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North Korean Decision-Making Processes Regarding the Nuclear Issue

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Introduction

Is North Korean behavior on the triple-track negotiations with the United States, the ROK, and the IAEA concerning a notorious nuclear issue strategic or erratic? Are the moves that North Korea makes in this respect based on a calculus of its national interests, and if yes, who this calculus and how? Or are these decisions driven by domestic politics, and if yes, what are these internal political dynamics and how are these related to the

North Korean foreign policymaking? Or is Pyongyang behavior totally erratic, and based on some blind passions and paranoia of its leaders and their followers, obscure standard-operating procedures of its obsolete decision-making apparatus, and a bunch of misperceptions and misunderstanding about the world around it? In sum, does North Korea have a nuclear game plan, what are its modalities, who draws its outlines, who implement it and how, and what may account for any discrepancies, if there are any? These are the issues I intend to address in this paper.

Who Draws the Nuclear Game Plan in Pyongyang?

The end of global East-West confrontation in 1991 opened new opportunities and posed new challenges on the Korean peninsula: a long-time uneasy peaceful coexistence of two belligerent Korean states may soon either end up with reunification of Korea or degenerate into a heated nuclear arms race between North and South and in the Northeast Asian region as a whole. Many argue that it is for Pyongyang to make this choice. To be prepared for any contingency, one needs to know what the true intentions of the DPRK leadership are, where policy initiatives come from, who and how formulates North Korean priorities, and what accounts for variation between policy guidelines and their implementation.

The evidence strongly suggests that it is the Great Leader Kim Il Sung himself who originally conceived and set forth the North Korean nuclear program (1). Though throughout decades its actual progress has been determined mainly by technical and technological developments and availability of financing, its practical utility was defined by political considerations. There is little doubt in my mind that as long as the DPRK was under the nuclear umbrella of the then-USSR and had credible guarantees of its national security from its Soviet and Chinese allies, Kim Il Sung did not contemplate using the nuclear program for any other purpose but the officially stated peaceful generation of atomic energy (2).

However, today quite a different set of nuclear intentions is attributed to the Great Leader. In particular, there is reason to believe that sometime in 1990, or maybe even in 1989, after consultations with his Defense Minister O Jin-u and Science Advisor Yi Sung-gi President Kim ordered the Ministry of Atomic Energy Industry to study the issues related to the possible military applications of the North Korean nuclear program. Consequently, later in 1990, the MAEI personnel extracted some plutonium from damaged fuel rods installed at the experimental 5-MWt 1986 nuclear reactor (3). It was this incident that led the US and South Korean intelligence communities in 1992 to conclude on the basis of the IAEA nuclear inspection results that the odds

were better than even that Pyongyang might have already produced enough plutonium to build one and perhaps two A-bombs.

These developments led to growing speculation about Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, and since late 1991 scholars and policymakers in the West and in East Asia have been pondering possible motives for such a dramatic shift in the North Korean nuclear policy. On the one hand, Dr. Donald Zagoria provides an excellent summary of very rational exogenous motives linked to changing security environment around the DPRK that may have influenced Kim Il Sung's decision. These are: 1) the "pariah state" syndrome (overnight the DPRK lost its major security allies, and hence had to defend itself by all means of its own); 2) the need to maintain the balance of forces on the Korean peninsula: the DPRK was faced with adversaries armed with nuclear weapons, therefore it had to develop its own nukes in order to balance this threat; 3) enhanced security through nuclear deterrence; 4) "low price tag": once nuclear weapons have been developed, they become relatively cheap, much cheaper than conventional arms; 5) "nuclear card": Pyongyang could draw international attention to its domestic problems and acquire some diplomatic and political clout in order to negotiate economic and political concessions from the West. In other words, if nuclear bomb is a "perfect weapon for the poor outcasts," Pyongyang is said to be the best fit for it.

On the other hand, Dr. Kongdan Oh at RAND stresses endogenous motives related to the following domestic factors: First, North Korean leaders try to avoid as much as possible forfeiting the sunk costs of the nuclear program: it is too expensive an acquisition to be easily abandoned (4). Secondly, these "family jewels" are seen by the Great Leader as guarantees of the continuity of the Kim dynasty as the heir apparent Kim, Jr. consolidates his grip on power. Finally, nobody in Pyongyang wants to lose face and be seen as yielding to outside pressures, which may undermine their positions in domestic politics.

Setting aside the question of their validity, these analyses are, admittedly, deductive, somewhat speculative in their origins, and static by nature. Their main shortcomings are twofold. First, while accounting for some apparent reasons, they stop short of identifying the sources of emergence of a "new strategic thinking" in the North Korean nuclear policy sometime in the early 1990s. In particular, they do not account for the evolution in the official Pyongyang line on the nuclear issue: from the adamant denial of having anything to do with the nuclear program (until 1990) to the recognition of its existence and emphasis on its exclusively peaceful nature (1991) to a "neither deny nor confirm" policy on the military aspect of its nuclear program (from mid-1992 on). Secondly, given the fact that the above-mentioned strategic and domestic concerns and priorities are more

or less constant over time, they fail to explain considerable vacillations in the North Korean behavior in its nuclear negotiations with the IAEA and the international community - from intimate cooperation in the first nine months of 1992 to growing bickering over the scope and character of the IAEA inspections during five months thereafter to outright defection from the non-proliferation regime in March-May 1993 to the reluctant return to the negotiating table with the US and the IAEA in mid-1993 to more than eager and almost euphorical midnight run to a "package deal" in late 1993 - early 1994 to another collapse of all the agreements made in Vienna and New York on February 15 and 25, 1994 respectively and a new escalation of war rhetoric on the Korean peninsula. What is going on here? Clearly, the knowledge of Pyongyang's strategic intentions alone, whatever they are, does not help a lot in accounting for its day-to-day negotiating behavior.

As for the sources of policy initiatives, some evidence points at rather non-traditional developments in the foreign policymaking process in the DPRK recently. First of all, it is the rise of the Institute of Peace and Disarmament as the principal think tank formulating new foreign policy approaches and proposing new policy implementation ideas. This is an elitist establishment research institution generously funded and relatively free to discuss in confidential memos any foreign policy issues of the day. Its senior research personnel is in part educated abroad, has access to all the information about the external world, widely travels overseas and often floats trial balloons regarding future North Korean positions, advises the WPK and different bureaucracies that are in charge of foreign affairs, as well as usually participates in the DPRK delegations at almost all international conferences and talks as experts. The fact that it is not formally part of the state or party apparatus allows it to stay above parochial organizational interests and to claim implicitly that it can discuss the national interests of the country. In sum, the IPD appears to perform a function remotely resembling the one played by the Moscow-based IMEMO under Mr. Gorbachev.

Indeed, once the security environment around the DPRK dramatically changed in 1991 (North Korea lost its Moscow ally and principal donor, its estrangement from the Peking ally was growing in parallel, and, hence, it was basically left in its defense all by itself facing the US nuclear shield and sword in South Korea), strategic thinking in Pyongyang was forced to change. Analysts at the Institute of Peace and Disarmament in their confidential memos began to urge the International Department of the WPK to adopt a new strategic posture vis-a-vis the international community. Their proposals included: 1) normalization of relations and diversification and improvement of economic ties with the West through cooperating with the IAEA,

establishing diplomatic relations with Japan and in the long-run with the United States; 2) engaging the ROK in comprehensive security, political, economic, and cultural dialogue; and 3) adopting a new policy stance on the nuclear issue. Instead of adamant denial of the existence of a nuclear program, which was characteristic of all the prior years, they urged the WPK leaders to admit its indigenous origins as an achievement of socialist construction, to stress its peaceful purposes aimed at solving the energy problem, and to seek cooperation with the IAEA in order to alleviate international fears.

Secondly, most analysts are aware that North Korea has a highly compartmentalized institutional structure. As Dr. Linton puts it, "North Korean society often evokes the image of a bicycle wheel with thin spokes radiating out from a small hub at the center and extending all the way out to a narrow rim." There appear to be relatively few formal lateral connections between the "spokes." So on the one hand, the DPRK bureacracy has a clear chain of command and a concentrated leadership structure; but on the other hand, decisions do not come quickly and easily or in the most efficient form because of lack of consultations across the bureaucratic lines. Rigid hierarchical vertical subordination blocks any horizontal coordination of policy.

However, as far as the nuclear issue is concerned, almost nothing was written about the recent cracks, shifts of decisionmaking authority, and relocation of resources and responsibilities in the North Korean state and party bureaucracy, which seem to be an adaptive response of the state to changing external demands. Until early 1992 when it was still a no-priority question, all the issues related to the NPT were handled by the MOFA Department for Treaties and Laws and the General Department of the MAEI. As the nuclear issue was brought into the limelight and Pyongyang became heavily engaged in negotiations and inspections with the IAEA, it was handed to the MOFA International Organizations Department, with direct political guidance being provided by the International Department of the WPK CC. The more politicized, intrusive and contentious the IAEA inspections became in 1992-1993, the higher the level of consideration was given to decisions on their modalities in Pyongyang, including the Great Leader himself.

Furthermore, later on, issue linkages advocated by the United States at its talks with the DPRK representatives in New York and Geneva, i.e. to resume North-South dialogue and open its nuclear sites for the IAEA inspections simulatenuously as preconditions for the third round of the US-DPRK high-level talks, literally forced North Koreans to reorganize part of its foreign policy-related bureaucratic apparatus in a way that attempts to break through this tight compartmentalization in order to be able to deal with the issues under consideration in a coordinated and

expeditious manner. Institutionally, it is not a surprise that there was no entity in MOFA or any other ministry to deal with the United States. It is the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland and the Reunification Policy Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, both headed by Mr. Yun Gi-bok who protects his turf as hard as he can, that are in charge of the North-South dialogue. The IAEA-related questions are to be handled by the MAEI and MOFA International Organizations Department. The International Department of the WPK CC seems to have failed to perform the policy coordination function because its personnel and resources were disproportionately oriented on the Soviet Union and China, which were rapidly losing diplomatic significance for the North Korean nuclear and security problems, and it simply did not have expertise to handle the nuclear and US-related issues.

From late 1991 on, not only did Pyongyang have to find somebody and to establish some entity to deal with the US, but also it had to set up some new coordinating mechanisms within its foreign policy bureaucracy to be able to draft and negotiate in tandem and jointly implement policies mutually agreed upon. Apparently, it was not easy because of the bureaucratic inertia and resistance from the ID of the WPK CC, North Korean-style turf battles, ideological reservations, and personal ambitions. However, in the fall of 1993, the word got out that Kim Il Sung appointed three "policy steering teams" - a US-oriented group headed by Mr. Kim Yong Sun in charge of all the IAEA-related matters and the DPRK-US relations. The intra-Korean relations lobby seems to have managed to keep the North-South dialogue separated from all other interests and concerns, and it will be President Kim's younger brother Mr. Kim Yong-ju who will head the ROK-oriented team. Lastly, the "Japan team" is reported to be headed by the newly elected Vice-President of the DPRK Mr. Kim Ryung-sik, a Japanese Korean, former deputy head of the "Chosun Soren".

Thirdly, as the foreign policy problems continued to mount in 1991-1992, with crippling North Korean alliances and growing pressures from the West on the nuclear issue, President Kim Il Sung who always was in charge of strategic foreign policy-making reportedly became more and more interested in day-to-day tactical issues as well. As a result, the stature of a person responsible for formulating foreign policy proposals within the WPK, Director of the International Department of the Central Committee Mr. Kim Yong-sun, grew considerably. In May 1990, he was promoted to the Member and Secretary of the WPK Central Committee (international affairs). In April 1992, as a recognition of his success in having the United States cancel 1992 "Team Spirit" and other progress at the talks with the West, he was promoted to the Alternate Member of the Politburo of the WPK (international affairs). Concommitently, not only did he get frequent access to

the Great Leader and his son, but given his extensive ties with the Institute of Peace and Disarmament, he was exposed to new ideas himself and did not hesitate to urge foreign policy innovations to both leaders by-passing traditional bureaucratic channels of decision-making.

However, this kind of high visibility and frequent access to the Great Leader is tricky and may prove fatal in domestic politics of North Korea. For a North Korean politician, it is a high risk, high stakes gamble to be assigned to handle the nuclear negotiations and the DPRK-US relations. For as these talks proceed, the American side tends to sort out its North Korean negotiating partners into "moderates" and "conservatives", "softliners" and "hardliners", and demand that all the contacts be channelled through those in Pyongyang whom they perceive as falling into the category of "progressive reformists," even despite official DPRK hierarchy. Obviously, at this moment nothing worse can happen to the regime insider in Pyongyang than to be labelled as a "pragmatic reformer" by the enemy, and to be subjected to this kind of attempts to be drawn into the anti-regime limelight; which usually results in charges of the "state treason and counter-revolutionary activities." On the other hand, whenever these talks stall and tensions mount, those politicians who are in charge of dealing with the IAEA and the US get blamed for the lack of competence, skills, etc. and often are transferred to other jobs. In sum, given the highly unpredictable nature and high stakes of the DPRK nuclear game with the international community, it is tantamount to political suicide for a North Korean party politician to be appointed for this job (6).

Paradoxically, since high-rank party officials try to avoid these assignments by all means, despite its enormous significance, the job is basically left to the state bureaucrats from the MOFA and MAEI. However, given the nature of their institutional position, the latter are not entitled to make strategic or even tactical decisions by themselves. Therefore, their approach to the nuclear-related issues is very cautious and piece-meal. They do not have either authority or reputation to introduce or promote policy changes. So the North Korean nuclear policy evolves in a slow incremental way within the parameters set forth by the Great Leader at the CPC. Although let me stress that this does not mean that bureaucrats receive orders from Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il on every petty issue involved. This is not necessary, because they have already mindsets which make them very sensitive to political opinions: while formulating policies, they are driven not only by their past negotiating experience and policy agenda but also by their anticipation of possible political reaction at the top.

Fourthly, although there is almost no official information on the

meetings of the Central People's Committee, sometimes it is compared to the Meiji-period "Genro", Council of the Elderly Rulers, and is reported to rival the institutional position of the Politburo of the WPK in the North Korean power structure. Especially, its role, albeit somewhat enigmatic, is always of paramount importance in forging strategic consensus among the top national leadership in Pyongyang, including top military brass, security officials, and political leaders, on matters related to national security issues and regime survival. The Great Leader is said to prefer to rely on the CPC's apparatus and his old comrades in arms, most of whom are members of the CPC, as well as his personel Bodyguard Service rather than on the much younger Politburo Secretariat or the Administrative Council. One could argue that after Kim Jong Il secured the first vice- chairmanship of the National Defense Committee of the CPC in May 1990 and its chairmanship in April 1992, he was more inclined to use the CPC rather than the Politburo, Administrative Council, and various state bureaucracies in promoting his policies, while still relying on his power base at the WPK Central Committee. Evidently, it was the narrow circle of the CPC members where the issues related to the DPRK nuclear program were considered, and where Pyongyang's nuclear strategy was adopted and amended. Correspondingly, the more institutionalized Kim Jong Il's position became within the CPC in 1990-1993 the more respect and authority his views on the nuclear issue commanded. It was at the 9th-term 7th session of the Central People's Committee held on March 11, 1993 that the decision to withdraw from the NPT was debated and made; and the next day Kim Jong Il announced it on the behalf of the CPC.

Briefly speaking, by late 1991 there had emerged a set of new policy ideas advocated by the IPD, institutional changes within the foreign policy bureaucracy were under way, new access to the nexus of power had been opened by the promotion of Mr. Kim Yong-sun to the WPK CC's Secretariat, and new source of decision-making authority had been provided by the elevation of Kim Jong Il to the chairmanship of the key body in charge of formulating the DPRK's nuclear policy, i.e. the CPC's NDC. In early 1991, after some prodding by Kim Yong- sun and upon Kim Jong Il's insistence, these new proposals caught Kim Il Sung's attention. After emotional consideration at a number of meetings with members of the Central People's Committee President Kim blessed the new course sometime in late 1991.

There are two extreme views on the Great Leader's involvement in making these strategic decisions. One opinion holds that he is totally "out of the loop", whereas the other contends the opposite that the entire country from top to bottom breathes, eats, and sleeps at Kim Il Sung's whim and command. Neither is true. Scores of foreign delegations, including those from the United States, which have visited Pyongyang since 1991, testify

that President Kim despite his age not only is in full control of his faculties and the country but also has a firm grip on the issues related to the nuclear problem. Conversely, talks with foreign visitors, in particular with his long-time friend Prince Norodom Sihanuk known for his pragmatism and realpolitik mentality, US Congressmen who like to shoot from the hip the American concerns, and the Japanese businessmen wary of further involvement in the North Korean economy because of lingering clouds of political instability, provide an indispensible check with reality for him. On the other hand, time and again we witness that policy innovations are adopted in the DPRK only after some consensus-building process has taken place at the level of the Central People's Committee, and not by the Great Leader alone. Moreover, as Dr. Steven Linton who visited the DPRK nine times in the past three years argues "while impossible to quantify with precision, public opinion is a factor in policies adopted by the DPRK leadership... and that when there is a change of policy the DPRK government must explain it to their population in a way that is palatable". I would add that usually it is done through the state-controlled news media and internal news releases, as well as during the consideration and approval of a new policy line by the Supreme People's Assembly, which performs more a function of informing the population about major changes in policy rather than as a policymaking institution.

In sum, this radical shift in the North Korean nuclear policy from moral indignation at "groundless accusations of us developing nuclear weapons by malicious imperialists" to a more open, pragmatic, and more sustainable policy of "neither confirm nor deny" regarding the military aspects of its nuclear program (which basically was mimicking the then US policy on nuclear weapons in South Korea) should be seen as a result of a new strategic consensus that formed among the top leadership in Pyongyang around the ideas proposed by a non-traditional analytical source, i.e. the IPD backed by the International Department of the WPK CC, and was blessed by President Kim, and was made palatable to the broad public opinion.

Psychodynamics of the nuclear play

However, new foreign policy priorities and corresponding intellectual and institutional developments alone are not sufficient in explaining the dynamics of the nuclear policy making in the DPRK. Psychological perceptions and appearances seem to matter as much in Pyongyang as they do in Washington. In particular, the changing perception of threat to the survival of the regime plays an extremely important role determining the tactics and modalities of the North Korean negotiating behavior.

According to the juch'e tenets, voluntary isolation is good because self-reliance underpins national security. However, forced abandonment is judged to be bad because it leaves North Korea alone contrary to its will, and the regime will have to struggle for survival on its own. In the same vein, mutual dependence is seen in a positive way because North Korea retains control over its decisions and can attend to its sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Entrapment is feared because it forces Pyongyang to lose face, leaves the impression that it is bullied into submission, and puts the regime stability to test. These distinctions are subtle but, nevertheless, very real in psychological terms and in policymaking processes. For external security is tightly linked to the survival of the Kim Il Sung regime, or as Paul Bracken at Yale put it succinctly, "a threat of implosion is linked with a threat of explosion in North Korea."

My hypothesis is that when a perception of threat to the national security and hence to the survival of the domestic regime increases, the feelings of entrapment are exacerbated; which leads North Koreans to stall cooperation with the IAEA, the United States, and the ROK. Conversely, when a perception of threat to the national security and hence regime survival is declining, feelings of abandonment by the international community grow; which leads Pyongyang to make more concessions to the IAEA, to talk business with the US and South Korea, and to scale down their belligerent rhetoric so that to avoid it. In other words, North Korea does not want to be abandoned but it does not want to be entrapped either - quite reasonable desires, aren't they ? Hence, such a gyrating pattern in its negotiating behavior.

What may cause these fluctuations in the perception of threat to the regime survival ? I would argue that these factors include: 1) the top two leaders' health; 2) challenges to Kim Jong Il's succession bid, legitimacy problem, and transfer of charisma; 3) regime performance in managing the economy; and 4) politics of transition.

First, in the short term, if the Great Leader's or Dear Leader's health deteriorates (the recent rumors about the son's failing health made me question who will outlive whom), the threat perception will rise, exacerbating the fear of entrapment, which is likely to lead to Pyongyang's intermittent defections at the nuclear game.

Secondly, in the medium-term, if political challenges to Kim Jong Il's succession mount, or he continues to face the legitimacy problem, the regime's threat perception is sure to be enhanced. As Kim Jong Il is faced with growing latent pressures from his domestic critics and opponents, he is likely to feel increasingly entrapped and besieged; which may cause him to turn to some kind

of reckless behavior, including on the nuclear issue.

Also, it is worth mentioning that every time the United States and the ROK hold the "Team Spirit" joint military exercises or escalate military buildup in South Korea, the North Korean military seems to get an upper hand vis-a-vis the civilian elites in strategic and tactical decision-making on the foreign policy issues, including the nuclear one. Even after Kim Jong Il was appointed the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the KNA in December 1992, top North Korean generals still get direct and preferential access to President Kim in emergency situations. Consequently, any new "defensive measures" by the US in the South are likely to exacerbate the military paranoia and fears of entrapment in Pyongyang; which tends to result in the DPRK stonewalling or cancelling the talks with the IAEA, the ROK, and the US again and again.

Thirdly, also in the medium-term, if the economy continues to stagnate at its current bottom-low level or deteriorates further, the political elite in Pyongyang is likely to become increasingly frustrated at the state bureaucracy for its inability to handle the economic situation "right", which may lead to attempts to reorganize or reform the latter, which in turn may provoke greater bureaucratic resistance to change. This schism is likely to induce splits within the state and party bureaucracy on how to proceed further, which may lead to growing reevaluation of domestic economic and ideological orthodoxy and reassessment of threats posed to the regime by the external world. Therefore, the threat perception is likely to decline, which should increase the fears of abandonment, and, hence, lead to greater North Korean cooperation with the IAEA, US, Japan, and the ROK.

Fourthly, in the long run, insofar as political transition from an exclusive totalitarian regime based on communist ideology, dictatorial one man - one party rule, and no political pluralism to an inclusive hard-type bureaucratic authoritarian regime based on market-oriented modernizing, nationalistic, and populist appeals, advocated by a new breed of enlighted pragmatists in Pyongyang, proceeds in a smooth and peaceful way without mass political mobilization and social upheavals, the regime threat perception is likely to decline; which will fuel the fears of abandonment, and consequently, will force North Koreans to cooperate more eagerly and fully with the international community and the IAEA.

To sum up, from the point of view of compelling domestic factors, theoretically, the best hope for successful resolution of the nuclear issue, paradoxically, seems to lie in good and lasting health of both the father and son, a smooth succession of leadership, with Kim Il Sung's charisma being fully transfered to his son, North Korea's peaceful and rapid transition to a new

regime type amidst continuing sluggish economic performance.

How do these predictions bear out in reality? Let's consider several key decision moments over the past three years in the nuclear diplomacy of the DPRK. First of all, I think that the original cooperation with the IAEA - decision to sign the NSA and open the Yongbyun nuclear complex for the IAEA inspections - may be largely attributed to a somewhat declining perception of threat to the regime survival. Indeed, the initial shock of a virtual cutoff of political and economic ties with the then Soviet Union and deteriorating relations with the PRC was gone, albeit bitterness and sense of betrayal remained. After the breakdown of their alliance system, North Koreans felt abandoned. Therefore, they decided to explore new routes to security. In September 1991, the DPRK was admitted to the United Nations. Throughout 1991 and most part of 1992 the North Korean party and state bureaucracy (the WPK International Department, Administrative Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Atomic Energy Industry, Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland) were busy trying to break new grounds with new counterparts. By the mid-1992, the MOFA had held already seven rounds of normalization talks with Japan in Beijing. Representatives of the Administrative Council and CPRF had held eight rounds of Pyongyang-Seoul talks, and North and South Korean prime ministers signed an "Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between the South and the North" (December 13, 1991) and a Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" (January 14, 1992). On January 22-29, 1992, Secretary Kim Yong-sun, held a series of talks in New York with Arnold Kanter, U.S. Undersecretary of State for political affairs, and forged a compromise agreement with the United States on opening the North Korean nuclear sites in exchange for assurances of American removal of nuclear weapons from South Korea and the cancellation of 1992 "Team Spirit" annual military exercises. Finally, Mr. Hong Gun-pyo, North Korean vice-minister of the Atomic Energy Industry after year-long negotiations with Hans Blix, Director-General of the IAEA, signed the NSA in Vienna on January 30, 1992, and afterwards the IAEA conducted five ad hoc inspections of nuclear facilities at the Yongbyun complex in 1992 and one in February 1993. By and large, expectations in Pyongyang were flying really high in 1991-1992, and North Koreans were willing to increase their overall cooperation with the IAEA and the international community as a whole even further.

Secondly, contrary to what many in the West believe, Pyongyang's confrontational policy of March-May 1993 was not founded in its reluctance to accept "special inspections" of two undeclared nuclear sites at Yongbyun. It was a precipitating event not the cause. It developed much earlier - in October-December 1992, and was a result of increasing threat perception to the integrity and

stability of the regime, which spurred the fears of entrapment among the North Korean leaders. We may disagree about the results of the meetings between Mr. Kanter and Mr. Kim Yong-sun in late January 1992, but there is clear evidence that the North Korean side interpreted the compromise as a quid-pro-quo deal which set the modalities of all further developments: the DPRK's permanent entrance into the NSA and acceptance of continuous IAEA inspections in exchange for the US permanent cancellation of the "Team Spirit" and withdrawal of its nuclear threat to the DPRK. This was Mr. Kim Yong-sun's understanding of the "deal" he brought home, and this was the palatable policy that he sold to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and that kept the conservatives and the military content and off the back of the moderates in Pyongyang. Thereafter, all the skirmishes with the IAEA about the scope, timing and regularity of inspections were considered of minor significance and manageable as long as the overall parameters of the "deal" were holding. This was due to the fact that a fragile domestic consensus was reached in Pyongyang that in order to consolidate its achievements at the talks with its new Western counterparts it was necessary to maintain the safeguards and allow the IAEA access to its already declared and undisputed facilities.

However, when the United States and the ROK in their 24th annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in Washington, D.C. agreed to resume the joint military exercises "Team Spirit" on October 7, 1992, it was the "deal breaker" for many and a beginning of the end of many diplomatic and political careers. First, North Korea tried to save the game by denouncing this decision. Then it invoked a threat to discontinue all North-South contacts (5). Neither worked, instead the ROK added fuel to the fire by accusing the North of running a 62-member spy ring in the South Korean government establishment. As tensions grew, neither MOFA nor CPRK could contain the dispute with the ROK and the US within their bureaucratic realms: tentative consensus among conservatives and pragmatic moderates, the military and civilian elites was cracking rapidly. So while on the defensive, the politicians who were behind the "new strategic thinking" were compelled by their opponents to start renegotiation of the original domestic "pact" with aim of narrowing its scope and hardening its underpinnings but broadening its political support base. Prime Minister Yon Hyung-muk, parts of the Administrative Council and the WPK CC were drawn into the battle. The PM-led North-South dialogue seems to have been slated to fall the first victim of this process. On October 14, 1992, Mr. Yon expressed his indignation at the decision of the 24th SCM in his letter to his South Korean counterpart Hyun Sung-jong. On October 27, 1992, a joint meeting of the government, WPK, and various organizations adopted a resolution which threatened to call off the ongoing inter-Korean dialogues and demanded that the US and the ROK cancel their decision to resume the "Team Spirit". On October 31,

1992, in a telephone message to his South Korean counterpart Prime Minister Yon Hyung-muk demanded that the ROK suspend all other military drills including "Hwarang" and "Foal Eagle", which were scheduled to take place beginning November 2 and 3, 1992, respectively. But all Pyongyang's concerns and demands were falling on deaf ears.

As a result, domestic pressure to halt the IAEA inspections began to pick up steam. So, on November 3, 1992, Pyongyang issued two statements simultaneously, including a statement by the MOFA spokesman, warning of the North's boycott of future IAEA inspections if the "Team Spirit" is resumed, and a joint statement by the chairmen of the North's delegations to the N-S Joint Reconciliation, Military, Economic, and Social and Cultural Sub-Committees, announcing that the North would boycott the first session of the N-S joint committees scheduled at Panmunjom at weekly intervals from November 5, 1992. Later in November the inter-Korean JNCC talks stalled, and the DPRK government representatives in Moscow, New York, and Beijing made a number of statements which explicitly said that the North would boycott the ninth inter-Korean high-level talks scheduled for December 21-24, 1992, unless South Korean and the US scrap their decision to resume "Team Spirit." In vain.

Apparently, by early December 1992, the political consensus in Pyongyang that the then- Prime Minister Yon Hyung-muk, Secretary Kim Yong-sun and their supporters could negotiate successfully with the international community and keep their end of the bargain about the cancellation of "Team Spirit" to the hardliners had completely broken down. The fears of entrapment rose sharply, and the effectiveness and viability of the course aimed at cooperation with the IAEA was increasingly challenged. At the meetings of the CPC, reportedly, course correction was urged, and heads began to roll. On December 10, 1992, at the 20th plenary meeting of the sixth CC of the WPK a dozen of generals were promoted to the Central Committee membership, and recommendation was made to remove Mr. Yon Hyung-muk from power. The next day, at the fourth session of the ninth Supreme People's Assembly the government was reshuffled, and a new Prime Minister Kang Song-san was appointed, with Mr. Yon being relegated to head the Jagang provincial chapter of the WPK. Curiously, at that time only those who were in charge of the North-South dialogue suffered demotions. Mr. Kim Yong- sun and others responsible for the DPRK-US contacts were allowed to make a comeback. I guess this may reflect a long-standing Pyongyang belief that in any case the ROK government was a US puppet, and it was a mistake from the very beginning to take the North-South talks seriously, as long as the DPRK-US disputes were not resolved. So while Mr. Yon was demoted, Mr. Kim was promoted to the alternate member of the WPK Politburo at the same Plenum. Besides, there was still some bleak hope in Pyongyang that the incoming Kim Yong Sam administration in Seoul

can be made more cooperative by intimidation or by persuasion (even Kim Il Sung alluded in his 1993 New Year Address thereto).

These hopes were put to rest when on January 26, 1993 the South Korean Defense Ministry and the US Forces Korea announced that they would conduct the 17th "Team Spirit" in mid-March 1993. Moreover, it was announced that B-1B bombers capable of carrying nuclear bombs would participate in the war games. At the same time, the IAEA stepped up its pressure on Pyongyang to open two undeclared nuclear sites to its ad hoc inspections, as well as its insistence on its right to conduct "special inspections" without prior notice. What is surprising is that at this late stage of the game there were still people in Pyongyang who tried to save the situation. A 6-member North Korean parlamentary delegation, headed by Mr. Kim Yong-sun, hoped to participate in a congressional meeting scheduled for February 3-4, 1993 in Washington, but it was denied visas by the US Department of State. Ultimately, the last attempt of North Korean doves to avert the confrontation was undercut by the American hawks.

From then on, every politician in North Korea realized that the showdown was inevitable, that it became a matter of principle for the Great Leader to stay the course and not to blink first. Once he asked his son "to do something about it," it became almost fatal for anybody to find oneself on the wrong side of the issue. I disagree with those who argue that it was Kim Jong Il who instigated the confrontation over the nuclear inspections in order to "crack over the heads of the entire elite". Yes, Kim Jong Il took the personal responsibility for initiating the showdown with the IAEA on March 12, 1993. But I believe it was masterminded by the risk-prone Great Leader himself, was debated several times at the Central People's Committee, and it reflected an emerging new political consensus, supported by a new coalition in power tilted in favor of conservative patriachs and the military, that the US-backed IAEA plotting and bulling must not stand, and that the regime survival was again at stake. Yes, heads rolled. But much earlier and very much later, so that from mid-March to late May -the peak of the confrontation -- there were no reports of the demolition man at work. On the opposite, the impression I have is that political elites jumped on the bandwagon of the seemingly winning course of adversarial engagement and most of them survived. It was only later when Kim Il Sung decided to ease up and come back to the negotiation table with the US that government and party reshuffles were resumed. Did Kim Jong Il use the showdown to his benefit? Of course, he tried to, but not by chopping away the heads and smashing the brains which were in scarce supply and which he needed so badly in time of crisis. He did it by using the occasion to boost his legitimacy, by showing to his potential rivals and opponents, as well as to the North Korean public at large, that he could also be tough, could stand up to external pressures, and could lead

the country through its hardships and challenges. Did he succeed? I believe he did partially. Although some people believe Kim Junior's handling of the whole matter was simply a disaster, which further contributed to his reputation as a reckless and unreliable statesman.

Thirdly, why did the North Koreans decide to return to the negotiation table with the US in May-June 1993 and eventually to suspend temporarily the "effectuation of withdrawal from the NPT"? Some explain this move from the viewpoint of strategic interaction, that is, that the nuclear standoff was a kind of game of Chicken, and Pyongyang, albeit bullish at the beginning, swerved first. However, if anything else 1) it was some sort of mutual blinking; 2) although the US did some pushing but it was too eager to quickly accommodate basic Pyongyang's concerns in order to bring it back to the NPT; and 3) later on North Korea did not hesitate to defect again whenever its sensitivities were disregarded. So since there was no tremendous external pressure of credible nature (like economic sanctions or threat of military strike) in reality, I guess the answer is mainly in the domestic politics and only partially in strategic interaction between the US and the DPRK.

In my view, having successfully suppressed the internal opposition to the decision to gamble on the DPRK's future status in the NPT, having created a new military-tilted support coalition for tougher policies toward the IAEA, and having sustained the initial shock of international outcry related thereto, Kim Jong Il and his supporters may have felt more secure by mid-May 1993 than they did in February that year when the nuclear-related domestic policy debate was at its peak. In a sense, the perception of threat to the regime survival among the top leadership might have declined far enough to make President Kim Il Sung worry about the excesses of this new policy and the prospects of abandonment of the DPRK by the international community. These fears of growing abandonment reportedly were also expressed at the April meetings of the Central People's Committee. This may be one of the reasons why Kim Il Sung is reported to have told his son and ordered bureaucrats around him to go the extra mile in order to reopen the dialogue channels with the US and the IAEA, and to revive the negotiating process, following the guidelines established in the past. He may have hoped that the mere engagement could alleviate these fears of abandonment, whereas if somehow it could produce any positive results then it would be only for the better.

Indeed, if one looks at the content of the agreements arrived at by the DPRK and US sides at the high-level talks in New York between the Vice-Foreign Minister of the DPRK Mr. Kang Sok-ju and the Assistant Secretary of State Mr. R. Gallucci on June 2-11, 1993 at the eleventh hour before the June 12 deadline, these are

basically limited to the reiteration of compromises reached eighteen months earlier at the Kim Yong-sun - Kanter talks in New York in January 1992. That is, the US agreed not to threaten the DPRK with the use of force and reiterated that it did not pose a nuclear threat to North Korea, while Pyongyang agreed to suspend "the effectuation of its withdrawal from the NPT" and to allow the IAEA to conduct inspections to assure the "continuity of the nuclear safeguards". But at the Geneva high-level talks, held the following month (July 14-19, 1993), both sides, represented by the same people, dramatically expanded the negotiating agenda and for the first time put on the table issues related to the future political and diplomatic settlement of the nuclear issue (including the transfer of the LWR) and normalization of their bilateral relations. With joint efforts, the dialogue, albeit lacking mutual trust and vulnerable to political manipulations on both sides, was put back on the right track. In August 1993, the IAEA inspectors went to Yongbyun to verify the continuity of the nuclear safeguards. In October 1993, low level DPRK-US and DPRK-IAEA contacts were resumed in New York and in Vienna respectively. In late February 1994, after some pulling and hauling the parties signed a broadly-based agreement on the immediate resumption of the IAEA inspections, their timing and scope, and on the resumption of the North-South dialogue in exchange for the outright cancellation of the 1994 "Team Spirit" joint military exercises and the date and mandate of the third round of the US-DPRK high-level talks. As a guarantee against unilateral cheating, all steps were to be announced and taken simultaneously.

Fourthly, why did the "small deal" break down? The official line from Washington is as follows. Following the February 15 and 25, 1994 accords, the IAEA 7-member team went to the DPRK to check the continuity of the safeguards from March 1 to March 15 of 1994, but, upon return, declared that the North Korean cooperation was unsatisfactory. In addition, eight South-North contacts in Panmunjom failed to lead to any agreement on the exchange of special envoys. Therefore, the US accused the DPRK of intentionally violating the agreements reached in February and said it was no longer bound by its commitments. Instead, the IAEA referred the matter for resolution to the UN Security Council, and the latter passed a UNSC president's statement (March 31, 1994) urging the DPRK to complete the inspections agreed upon and to continue to cooperate fully with the IAEA toward the exhaustive resolution of the nuclear issue as a whole.

From a North Korean perspective, as expressed in the DPRK MAEI statement of March 18, 1994, the MOFA statement of March 21, 1994, and a statement of the North delegation to working contacts for the exchange of special envoys of March 21, 1994, these developments were another example of the "widening partiality of the IAEA", of the US attempts "to stifle the North Korean

regime", and of the South Korean "deliberate attempts to put the brakes on the DPRK-US talks by abusing the idea of exchange of special envoys".

In particular, the MAEI General Department spokesman stated that the DPRK fulfilled all its obligations to the IAEA under the February 15 agreement, i.e. it allowed the IAEA inspectors without hindrance to reload and service containment and surveillance devices, to verify physical inventories, to examine a number of records and documents, to verify design information, and to do sampling and measurement. However, the IAEA inspectors went beyond the agreed procedures and insisted on taking samples from the Input Accountability Tank contained by the IAEA seals, which were certified as unbroken, on gamma mapping at most of points instead of a few selected points agreed earlier, and on verification of cooling systems, which was never part of the agreement. In other words, Pyongyang claims that the procedures agreed earlier in Vienna and fully implemented by the IAEA inspectors were "sufficient to enable the agency to fully verify non-diversion of nuclear material at our nuclear facilities and definitely ensure the continuity of safeguards as well". In sum, such a divergence between what the IAEA agreed to in Vienna and what its inspectors really tried to do in Yongbyun, the fact that the IAEA bombarded Pyongyang with three telexes during the 14-day inspection period threatening to ask the UN for sanctions if it does not allow its inspectors to take extra samples, as well as total disregard for its "special status" as a country that "only temporarily suspended the effectuation of its withdrawal from the NPT" - all these could not but make the North Koreans feel cheated on and frustrated.

In the meantime, Pyongyang's frustration also grew as in Panmunjom South Koreans insisted in contact after contact that the main purpose of the exchange of special envoys be to talk about the nuclear issue, or Seoul would not agree to these at all, and then the North would not be able to tell the US that it fulfilled its second obligation under the February 25, 1994 accord with Washington. In an effort to beat the March 21, 1994 deadline and to break the impasse, at the sixth round of working contact on March 12, 1994 the North delegate Mr. Pak Yong-su dropped all the North's previous preconditions and proposed to sign a joint communique pledging an early exchange of envoys. But his South Korean counterpart Mr. Song Young-dae rejected it after Seoul decided to adopt a "tough reaction policy" toward Pyongyang at the same day.

It was a misfortune that the US hastily jumped into the fray without sitting it out: even before the IAEA inspection was over and while the South-North contacts were still under way, some of the key US policymakers indicated that the United States was likely to reconsider its promise to cancel the "Team Spirit" and

to hold the third round of high-level US-DPRK talks. I consider this an ill-timed move because at that moment there were still bureaucrats in the DPRK MOFA, the CPRK, and the MAEI who believed that they still could pull it out without political interference and a renewed confrontation with the international community. However, after the US announcement the regime security and stability was put in question again. The military and hardliners in Pyongyang, who were watching closely the developments, got excited all at once. They began to display the growing fears of entrapment. As a result, the bureaucratic players were shut off from the policymaking process. Kim Jong Il stepped in and orchestrated a traditional "face-saving" exit for domestic consumption in North Korea, basically saying "We do not want to talk to you either, cheater."

Conclusion

To sum up, my basic argument in this paper is as follows. As a rule, the general parameters of Pyongyang's policy toward the IAEA are considered and decided at the Central People's Committee meetings chaired by President Kim Il Sung and/or his son. Decisions are made with strategic considerations in mind and concern for bargaining reputation, and are not driven by passions or other ulterior motives. A newly powerful think tank with close links to the CPC, the Institute for Peace and Disarmament, has had a considerable intellectual input in the reformulation of the DPRK's nuclear strategy and providing justification for its negotiating behavior recently. However, there is a certain degree of bureaucratic autonomy on the nuclear policymaking in North Korea, especially as far as the activities of the Ministry of Atomic Energy Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are concerned.

This limited bureaucratic autonomy stems from two sources. On the one hand, a growing inter-agency coordination and cooperation, ironically, imposed on a highly compartmentalized and rigidly hierarchical North Korean bureacracy by issue linkages advocated by the US negotiators, made different ministries more aware of the play around them and the game as a whole, expanded information available to them, enabled them to produce more realistic policy outputs when requested by the top political leadership, as well as allowed them to band together to press policy positions they deemed rational whenever they were faced with political challenges from the WPK CC International Department and other players. On the other hand, this relative bureaucratic autonomy regarding the North Korean tactics at the negotiations with the IAEA and the US stems from the fact that party politicians in Pyongyang consider the whole nuclear issue too tricky and risky for their political careers to stay close to. Hence, they try to stay away from it until a rallying battle cry is issued from the very top. This leaves bureaucrats alone to

handle the dialogue. They have little latitude to change the course, except in a minor, very incremental way, however, they are not burdened with particularly heavy responsibilities either. As a result, we witness a slow piece-meal kind of evolution of the nuclear policy within very general parameters set forth previously at the top.

Furthermore, this slow policy evolution tends to be very sensitive to the prevailing concerns about threats to the regime survival and stability in Pyongyang. Whenever a perception of threat to the regime survival increases, the fears of entrapment grow, and a coalition tilted in favor of the positions advocated by the military and hardliners is formed. Consequently, the DPRK's defections mount, negotiations stall, if not totally break down. In contrast, whenever a threat perception declines and the Kim family feels more secure, they tend to experience a growing fear of abandonment, which leads to the redistribution of influence back to the civilians and pragmatic softliners. Consequently, the North Korea's cooperation with the IAEA increases, its attitude becomes more flexible and forthcoming.

As for the future, I think the patterns of the North Korean behavior analyzed above will last for some time. Hence, we should not expect any breakthroughs in its talks with the IAEA and the United States beyond the parameters already established in the form of a so-called "package deal". The US will be well advised not to do anything hasty which could increase the fears of entrapment in Pyongyang and provoke the consolidation of the belligerent defense coalition that might risk total isolation or war in order to prolong its stay in power. Also a piece of advice from the scores of textbooks on the art of diplomacy is appropriate: if you want the accords to be implemented, make them as specific as possible and adhere strictly to their provisions. Do not change your gears at the crossroads. If you cheat yourself, you cannot expect full cooperation from the others, especially when verification is available and good will is such a scarce resource on both sides.

Endnotes

1. In 1955, Kim Il Sung signed an agreement with the Soviet Prime Minister Bulganin on scientific cooperation which contained provisions for the exchange of information related to nuclear technology and training of North Korean scientists at the Soviet nuclear research complex in Dubna. In August 1965, he ordered to import from the USSR a small 2-4 Mwt research reactor (called the IRT 2000). In 1986, with the Soviet assistance, the DPRK commissioned a 5-MWT nuclear power reactor, and later launched construction of a 50-Mwt nuclear reactor due in 1995 and a 200-Mwt reactor due in 1996.

2. It suffices to say that in September 1974, the DPRK joined

the IAEA. In December 1985, under heavy pressure from Moscow Kim Il Sung agreed to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and reiterated peaceful purposes of the North Korean nuclear research efforts.

3. A Carnegie Endowment team of non-proliferation experts who visited the DPRK in May 1992 and had talks with Mr. Choe Chong-sun, an official of the Ministry of the Atomic Energy Industry, in their report cited him as saying that North Korean nuclear scientists extracted spent fuel "to produce a little bit of plutonium for experimental purposes and to study the nuclear reprocessing cycle sometime in 1989-1990. Earlier at a briefing for the Japanese reporters visiting Pyongyang on occassion of President Kim Il Sung's 80th birthday, Mr. Choe made similar comments (cited from the New York Times, April 16, 1992, p3).

4. Overall, it is rumored that North Korea might have spent almost 10 bln US dollars on its nuclear program. For comparison, the size of its GNP is estimated at 23 bln dollars in 1992.

5. Also in April 1992, he was appointed the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly in order to smoothen the ratification of the NSA due in May 1992, as well as other pending legislation aimed at establishing "free trade economic zones" in the DPRK.

6. Mr. Kim Yong-sun was among those who lost his title and job in December 1993 apparently for his failure to solicit the kind of outcomes at the talks with the IAEA and the US that the father and son wanted.

7. Interestingly, the defeat of the anti-Gorbachev coup in August 1991 in Moscow reportedly accelerated the new policy formation in Pyongyang.

8. On October 12, 1992 the MOFA of the DPRK issued a statement denouncing the ROK and the US for deciding to resume the "Team Spirit".

9. The spokesman of the CPRF issued a statement in Pyongyang on October 13 that said "If the US and the South Korean authorities go down the road toward the intensification of tensions through any resumption of the joint military exercise called "Team Spirit", all the dialogues including the inter-Korean high-level talks will be deadlocked and the implementation of the North-South agreements will be suspended" (cited from North Korea News, Oct. 26, 1992, No. 654, p. 4).
Comments offered by Professor James Cotton, Political Science Department, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

Matters of detail

p. 2: N Korea's admission that it has been running a peaceful nuclear program goes back long before 1990. And Kim Il-sung has been quite clear in his claim (as of April 1994) that N Korea has no nuclear weapons program. This cannot be described as a 'neither confirm nor deny' stance.

Institutional analysis

This is interesting, plausible, but cannot be either confirmed or falsified. Undoubtedly these different institutions (Institute for Peace and Disarmament, International Department of the WPK, etc) have different approaches, but different observers have formed sometimes different views of their roles. Thus we have (p4) 'the word got out' etc on the 3 policy steering teams, which is taken as really being the case. How do we know?

Institutional versus psychodynamic approach

The psychodynamic approach depends upon an analogy between the political system and the psyche of an individual human being. But the institutional approach identifies different bureaucratic and political bodies with different agendas. The paper uses the former to some effect (describing, eg, the main turning points in N Korean policy), but relies upon the latter to identify the main actors and agenda setters. It also (p6) rejects the characterisation of N Korea as a country which breathes, eats, and sleeps nothing but Kim Il-sung. If the political system is at all like a human psyche, how can there be different agenda setters?

The 1992 'deal' and North Korea's nuclear weapons program

The paper suggests (p. 2) that N Korea does have a nuclear weapons program. The language is not clear (and thus this question should be addressed directly), but no other inference seems possible from the text. It then describes (p12) the 'quid-pro-quo deal' struck in January 1992 between Kanter and Kim Young-sun, that is, that N Korea would accept full IAEA inspections designed to demonstrate that no weapons program existed, in exchange for cancellation of 'Team Spirit' and a withdrawal of the US nuclear threat to N Korea. The paper then goes on to describe the breaking of the deal, attributing the outcome of the US-ROK Security Consultative Committee held in Washington in October 1992 as crucial. We could argue about the details here - after all, the US and the ROK were still talking about the possibility of cancelling Team Spirit into the New Year. But reconsider the terms of the deal. If N Korea really was accepting full IAEA inspections, and at the same time was engaging in a nuclear weapons program, then sooner or later that program was likely to be detected, and the terms of the deal broken. Who was breaking it, and indeed never intended to keep

it, but N Korea?
Mansourov's response to Dr. Cotton's comments:

General thrust

As you are well aware, whenever we, political scientists, have to deal with closed societies, most of our findings tend to be somewhat of a speculative nature. We can only hope that years and years later we might get a grab on some real hard data and tap some primary sources, which will allow us to prove or disavow our present writings. But this scarcity of reliable empirical evidence does not mean that we should either just forget about it and wait until that moment will come one day in a distant future or be driven by some propagandistic efforts by the sides concerned.

As for the question of falsifiability, my attitude is a little bit unusual, and I hope staunch positivists will forgive me. Namely, in evaluating the plausibility and validity of the arguments made about political processes in North Korea I rely on my "gut feeling." I believe that most of us who studied Korean history, culture, politics and economics for the most part of our lives have developed this type of intuitive judgement capacity, or "gut feeling," which helps us determine whether an argument makes sense as far as North Korea is concerned or not. This may be a parochial defense against the unfalsifiability charge but so far my intuition has worked for me pretty well.

However, this does not mean sloppiness or lack of diligence in searching for the data which might be available from different sources. Most of the facts I cite about the newly emerging role of the International Peace and Disarmament Institute, about the sessions of the Central People's Committee, and about the recent changes in the WPK Central Committee are based on the information I received from well-informed Russian diplomatic sources who cannot be identified.

On the relationship between institutional and psychodynamic approaches

I do not try to draw an analogy between the political system and the psyche of an individual human being. Nevertheless, the two approaches are compatible because both attempt to capture some patterns of regularized human behavior. Both approaches deal with instances of collective or group behavior. Although the difference between them is that institutionalism tends to focus on formal institutions like structures, organizations, and norms, whereas a psychodynamic approach focuses on informal patterns of behavior such as emotion and/or reason-driven coalitions and individual-based decision output.

Also, I do not agree with the view that North Korea as a country "breathes, eats, and sleeps nothing but Kim Il- Sung." Not only is this proposition difficult to defend theoretically, but more empirical evidence suggests that the Pyongyang leadership is not a monolith united unanimously behind the Great leader and that North Korean public opinion is multicolored and much more sophisticated than such a primitive interpretation would suggest.

On the definition of the DPRK's nuclear policy

As I stated on page 3, North Korea admitted that it had a nuclear program a long time ago. Also on every occasion its representatives underscored the peaceful nature of this effort. However, it was only in April 1994 that President Kim Il Sung for the first time stated that the DPRK did not have nuclear weapons, which, however, did not touch upon the question whether North Korea had a nuclear weapons program or not and could be interpreted either way. That is, we have a NW program, whose existence we are not going to admit, but we have not produced any NW yet. Or we do not have NW nor are we engaged in any purposeful effort to develop and build them. This is precisely the kind of policy which I call "neither confirm nor deny." If Kim Il-Sung wants the international community to believe sincerely that the DPRK is not involved in a clandestine NW program, he will have to make a more persuasive case.

The paper does not suggest that North Korea has or does not have nuclear weapons or a nuclear weapons program. I simply cite different sources presenting different assessments of the current situation in order to make my own point. That is, at present the issue is no longer about reality, it is about perception. It is the image of North Korea and perception of potential threats it might present, held at the policymaking level and by the public opinion, rather than hard facts, which are obviously scarce, that seem to be fueling the crisis and driving the policy. If this interpretation is correct, then the real question is how to influence this perception so that to avoid an escalation of conflict and resolve the nuclear issue peacefully and by the mutual accord.

Comments offered by Kongdan Oh, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

This is an extremely interesting and timely paper. The world talks about the secrecy of North Korean society and how difficult it is to understand what is going on inside its decision-making community. Alexandre makes a valuable contribution to this topic by providing challenging thoughts and many new facts. I enjoyed reading it very much. The structure is clean and well-organized, and the flow of logic is good. Overall, many people will benefit from reading this paper in terms of understanding the North Korean polity.

Alexandre provides many facts and insights. For example, he outlines the behind-the scene debates in the CPC. But I am concerned that he rarely cites his sources of information. If this information is speculative, he should clearly indicate this. The greatest stumbling block I face in communicating with non-North Korean experts in the U.S. decision-making community is that what I know (or think I know) from experience and intuition as a Korean scholar does not persuade my hard-core conservative audience, because I often cannot provide anything other than circumstantial evidence. I hope Alexandre has had more luck than I have had in finding solid reference sources.

Alexandre suggests that North Korea's nuclear policy has evolved from a peaceful program to (by 1990) a strategic deterrence program. While I cannot reject this possibility, I suspect that the origin of the North Korean nuclear program had the same features as the origin of such programs in more advanced nuclear nations. That is, the motivation was always complex, combining civilian technology and energy concerns with military utility. The degree of emphasis may have changed over time, but it is hard to exclude the possibility that the North Korean leaders were interested in a weapons program almost from the very beginning. Certainly I do not see the change in rhetoric that Alexandre claims to find. For years (or at least since the mid-80s), right up to today, North Korea has admitted having a peaceful nuclear program and denied having a nuclear weapons program.

The paper's conclusion is excellent.

Response to Dr. Oh's comments:

As far as the sources of my information are concerned, most of the facts I cite regarding the newly emerging role of the International Peace and Disarmament Institute, sessions of the CPC, and some recent changes in the WPK CC are based on the information I received from a credible Russian diplomatic source who asked not to be identified.

My conclusion that North Korea's nuclear policy has evolved from a peaceful program to (by 1990-1991) a strategic deterrence program is partly speculative, but in part it is based on such circumstantial evidence as the above-mentioned information derived from well-informed Russian sources that I cannot cite.

As for the rhetoric, hardly could one find any reference to the nuclear issue in the North Korean media or official statements prior to 1991. However, since then not only have I found a tremendous increase in the number of government statements and newspaper articles related to the nuclear issue but also a considerable elaboration of the initial North Korean position. Moreover, instead of ignoring or dodging the issue, as it had

done in the past, since 1991 Pyongyang has clearly tried to engage the international community in the debate, whatever its purpose and content might be.

Comments offered by Young Whan Kihl, Political Science Department, Iowa State University

A. The General Impression:

1. Alexandre Mansourov's study of "North Korean Decision-making Processes regarding the Nuclear Issue" impresses me as a carefully-planned, competently-crafted and well-executed research paper on an important and timely issue that carries potentially significant policy implications.

2. The analytical framework of the paper is appropriate and convincing, in terms of its identifying the key decisionmakers (both individual and institutional), with their role specification.

3. The posing of key hypothesis, based on what Mansourov calls the "psychodynamics" of the elite threat perception of the external environment (p. 9), is also appropriate and interesting. Also appropriate are the posing of interesting research questions at the outset and surveying of the existing literature and expert's opinion (pp. 3-4).

4. The author's evaluation of the four-fold factors, that might impinge upon North Korea's "gyrating pattern" in foreign policy and negotiation behavior (pp. 10-11), is fine but somewhat contrived. Why only four factors, not five or six for that matter, are relevant is not clear or obvious.

5. The best part of the paper is an analysis of the four policy episodes, or what the author calls the"key decision moments," where the policy reversal was shown in North Korea's negotiation positions on its nuclear diplomacy in the last three years since 1991 (pp. 11-17).

B. Specific Comments and Questions:

1. Is the "rational actor" model of decision-making which the author utilizes in the present study applicable to all or most of the foreign policy decision-making cases in North Korea, or only to the nuclear issue episode? Why? Why not?

2. Do you assume, by implication, that North Korea's decision process is not unique but is comparable to other political systems?

3. The role of Kim Il Sung on the nuclear issue is

characterized both as an "initiator" of policy (as in the early years) and as an "arbiter" of the DPRK nuclear policy in the 1990s. When, and under what circumstances, does Kim Il Sung choose to intervene in the policy process? Under the crisis situation? If so, how do we know when the leadership defines the situation as "critical?"

4. To what extent can we call North Korea's nuclear game plan one of fixed or flexible strategy? Can we assume that there is a master plan of North Korea's grand strategy as well as the plan of tactical moves and implementation?

5. Please give citations, as footnotes, to your references on Zagoria, Oh (pages 3) and Linton (on page 5).

6. Fine to characterize the Institute of Peace and Disarmament as "think tank" (p. 4), like the IMEMO under Mr. Gorbachev. But is this your speculation or is it based on tangible evidence? If the latter, please give citations as footnotes. I am especially intrigued by your reference to "confidential memos" that you refer to on page 4.

7. What is your evaluation and asssment of other potential "think tanks" in North Korea? Do academicians and scientists in the Kim Il Sung University, the Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Atomic Energy, the Ministry of Atomic Power Industry, etc. provide any input to the policymaking and implementation process?

8. What is the trade-off, or potential conflict, between the civilian "nuclear power program" and the military "nuclear weapons program" in North Korea? Is inter-bureaucratic coordination and rivarly a problem in North Korea, such as the ones existing between the Ministry of Atomic Power Industry and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces?

9. How does an interlocking membership, and arrangement, between the state and the party affect the ways in which the negotiation on nuclear diplomacy is carried out? For instance, was Kim Yong-sun's style as party cadre varied from Kang Sok-ju's as government official because of their different status?

10. If the Central People's Committee is the highest decision body in North Korea, as you argue, what is its relationship with the State Administration Council, the National Defense Commision on the government side, and with the Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee and its International Division? How about its role vis-a-vis the parliamentary body of the Supreme People's Assemby? When does the latter come to participate in the policy process, if at all?

11. What is the specific time frame of the short, medium and

long-term references on page 10? One, five, or ten years?

12. The paper will need further discussion on Kim Jong Il's role, lack of his role, on the nuclear controversy on page 14.

13. Is it conceivable that the North Korean chief delegate Pak Yong-su's threatening remarks at the Panmunjom meeting in March was "deliberate" or indeed "out of line" as Kim Il Sung stated? Should it not be taken as a tactical move of North Korea's grand strategy and game plan?

14. Please give more footnote references to identify the sources of your information.

In conclusion, the paper shows that the author has both intellectual vigor and ability to sip through an array of obscure facts and information on North Korea. His analysis and interpretation is both sound and credible. He has written a first-rate, reliable and competent paper that should be read widely by the policy analysts and decision-makers as well as by the area specialists and the nuclear nonproliferation research scholars.

Response to Dr. Kihl's comments:

1. In this paper, I do not apply the "rational choice model," although I refer my readers to some research done by others (Dr. Kongdan Oh, Dr. Don Zagoria) along these lines. I feel that the "rational choice" explanations are inadequate in terms of accounting for the persistent vacillations in North Korean behavior. Hence, I resort to the institutional and psychodynamic approaches.

Regarding all or most of other cases in the foreign policy decision-making in the DPRK, their explanation is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to recommend either of these approaches. As a matter of principle, I think that each case should be treated on its merits first, and only then could one attempt to draw some generalizations.

2. Yes, I do assume that the nature of the North Korean decision-making processes, albeit a little bit complicated, peculiar, and not easily ascertainable, is not unique, hence comparable to other political systems.

3. Excellent question! As a matter of speculation, I believe that Kim Il-sung tends to intervene mainly at "critical junctures." However, it is the inner circle of people around the Great Leader that define the situation as "critical." When do they tend to do so? My guess is that struggle to define a

situation as "critical" within the leadership opens up. In turn, the latter seems to be linked with clear-cut signals (in either direction) that the Pyongyang elite receives from the international community, which, of course, each cue-taker interprets in his own interest and tries to exploit for his own benefit.

4. In this paper, I attempted to make a point that the overall parameters of the North Korea nuclear game plan are pretty much fixed and are unlikely to change dramatically unless kim Il-sung personally decides to reassess his vision of the DPRK's future (which is highly unlikely), whereas the roadmap, the speed, type and tactics of implementation appear to be open for negotiation and compromise.

5. Regarding my reference to Dr. D. Zagoria's views, he expressed them in his presentation at a conference sponsored by the Korea Forum at Columbia University in November 1993. Concerning Dr. S. Linton's views, he expressed them during his presentation at the February 1994 Seminar on Contemporary Korean Affairs sponsored by the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University. As far as Dr. Kongdan Oh's views are concerned, she expressed them at a brown bag lunch in her honor sponsored by the East Asian Institute at Columbia University on March 31, 1994. I participated in all three events, and cited their views from my notes.

6. See my answer to question 14.

7. Yes, they do, but their relative influence varies.

8. I do not have any "hard evidence" suggesting that there is inter-bureaucratic rivalry between the MAEI and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces. But this does not mean that in reality this is not the case. My speculative guess is that although both ministries work very closely on most of the components of the program, potential conflict between the civilian and military aspects of the nuclear program, presumably dealt with by the MAEI and MPAF respectively, might arise regarding the questions of budget appropriations, bureaucratic influence on the top political leadership at "critical junctures," as well as in shaping the future contours of the North Korean nuclear program as a whole. Furthermore, if the international community opts to crack down on Pyongyang's nuclear program, its civilian aspect is likely to have a better chance for survival than its military aspect. Hence, it is in the MAEI's interest to distance itself from the MPAF's intentions and efforts, whatever these may be.

9 and 10. Excellent questions! I will defer my answers until the conference.

11. I refer to one year as a short term, three to five years as a medium term, and ten to fifteen years as a long term.

12. I discuss Kim Jong-il's role in the nuclear issue in greater detain in another paper which I presented at a conference on the Future of the Korean Peninsula in the 21st Century held in July 1993 in East Lansing, MI. Its title is "Bringing North Korea Back In: A Creeping Elite Revolution?" by and large, I stand by my earlier conclusions presented in that paper.

13. I think Mr. Pak Yong-su's notorious remark was intensely emotional and personal. I believe it had nothing to do with Kim's official line. Rather, it reflect profound frustration which Mr. pak Yong-su and a seemingly dovish coalition behind him must have felt when they were trying to beat the March 21,1994 deadline but were confronted with the South Korean stonewalling in Panmunjom. They saw the deal collapsing and their own fortunes being demolished but they could do nothing to avert it.

14. As far as the sources of my information are concerned, most of the facts I cite regarding the newly emerging role of the International Peace and Disarmament Institute, sessions of the CPC, and some recent changes in the WPK CC are based on the information I received from a credible Russian diplomatic source.

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