



# **The Contemporary Strategic Setting**

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## **PRINCIPAL DRIVERS OF SECURITY DYNAMICS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA: INTERNAL AND EXTRENAL FACTORS AND INFLUENCES**

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### ***Overview***

The main driver of the Korean nuclear issue today is the continuing collision between the United States (US) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). It is, therefore, necessary to examine the respective strategic goals of the US and DPRK, and the dilemmas that currently face the North Korean leadership, if one is to fully understand the political dynamics on the Korean Peninsula.

### **Driver 1: US Policy Goals re DPRK**

US strategic goals in the Korean Peninsula are, in order of priority:

- Anti-terrorism, especially as relates to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and export. Arguably, this goal is now pre-eminent in a post-911, global context.
- Stability in the Korean Peninsula – meaning a) no war in Korea; b) a dynamic relationship of mutual deterrence along the demilitarised zone (DMZ); and c) supporting regional stability.
- Non-proliferation of WMD, especially of nuclear weapons.
- Reconciliation between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK).

The United States has many other interests in relation to North Korea, including regional economic stakes and humanitarian concerns. However, none of these rise to the overarching level of the four guiding strategic goals outlined above. All of these objectives reflect contingencies that are both threatening in of themselves and, more importantly, liable to generate debilitating effects that are likely to directly feed off one another. An unstable DPRK, for instance could result in the use or threat to use nuclear weapons and trigger heightened tension along the demilitarised zone (DMZ). An unstable Korean Peninsula could, in turn, accelerate WMD proliferation and encourage the propensity of the Pyongyang regime to engage in other manifestations of 'rogue' behaviour (such as the sponsoring of terrorism).

US goals contrast with the DPRK's strategic imperatives. These are listed below and also ranked by priority:

- Regime survival.

- Attainment of a conventional military capacity that is able to offensively deter a US/ROK attack across the DMZ.
- Acquisition of WMD, especially of nuclear weapons.
- Economic revival.

US and DPRK objectives do not correspond, mostly clashing directly with one another. This antagonism combined with the lack of common interest underlies the almost cosmic repulsion that currently exists between Washington and Pyongyang.

## **Driver 2: DPRK Strategic Goals**

To support regime survival, Kim Jong Il has two simultaneous overarching goals that contradict each other. The first is to deter and defend against American attack, and to that end, to obtain nuclear weapons. The second is to rebuild the country's defunct economy to support the DPRK's conventional armed forces - his primary means of deterring and defending against American and South Korean attack as well as projecting force and threat influence. The military are also the wherewithal by which the leadership currently occupies and runs the DPRK. Indeed, it is, arguably, the only remaining national institution that actually works, with both the party and economic agencies failing miserably to deliver the means of state power.

Kim Jong Il's dilemma is that he can attain the first goal, but only at the cost of the second—with the negative consequence of an increasingly alienated and unhappy conventional military. Equally, by acceding to American demands to obtain the second, he loses the first and necessarily leaves the country denuded of a nuclear deterrent. To run this risk, Kim Jong would have to believe that the Bush Administration is willing to rebuild the DPRK's economy and the regime's longevity. This is contrary to Washington's post 9/11 rhetoric, which specifically singles out the need to contain 'evil states' for the purpose of augmenting international security – an imperative that was given concrete expression by the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Due to the deteriorating situation in North Korea, US policy must be robust against uncertainty and flexible across a wide array of possible negative contingencies that the DPRK could pose over the next two years. Ranked in order of potential impact on American strategic goals and characterised by probability, possible contingencies include:

- DPRK starts a second Korean war (low probability) or a major military provocation at DMZ (low-medium probability).
- DPRK exports nuclear weapons/WMD-related design, material, systems (low to medium probability).
- DPRK declares itself a nuclear weapons state and/or tests and deploys nuclear weapons (low to medium probability).
- DPRK deepens nuclear opacity with no inspections, increasing uncertainty on intention and capacity (high probability).
- DPRK shifts back to nuclear ambiguity by freezes and declaring enrichment and refreezing plutonium activities (low to medium probability).
- DPRK regime collapses or coup (low probability).

Certain contingencies are considered of low probability but judged to have catastrophic costs in terms of their consequences. Foremost among these would be a second Korean war and DPRK-sourced nuclear proliferation.

The probability that the first five contingencies will evaporate due to the collapse of the DPRK is low. Moreover, this 'happy' contingency could loop immediately back to negative contingencies a) war and/or b) loss of control over nuclear weapons. Thus, even some apparently welcome scenarios contain potentially threatening implications and therefore need to be avoided on the Korean Peninsula.

Clearly, the first five DPRK contingencies directly challenge the first three US strategic goals in Korea, namely, global anti-terrorism, stability, and nuclear non-proliferation. A major military clash and all the nuclear contingencies work against inter-Korean reconciliation and regional stability. Obviously, a war, a collapse, or a coup, all render moot the question of a DPRK-ROK settlement as, under such a scenario, the former would no longer exist in its present configuration.

### ***Key Concepts and Issues***

- US and DPRK strategic goals on the Korean Peninsula
- DPRK and regime survival
- DPRK threat perceptions post-9/11
- Future DPRK threat contingencies

### ***Key Questions***

- What are US policy options faced with DPRK contingencies?
- What is the DPRK's strategic goal?
- What leverage does China have over DPRK behaviour?
- What is a pragmatic meeting point between the United States and the DPRK?
- What is Australia's security and economic interest in the DPRK and do Australia's vital interests align with those of the United States?

### ***Primary Reading***

- *Scenarios for the Future of US-DPRK Relations*<sup>76</sup>:  
[www.nautilus.org/security/Korea/index.html](http://www.nautilus.org/security/Korea/index.html)

## **Directed Bibliography**

### **US Policy Options**

- *US DPRK Policy Briefing Book.*  
[www.nautilus.org](http://www.nautilus.org),
- *North Korea and Nuclear Weapons - Policy Options.*  
<http://www.choices.edu/koreaoptions.cfm>

### **Turning Point in Korea:**

#### **New Dangers and New Opportunities for the United States**

- *Summary Report of the Task Force on US Korea Policy.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/taskforce2.pdf](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/taskforce2.pdf)

### **DPRK Strategic Goals**

- *North Korea's Negotiating Tactics and Nuclear Strategy, April, 2003.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/Peter\\_Tactics\\_2.txt](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/Peter_Tactics_2.txt)
- *Military-First Ideology Is an Ever-Victorious, Invincible Banner for Our Era's Cause of Independence, April, 2003.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/MilitaryFirstDPRK.txt](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/MilitaryFirstDPRK.txt)
- *What Does North Korea Want redux?*  
[www.thebulletin.org/issues/1993/d93/d93Hayes.html](http://www.thebulletin.org/issues/1993/d93/d93Hayes.html)

### **Links of WMD-DPRK in US global war on terrorism**

- *Nixing Nukes.*  
[www.nautilus.org/VietnamFOIA/analyses/bulletin.html](http://www.nautilus.org/VietnamFOIA/analyses/bulletin.html)
- *Al Qaeda & Nuclear Weapons.*  
[www.nautilus.org/fora/special%2Dpolicy%2Dforum/47%5Falbright.html](http://www.nautilus.org/fora/special%2Dpolicy%2Dforum/47%5Falbright.html)

### **Regional Context**

- Wolf, David, *A Role For Russia In Korean Settlement.*  
[www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0329\\_Wolff.html](http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0329_Wolff.html)
- Shambaugh, David, *China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long-Term.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/shambaugh.pdf](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/shambaugh.pdf)

### **How Did We Get Here?**

- Pollack, Jonathan, *US-DPRK Agreed Framework: May 5, 2003 The United States, North Korea, and the End of the Agreed Framework.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/Pollack-AgreedFramework.txt](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/Pollack-AgreedFramework.txt)

### **Monitoring and Verification of Nuclear Issue**

- *Next Step Workshop Papers.*  
[www.nautilus.org/security/workshop/paper.html](http://www.nautilus.org/security/workshop/paper.html)

### **DPRK Economy**

- Babson, Bradley, *Economic Cooperation On The Korean Peninsula.*  
[www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/Babson-EconomicCooperation.txt](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/Babson-EconomicCooperation.txt)