


# **Policy Forum 05-20A: The North Korea Nuclear Issue and Inter-Korean Relations: Prospects and South Korea's Corresponding Strategy**

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Yang Moo-Jin

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### **I. Introduction**

Yang Moo-Jin, Professor at Kyungnam University's Graduate School of North Korea Studies, writes: "Peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula depend primarily on the efforts of the two Koreas. The situation could be positive or negative according to how they manage it. The year 2005 is very meaningful for both South and North, since it is their 60th year of Independence, and the 5th year of the June 15 Joint Declaration. This year, I expect that we will be able to settle peace on the peninsula more firmly through economic development, improvement of the South-North relationship, and resolution of the North Korea nuclear problem."

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### **II. Essay by Yang Moo-Jin**

"The North Korea Nuclear Issue and Inter-Korean Relations: Prospects and South Korea's Corresponding Strategy"  
by Yang Moo-Jin

The inter-Korean summit and Joint Declaration of June 2000 toward "reconciliation and cooperation" between North and South Korea provided a turning point toward establishing peace on the Korean peninsula. In the following October, DPRK National Defense Commission First Vice Chairman Jo Myong-rok visited the United States, which led to the DPRK-U.S. Joint Communiqué, which in turn created a real step toward improving North-South Korean relations.

But after the inauguration of George W. Bush as U.S. president in 2001, the relationship took a turn for the worse. In 2002, the rising of the North Korea nuclear issue restricted ROK-DPRK and U.S.-DPRK relations, and also raised tensions on the peninsula.

With the worsening of the nuclear issue in 2003, the coming Roh Moo-hyun government in South Korea presented its priority policy task for diplomacy, national security, and unification: the building of a peace system on the Korean peninsula. By pushing forward parallel policies, the government tried to develop North-South Korean relations and solve the North Korea nuclear issue.

Over the last two years, the result of this drive has produced some fruits, along with some problems.

Let's begin with the fruit. First, there has been a stabilization of the situation on the Korean peninsula. Through the deterioration of the DPRK-U.S. relationship has come mutual cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the United States, as well as China and Russia, on a regional policy approach toward the denuclearization of the peninsula, most evident in the six-party talks framework that seeks to find a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis and keep the peninsula "nuclear free." Also, the issues of realignment and reduction of the U.S. military in the region have been actively addresses. This mutual understanding and active management has helped minimize both citizens' fears concerning national security and the international community's anxiety over peninsular security.

The second produce has been the continuance of North-South relations. Between the two Koreas' exchange of peoples and goods, the business of the Kaesong Industrial complex (KIC), Kumgang Mountain tourism, and construction for the connection of the inter-Korean railways and roads -- the three main areas of economic cooperation -- have all progressed, entering a level of systematization. In particular, the shipment of Kaesong's first products has been a sufficient guide to how the inter-Korean relations have continued. And although the first and second meetings between high-level military officials from both sides and the number of military-level talks have reached their dusk since the naval accident in the West Sea, consultation and execution of the removal of propaganda and its means within and around the demilitarized zone (DMZ) cannot be seen as anything less than colossal progress in North-South relations.

The third has been the bringing about of transparency of policy toward North Korea. The transparent cooperation and policy of the inter-Korean cooperation fund became amplified, and inter-Korean relations and correlating method for unification and reconciliation have been put back on track.

Fourth, there has been an acceleration of change in the DPRK. Recently, market concepts like product production, incentives, purchasing, and profit making have been spreading in North Korea, and positive recognition of South Korea also has increased immensely.

Despite these fruits, not all the produce has been quite as tasty. The function of the National Security Council (NSC) in South Korea has been one sour note. The NSC was charged with summarizing and mediating the different opinions among government departments about policy toward North Korea. However, there has been growing concern that the NSC may have gone beyond its original function in trying to analyze and administer policy. This is problematic as it degenerates the organs that administrate and have authority to execute policy. I sincerely hope these rumblings do not boil over and become the reality.

A second problem -- as many experts point out -- is the channel of communication with North Korea, something that the Roh Moo-hyun government really does not have. Forgetting the history and peculiarities of North-South Korean relations, the government overemphasized the transparency issue in the absence of a channel to communicating with North Korea. This problem will need to be rectified.

A third issue is the conflict that resides within South Korean society itself over policy toward North Korea, which is also referred to as the "South-South conflict". This conflict not only has weakened the driving force behind the policy toward North Korea, but also can never help make or maintain peace on the peninsula. This South-South conflict can be witnessed here and there within society. In some cases it appears as mere bickering, but in others it the form of a serious showdown. Overall, many people worry about the Roh Moo-hyun government's capability to solve this conflict.

In this way we can analyze the Roh government's efforts. Even though there have been several problems over the last two years, the government has persevered with its policies, which is encouraging.

But from the middle of last year, consultation between the governments of the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States via the Six-Party Talks came to a halt. In particular, North Korea's declaration that it would put off participating in the Six-Party Talks this past February 10, 2005 has increased the anxiety within South Korean society and the international community, and has cast a dark shadow over the chances of solving the North Korea nuclear issue and improving inter-Korean relations.

Personally, I believe we not need be so pessimistic. This pessimism appeared during the progress of the North Korea nuclear issue. If we analyze the shape of negotiations between the United States and the DPRK and North Korea's declaration of February 10, along with a thorough strategy, I believe crisis can be turned into an opportunity. After the North Korean nuclear issue raised its head, North Korea had come to use a tit-for-tat strategy and brinkmanship tactics against the United States. In other words, North Korea used brinkmanship tactics to raise tensions while the United States showed indifference, neglect, and delay. We can recognize it clearly in Pyongyang's speeches: "We have nuclear weapons. We've processed 8,000 spent fuel rods. We are already a nuclear-possessing state." What North Korea seeks through its strategy of brinkmanship most likely is increased U.S. interest so that it may gain security guarantees and compensation.

Against this, the United States has continued to neglect the North with its hard-line policy stance. The U.S. negotiation pattern has been to refuse bilateral talks with the North under the CVID principle (complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement) while pressing South Korea and China to play along. The recognition for North Korea has been that "the United States can have conversation with North Korea, but not negotiation."

Arguments have proliferate as to the reasons for the declaration made by North Korea's foreign minister on February 10. Personally, I believe it might be an extension of the existing negotiation strategy and tactics. First of all, this declaration seems to focus more on the indefinite suspension of the Six-Party Talks rather than on declaring the North's possession of nuclear weapons. North Korea did not provide any concrete evidence, such as a nuclear test, that can be confirmed by any international body, but only seems to be emphasizing the problem-solving through negotiation and that the Korean peninsula be free of nuclear weapons. The timing of the declaration is also interesting. Though Kim Gye Gwan, Vice Foreign Affairs Minister of the DPRK, mentioned to U.S. Congressman Curt Weldon during his visit to the DPRK last January that North Korea was a state in possession of nuclear weapons, President George W. Bush made only about a two-line reference to the North Korean issue in his annual State of the Union Address. Pyongyang may have regarded this as indifference on the U.S. part, and thus decided it needed a special measure to raise some eyebrows over in Washington. Moreover, there were other burdensome factors -- such as the spreading suspicion of nuclear material transactions between North Korea and Libya, Japan's move toward economic sanctions on account of Japanese society's anger over the forgery of the Megumi Yokota remains, pressure from the international community, and the like - that may have induced Pyongyang to try and reverse the situation. In this way, I believe the declaration of February 10 was a measure utilized to raise U.S. interest through brinkmanship tactics, tighten inner solidarity, and reverse the disadvantageous situation.

The U.S. reaction to North Korea's declaration has been consistent neglect. The United States seems to be emphasizing the six-party talks format as a way to erase the recognition that the United States can have conversation with North Korea, but not negotiations, while at the same time strengthen its pressure on China to reopen the talks. And although South Korea is guilty of underestimating the declaration, its practical behavior is more understandable, since escalation of crisis on the peninsula has a direct negative impact on South Korea's economy.

Merely because the protraction of North Korea's nuclear problem increases tension on the Korean peninsula and the one who is exposed to its results most is South Korea, the ROK diplomatic action must be doubled.

On the problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons, the most important thing above all is peaceful resolution of the issue through conversation based on the principle of denuclearization of the peninsula. The Six-Party Talks must be held as soon as possible to achieve this. North Korea's strategy and brinkmanship, the U.S. hard-line strategy and neglect are already well acquainted with

each other. Since both North Korea and the United States know exactly what each other wants to get, the conversion toward a win-win negotiable attitude based on concession is needed. Of course, the other states involved in the talks should provide enough effort and wisdom to promote a win-win strategy.

The South Korean government, as a concerned party, should double its effort toward the following. First of all, we should strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance. This will be important as we move forward. Second, we should maintain the South-North reconciliation cooperation. To achieve it, there must be economic cooperation and ongoing delivery of humanitarian aid to North Korea. The United States spends millions of dollars for remains exhumation in the DPRK. South Korean humanitarian aid must come without any hesitation. In this case, it may be prudent to explore the possibility of creating a linkage between humanitarian aid and inter-Korean talks. In addition, it is urgent to secure channels toward North Korea whether through private organizations or through a third country. Third, South Korea should strengthen the cooperation between Japan, China, and Russia. A post-resolution plan is needed. To script one successfully, it is necessary to cooperate with these countries. Fourth, though it is an internal matter, we need supra-partisan cooperation on the policy toward North Korea and consistent transmission of the policy message. The effect of such policy is maximized when agreement, goals, approach, procedure, and so on are achieved regardless of whether they come from the ruling or opposition party. Such would be particularly helpful to convince North Korea and could have a more powerful driving force, but only if this consensus goes beyond each government level.

Peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula depend primarily on the efforts of the two Koreas. The situation could be positive or negative according to how they manage it. The year 2005 is very meaningful for both South and North, since it is their 60th year of Independence, and the 5th year of the June 15 Joint Declaration. This year, I expect that we will be able to settle peace on the peninsula more firmly through economic development, improvement of the South-North relationship, and resolution of the North Korea nuclear problem.

### **III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses**

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: [napsnet-reply@nautilus.org](mailto:napsnet-reply@nautilus.org) . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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