Policy Forum 10-041: Will North Korea Be Able to Overcome the Third Wave of Its Collapse?


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Policy Forum 10-041: July 27th, 2010

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I. Introduction


Suk Hi Kim, Professor of Finance and Editor of North Korean Review at the University of Detroit Mercy, addresses the problem of the third wave of the North Korean collapse in the first decade of the 2000s and asks if North Korea will overcome it. The author explains that a combination of unique cultural and historical factors, including the part played by Neo-Confucianism, the principle of self-reliance (Juche), and the military-first policy (Songun), have contributed to the survival of the crisis-ridden and impoverished North Korean state in the post-Soviet era. Examining these factors in conjunction with established prediction scenarios, the paper argues that the collapse of North Korea in the near future is an unlikely event. Because North Korea will be around for sometime to come, confidence-building initiatives are needed to resolve longstanding security, energy, and economic issues between the country, the major powers, and other regional actors.
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-"Will North Korea Be Able to Overcome the Third Wave of Its Collapse?"
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Introduction

In the first decade of the 2000s, North Korea has faced the third wave of its collapse, a phenomenon triggered by food shortages, failed currency-economic reforms, and Kim Jong Il's declining health. The first wave occurred in the 1980s, when the North Korean economy spiraled downward as chief allies—the Soviet Union and China—discontinued new loans and demanded payment for outstanding debts. The second wave came in the late 1990s, when the great North Korean famine claimed anywhere between 200,000 and 3,000,000 lives. Every Communist country either collapsed or carried out significant economic reforms following the fall of the Soviet Union, except for North Korea. Renewed speculation of a North Korean collapse has come from numerous intelligence analysts, scholars, think tank specialists, and relief organizations.[1] Why should one assume that North Korea, the only Communist country today without significant economic reforms, can defeat the pattern of history and survive? [2]

The termination of the Cold War in 1991 and the onset of food shortages in North Korea strengthened the widespread belief that, just like East Germany, the Pyongyang regime was doomed. The persistence of this belief, especially by the United States and its allies, is the main

reason why they failed to develop a coherent long-term policy toward North Korea. Instead, these actors have relied on short-term fixes while waiting for a collapse. Admittedly, there may be several similarities in the recent histories of Korea and Germany, even commonalities in the last fifty years, but a collapse of North Korea is unlikely anytime soon.[3]
Similarities between the two nations include the occupation and division of societies with a long history, the Cold War and participation in the Soviet alliance and trading bloc, tensions between a dictatorial Communist system and a liberal capitalist system, and a traumatized sense of postwar national identity. When predicting a collapse, however, many observers overlook the unique cultural and historical factors that distinguish the two nations. The Soviet military occupation imposed an alien totalitarian Stalinist model in East Germany, whereas Stalinist totalitarianism in North Korea was reinforced by centuries of feudal autocracy and guided by Neo-Confucianism and the concept of national self-reliance (Juche). On the basis of Neo-Confucian and Juche principles, along with socio-historical factors, North Korea might experience longevity, contrary to widespread assumptions that the country will collapse in the conceivable future, thus justifying a strong case for a new way of thinking about the possible solution of the United States-North Korean nuclear standoff.

Neo-Confucianism
Before the division of the Korean peninsula in August 1945, Korea was home to a population with tendencies of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, coupled with a history of exclusionism as a result of numerous invasions and territorial claims by powerful countries, for example, the Chinese and Mongol empires and, in more recent history, the Japanese Empire. That is a legacy with reverberations in North Korea today. Besides pre-modern and twentieth-century imperialism, a history of Neo-Confucianism and a top-down bureaucratic and administrative structure continue to assert influence in North Korean governance. Confucianism, the source of Korean Neo-Confucianism, is an ideology and value system rooted in ancient China and derived from the social-political philosophy of K'ung Fu Tzu (551–479 BC), better known as Confucius. Born during a period of social crisis in the Chinese Empire, Confucius was deeply concerned by the unstable state of affairs in his country and sought the reformation of Chinese social life.

As a secular political-philosophical doctrine, Confucianism promotes a value system based on harmony in human relations structured around the so-called "three bonds and five relations." The three bonds are (1) ruler-minister, (2) parent-child, and (3) husband-wife. The five relations are (1) ruler-subject, (2) father-son, (3) husband-wife, (4) elder-younger brothers, and (5) friend-friend. These relations are based on ideals of righteousness, affection, respect, faithfulness, and the separation of social functions. Societies deeply affected by Confucian ethics and statecraft include, most notably, the Northeast Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea. Politically, Confucianism promotes a type of virtuocracy (government by virtue), emphasizing moral education, self-cultivation, family regulation, and harmony in social relationships.[4]

Confucius had some 3,000 disciples who recorded his thought in volumes of commentary and dialogs. Although the philosopher and his followers traveled throughout China as political advisors, Confucius never held a government position to test his theories. He lived primarily as an itinerant scholar and teacher. Despite the fact that Confucius avoided metaphysical and supernatural questions for human affairs, social order, and good government, his thought nevertheless came to function as a substitute religion. Subsequent followers venerated the sage and his greatest disciplines, such as the Neo-Confucian Chu Hsi (1130–1200), in an effort to spread Confucian doctrine.

Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism, introduced to Korea in the fourteenth century, became the predominant philosophical system of the Choson dynasty (1392–1910) and greatly influenced the political and social order of the peninsula. The ethical and social-political philosophy was accepted so eagerly

and strictly by the Koreans that the Chinese came to regard Korea as "the country of Eastern decorum."[5]
Neo-Confucianism thoroughly influenced education, ceremony, and civil administration. More specifically, the doctrine became the guiding precept of the state, presiding over social reform and the development of judicial systems. The deeply ingrained legacy of Neo-Confucianism is still an important feature of Korean life, and South Korean academics, for example, attempt to make Confucian values relevant to modern, post-industrial society, stressing reverence for learning and culture, social stability, and respect for the past. Korea is thus a nation built on strictly defined relationships centered on the idea that one person is naturally superior to another. Several factors determine status, and the social rules are so extensive that there is nearly always something to distinguish two people. Even the firstborn among twins has superior status. While determining social status can be complex, Koreans know how to identify their place in the vertical social hierarchy.

The Neo-Confucian tradition in Korea also includes worship of ancestors, continuity of family bloodlines, and proper burial of patriarchs and matriarchs. Burial of an ancestor is of considerable importance in Korean Neo-Confucianism. That is because the place of rest of the deceased is believed to affect posterity. Therefore, "ancestral remains are sometimes moved to a more propitious location several years after internment. This is especially true if a lack of preparation or a lack of financial resources mandated less than suitable arrangements at the time of death."[6]

Respect for the dead also comes in the form of continued ancestral rites and memorial ceremonies. Many South Koreans, for instance, hold memorial rites for their deceased parents before important events in the belief that the duly departed can help them obtain their wishes. South Korean presidential candidates have even visited their parents' graves beseeching good fortune. Also, in an April 10, 2010 case, former Prime Minister Han Myung-sook visited the grave of President Rho Moo-hyun when a Seoul court dismissed bribery charges against her. She said she visited Rho's grave to express appreciation for his help in the court finding her not guilty. Han served as a primer minister under Rho, who committed suicide on May 23, 2009, following bribery charges that tarnished his reputation.

Since the beginning of Japanese colonialism over Korea in 1910, the U.S.-Soviet liberation and division of the peninsula in 1945, the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, and the post-Korean War period, Neo-Confucianism has had a continued historical presence in Korea. Despite sixty years of nationally adapted Marxism-Leninism, North Korea still consciously appropriates the Neo-Confucian traditions of political centralization and obedience to authority. Neo-Confucianism, like its predecessor Confucianism, teaches that every person has a place in the social order and that the preservation of harmony in society is paramount. Under the influence of Neo-Confucian thought, inferiors in North Korea are expected to be obedient to superiors and superiors benevolent to inferiors. In practice, the obedience component is emphasized over the benevolence component in order to maintain the status quo. In addition, the emphasis on preserving harmony results in a lack of mobility between levels in the social hierarchy. Especially since the 1970s, the regime of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il has consciously sought to wrap itself in the mantle of pre-modern Neo-Confucian values. The state constantly depicts the late leader and his son-successor as benevolent fathers of the nation. North Korean propaganda also refers to the country as one large family. Appeals for social and political support use metaphors designed to draw on the feelings of duty toward one's parents, seeking to transfer these feelings to a national father figure.[7]

As a result of the peculiar historical situation on the Korean peninsula, the tightly controlled North Korean system has lasted longer than any other twentieth-century dictatorship, with the North Korean leadership carrying over traditions of centralized authority inherited from the Neo-Confucian

Korean dynasties of the past.

Principle of Self-Reliance (Juche)
Under the auspices of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, Juche, not to mention its recent development as Songun (military-first) ideology, has served as the programmatic guide for North Korean politics. Officially, Juche was conceived by Kim Il Sung, who is described in the 2009 constitution as "a genius in ideology and theory." The word Juche (zhǔtǐ in Chinese) literally means agent, main part, subject. The first Chinese character ju/zhǔ means master, lord, primary, to host, to own. The second Chinese character (che/tǐ) means body, form, style, system. Kim Il Sung's first major official use of Juche appeared in his December 28, 1955, party speech in opposition to the Soviet campaign of "de-Stalinization" (bureaucratic self-reform), "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing the Subject in Ideological Work." Kim declared that the "subject" (juche) of the party ideological program was the Korean revolution, and he maintained a core belief in national self-determination and national pride. Thus, Soviet Marxist-Leninism was adapted to Korean conditions rather than accepted wholesale. Since China saved North Korea during the Korean War and Soviet and Eastern Bloc aid rebuilt the war-shattered national economy, North Korea was never regarded in the Western press to possess complete national self-determination. Dependence on fraternal aid and military support also confirms that the autarkic state was never, for that matter, a completely self-sufficient country.

The Juche slogan eventually emerged as an independent line and doctrine of national self-reliance in response to the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. As is well known, Kim advanced three key principles of Juche in his April 14, 1965, speech "On Socialist Construction and the South Korean Revolution in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea." These principles are (1) independence in politics (chaju), (2) self-sustenance in the economy (charip), and (3) self-defense in national defense (chawi). Kim Jong Il, who was officially designated as Kim's successor in 1980, transformed Juche into a cult ideology from the mid-1970s. Not being an economist, military man, or political leader, his role was to interpret and propagandize his father's doctrine and manage cultural affairs. Kim Jong Il was accountable to no one except Kim Il Sung and made Juche a fundamental belief in all matters.[8]

Since its inception in 1955, Juche has undergone several pragmatic revisions, as seen in republished works by the Kims. Revision of authoritative texts is a common practice in North Korea, making the works consistent with and thereby justifying the changing political tactics. Ideologically, Juche is inseparable from socialism in the eyes of most North Koreans and is considered the only way the masses of people can maintain national independence. Yet, whatever modifications have been made in Juche over the past fifty-five years, the North Korean commitment to the program of nationally self-contained socialism has never changed.

Juche has several functions: (1) it serves to maintain the political independence of North Korea in the international community; (2) it simultaneously indoctrinates citizens to be loyal followers of the leader and to believe that they are the "masters of society"; (3) it promotes popular solidarity by uniting the people as a modern Neo-Confucian family headed by the "father leader" and "mother party"; (4) it justifies the North Korean conception of socialism amid economic decline in the post-Soviet era; and (5) finally, under adverse material conditions since the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, it gives the people a reason to live, even to die for the regime. Apparently, most North Koreans seem to support Juche in principle. National pride and the desire to safeguard independence characterize all modern nations, and national self-sufficiency appeals to people in general, even though the world economic system makes it objectively necessary for national economies to operate interdependently.

Despite the apparent public support for Juche in principle, the North Korean leadership exploits it to

preserve its own social interests. Juche is literally attached to anything sanctioned by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. For example, there is Juche art for the state-approved style, Juche farming for the prescribed planting of crops, and Juche steel for the steelmaking process. These notions create the idea that North Korea is self-sufficient. Unfortunately, Juche is an anchor that prevents the state from moving forward. Although it is propagated in the media and in classrooms, regular North Koreans often do not observe Juche teachings in day-to-day life. Nevertheless, the ideology exerts considerable influence on North Korean domestic and foreign policy. With Neo-Confucian elements, nationalist populism, and a quasi-religious appeal, Juche explains in part why the North Korean regime is able to command popular support in the eroding totalitarian system.

The North Korean economy continues to apply the three ideological principles of Juche. Even though the regime has made concessions to capitalism since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is being structurally reintegrated into the international profit system, the 2009 revised North Korean constitution still maintains that "the means of production are owned by the state and social cooperative organizations." State ownership of industries and enterprises continues to be a cornerstone of the system. Therefore, although farmers, for example, have begun producing crops privately, most farms operate as collectives under government supervision. Furthermore, while central control of the economy is eroding, the state still formulates coordinated plans for production growth and balanced national economic development. As per the Juche principle of self-sustenance in economy, self-contained socialist production relations are based on an independent national economy. The result of Juche economics is that trade volume in 2008 was 3,820 million dollars (1/244th that of South Korea), and the nominal gross national income (GNI) was 27,347 billion won (1/38th that of South Korea).[9]

Military-First Policy (Songun)[10]
Songun (military-first) policy is a North Korean adaptation of Juche to the present domestic and world political situation and places the Korean People's Army at the head of state and economic affairs. As with Juche ideology, Songun advocates self-reliance, national familism, and patriarchalism. The military-first policy was introduced in the North Korean media in 1998; however, official North Korean histories have backdated it to a visit Kim Jong Il made to a military unit in 1995, even claiming the policy originated with Kim Il Sung in the 1930s anti-colonial guerrilla struggle against Imperial Japan. Coming after the death of Kim senior, Songun legitimizes rule under Kim Jong Il and the National Defense Commission, which became the highest organ of the state in 1998, contemporaneous with the inauguration of the military-first policy.

Why Songun? Although many explanations have been offered as to why North Korea has adopted Songun as its primary ideology, the views tend to fall into two general categories: external affairs and internal affairs. The first view points to the need to increase military strength in response to a precarious international situation. In this sense, Songun is perceived as an aggressive policy that privileges the North Korean military at the expense of other sectors of society. This argument points to the chain of crises that afflicted North Korea with the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the great famine in the late 1990s. The second view focuses on internal politics as the reason behind the military-first policy. When Kim Il Sung died in 1994, the two most important positions held by his son, Kim Jong Il, were supreme commander of the Korean People's Army and chairman of the National Defense Commission. Consequently, Kim sidelined other areas of government and used the armed forces to consolidate personal power.

When North Korea adopted its revised constitution in 1998, the chairmanship of the NDC was elevated to the highest position of state authority. This new position gave Kim Jong Il a basis to legitimize his power. Under Songun, three functions of the military are as follows: (1) the military must live and die with the leader to the end; (2) the military will achieve its assigned goals at all

costs; and (3) the most admirable quality of a soldier is to stay with the leader to defend the nation. Because Songun is now pervasive in North Korea and deeply integrated into the lives of the masses, it is highly unlikely that the North Korean regime will collapse as a result of an internal rebellion.[11]

Songun also accommodates possession and production of nuclear weapons to ensure governance of the North Korean state. There is the concern that the longer the military-first ideology guides North Korea, the U.S. and its allies will be less able to coax the regime into relinquishing its nuclear arsenal and program. In addition, North Korea could perceive insistence to denuclearize as a threat to the ruling position of the military elite, thus casting doubt that North Korea will ever give up its nuclear weapons program. The military-first policy formulates domestic politics, foreign policy, and decision making in North Korea.

Analysts assert that Songun has been instrumental in transforming the country into a nuclear-armed state, despite international sanctions and worsening economic conditions. The core concepts of Songun are consistent with the presumed conviction in North Korea that only a "nuclear deterrent," to the use the North Korean phrase, will prevent a U.S. invasion. Some experts argue that North Korea will never surrender its nuclear weapons under any concessions with the U.S. and its allies. According to some observers, the foremost goal of North Korea until the 1990s was reunification of the Korean Peninsula on its own terms. Since then, however, regime survival with the military-first policy has replaced reunification as the single most important prerogative of the state. Can North Korea survive as a sovereign country? Most analysts think that depends on its future economic conditions and problems. With dissolution of the Soviet Union, North Korea began appealing for and accepting humanitarian assistance from the U.N. and other donor countries, extracted economic aid through brinkmanship diplomacy and missile tests, established a number of capitalist Special Economic Zones to attract foreign investment, allegedly earned a substantial amount of cash through narcotics sales, and carried out limited economic reforms. In other words, North Korea has made numerous small attempts to jumpstart its ailing economy, but these measures have been superficial and completely inadequate for pulling the economy out of its nosedive.

On October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, becoming the ninth member of the international "nuclear club." A second test with the same magnitude of the U.S. atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945 was conducted on May 25, 2009, at an unconfirmed location. A number of missile tests followed. Afterwards, the U.N. Security Council voted unanimously on June 12 to expand and tighten sanctions against North Korea. Altogether, the U.N., the U.S., and its allies have taken a series of hard-line actions (e.g., tougher sanctions and a stronger proliferation security initiative) to punish North Korea. Rather than being anything new, this is a continuation of policies that began with U.S. sanctions against North Korea on June 28, 1950, three days after the outbreak of the Korean War, in an attempt to destabilize the North Korean regime. Has the latest hard-line stance worked, or will it work? If history repeats itself, the new round of sanctions are bound to fail. Sanctions and other hard-line measures have been largely ineffective in forcing North Korea to change its domestic and foreign policy.

North Korea watchers who are anticipating the collapse of the state in the near future are encouraged to read The Art of War, an influential Chinese military manual written by Sun Tzu (ca. 544–496 BC) in the sixth century during the Warring States period (475–221 BC). Sun Tzu was a strategist and pragmatist committed to efficient and decisive military operations. His thirteen-chapter work examines different aspects of war, such as strategy, planning, and psychological warfare, and is a standard military text with a profound influence in Northeast Asian history. Sun Tzu, moreover, has had an important presence in the West since his introduction in the nineteenth century, and he is even studied in American military colleges. Given its historical and military

significance, The Art of War is, no doubt, a work that is read in North Korea and likely instrumental in the logic behind the North Korean military-first policy.

Prediction Scenarios

Most North Korean experts divide predictions for North Korea into three broad scenarios: war, collapse, and the continuation of a two-state peninsula with some reform.[12]

The U.S. is unlikely to attack North Korea, in view of the logistic and political problems it is confronting with the military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. North Korea will also not likely attack South Korea, because that would inevitably turn into a bigger war involving the U.S. and China, spelling the end of North Korea as it is known today. If the U.S. foresees North Korea as either collapsing or giving up its nuclear weapons through a policy of economic strangulation, the odds of success seem remote. Realistically, the most likely scenario in any conceivable future appears to be the continuation of a two-state peninsula with limited reforms, largely because China and South Korea presently wish to maintain North Korea as a viable buffer state.

One should ask why repeated collapse predictions by Western experts have not materialized in the North Korean case. If one studies reports prior to the North Korean missile and nuclear tests, one sees that some experts predicted that the country would not conduct these tests. North Korea is not conforming to analysis. Of course, North Korea is not the only case study in which social science predictions have failed. One can observe predictions preceding elections in countries worldwide and see results that are sometimes completely different from original forecasts. Forecasts concerning the Iraqi attack on Kuwait or the Chinese intervention in the Korean War are examples of how social science researchers can err. Miscalculations by analysts and incorrect predictions in the North Korean case occur for several specific reasons. Alon Levkowitz, a professor of international relations at the Tel Aviv University, has listed eleven reasons why Western experts are unable to make accurate forecasts about countries such as Iraq and North Korea: (1) analogies, (2) cold war mentality, (3) determinism, (4) idiosyncratic events, (5) lack of facts, (6) political bias, (7) psychological warfare, (8) too many variables, (9) terminology or translation problems, (10) Western-style logic, and (11) wishful thinking.[13]

How can the U.S., China, and other countries that do not want a nuclear North Korea maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula? The above discussion has ruled out predictions of unification through collapse or unification through military defeat. In addition, China will never allow the U.S. to unite the Korean peninsula on American terms. Western experts and policymakers will benefit from studying cultural, historical, political, and situational factors in order to see why what happened in East Germany is unlikely to be repeated in North Korea in the conceivable future. Unlike the East German case, attention should be given to the fact that North Korea has become increasingly dependent on China as its greatest economic benefactor—negotiating economic aid, inward investment, foreign trade, and political support—especially now that the Six-Party Talks are at a standstill and with U.S. and UN economic sanctions. There is no doubt that Chinese aids and support is designed to prevent a sudden North Korean collapse.

Chinese objectives toward North Korea are geared towards protecting Chinese national interests. That makes military-strategic environment, border security and stability, and economic development and political stability in bordering North Korean provinces a vital necessity. Understandably, international efforts to bring about a North Korean crisis or foreign regime change will face Chinese resistance. Although Chinese calculations for intervention are unknown, China will become involved and restore stability and political order in North Korea if circumstances run out of control.[14] Therefore, complete downfall in the third wave of the North Korean collapse might be wishful thinking on the part of those who want to see the country abandon its nuclear weapons program. Ironically, the U.S. strangulation policy may actually increase the probability that Pyongyang will produce more nuclear weapons and sell such weapons to the highest international bidder so as to

replenish the impoverished North Korean economy. Oddly enough, the U.S., its allies, and several North Korean experts maintain that the U.S. should provide economic aid and security assurances—replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace treaty—only after nuclear disablement in North Korea and settlement of the nuclear deadlock. That is something the North Korean regime is unlikely to accept.

The problem is that the U.S. and North Korea have been key enemies since the Korean War and naturally do not trust each other. Washington demands that North Korea destroy all its nuclear weapons in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner before substantial rewards are delivered. Pyongyang, however, insists that only if the U.S. first provides economic assistance and a security guarantee, will it gradually dismantle its nuclear weapons.[15]
In view of the cold facts, the U.S. and its allies should acknowledge that North Korea will not collapse, nor will it surrender its nuclear weapons until the country gets what it wants. North Korea, too, should acknowledge that the U.S. and its allies will not give economic aid and security assurances until the country abandons its nuclear program. Psychiatrists explain that the most difficult part of their job is to convince their patients that they have problems beyond their control and need professional help. Likewise, some type of mechanism is needed to convince the U.S. and North Korea to admit that each party will never accept the other's demands, thus enabling each side to understand their respective positions more objectively. The problem is that any type of mechanism for such a task requires years of confidence-building.

Building Mutual Confidence

In the middle of a precarious and tough regional neighborhood, divided Korea stands as a pivot. History and geography have consigned the peninsula to the position of a highly contested strategic crossroads, the site of over a century of collisions between great power interests. Yet the four major powers—China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S—will eventually have to work together, because they will need each other's help on Korean issues for their national security, energy security, and economic security needs. Where North Korea is concerned, it is imperative for one to step back and see the forest instead of the trees. The North Korean nuclear standoff must be taken on the premise that the U.S. and respective Northeast Asian countries will have to learn to work together. First, they have no other choice but to resolve the nuclear standoff through peaceful negotiations, since a nuclear North Korea poses a greater threat than that posed by the Middle East. Second, the Northeast Asian countries are likely to cooperate for their national energy security, as the region is home to major energy consumers, such as China, as well as major energy producers, such as Russia. The U.S. is likely to support such regional cooperation because it does not want these countries to depend excessively on Middle Eastern oil. Third, scholars argue that Northeast Asia is a region that has every possibility of becoming the best trading bloc in the future, given Japanese capital and technology, Chinese labor, Russian natural resources, and the Korean work ethic. In addition, the Northeast Asian countries and the U.S. have already had close economic ties for many years and are increasingly interdependent economically. Eventually, these factors are likely to compel the China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the U.S. to collaborate on security, energy, and economic issues, even if they have some differences.

An important implication of U.S. relations with North Korea is the impact of those relations on other nations in the region. If North Korea were to face political and economic problems beyond its control as a consequence of U.S. containment, there is a possibility, even if remote, that the threatened and desperate state could invade the South. North Korea, to be sure, has frequently declared that it will not capitulate without bringing South Korea into a conflict. With Seoul located a mere 25 miles below the Demilitarized Zone, it would be impossible to shield the city from North Korean artillery bombardment. Even without a direct invasion of the South, a hypothetical collapse of North Korea through U.S. containment policies would lead to insurmountable problems for South Korea. In short, North Korea stands as one of the few countries in the world that could involve the

four major powers in major military operations. In view of the gravity of the situation, it is important for North Korea watchers to take a long-term view on North Korean affairs and promote mutual confidence-building initiatives.

If the land bridge that passes through North Korea were to be restored, not only Northeast Asian countries but also other parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe could be connected through a land transportation network with highways, railroads, and undersea tunnels. Such a network would open the possibility of direct travel between Tokyo and London by train, car, and truck. But before a transportation network comes into being, confidence-building with North Korea and billions in investments in its degraded rail and highway systems are needed. Of course, this future may not be possible until North Korea compromises on its nuclear weapons program and resolves reported human rights abuses. Such moves will help build public support in South Korea and other countries for substantial investment and enable international development aid.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the longevity of North Korea, owed to cultural, historical, political, and situational factors, and its role in Northeast Asia justify a strong case for a new way of thinking about the possible solution of the U.S.-North Korea nuclear standoff. Presently, no stable and authoritative institution exists for the deliberation and development of multilateral security, energy, and economic cooperation in Northeast Asia. One potential candidate for the role of driving Northeast Asian energy and economic cooperation is the Six-Party Talks, informally established to solve the nuclear dispute. Given the vital role of energy supply and economic growth in stabilizing the Korean peninsula, it is conceivable that the Six-Party Talks grouping could develop into a more formal economic institution even before solutions to present challenges emerge. For example, the six participating countries could establish some sort of standing committee under the auspices of the U.N. for negotiations over the nuclear standoff, along with other issues. Six-party talks and bilateral talks have produced quite a few agreements, but not all of them have materialized, mainly because these agreements have been reached in a hurry without confidence-building. The European Union provides another precedent, as its origin lies in political and security concerns.[16]

Although Asia does not have a strong trading bloc like the North American Free Trade Agreement or the European Union, it does have two loose affiliations: ASEAN Plus Three and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Created in 1967, ASEAN consists of Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. The ASEAN Plus Three was institutionalized in 1999 when ASEAN leaders and their Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean counterparts issued a Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation at their Third ASEAN Plus Three Summit in Manila. Formed in 1989, APEC includes the China, Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. ASEAN Plus Three and APEC do not, however, focus on contemporary issues in Northeast Asia. Economic patterns are complementary and can be transformed into a force that drives regional cooperation. North Korea can also become a potential market, because it is one of only a few countries still untapped by multinational and transnational corporations.

The establishment of a development bank, a “North Korean Bank for Reconstruction and Development,” may be another workable idea to resolve the half-century-old U.S.-North Korean conflict. This bank can be funded by the China, South Korea, the U.S., and other countries. But for political credibility and stability, it may be better for it to be run by three countries, namely, China, the U.S., and a neutral third country, such as Switzerland. The bank can encourage development and construction in North Korea through loans, guarantees, and equity investments in private and public companies. The establishment of such a bank may convince North Korea that other member countries are indeed ready to provide a security guarantee and economic aid in exchange for the abandonment of its nuclear program.

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IV. Nautilus invites your responses

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