Competing Visions of Security by Key Players

In the past two decades, North Korea, China, the United States and South Korea constitute key players on the Korean Peninsula. How they envision their respective national security objectives and respond to their counterparts’ behavior accordingly have largely shaped both the status of security competition and the international outcomes of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis. In this paper, I will generally identify their visions of major security interests from two dimensions: international and domestic. The international dimension focus on a country’s view about its status in international structure and its security concerns in a broader international and global background, including about how the country views its security objectives on the Korean Peninsula, and how it views the relationship with/between the two Koreans. Visions of security from domestic dimension answer how the country’s domestic politics impacts on its security objective in addressing the nuclear crisis.

North Korea

To understand the security dynamics of nuclear crisis on Korea Peninsula, a foremost step is to investigate the basic drive of North Korea to go nuclear. Political scientists have developed many insightful arguments to explain the factors contributing to a

state's choice to pursue the development of nuclear weapons.⁵ The fact that DPRK's initial development of nuclear program dated back to late 1970s might be helpful to illustrate the background of Pyongyang's consideration to go nuclear. But it was not until early 1990s that DPRK's nuclear ambition brought about the first round of nuclear crisis. In the past, North Korea displayed dual characteristic of both aggressiveness and insecurity. Giving the secretive nature of North Korea regime, it is hard to determine North Korea's real motives. However, we can still make some evaluation with the help of conventional rational wisdom. This paper argues that in terms of international dimension, DPRK's major security objective is to change the unfavorable external security environment it faced after the end of the cold war. Pyongyang hopes to formally terminate the status of armistice on the Peninsular and finally normalize its relationship with the hostile U.S., ROK, and Japan. Going nuclear was seen as both a weapon to deter threat from the U.S.-led alliance and an important bargain chip that could compel the U.S. and its allies to negotiate with Pyongyang over normalization issue and a nonaggression pact with the United States.⁶ At the meanwhile Pyongyang hopes to free itself from overdependence on China both strategically and economically. Since China began its socialist reform and opening-up policy in late 1970s and the established formal diplomatic relations with Seoul, Pyongyang has doubted China's commitment to the bilateral defense as formulated by the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance.⁷

In terms of its view about how to address its relationship with South Korea, North Korean's major security objective is to show a victory over South Korea in the race of national strength. Since it has lagged far behind the South on the economic race over the past decades, getting nuclear capability would be perceived as a good way to prove such an achievement.⁸ Moreover, if DPRK really becomes a nuclear-armed country, both Seoul and Washington would find it difficult to make a coordinated policy in addressing the thorny problem, thus creating splits between the two allied countries.

In the domestic dimension, North Korea's major security objectives span regime survival, domestic stability, and economic considerations. Political leaders in Pyongyang seemed to be convinced that development of nuclear capabilities would foster national solidarity and divert attention from serious economic decline since

⁵ For example, Scott Sagan developed three theoretical models: the security model, the domestic politics model, and the norms model to examine the causes of nuclear proliferation. See Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Winter, 1996-1997): pp.54-86.

⁶ Jeffrey Goldstein, "The North Korean Nuclear Test: A Perilous Path Back to the Negotiating Table," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 26, 2009.

⁷ Dingli Shen, "Cooperative Denuclearization toward North Korea," *Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2009): 176.

⁸ Andrew Mack, "The Nuclear Crisis on the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 4 (1993): 343.

early 1990s.⁹ After George W. Bush initiated preemptive wars against Afghanistan and Iraq and relentlessly listed DPRK as a rouge state and member of “Axis of Evil”, the DPRK leaders were very concerned about the American intention of overthrowing DPRK’s regime and the potential of being attacked. Pyongyang might believe that if Saddam Hussein had developed nuclear weapons, the U.S. could not have dared to attack and topple his regime. There is a similar example of Libya here too. Moreover, nuclear weapons can be a relatively economic tool to neutralize the perceived severe threat posed by U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan military alliance, because to win an arms race of conventional weapons capabilities with the opponents would be of high cost for an economically and technologically backward DPRK. On the other hand, to have nuclear weapons would mean Pyongyang master a trump card against the U.S., Japan and South Korea. Finally, Pyongyang seemed to be ready for trading its nuclear weapons program with an economic assistance provided by other countries, as evidenced in the previous negotiations.¹⁰

China

China’s role in the nuclear crisis has undergone significant transformation during the past two decades. When the first nuclear crisis broke out in early 1990s, China’s response was relatively indifferent, as if it was a dispute between North Korea and the United States. Since 2002, the nuclear crisis issue has become a focus of policy attention in China and other countries in North East Asia. China has played a central role from 2003 when it began to host the Six Party Talks. Until recently, China has been deeply involved in the nuclear crisis and tried to manage its policy priorities. From a domestic dimension, China’s security concern centers on two points. One is to ensure that the nuclear crisis issue can be addressed peacefully so as to ensure China’s continued economic growth and avoid China’s reluctant military involvement. China worries about the potential of military conflict between DPRK and the United States. The other objective is to maintain stability. China is seriously concerned about how the mishandling of a nuclear crisis would spillover and lead to instability in North Korea to China’s northeast provinces that border with DPRK. In particular, the issue of Korean refugees and defectors remains a thorny problem for China in recent years.

From the regional dimension, China’s security objectives focus on its interest in adopting a dual engagement policy towards the two Koreas since August 1992 when China established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (South Korea).¹¹

⁹ Mun Sun Ahn, “What Is the Root Cause of the North Korean Nuclear Program?” *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 38: 175-187, 2011.

¹⁰ Wade L. Huntley, “U.S. Policy toward North Korea in Strategic Context: Tempting Goliath’s Fate,” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 3 (May/June 2007): 457.

¹¹ On China’s relations with the two Koreas, see Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States*, Columbia University Press, 2007; Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security*, Lynne Rienner, 2009; Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee, “Chinese-North Korean Relations: Managing Asymmetrical Interdependence,” in Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee, eds, *North Korean and Northeast Asia*, Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield (2002).

Since early 1990s, China has tried to develop good relations with both the North and the South. China's bilateral trade with South Korea has witnessed rapid growth in the past two decades, enabling China to become the largest trade partner, the biggest export market and the largest source of imports of South Korea, while South Korea is the fourth largest trade partner of China. Simultaneously, North Korea is a long time partner and "traditional friend" of China. Due to special ideological and geographical interests with North Korea, China has never intended to give up its old friend, though it does not necessarily mean that China agrees on all of North Korean policies. In this regard, China has a big interest to ensure that North Korea regime remains stable.¹² If hardliner reactions by other countries towards North Korea would endanger the survival of the North Korea regime or if the military response by the U.S.-led alliance risks a military conflict or local war that China might be get involved in unwillingly, China will find that it is hard to take a stance against the DPRK.

In a broader international dimension, China has several major security concerns. The first concern is U.S. military response to the nuclear crisis would lead to the strengthening of the U.S.-led military alliance and U.S. military deployment in East Asia and West Pacific. For many Chinese, U.S.-led alliance system in East Asia is a legacy of the Cold War. The subsistence and strengthening of that alliance system can be used to contain North Korean threat though; it is more likely to be used as a tool to contain China. The pivot or rebalancing strategy recently pursued by the Obama administration increases China's concern that the U.S. would take advantage of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis as an excuse to allocate more military sources to East Asia.

The second concern is the process and consequence of the unification on the Korean Peninsula. Unification is the final goal for the two Koreas. China supports Korean unification and hopes it to be achieved in a stable and gradual way in order to avoid any possible chaos or even disruption. However, China would concern about U.S. military presence after the unification in that it is more likely to be dominated by U.S. and South Korea. China would be afraid of a united, pro-West Korea, which might be posing a more serious challenge to China's security.¹³

China's third concern is nuclear nonproliferation. DPRK's pursuit of maintaining nuclear weapon capability would all but lead more countries near to China to go nuclear, notably South Korea and Japan, among others. Observers might argue that South Korea and Japan would not go nuclear under the circumstance of America's providing a nuclear umbrella to these two countries. But recent polls showed that more than 60 percent of the South Korea citizens favor their country to have nuclear weapons in the event of no denial from the United States. Furthermore, Japan,

¹² Shi Yinhong, "China and the North Korea Nuclear Issue: Competing Interests and Persistent Policy Dilemmas," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 2009, p.34.

¹³ Mark P. Barry, "Korean Reunification Would Cast Off China's Shadow," *Security Watch*, 26 Jun 2012.

despite its anti-North Korea position, will be very concerned about having a unified, nuclear-capable neighbor of over 70 million people.

United States

In the past decades, the U.S. stance on DPRK's denuclearization seemed to be very persistent. However, the U.S. policy approach to that goal has undergone some changes. For example, few people would disagree that there was a fundamental gap of policy between the first George W. Bush term on the one hand and the George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and the second George W. Bush term on the other in addressing the North Korean Nuclear Crisis. These changes reflected a change of the perceived priorities of the U.S. security objectives and U.S. perception of North Korean regime, nuclear proliferation and the American grand strategy per se. U.S. visions of security toward North Korean Nuclear Crisis can be understood from the international and domestic dimensions.

As far as the international dimension is concerned, the U.S. government has the following major security objectives and interests in addressing the North Korean Nuclear Crisis. Firstly, the U.S. policy in responding to the nuclear crisis is centrally driven by its alleged commitment to the international nonproliferation institutions. The U.S. government has long stressed that the proliferation of mass destruction weapons poses a serious threat to America. It might also undermine extended deterrence for Japan and the ROK. If a hostile state like DPRK masters mass destruction weapons like nuclear weapons, it would be regarded as a direct danger to America and its allies.¹⁴ As such, the U.S. has always opposed North Korean going nuclear under a banner of international nonproliferation institutions. As a critical state in building and safeguarding these institutions, the U.S. attitude to DPRK's nuclear ambition is regarded as a touchstone to the credibility of U.S. commitment to the international nonproliferation causes. The central U.S. demand is that North Korea declares its willingness to the "complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement" of its nuclear programs, a policy that had come to be known as CVID.

Secondly, America hopes to maintain and strengthen its alliance system in East Asia. The U.S.-led alliance system in East Asia was formed during the Cold War era, with DPRK being regarded as one of the major opponents. DPRK's pursuit of nuclear weapons was viewed by the United States as a threat to the national security of United States and its allies, especially ROK and Japan. After the end of Cold War, the U.S. government continued its alliance policy around the world. The Obama administration has taken a more active alliance policy in East Asia under the rebalancing strategy, with an emphasis of a significant increase of military

¹⁴ Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Out Law: American Search for A New Foreign Policy* (New York: Hill and Wang), 1999.

deployment and strengthening of alliance relationship with ROK, Japan and others allies. Under this background, the U.S. harsh attitude toward DPRK's nuclear ambition would be viewed as a credibility of U.S. deterrence against North Korea. However, as was mentioned previously, this logic can also lead the U.S. to take advantage of DPRK's nuclear weapons program as an excuse to strengthen its alliance system and develop controversial missile defense systems there.

Thirdly, the U.S. policy toward the nuclear crisis has also been driven by its negative perception of DPRK's regime. DPRK is generally viewed in western world as a totalitarian regime that remains hostile to the U.S. and its allies. DPRK's political and economic system is viewed as totally outdated and its backward economy and instable political situation are widely perceived as running out the clock on the regime.¹⁵ This perception further leads some U.S. policy makers to establish an undue security objective of toppling down the North Korean regime in the process of managing the nuclear crisis.¹⁶

The role of U.S. domestic politics in addressing the North Korean Nuclear Crisis is mainly reflected by the shift of U.S. policy approaches. Here we can distinguish two approaches: those emphasizing political and economic incentives and those focusing on constraints and preventions.¹⁷ Both approaches have been used by the U.S. government at one or another, and used together, during the past two decades. However, they both encountered difficulties. When DPRK was suspected to have participated in material and technological transfer internationally or conducted more nuclear and alleged satellite tests, the strategy of accommodation and engagement would be losing some political support in the U.S. policy debates. On the other hand, the advocates of assurance might argue that the U.S. has never demonstrated sufficient clarity or commitment to a more cooperative approach, enabling the repeated intrusion of more coercive options. These debates have significantly impacted the U.S. policy shift in responding the North Korean Nuclear Crisis.

South Korea

South Korea plays a critical role in addressing the nuclear crisis. Seoul shares much common interest with Beijing in that both foster peace, stability, and denuclearization. As an ally of the United States since the end of Korea War, Seoul

¹⁵ Victor Cha, "What Do They Really Want?: Obama's North Korea Conundrum," *The Washington Quarterly*, October 2009, p.128.

¹⁶ Asia Foundation, *North Korea Contingency Planning and U.S.-ROK Cooperation*, 2009, Washington, DC: Center for US-Korea Policy, Asia Foundation

¹⁷ The debates over alternative policy approaches by American and South Korean are remarkably unchanged over time. See Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*, Princeton University Press, 1998; Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies*, Columbia University Press, 2003; and Joel Wit et al., *U.S. Strategy Towards North Korea: Rebuilding Dialogue and Engagement*, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, U.S.-Korea Institute, October 2009.

and Washington have common interest to deter a hostile Pyongyang that pursues nuclear weapons and looks like bellicose most of time during the past decades. South Korea even shares a common interest with the North because both Koreans hope to unify the divided peninsula into one Korean country, though they have very different ideas as to how that would work in practice. In the past, several ROK administrations, including that of President Kim Yong Sam, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moon-hyun, actively enforced engagement policy toward DPRK regardless of their U.S. counterpart's opposition. Despite common security objectives and interests that ROK shares with other key players, ROK has typically different views of the approaches and conditions to reach those security objectives and interests.

Firstly, a peaceful resolution of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis is in the critical interest of South Korea. Seoul is more sensitive and vulnerable than any other players to the possibility of an overall war or even a local military conflict with the North. Pyongyang's nuclear ambition might invite harsh responses from the U.S. and other stakeholders, but the top leaders in DPRK have good reasons to conclude that such responses would not be an overt war initiated by U.S. and South Korea against the North since the intensive canon and missile deployment by the DPRK can take advantage of its geographical proximity to Seoul, the capital and the lion share ROK's economy, to deter any attack from the South. Furthermore, an overall war, especially one that is brought from a preemptive attack from the U.S. on DPRK would also risk the involvement of China, which is still a nominal ally of DPRK. It might be anticipated that China would be led to take necessary measures if there is a unilateral and violent change of the status quo in general and the preemptive strike by the U.S. in particular. Therefore, South Korea would be more cautious to escalate tension with the North and would normally oppose any U.S. plan of risky preemptive attacks against the North.

Secondly, as there was disagreement inside the United States over whether to use those approaches emphasizing political and economic incentives or those focusing on constraints and preventions, there was also disagreement inside South Korea and between South Korean and the United States about the overall approach towards North Korea in responding to the Nuclear Crisis. For example, the U.S. Bush (senior Bush) administration initially sought a modest engagement policy towards DPRK and that policy was not favored by the ROK's conservative Roh Tae-woo government. So when the suspicion of DPRK's hidden plutonium arose, the U.S. hardliners in Congress in particular and the ROK government increase their influence, resulting in a tougher U.S. attitude towards DPRK. Under the Clinton administration, a relatively cooperative strategy invited ROK's Kim Yong-sam government fear for abandonment from the United States. As a result, South Korea's opposition to engagement policy intensified the U.S. domestic oppositions by hardliners. At the same time, DPRK was able to exploit U.S.-ROK disagreement and to exacerbate tensions between the U.S. and ROK by showing cooperative behaviors. When Kim Dae-jung came into power, the Clinton administration found it is easier to coordinate policy with Seoul and

contain hardliners in America since they are able to produce some positive responses from DPRK. After George W. Bush came into power, however, the two countries found it was difficult to coordinate their policies. Both the cooperative-oriented Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun government were afraid that the hardliner policy taken by the Bush administration would cause conflicts with DPRK.¹⁸

Thirdly, unification is allegedly a common interest for all the four key players. Unfortunately, there is remarkable difference in the specific scenarios favored by different parties. For Seoul, the ideal scenario is peaceful unification by ROK's absorption of the North, similar to the German case. On the contrary, political leaders in Pyongyang of course would like to see the process is in their favor, i.e. DPRK's absorption of the South. For the United States, unification by force is likely to maximize the advantage of America's military superiority, but this would risk tremendous casualties in South Korea. For China, it has favored a unification way of consensus. Given the fact that the South has more potential to dominate the process of unification and that South Korea is an ally of the United States, China would concern a unified Korea remains to be an ally of the United States and host the U.S. troops after unification, regardless of Seoul's interest in deterring limited conventional attacks.

III. Hypothesis of Security Competition

I define "security competition" as a phenomenon when states have competing visions of national security objectives and pursue different and at least partially contradictory approaches to realize them. Besides, states tend to have different hierarch of preferences when they pursue those different security objectives, thus making it relatively difficult to reconcile and achieve their common objectives. For example, China tends to prioritize regional stability, finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution of denuclearization, and maintaining its traditional bilateral relations with North Korea. The United States wants denuclearization with or without stability and either through regime collapse or multilateral diplomacy. South Korea prioritizes denuclearization, stability and unification. It seems that the North Koreans have made its preference of priority volatile. They used to be willing to trade their nuclear program with security assurance or/and economic aids, but until recently they openly expressed their determination to maintaining nuclear capabilities indefinitely, thus denying a possibility to reconcile with other interests.

¹⁸ Partly due to this hawk-dove divide between the US and ROK, and the similar divide inside the US and inside ROK, Pyongyang has on the one hand promoted the economic exchanges with the soft-liners in the US and ROK, on the other hand has sought to counterpunch the hardliners by taking risky behaviors. See Jonathan D. Pollack, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development: Implications for Future Policy," *Proliferation Papers*, No. 33, Spring 2010.

Security competition lies in somewhere between security cooperation and security dilemma. Security cooperation happens when states attach more importance to cooperation in fulfilling their common security interests, regardless of the existence of some competitive and even conflicting interests between them. A security dilemma has typically referred to the action-reaction spiral that occurs when states concerned find themselves being stuck into increasing capabilities with each other. A security competition, by contrast, may or may not be in such arms spirals. If the parties concerned refrained from taking measures that might put the other key players' major security objectives at high risk, or if they build mutual confidence by focusing on cooperation over complementary or common security interests, there is a big potential for them to prevent security competition from moving toward security dilemma. Security competition on the Korean Peninsula can be manifested as a security dilemma, but it need not be.

In order to apply the concept of security competition to explain the North Korean Nuclear Crisis in the past and predict advisable strategic options for potential scenarios in the future, I advance some major hypothesis. Firstly, the competing visions of security interests by major stakeholders matters in understanding the background of security competition. Rational states with different domestic, regional and international status normally develop different views on their security objectives and interests, these objectives and interests might be complementary or common ones, but they also might be conflicting or confrontational ones. As indicated in the previous section, North Korea, China, the United States, and South Korea are four key players of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis and they have some competing visions of security in addressing the crisis. Facing a series of contradictions in their ways to address the nuclear crisis, China, South Korea and the United States would be reluctant to cooperate with each other if anyone of them finds it difficult to fulfill the priorities of their major security objectives.

Secondly, the approaches taken by states in question to address an international crisis are more likely to be competitive ones when they encounter more conflicting or confrontational security objectives and interests, but these approaches do not necessarily exclude cooperative ones if they focus more on complementary or common security objectives and interests. It is possible for all these key players to cease competitive ways in pursuit of their competing visions of national security so as to reach security cooperation and avoid a transformation from security competition to security dilemma. It is necessary for the key players in the North Korea Nuclear Crisis to make good use of positive factors that would facilitate their cooperation in reaching agreement for addressing nuclear crisis. Furthermore, they have to forge as much common and complementary interest as possible and reconcile their conflicting and confrontational interests. Only when Pyongyang is convinced that denuclearization would be in its favor in the calculation between costs and benefits can the key players reach the agreement to denuclearize.

Thirdly, incentive stimulus and coercive threat could be jointly but moderately used so that they can play as intervening factors that might induce or compel states in security competition to take cooperative ways, thus reconciling their competitive objectives and interests. Simply employing incentive stimulus but with no coercive threat would make DPRK feel free to go nuclear. A totally accommodative policy toward the North is going to be seen a surrender the risky opponent and was deemed to stimulate the North to ask for more undue benefits. Nevertheless, no carrot but sticks would all but remove DPRK's motivation to abandon nuclear. Furthermore, coercive threat can only be used moderately. As a relatively vulnerable side, Pyongyang is more likely to take risky measures, including going nuclear, to defend its major security objectives if Washington or Seoul takes measures to put DPRK's major security objective at high risk or essentially more vulnerable. In the past, an intensive harsh response by following the old way of economic sanction and military confrontation has been pushed North Korea to an even more provocative posture. Therefore, mixing effective deterrence and credible security assurance to North Korea is a more advisable choice.

Fourthly, for each state in question, the perceived priority of its national security objectives and interests might be changing under the circumstance of the transformation of the security environment domestically, regionally, and internationally, thus making it possible for states to change its approaches to address an international crisis. It is also sufficient that if only one of the key players defects its previous commitment, states concerned might cease cooperation for a full brown security competition to ensue. In particular, if one influential power acts in ways that ignore the security objectives of its opponents or that adversely affect them, the opponent state is highly likely to take counteractions that would be seen in turn by the state that first acted unilaterally as competitive.

Finally, there is a possibility that one country's alleged justified security objectives and interests are doubted or misperceived in the other country, and this misperception and miscalculation might be leading to countries in question to take competitive ways to address an international crisis. In many cases, both North Korea and the United States have tended to exaggerate and/or misrepresent the threat that the other side posed to it. China in many cases has been reluctant to take hardliner policy against the North, partly because China would doubt that U.S. might be taking advantage of the nuclear crisis to strengthen U.S.-led alliance and increase military deployment in East Asia. China has also doubted if the U.S. would renounce its nonproliferation commitment and unilaterally reach out to DPRK, exactly as what Clinton and Bush did to India after India's going nuclear. Given the fact that the U.S. is unfolding its rebalancing strategy, China would disappoint if North Korea becomes the next Burma when the U.S. defects. Therefore, it is highly demanded for the major stakeholders in the North Korean Nuclear Crisis attach much importance to mutual trust building so that they would cultivate a favorable strategic culture of making positive reciprocity, instead of engaging a vicious circle of mistrust and confrontation.

IV. Cases of the Previous Two Crises

During the past two decades, North Korea's nuclear ambitions have created several rounds of nuclear crises. In the following sections, this paper focuses on the first and second round of North Korean Nuclear Crisis beginning from early 1990s and examines whether the hypothesis of security competition is helpful to explain how the key players respond to the nuclear crisis and why they fail to manage their security competition.

The First Round of Nuclear Crisis (1993-2001)

Briefly speaking, the first round of nuclear crisis was caused by IAEA's request for inspecting two secret facilities in Yongbyon in order to know how much plutonium has been separated from the spent fuel by North Korea. In February 1993, the IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution that required for this special inspection. North Korea did not allow further investigation, however. Instead North Korea insisted that the two sites were military warehouses and were not associated with its nuclear program. Relations between the IAEA and North Korea deteriorated. At this point, Bill Clinton came into office as a new U.S. president. Although Clinton administration was ready to talk with North Korea, it also prepared to test a new harsh policy's effectiveness in addressing Pyongyang's nuclear ambition. Contrary to senior Bush's experienced diplomatic way in treating with North Korea, Clinton at the beginning expected to use more coercive ways to press North Korea to accept inspections or face consequences that could include economic sanctions.

While IAEA were negotiating with the North Korean officials about the special inspection, the U.S. and South Korea stated that they would resume the annual joint military exercise which was called off in 1992. North Korean then declared a state of semi-warfare and decided to suspend the inspection activity of IAEA in Yongbyon. Pyongyang criticized that IAEA provide investigation results to the U.S., thus enabling the enemy to spy on the DPRK's military bases. In March 1993, DPRK threatened to withdraw from NPT. In the 1993 crisis, the United States reviewed the military options against DPRK's Yongbyon nuclear reactor and even expressed its preference for a preemptive attack on the North.¹⁹ It was at this risky point that the former U.S. president Jimmy Carter reached out to meet Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang and eased the tension between North Korean and the United States. The Clinton officials finally negotiated with their North Korean counterpart in Geneva. The 1994 Agreed Framework negotiated by the Clinton administration initially froze North Korea's

¹⁹ For U.S. preparation for preemptive attack against North Korea, see Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, new edition, Basic Books, 2001, pp.258-260.

plutonium production facilities at Yongbyon in return for U.S.-supplied heavy fuel oil and light water reactors. The agreement also laid out a design for normal relations with the United States as well as economic and energy assistance in exchange for denuclearization.²⁰

The hypothesis of security competition tells us critical points that could be conducive for our understanding on how the first round of nuclear crisis was created, why the key parties could reach the agreement to address the crisis, and why it later became a new stalemate. Firstly, the basic reason for this round of nuclear crisis lies in the North Korean perception that it has been facing increasing security threat from the U.S. and South Korea and that the ideal way to ease its insecurity is to develop nuclear weapons program. North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons program has its long historical background. Partly driven by the U.S. threat of using nuclear weapons against the North during the Korean War in early 1950s as well as the U.S. deployment of nuclear weapons in South Korea in late 1950s, North Korea determined to initiate its own nuclear program in early 1960 and join the IAEA in 1974. Until the late 1970s, North Korea appeared to be aiming at peaceful nuclear energy supply. It was reported that the South Korea, for fear of a reduced U.S. military presence under the Nixon Doctrine, once had a secret plan to develop an indigenous nuclear weapon arsenal in 1970s. As a response, North Korea intensified a development of biological and chemical weapons. At the same time, Pyongyang asked Moscow and Beijing to provide assistance in developing nuclear programs and succeeded in getting some nuclear technologies and materials from Soviet Union.²¹

After the end of the Cold War, North Korea lost both patrons (the Soviet Union and China) but had to face an even stronger U.S.-led military alliance. In Pyongyang's view, although the tactical nuclear weapons that the United States had placed on South Korean soil were allegedly relocated to the United States in 1991, the US forward deployed troops in the South and the annual U.S.-ROK military exercises since 1977 carried out by the nuclear-capable Seventh Fleet has been invariably posing a serious military threat to North Korea. Furthermore, American policymakers and scholars frequently discussed about the plan to launch military attack against North Korea.²² In addition to these perceived external threat was the unprecedented tragic

²⁰ "Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), October 21, 2004, <http://www.kedo.org/pdfs/AgreedFramework.pdf>.

²¹ About the history of DPRK's nuclear program, see Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy with North Korea," *International Security*, Vol. 13, (Winter 1988); Michael Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Non-proliferation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Leon Sigal, *Disarming the Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²² For example, according to William Perry, the former U.S. Defense Secretary, the Clinton administration in late 1993 had plans for striking at North Korea's nuclear facilities and for mobilizing hundreds of thousands of American troops for the possible war. See William Perry and Ashton Carter, "Back to the Brink," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2002.

domestic situation North Korea faced in early 1990s. Severe famine emerged in 1993. A nuclear crisis and conflict with the United States would not be a bad choice for Kim Il-sung and could be conducive to divert Korean people's attention to the economic turndown and foster national solidarity. For a vulnerable and insecure regime, development of nuclear weapons program seemed to be a natural option.

Moreover, there was a significant shift of Clinton's policy from senior Bush's engagement to coercion in the first year after Clinton took into office in January 1993. This policy change would well be viewed by North Korea as security challenge and has contributed to the first nuclear crisis.

In early 1990s, when senior Bush was the U.S. president, the U.S. and DPRK experienced a process of positive reciprocation. First, the senior Bush administration's decision to ease the U.S. embargo to North Korea in 1990 was reciprocated by North Korea's commitment to cease its support of terrorism at the same year. Second, the Bush administration's discussion of removing U.S. nuclear warheads from South Korea in 1991 was reciprocated by North Korea's consent to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement in late 1991. Third, the Bush administration's decision to cancel the planned annual military exercise with South Korea in 1992 was reciprocated in the same year by North Korea's subscription of the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation, and the Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula which was reached between the two Koreas in December 1991. In January 1992, North Korea signed the Safeguards Agreement with IAEA and later provided detailed information about its seven nuclear power facilities. The Bush administration then cancelled the 1992 Team Spirit exercise in spite of some disagreements from U.S. bureaucracy and South Korea's officials.²³

Although it is well known that the Clinton administration adopted a relatively dovish approach in dealing with the North Korean nuclear program, it might be noted that at the beginning Clinton's approach was not very conciliatory, as it was indicated above. One may argue that this was part of a larger Clinton focus on non-proliferation globally and that it was not focused solely on North Korea at the beginning. Unfortunately, North Korea became the key test case. Shortly after Clinton took into office, he reversed senior Bush's engagement policy. He suspended high-level talks with the North in the first few months, because they had little faith that North Korea could be persuaded from getting bombs. He also sought to use more coercive ways to press North Korea to accept inspections. When he visited South Korea in July 1993, Clinton warned that North Korea appeared committed to developing Scud missiles and related technology and expressed concern that North Korea would sell missiles to countries in the Middle East. When he visited the

²³ Leon Sigal, *Disarming the Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

De-militarized Zone (DMZ), Clinton warned that, if Pyongyang developed nuclear weapons, “we would quickly and overwhelmingly retaliate. It would mean the end of the country as they know it.”²⁴ This abrupt change of policy approach succeeded to push North Korea to a more insecure and vulnerable position and largely contributed to the first nuclear crisis.

Secondly, why the United States and Korea could reach the 1994 Agreed Framework? Convergence of security objectives and policy approaches among the U.S., ROK and DPRK could well explain for this. Between the U.S. and ROK, there was a mechanism to check the option of launching a risky military attack against the North. Although the Clinton administration in 1994 was ready to strike North Korea’s nuclear facilities and mobilize hundreds of thousands of American troops for the possible war, South Korea increasingly recognized the necessity of dealing with the North and maintaining peace and stability. In 1994, when the U.S. shared its plan to attack the North, there was alarm that if another Korean War was triggered, casualties including South Koreans and U.S. soldiers could top one million—just in the early stages.²⁵ The new president of ROK, Kim Young Sam, emphasized in his inaugural address in February 1993 the need to preserve the Northern part of the nation more than the alliance with America. Kim strongly opposed Clinton’s plan of preemptive attack on the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon.²⁶

While opposing a military attack against the North, Kim and Clinton shared a common interest to combine carrots and sticks to address the nuclear crisis. In order to induce Pyongyang to abandon the nuclear weapons program, Seoul and Washington were ready to provide some incentives that could exactly satisfy the North’s interests, including energy assistance, economic development assistance, and the potential normalized relations with the United States. Convergence of security interests even existed between the U.S. and DPRK. On 8 July 1994, Kim Il-sung died and his son Kim Jong-il succeeded the position as DPRK’s supreme leader. During this period of power transition, an agreement rather than a conflict with the U.S. would be conducive for Kim Jong-il to consolidate his power. On the other hand, Clinton and the Democrats were facing a mid-term election in 1994. Given the fact that Clinton administration made no great achievements in foreign affairs in his first 20 months, an agreement on North Korean nuclear issue would be seen as a remarkable progress and would be facilitating a Democratic win over the coming mid-term election.

²⁴ New York Times, July 13, 1993.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/13/world/clinton-s-warning-irks-north-korea.html>

²⁵ William J. Perry, “The United States and the Future of East Asian Security: Korea—Quo Vadis?” presented at the 1st Jeju Peace Forum on June 16, 2001, at Jeju, South Korea.

²⁶ Jong-Yun Bae, “South Korean Strategic Thinking toward North Korea: The Evolution of the Engagement Policy and Its Impact upon U.S.-ROK Relations,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (March/April 2010), p. 337.

Thirdly, why it later became a new stalemate? A significant change of US and North Korean visions for their security interests that was at odds with the other side tells a lot. Shortly after the U.S. and DPRK signed the Agreed Framework, the republicans won the 1994 mid-term election and controlled both houses of U.S. Congress. The neoconservative coalition in the Congress tended to distrust on North Korean's policy and expressed their concern over Pyongyang's suspected proliferation activities, human rights violations, and the possibility of a covert nuclear weapons program. They used their legislative rights to ask for preconditions when providing economic aid to DPRK and stressed the importance of coercive and containment strategy in compelling DPRK's submission.²⁷ The executive-legislative discord on the policy toward North Korea inevitably affected the implementation of the Agreed Framework. Clinton administration later shifted to establish multinational consortium and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to share burdens with its allies on the implementation of the Agreed Framework. Unfortunately, the members of the KEDO argued on their shares of funding. At the same time, the U.S. intelligence has increasingly indicated there was a suspicious underground nuclear facility conducting a clandestine enrichment program, which was followed by intractable gossips on DPRK's missile test plan and the proliferation of mass destruction weapons. The American haunted image of North Korean threat over its covert nuclear weapons program and proliferation activities has fundamentally eroded the international enthusiasm and willingness to enforce the Agreed Framework.

In the following four years after Washington and Pyongyang signed the Agreed Framework, the KEDO has been incapable to provide necessary assistance in building two light water reactors with 2,000 megawatt's power generation capacity for North Korea. Nor has the U.S. Congress been willing to approve a project supplying 500,000 tons' heavy fuel oil to North Korea according to the Agreed Framework. This led to a North Korean warning in March 1998 that it would resume its nuclear facilities to produce nuclear energy and possibly obtain plutonium that can be used to make nuclear bomb, if the U.S. refused to implement the Agreed Framework. In April 1998, Pyongyang expelled the American Department of Energy staffs that stationed in Yongbyon and restored the function of a laboratory nuclear reactor. On August 31, Pyongyang made its second test of missiles (Taepo Dong 1). The test missile flew over the Japanese sky, creating a missile panic in Japan and further affecting Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul's support to fully implement the Agreed Framework. The North Korean provocative actions were totally inappropriate response to the situation and would risk encouraging security competition. However, the Clinton administration fully understood that if the Agreed Framework really collapses, Pyongyang will have a good reason to restart its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon. Moreover, North Korea continued its missile sales to other states in exchange for cash, thus breaking the

²⁷ Curtis H. Martin, "Rewarding North Korea: Theoretical Perspectives on the 1994 Agreed Framework," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.39. no.1, 2002, pp.51-68.

mechanism of balance contributed by U.S.-led allies in deterring North Korean threat to regional conflict and global proliferation. Therefore, the Clinton administration had to seek some policy adjustment toward Pyongyang so that they can still work together on the basis of the 1994 Agreed Framework. This has largely led to some policy reviews and engagement proposals at the last two years of Clinton's second term, including a practical Perry Report on U.S. policy towards DPRK in August 1999, a removal of North Korea at the list of "rogue states" in June 2000, and a planned visit of Clinton to Pyongyang.²⁸ However, neither North Korean nor the United States can move further on a full implementation of the Agreed Framework.

The Second Round of Nuclear Crisis (2002-2009)

Briefly put, the second round of nuclear crisis was caused by North Korean recognition of its highly enriched uranium program and its open possibility to develop nuclear weapons when the American Assistant Secretary of State James Kelley visited Pyongyang in October 2002. The United States condemned that North Korea had violated the 1994 Agreed Framework and the NPT. As a result, the United States stopped supplying the heavy oil to North Korea as demanded under the Agreed Framework, while North Korea declared to re-operate nuclear power plant. Furthermore, North Korea declared to officially withdraw from the NPT, expelled the remaining IAEA inspectors from nuclear complex at Yongbyon, and removed the IAEA seals and monitoring equipment from Yongbyon facilities in January 2003.

After that, Pyongyang demanded that this issue be resolved bilaterally with Washington. But the United States refused to deal directly with Pyongyang anymore and insisted on broadening negotiating players. The Bush administration did not want to repeat the failure story of the Clinton administration's Agreed Framework. Following two rounds of three-party talks among the United States, North Korea and China from April to July in 2003, China began to organize and host the Six Party Talks (6PTs) that involved the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China. Throughout the past 6 rounds of 6PTs from August 2003 to October 2007, the central mission remained to be persuading Pyongyang to accept denuclearization in exchange for a credible security assurance and possibly economic rewards. The 6PTs made some important progress, among which included the "September 19 Statement" issued at the 4th round of 6PTs in 2005 and the "February 13 Joint Statement" issued at the 3rd session of the 5th round of 6PTs in 2007.

The "September 19 Statement" affirmed that the goal of 6PTs would be a veritable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner and that the DPRK "is

²⁸ William J. Perry, *Review of United States Policy toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations*, Office of the North Korea Policy Coordinator, United States Department of State. Available from the website: <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/1997%20NKPR.pdf>; Robert Carlin and John W. Lewis, *Negotiating with North Korea: 1992-2007*, Center For International Security And Cooperation, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies: Stanford University, U.S. January 2008.

committed to abandonment of all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning to NPT and the IAEA safeguards". In return, the United States affirmed that "it has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons". The DPRK stated that it had the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy.²⁹ The "September 19 Statement" also led to North Korea disabling its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, with the televised demolition of the cooling tower of the experimental reactor at the Yongbyon site in June 2008. In the "February 13 Joint Statement", the six parties agreed to "take coordinated steps to implement the 'September 19 Statement' in a phrased manner in line with the principle of 'action for action'." These steps included shutting down and sealing the Yongbyon nuclear facility in the North, removing the DPRK from the list of "state sponsors of terrorism", normalizing of U.S.-DPRK and Japan-DPRK relations, promoting cooperation on energy and economic relations, and creating a Northeast Asia Peace and Security mechanism.³⁰ However, North Korea and the United States have long disputed over which side should be the first to take due measures. Moreover, the efforts to defuse the crisis was severely damaged by DPRK's missile tests in July 2006 and its first nuclear test in October 2006, which outraged the United States, China and other countries and led to the UN's first 1695 and later 1718 resolution to impose economic sanction against Pyongyang. Partly due to China's constructive role in hosting the multilateral negotiation and Bush administration's sudden softening approach as North Korean can now claim a de facto nuclear state status, Pyongyang was persuaded to come back to the negotiating table at 6PTs. However, even there was "February 13 Joint Statement" at the 3rd session of the 5th round of 6PTs in 2007, North Korea officially refused to abandon its nuclear program in December 2007, launched its missile in April 2009, and conducted a second nuclear test in May 2009. As a part its tough response to UNSC's statement in condemning Pyongyang's missile launch in April 2009, DPRK declared to permanently withdraw from the 6PTs On April 14, 2009.

The hypothesis of security competition can well explain some critical points on how the second round of nuclear crisis broke out, why the key players could reach some agreements, and why it later become a stalemate once again. From the beginning, the Bush administration's hardliner policy toward North Korea since Bush took into office greatly led to the Pyongyang's perception that the U.S. would not provide security guarantee to North Korea and that Bush administration would instead favor to topple down North Korean regime in accordance with the new U.S. national security strategy. Upon his inauguration in January 2001, George W. Bush decided not to follow Clinton's conciliatory policy toward North Korea, refusing to engage Pyongyang in missile negotiations. After the 9/11 terrorist accident, the Bush administration launched an international anti-terrorist war. In his 2002 State of Union address, Bush declared three states -North Korea, Iraq, and Iran - as the "axis of

²⁹ *Joint Statement Issued at the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks*, Beijing, September 19, 2005.

³⁰ *Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement [September 19, 2005]*, Issued at the Third Session of the Fifth Round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing, February 13, 2007.

evil”.³¹ The Bush administration also adopted a new doctrine of preemptive war as enshrined in the national security strategy issued on September 20, 2002.³² Such policy evolution totally contradicted the previous U.S. policy approach of engagement with North Korea and utterly expressed Bush’s hostility toward Pyongyang. Anyway, North Korea is different from Al Qaeda or Iraq; it does not work together with Iran or Iraq to develop WMD or sponsor terrorist groups. The combination of U.S. superior capability and malign intention stimulated Pyongyang to go to extreme maneuver of withdrawal from NPT and the later tough responses.

Secondly, some agreements reached during the 4th and 5th round of 6PTs seemed to be major breakthrough of the multilateral negotiation at the first glance though, they have been proved to be short-lived and unable to foster strict observation by all parties concerned later. The reason for this inability to implement the agreements lies in the fact that throughout the second round of nuclear crisis, the major three parties – the United States, South Korea, and China – failed to forge a consensus approach toward North Korea and the way to realize ultimate goal of denuclearization on Korea Peninsula. Bush administration was either distrusting Pyongyang’s willingness to reach a final denuclearization, or keeping a unilateral wishful expectation that Pyongyang’s regime would collapse at a sooner occasion under a circumstance of stricter economic and military sanction. The perception of Pyongyang’s definite intention and capability to go nuclear has haunted over Bush administration’s hesitancy to provide security assurance, lift international sanction, or discuss the possibility of relations normalization. In the era of Bush, the U.S. officials also repeatedly warned that South Korean president Kim Dae-jung’s “Sunshine Policy” and his successor president Roh Moo-hyun’s “Peace and Prosperity Policy” were risking encouragement of DPRK’s highly enriched uranium program and missile program.³³ Bush’s disrespectful treatment and open disagreement offended many South Koreans and hurt Kim and Roh’s ego. Bush’s hardliner policy toward North Korea was perceived by many South Korean as an effort to perpetuate Korean division and obstruct inter-Korean reconciliation and unification. It was not until Lee Myung-bak came into office in February 2008 that the U.S.-ROK relations turned warm and the two countries unanimously take an unyielding policy against North Korea. However, the abrupt shift of Lee’s policy has also prompted Pyongyang’s harsh response, as evidenced by North Korea’s missile test, nuclear test, and its withdrawal from 6PTs in 2009. Furthermore, China’s policy option becomes strained by its concern over the potential of real conflicts, the consequence of North Korea’s regime collapse, and the strengthening of U.S.-led military alliance in North East Asia. These concerns did affect China’s willingness to join an enhanced international sanction against the vulnerable North Korea.

³¹ David Sanger, “The State of Union Address: The Overview,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2002.

³² For the full text of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America issued in 2002, see: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.

³³ Howard French, “Korean Diplomacy Enters a New Era,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2003.

Thirdly, the stalemate of the second round of nuclear crisis after Pyongyang's withdrawal from the 6PT in 2009 is the result of some key contributing factors that are indicated in the hypothesis of security competition. First, as previously mentioned, Bush's longstanding tough policy and the later change of Lee's policy have negatively affected the mutual trust between Pyongyang's leaders and their counterparts in Washington and Seoul. It was difficult for either side to make initiative concession in exchange for reciprocal reaction from the other side. Second, the "September 19 Statement" was a significant achievement of the 6PTs, but it failed to set a specific agenda with deadline requirements for the parties concerned to implement it, thus leading to a mutual blaming for violation of the agreement between North Korea and the United States. Third, the stalemate was enhanced after Lee Myung-bak joined the U.S. and Japan in taking a unanimous unyielding position against the North, which was just reluctant to accept proposal of denuclearization without receiving benefits. Fourth, China has found that it was essentially difficult to have an unbalanced reaction to the crisis because China has been facing a real dilemma. In seek of regional stability, China repeatedly calls for restrained behavior by all parties, demanding the U.S. soften its position and be more accommodative towards North Korea. Nevertheless, this approach risks DPRK's bold provocation. On the other hand, if China works together with the U.S., Japan, and South Korea to impose more harsh pressure on North Korea, China would put the North Korean regime and its traditional friendship with Pyongyang in risk, thus making it more difficult to call North Korea in to move forward a final resolution of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The fact remains that the Obama administration was prepared, within limits, to engage North Korea – to the point that South Korea was very afraid. However, before Obama even had time to get his administration organized, there were clear signs that North Korea was preparing provocative actions.

V. Analysis of Future Scenarios

The current stalemate of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis since 2009 is the continuation of the second round of nuclear crisis. From April to May of 2009, Pyongyang launched its missile, withdrew from the 6PTs, and made the second nuclear test. The year 2010 witnessed dramatic deterioration in Seoul-Pyongyang relations. The accident of South Korean warship *Cheonan's* sinking in March 2010 and the South Korean island *Yeonpyong's* shelling in November 2010 pushed the two Koreas to the brink of the war. Diverging security interests among major powers, especially U.S Obama administration's speeding up to a rebalancing strategy in Asia and China's reluctance to condemn Pyongyang's risky behaviors, further entangled the situation. Furthermore, North Korea's power succession from Kim Jong-II to his son Kim Jong-un since late 2011 increased uncertainty and unpredictability in the

situation. While North Korea continued to build up its nuclear arsenal and the Koreans hardened their positions and exchanged threatening rhetoric, the situation on Korean Peninsula has been transforming to a new point. After attempting two satellites launches in 2012 - in an effort to test its long-range ballistic missile technology, Pyongyang conducted the third nuclear test in February 2013 and amplified its rhetoric against South Korea and the U.S. to include the threat of preemptive nuclear strikes. The U.S. and South Korea then carried out joint military exercises as a response. The U.S. also sent a B-2 stealth bomber as well as B-52 bombers and F-22 fighters to deter North Korea's more furious rhetoric and behaviors.

Currently the intensity of negative reciprocity that marked in the spring of 2013 has receded, but the Obama administration has insisted that North Korea must agree to abandon its nuclear weapons before any negotiation restarts. It might be noted that there have been some improvements to the relations between the two Koreas since South Korean president Park Geun-hye promoted "trustpolitik" approach to rebuilding inter-Korean relations after she assumed office in February 2013. There is also evidence that new Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, has more willingness to rein in the risky behavior taken by the North and to use China's unique leverage in persuading Pyongyang and other parties concerned to resume 6PTs. However, the past experiences did tell us that a period of North Korean concessions has usually been followed by another round of belligerence. The potential peaceful resolve of the nuclear crisis will largely be depended on how the four key stakeholders reconcile their perceived major security interests and reach the point where each party sets denuclearization as a desirable goal on the basis of their calculations of benefits and costs. Taking this vision into consideration and looking into the future, four scenarios on the evolution of North Korean Nuclear Crisis are essentially possible.

First, the U.S. and North Korea may be persuaded by China to resume multilateral 6PTs so as to transcend the current stalemate and realize the final goal of denuclearization. In this case, the "September 19 Agreement" reached in the 4th round of 6PTs in 2005 would be regarded as a new starting point so as to meet each key party's major security interests. The "September 19 Agreement" remains to be a landmark document reached by 6PTs in that it integrated denuclearization, Pyongyang's energy demands, America's commitment to provide security assurance to North Korea, and future arrangements for Northeast Asian security. For Pyongyang, the cost is to initially suspend, then reduce and eventually abandon its nuclear arsenal, and to shut down its nuclear facilities, but the benefits would be a gradual lifting of international sanctions, economic and energy aids, security assurances from international community, and the relation normalization with the U.S. and other adversary countries. If Pyongyang continued to refuse the talk, its fragile economy would further deteriorate and possibly threaten its regime survival given the fact that the international sanction has lasted for a long time and that China is cutting its aid to Pyongyang and participating more sanction plans in recent years. For the U.S. and

South Korea, it is a pragmatic way to return the negotiating table so that an international coalition can be forged to propel Pyongyang's implementation of denuclearization and nonproliferation. Engagement with North Korea would be the most effective way to address the nuclear crisis because the U.S. could find that the past confrontation and sanction had little effect in forcing Pyongyang to succumb. For China, returning to the "September 19 Agreement" can be helpful for China to regain the central role as a mediator and responsible power to address the nuclear crisis. More importantly, it is conducive to defuse the tension and stalemate situation that have lasted for many years, during which period North Korea was successful in developing its nuclear capability, using the excuse of the U.S. and South Korea threat, while the U.S. has taken advantage of the North Korean threat to strengthen its alliance system and military deployment in East Asia.

However, for the "September 19 Agreement" to be reclaimed as a starting point of the resumed 6PT, the key stakeholders of the nuclear crisis have to retreat from acute security competition and reach consensus on the final objective of denuclearization. China has to take more hardliner policy toward DPRK on denuclearization and uses its unique leverage to persuade the latter returning to the multilateral talks, while maintaining necessary economic and humanitarian aid to DPRK so as to avoid social instability and hostile resistance from North Korea. The U.S. and its allies will have to refrain from either taking more military confrontational measures or strengthening military deployments, and to prepare for the mutual trust building with North Korea. A united China-U.S.-ROK front on denuclearization should be based on a balance between denuclearization as the common goal and other security interests envisioned by different players. Moreover, the engagement with North Korea should be based on a combination between carrots and sticks, so as to induce the North Korean willingness to abandon its nuclear arsenal after its reasonable calculation over costs and benefits.

The second scenario is that security competition or even power calculation dominates the strategic choice by key stakeholders in the nuclear crisis. Under this scenario, denuclearization becomes a sacrifice because each country regards their other security and power calculation as more important than denuclearization. For example, the U.S. might try to live with a nuclear armed North Korea, just as it did when India previously became a de facto nuclear weapons state. To live with a nuclear armed North Korea, the U.S. is likely to unilaterally accommodate Pyongyang so as to alienate North Korea's relations with China, or to use North Korean nuclear threat as an excuse to strengthen its alliance system and military presence in East Asia, with a view to consolidate the U.S. dominant position. China, for fear of either losing the traditional friendly relationship with Pyongyang or being exploited by U.S. wedge strategy, might also be hesitant about using its unique leverage to inhibit North Korea from developing nuclear and missile capabilities. If China believes that the U.S. has determined to live, compromise or even cooperate with a nuclear armed North Korea, it is highly likely that Chinese leaders will have to rethink the necessity

of denuclearization policy. It is also likely that what DPRK wants are not only engagements and negotiation, but also keeping nuclear weapons indefinitely.

If the major players like the U.S., China and North Korea really cannot overcome this extreme logic of security competition and power calculation, then the objective of denuclearization would never be realized. Any multilateral negotiations setting denuclearization as a goal will invariably reach a dead end. In this case, the nuclear diplomacy could well be evolved to the security dilemma scenario and the power politics is likely to dominate the international relations in Northeast Asia. In this scenario, it is difficult for the U.S. to accommodate unilaterally with Pyongyang because the nature of North Korean regime is not welcome either in the U.S. or in South Korea, who is an American ally that has been hostile to the North for decades. This scenario would lead to a lasting stalemate and the persistent instability on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S., China and other players would be hesitant to take effective measures to ensure denuclearization. There would be more nuclear tests and missile launches by North Korea on the one hand and more sanctions being extended and intensified on the other.

The third scenario would happen when China, South Korea, and the United States each is willing to reconcile its security interests so that denuclearization becomes a top priority objective for all of them. Unfortunately, North Korea is likely to have well prepared to defend its alleged "right" to keep and develop the nuclear weapons capabilities. The DPRK leaders might believe that their country could overcome the difficulties created by whatever strict international sanctions and that being a de facto nuclear weapons state serves North Korean critical interests in terms of security, prestige, or domestic stability. What Pyongyang really wants might be much more than other parties could expect. North Korea might want a complete lifting of international sanctions, a special type of security assurance from the United States, and even a rewritten rule for the NPT regime for them, so that they can also enjoy a status as India is enjoying under the recent auspice of the United States.³⁴

If the DPRK leaders have such ambitious but undue objectives in their mind, then denuclearization will never happen through negotiation. The United States is unlikely to offer Pyongyang that status or assurance before North Korea agrees to abandon nuclear weapon programs. China, frustrated by its failure to rein in DPRK's repeated recklessness and defiance, would have to decide to join other parties in containing the threat North Korea poses to regional security and non-proliferation. Each of China, South Korea, and the United States would not pursue identical specific policies (China could be somewhat softer than the U.S. or South Korea), but they would coordinate better and the cumulative impact of their policy would be to contain North Korea, collectively and persistently, until another scenario looms ahead.

³⁴ Victor Cha, "What Do They Really Want?: Obama's North Korea Conundrum," *The Washington Quarterly*, 32:4, October 2009, pp.119-138.

The final scenario would be the contingency scenario. This includes two kinds of contingency. The first kind of contingency is that the current stalemate evolves into a military conflict between the two Koreas. Under the vicious circle of security dilemma, U.S.-ROK alliance is likely to become less tolerant about the North Korea's provocative behaviors including more nuclear tests and missile launches. It is conceivable that the North Koreans might also be outraged over more military exercises and stricter sanctions against their weak country. A small scaled military friction on this confrontational peninsula might lead to a regional conflict that involves the United States. China, for fear of DPRK's collapse, alliance abandonment and regional instability, might also be unwillingly involved. Such a war would be a total catastrophe to the region and the world. The other kind of contingency might be an abrupt political and economic disruption in DPRK. This kind of contingency has long been discussed in the U.S. and South Korea.³⁵ The North Korean regime seems to have much bigger survivability than many westerners expect though, there is a possibility of domestic contingency happening from the inside of this vulnerable country, who has already suffered from severe economic difficulties and relentless international sanctions.

In the event of any contingency cases, it is in the critical interest of the key stakeholders, especially the United States and China, to cooperate and control these contingency scenarios. A conflict contingency would risk escalating to a devastating war that might involve the United States, China, and other major powers. Such a war is just unaffordable for any major power in an era of complex interdependence. The domestic contingency possibly happened in North Korea would also bring about unthinkable chaos and upheavals in the region, including refugees, the safety of North Korean nuclear arsenal, and an unprepared unification process. These unexpected contingency scenarios would be the result of uncontrolled security competition and power struggle among the major stakeholders of the nuclear crisis. To prevent those scenarios from happening, the key stakeholders, especially the United States and China, must make coordinative efforts to move forward to the direction of the first scenario.

Conclusion

The North Korean Nuclear Crisis is a manifestation of the security competition among the key stakeholders, especially the two Koreas, the United States and China. In this paper, I argue that the competing vision of national security interests/objectives and the existence of "security competition" by major players in Northeast Asia under the

³⁵ Asia Foundation, *North Korea Contingency Planning and U.S.-ROK Cooperation*, 2009, Washington, DC: Center for US-Korea Policy, Asia Foundation; Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*, 2007, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

particular international structure provide both constraints and opportunities for the formation of this re-emerged stalemate and the potential resolution of the nuclear crisis. Failure to moderate security competition among the four key players, i.e., DPRK, ROK, China and the U.S., is the real reason that leads to the deadlock.

The four key players have competing visions of national security interests/objectives, ranging from regional peace, regime stability, alliance relationship, security assurance, to denuclearization. Some security objectives of one country are shared by the other one or more parties, while other security objectives of one country might be conflicting with the other one or more parties. For some countries, its pursuit of some security interests might even conflict with its pursuit of other security objectives. Besides, these major parties in the nuclear crisis tended to have different hierarch of preferences when they pursued those different security objectives, thus making it difficult to reconcile and achieve their common objectives. In many cases, one country's misperception and suspicion of other countries' security objectives would lead to confrontation and conflicts.

A closer exploration of the past rounds of nuclear crises could find that the four key players of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis did have some competing visions of security interests in addressing the crisis and that they did face a series of contradictions as indicated in the hypothesis of security competition, in their ways to address the nuclear crisis. The past experience told us that it was possible for all these key players to cease competitive ways so as to reach security cooperation and avoid a transformation from security competition to security dilemma, only if they could reconcile their competitive security interests. However, an abrupt change of policy approaches or misperception and suspicion of the other players' security interests/objectives is highly likely to propel the situation into crisis stalemate.