


How Can We Solve the North Korean Long-Range Rocket Problem?

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I. Introduction

In this essay Mr. Cheong examines recent history to bring into focus North Korea's long-range missile problem. He then proposes solutions for peace.

II. Essay by Cheong, Woosik

1. Foreword

Despite what some may have feared, North Korea didn't fire a long-range missile around October 10, 2015, which was the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the labor party in North Korea. Kim Jong-eun, the First Chairman of the National Defense Commission, did not mention the word 'nuclear' even once in his speech. Instead, he focused on a 'people-first' policy and made it clear that he will work on economic development and stabilizing people's livelihoods. Sino-DPRK relations, which have worsened since the inauguration of the president Xi Jinping, seem to be improving after this ceremony.

Fears that North Korea would fire a long-range missile were caused by two factors. First, North Korea 'implied' firing a satellite and practicing a nuclear experiment. The other is, South Korea and the outside world 'interpreted' that North Korea will fire a long-range missile around the 70th anniversary of the founding of the country's labor party on October 10. But technically speaking, North Korea never announced its plan to fire a rocket. Actually, North Korea announced that setting the specific date for firing the missile is both technologically difficult and unnecessary. Anyhow, it should be welcomed that North Korea did not fire a missile nor does it plan to fire a missile soon.

The reason why North Korea implied firing a rocket, though they weren't technologically ready, was to send a 'love call' to its neighboring countries. After the August 25 agreement between the two Koreas, ROK-China Summit, the U.S. - China Summit, and the UN General Assembly have taken place. Also, the ROK-U.S. summit was to be held in the mid-October. Having these schedules in mind, North Korea wanted to propose its own issues. It chose to stimulate South Korea, the U.S. and China by mentioning the possibility of firing a rocket and executing a nuclear experiment.

North Korea's intention is well-shown in the statement of the spokesman of North Korea's foreign ministry on October 7. The statement reads, "We expect the U.S. to seriously study and positively respond to our suggestions regarding concluding the Peace treaty." It also added, "Then, the concerns related to the security of the U.S. will be addressed," As the most important concern of the U.S. is the nuclear and missile issues of North Korea, North Korea implied including these issues during the negotiation table for concluding the Peace Treaty.

To put it in a nutshell, the reason why North Korea implied firing a satellite was to bring the issue of the Peace Treaty to the discussion table - and this is a good opportunity to solve the situation on the Korean peninsula. If there can be peace talks between the two Koreas to replace the armistice with the Peace Treaty, this itself will contribute a lot to the stability of the Korean Peninsula. However, both the U.S. and South Korea turned down North Korea's proposal of a Peace Treaty.

Therefore, it seems clear that Korea is at a crossroads. The most worrisome scenario is that the Korea-U.S. alliance keeps rejecting the talks on a peace treaty and North Korea completes its technological preparation for firing a satellite. However, considering North Korea's obsession with having its own satellite system and the objection of South Korea-U.S. alliance to talks on a peace treaty, it seems this worst scenario is quite possible. In addition, large-scale South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises are scheduled for the spring of 2016.

However, if South Korea and the U.S. hold North Korea's hand, South Korea and the U.S. can take leadership. By starting peace treaty talks, the alliance can require North Korea to make a promise to not launch long-range missiles, execute a nuclear experiment, and delay firing a satellite. At the same time, a third party country firing a North Korean satellite instead of North Korea can also be considered. This was already discussed once and this plan can prevent the North Korean Rocket Program from developing ICBMs.

2. Case study on North Korea's firing of a Long-Range Rocket

Until now, there have been five rocket launches and three nuclear experiments. Analyzing each case will be helpful for us to analyze the situation and come up with the right alternatives.

The first missile firing was at the end of August in 1998. At that time, North Korea claimed that it fired the Kwangmyongsong-1 satellite. But South Korea, U.S., and Japan thought it wasn't a satellite but a Taepodong-1, a medium/long-range ballistic missile. As North Korea fired a rocket and the U.S. suggested the possibility of the North having nuclear facilities in Geumchangri, it seemed another crisis had arrived on the Korean peninsula. However, the situation reversed when Kim Dae-jung administration and the Clinton administration started the 'Perry Process'. The North Korea-U.S. nuclear talks were on the upswing and relations seemed amicable, even the possibility of Clinton visiting North Korea being discussed. However, in 2001, as the new president Bush was a hard liner on North Korea, the missile talk was cancelled and the nuclear issue came up again.

The second rocket firing of North Korea was in July 2006. At that time, North Korea launched seven missiles which were Taepodong (medium and long-range), Nodong (pseudo-medium range), Scud (short-range). In response, the UN Security Council passed a resolution on North Korea under the leadership of the U.S., which North Korea responded to by executing their very first nuclear experiment in October. The so-called Korea Chain response was made at this time: North Korea fires a long-range missile → Response of the UN → North Korea conducts a nuclear experiment → The UN Security Council imposing an additional sanction → Crisis on the Korean peninsula being worsened. At that time, North Korea was practicing brinkmanship tactics. It was seeking to change the U.S. foreign policy on North Korea, including financial sanctions on North Korea through Banco Delta Asia (BDA). Its tactics were decisively effective. The Bush administration, which rejected direct talks

between the U.S. and North Korea, changed its policy on North Korea. North Korea thought this was the result of its brinkmanship tactics. But the reason why Bush turned the direction of his policy was the withdrawal of the Neocons due to the aftermath of the Iraq war.

The third missile launch was the early 2009. North Korea fired 'Kwangmyongsong-2' in April of that year. In May, it executed the second nuclear experiment. The new Obama administration tried to dissuade North Korea from firing it. However, North Korea, eight hours before Obama's historical 'Prague Address', fired a space launch vehicle. Obama became furious and he himself modified his address, showing his strong will to firmly respond to North Korea. Lee Myung-bak showed an even firmer response. At that time, the North's intentions were different from its second firing in 2006. In 2009, it was for 'domestic' use. It was a sign of celebration saying that it will "open the door of the Strong and Prosperous nation" as 2009 marked the third term of the Kim Jong-il regime. Of course, the missile also had a foreign purpose. While North Korea's missile launch in 2006 was to change Bush administration's North Korea policy, the missile launch in 2007 was to test the foreign policy of the Obama administration.

The test was caused by three contexts. First, it wanted to ask whether the Obama administration wanted to respect "the spirit of mutual respect and equality" that was stipulated in the September 19 Joint Declaration. Second was whether the Korea-U.S. military exercise, which was strengthened by the news that Kim Jong-il was ill, would be continued. Third was whether the U.S. was ready to treat North Korea like it does Iran. The UN Security Council banned launches using ballistic missile technology even for Iran. However, Iran fired a satellite on February 2009, two months before the North's rocket firing.

However, when the U.S. held its test paper, it responded by ignoring the paper. It treated the North Korea case differently from Iran. This was the first time when a country was referred to the UN Security Council for firing a satellite. At the same time, the U.S. considered North Korea's rocket firing as the 'North Korean Pattern' and decided that this pattern should be finished. Because of this, North Korea was excluded from the North Korea policy of the U.S. and the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral alliance was pursued instead. North Korea also decided to reject six party talks and began focusing on its 'nuclear deterrence' capabilities.

The fourth crisis happened between 2012 and 2013. Kim Jong-un, who just came to power, considered firing a satellite as his father's dying wish and fired Kwangmyongsong-3 near the Day of the Sun in April. 2012. The U.S. considered this as the violation of the February 29 agreement and responded with a condemning statement of the UN Security council. There was also a serious concern that the 3rd nuclear experiment was near. However, North Korea accepted the secret envoy of the U.S. During the conversation, North Korea required peace treaty talks that could replace the armistice but the U.S. did not give a positive answer. Then, North Korea fired Kwangmyongsong-3-2 in that December and the U.S. and the international community chose to impose stronger sanctions on North Korea, even stronger than the previous condemning statement. Then, North Korea executed the third nuclear experiment and there was the worst crisis on the Korean peninsula in that year after 1994 when a war almost broke out.

Then, how can we explain the fourth example? The first crisis and the second crisis were for 'negotiation', and the third was for 'domestic political use' and the fourth was more leaning on strengthening its 'nuclear deterrence'. In April 2012, North Korea stipulated that it is a 'nuclear state' and it enacted the related law stating 'Economy-Nuclear Parallel Policy.' North Korea's basic stance was that the purpose of firing a long-range missile was to fire a satellite for a peaceful goal. This time, North Korea made it clear that the firing of the satellite is with the intention of developing ICBMs. Each case can be analyzed from various perspectives but some things should not be overlooked. One is the North Korea's obsession with building its own satellite system.

The international community along with the Korea-U.S. alliance sees North Korea's long-range missiles with two perspectives. One is, they don't understand why North Korea wants to have a satellite when it is going through financial difficulties. In fact, it is obvious that North Korea's space launch vehicle program is deeply related to a ballistic missile, making their question valid. Also, it is difficult to understand why North Korea invests a lot of resources for developing satellites and rockets despite its struggling economy.

However, North Korea wants its own satellite system, not only for military purposes, but also for economic purposes. As North Korea experienced natural disasters like the big flood and big famine, it considers having a meteorological observation satellite necessary for its agricultural development. Also, implementing its own satellite system will be helpful for communications, location detection, resource investigation and other fields. For these reasons, North Korea is fervently working on the satellite system.

The future of the Korean peninsula is bleak if North Korea continues to want its own satellite system. If North Korea can't get rid of this obsession, future long-range missile firing can be done anytime. Then the U.S. and the international community will send North Korea to the security council of the UN and impose sanctions and criticize them. Then, North Korea will resist this and give provocative remarks, conduct nuclear experiments and other behaviors. The solution to the North Korean rocket problem should be able to cut this vicious cycle.

3. How can we solve the problem?

To solve this problem with conversation and negotiation, we should combine all three methods. The first way is to make a new agreement between North Korea and the US or among six party talks on long-range missiles. On the February 29 agreement, there was a phrase which said that North Korea agreed to "implement a moratorium on long-range missile launches" But this agreement was weak as it had a loophole - North Korea did not agree to not launch satellites. In that, for every new agreement, we should put "any launch." This can open a new way to avoid the firing of satellites. In 2000, in the North Korea - the U.S. Communique, North Korea "informed the U.S. that it will not launch long-range missiles of any kind while talks on the missile issue continue."

Second is to separate the North Korean satellite program from developing the ICBMs by launching a rocket. In 2000, during negotiations between North Korea and the U.S., Russia suggested an arbitration plan that Russia firing a North Korean satellite instead. This also almost worked between the U.S. and North Korea. However, the Bush administration, which was just inaugurated, stopped its missile negotiation and missed the historical opportunity. Countries, including North Korea and the U.S. should work on solutions to restart the unfinished negotiation.

Lastly, it is also important to start peace negotiations for building a peace system on the Korean peninsula as agreed on September 19, 2005. Holding peace talks that haven't been held for 10 years is a good way to solve nuclear issues and rocket issues in North Korea.

Often, people say accepting a peace negotiation is surrendering to the threats of North Korea. However, North Korea can't gain anything practical just with peace negotiation. In addition, replacing the armistice with a peace treaty is not only beneficial for North Korea but also for every country including Korea and the U.S. Most of all, starting a peace negotiation enables the Korea-U.S. alliance and China to be able to manage the North Korea rocket issue, as long as an agreement could be reached that North Korea can delay long-range missile firing, nuclear experiments and running nuclear facilities during the four party talks among South Korea, North Korea, the U.S. and China or six party talks.

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