

Strategies for Positive Engagement with North Korea*

Haangsok JUNG

Abstract

Arguing against the view that “coercive measures” or “neglect approaches” work, this article suggests ways to utilize “positive engagement” as a cooperative measure for reducing threats and facilitating the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Thus far, tactics for avoiding lethal confrontation on the Korean peninsula have been based heavily on coercion with a lack of genuine negotiation, and such measures are clearly unstable and conflict-prone. Instead, the positive engagement approach aims to achieve the peaceful transformation and social rehabilitation of North Korea. In order to prevent future conflict, the self-imposed isolation of North Korea and the antagonistic attitude of Pyongyang must be subverted through a judicious combination of aid and deterrence. North Korea must be encouraged to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, with a strong emphasis on transparency. The most appropriate policy for effectively dealing with North Korea is a bold, open approach that combines positive engagement with a genuine willingness to negotiate, with the ultimate goal of preventing nuclear proliferation and other potentially dangerous situations. In this context, the “Nunn-Lugar” concept may be a viable option, allowing supervising states to enact control measures that are very difficult to reverse.

Keywords: North Korea, positive engagement, Nunn-Lugar, nuclear security, risk avoidance, joint consortium

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-35C-2011-2-B00066).

Haangsok JUNG is Adjunct Professor of Politics at Chonbuk National University. E-mail: abc@jbnu.ac.kr.

Introduction

In the last 20 years, has the nuclear threat on the Korean peninsula been reduced at all? How much progress has been made by holding fast to the strategies of “coercive measures” or “neglect approaches”? In light of the Global Zero campaign for nuclear disarmament, every nation should strive to detect and prohibit potential infringements upon the conventions governing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). But thus far, there has been little to no success regulating such weapons, even among nations that are not particularly powerful, such as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (hereafter, North Korea) (Baldwin 1971; K. Kim 2006).

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have been consistently heightening, as North Korea has continued its nuclear program unabated, even amidst the relative insecurity of its ruling regime and the overall volatility of the global nuclear society. Perhaps the most disconcerting is the fact that official talks between Washington and Pyongyang have continually stalled.¹ Under the influence of some aggressive foreign policy commentators, the United States has grown very disinterested in negotiating with North Korea and continues to pursue a needlessly coercive engagement policy (K. Kim 2007). During multilateral talks in September 2005, February 2007, and February 2012, North Korea pledged to dismantle its existing nuclear program in return for economic aid, security guarantees, and diplomatic recognition, but no further steps were taken. In fact, at this critical stage, the negotiations were put on hold. The two countries are

1. For example, after the agreements of February 29, 2012, North Korea launched an earth observation satellite on April 16, 2012, which failed to enter its preset orbit. The United States termed North Korea’s plan to launch an earth observation satellite as “highly provocative.” Then, in December 2012, North Korea declared that it would launch another earth observation satellite during its founder’s centennial celebration. The United States again denounced the planned launch as a violation of existing agreements, and suspended its commitment to provide food aid. North Korea responded by declaring that it would nullify the February 29 agreement and then conducted a third nuclear test on February 12, 2013. A similar launch in 2009 drew criticism from the United States and its allies, and led to UN Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874. This was similar to the situations in 2009 and 2012, all before their agreements fell apart.

hardly on common ground because neither have gotten what they expected: i.e., North Korea's stop to its nuclear programs and the United States's provision of security and aid guarantees in return. So far, the United States insists that North Korea should end its nuclear weapons program—i.e., it has not only a weapons program, but also nuclear weapons themselves—in return for security guarantees and energy supplies. Washington adds that they must first see Pyongyang's commitment to scrap its nuclear weapons program while North Korea insists it is the United States that must first provide security and aid guarantees. The dispute over the order of the trade has become the source of all the subsequent problems today.

Presumably, the launches in 2012 were aimed at pressuring Washington into one-on-one talks with Pyongyang, something North Korea has been requesting for years. But the United States has preferred to handle the North Korean nuclear issue with the participation of North Korea's neighbors. In this way, Pyongyang seems to read the countenance of Washington and follow the response of the United States by becoming more agreeable when the United States cooperates and more antagonistic when the United States reneges on an agreement (Sigal 2005, 41). Thus, some form of retaliation seemed imminent, and indeed, North Korea conducted a third nuclear weapon test as a way of "getting attention" from Washington and its allies.²

In public diplomacy, "engagement" signifies a method or process for implementing policy. Unfortunately, the term has been obfuscated by policymakers and commentators. Over the past two decades, several versions of engagement policy have been put forth in an effort to develop a more

2. In February 2012, Pyongyang agreed to suspend nuclear tests and allow the IAEA back in to monitor activities at Yongbyon, possibly paving the way for the resumption of multilateral talks. However, North Korea's launch of a long-range rocket in December 2012 was widely viewed as a test of ballistic missile technology. The incident triggered a UN Security Council that placed broader sanctions on the Kim Jong-un regime. In response, North Korea carried out its third nuclear test that had doubled the force of the 2009 explosion. The act drew international condemnation from the six-party powers, including China and Russia. For more on this, see Jayshree Bajoria, "The Six-Party Talks on North Korea's Nuclear Program," last modified March 8, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/proliferation/six-party-talks-north-koreas-nuclear-program/p13593>.

effective approach towards North Korea, but virtually all of these strategies ended up relying on conventional terms. Today, there are two predominant views with regard to South Korea's engagement policy towards North Korea. One perspective is that the existing engagement policy has failed to change the perverse attitude and militaristic nature of North Korea. Policies of peaceful engagement with North Korea have been denounced for their limited effectiveness³ and high economic costs for South Korea (Yoo 2011). Thus, some critics have claimed that the use of the term "engagement" can only be cynical or naive, and has become associated with rewarding bad behavior. On the other hand, arguments for a new type of engagement policy are emerging, based on the observation that North Korea seems amenable to persuasion. Indeed, with its crippled economy, North Korea requires more assistance than China alone can provide, leading Pyongyang to reach out to Seoul, Washington, and other global powers. In particular, North Korea's pursuit of engagement has primarily been motivated by the incentive of possible assistance from South Korea and the United States.

Obviously, with North Korea, engagement policies based on intervention, isolation/containment, and "rollback" have proven to be ineffective. For example, the administrations of Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun actively pursued more cooperative engagement policies with North Korea, aimed at ending the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula and gradually increasing Pyongyang's economic dependency on Seoul (K. Kim 2007; Ha 2009; Park and Cheong 2009). Advocates of this type of engagement believe that thawing North Korea's antagonism is an essential step to defusing their attempts at nuclear proliferation. However, for major changes to be made within North Korea, radical action must be undertaken, similar to that which undermined the communist regimes in China and Vietnam.

3. Park Jinho, "Refreshing Our Understandings of North Korea before Approaching Its New Leader Kim Jong-un," last modified August 23, 2012, <http://blog.keia.org/2012/08/refreshing-our-understandings-of-north-korea-before-approaching-its-new-leader-kim-jong-un/>.

Notably, however, advocates of such engagement remain subdivided into various camps, differing primarily due to opinions regarding the rate and direction of engagement. Thus far, Pyongyang has not embarked on significant or even incremental changes in its agenda, and the cooperative engagement policies (e.g., the Sunshine Policy) have been harshly criticized in South Korea. Moreover, engagement with North Korea seems to be sliding lower and lower on Washington's priority list. In retrospect, however, under the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Bill Clinton, the engagement approach to North Korea was relatively effective at controlling the North Korean threat and encouraging North Korea to move forward from its earlier stance (Park and Cheong 2009).

Given this, if nuclear disarmament is to take place on the Korean peninsula, the United States should be encouraged to take a more forward-looking approach. For instance, Pyongyang could be advised that the international community disapproves of nuclear equalizers in North Korea. Meanwhile, Beijing should remind Pyongyang of its food shortage, which could be overcome through aid. Most importantly, in order to prevent them from taking desperate measures, Pyongyang must not feel cornered or threatened. Punitive measures have proven unsuccessful in creating progress for North Korean nuclear disarmament, so policymakers and commentators should prioritize reducing the threat to North Korea by pursuing positive engagement, rather than punitive policies.

There are several reasons why North Korea feels compelled to seek nuclear armament: (1) they view military self-reliance as a necessary security precaution, as demonstrated by the cases of Iraq and Libya in which a lack of military self-reliance compared to their opponents was their main weakness; (2) nuclear weapons would offset North Korea's deficiency in conventional weaponry; (3) nuclear weapons are a powerful bargaining chip in negotiations with the United States; and (4) nuclear weapons are a much needed point of national pride for a country with a weakened military, devastated economy, and antiquated technology. Thus, it is crucial to remember that North Korea is lashing out in order to survive, rather than to conquer.

With regard to North Korea, the United States seems to excel at for-

mulating strategy, but weak at implementing it. Across multiple administrations, the United States has engaged North Korea as an occasional tactic, not as a consistent policy (Byman and Lind 2010; Paik 2012). For the United States, engagement is supposedly geared towards “active participation” and “mutual interests and mutual respect” (United States White House 2010). Thus, engagement can only have a positive effect through peaceful and productive diplomatic practices. By 2007, the Bush administration’s policy had shifted from a coercive approach, known as the “grand strategy,” to negotiated settlement, which would seem to indicate that the coercive policy towards North Korea was not very successful (Yun 2005; T. Kim 2010; Cho 2010, 464). Afterwards, the Bush administration practiced a policy of malign neglect for its final two years, which also did not work. Unlike the Bush administration, the Obama administration revoked the label given by Bush of the Pyongyang regime as an “axis of evil,” but Obama has not backed down from or reversed his predecessor’s policy toward North Korea. Additionally, the Obama administration has still not undertaken steps for resolving the outstanding issues that brought on the six-party talks, which have been stalled since 2008.

Meanwhile, North Korea’s foreign policy is quite predictable. Kim Jong-un is regarded as inexperienced to lead North Korea, and most observers believe that he will simply follow the footsteps of his father and grandfather.⁴ But if North Korea is to remain viable, Kim Jong-un must find a way to procure political and economic benefits for his people. In this situation, if the United States were to lead negotiations by hinting at possible benefits for North Korea, a policy of *positive engagement* could work. Any policy of positive engagement should incorporate concrete steps on how to achieve its objectives.

Amidst the complex array of theories regarding North Korea, this article suggests a bold approach based on positive engagement. Specifically, it

4. Michael J. Green, “Pyongyang’s Options after Kim Jong Il: The Hermit Kingdom’s Quest for Continuity,” last modified December 19, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136965/michael-j-green/pyongyangs-options-after-kim-jong-il>; Lee Sung-Yoon, “The Pyongyang Playbook,” last modified August 26, 2010, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66581/sung-yoon-lee/the-pyongyang-playbook>.

explores why coercive measures are unlikely to reduce the risk from North Korea until certain conditions are met, and proposes positive engagement (e.g., the Cooperative Threat Reduction [CTR] Program, also known as the Nunn-Lugar method)⁵ as a strategy for neutralizing the threat of North Korea and accelerating the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. This article stresses that, in the absence of genuine negotiations, coercive approaches, whether that of malign neglect or patient neglect, for avoiding lethal confrontations have proven to be unstable and prone to conflict. Pseudo-negotiations only lead to pseudo-solutions, rather than legitimate breakthroughs. The immoderate hawk position and the blind commitment to unilateral U.S. military measures are equally undesirable. The most effective option is to combine boldness with a willingness to negotiate, and such an approach must be carefully coordinated and managed in order to prevent any conflict on the Korean peninsula. Ideally, the United States and North Korea should broker a deal that prioritizes the avoidance of risk, establishing a U.S.-North Korea cooperative engagement consortium. Each side would agree to allow a joint consortium to oversee all nuclear facilities and weapons, with a third-party trustee acting as a reserve organization to arbitrate perceived violations of the agreement.

The CTR has many beneficial features. Noticeably, it is not a reward for bad behavior, but rather an encouragement of “defense by other means.” This concept would entail a package deal based on the principle of simultaneous action, which would be difficult to reverse.⁶ For example, the Nunn-Lugar method, which gives total control to supervising states, has been quite successful in some former Soviet states (e.g., Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus) and could prove to be equally effective for North Korea. Although Washington’s sanctions remain in place, North Korea has indicated that it would like to improve bilateral relations in return for a security guarantee from the United States. In this situation, positive engagement is the most desirable course of action to pursue.

5. The Nunn-Lugar method is based on a 1992 U.S. law sponsored by Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar. See <http://www.dtra.mil/Missions/nunn-lugar/nunn-lugar-home.aspx> (accessed August 15, 2013).

6. For one such alternative, see Park (2004).

Roots and Branches of Pyongyang's Brinkmanship

A great deal of debate over North Korea is based on the assumption, either implicit or explicit, that Pyongyang's strategy of brinkmanship is driven by rational decision making. Some, however, have found North Korea's actions to be strange and unreasonable and have thus taken Pyongyang's aggressive behavior as a sign of irrationality, particularly from a state with such weak fundamentals. Pyongyang's odd bargaining behavior has led many to conclude that North Korea was hoping to blackmail Washington into providing economic aid without receiving any concessions in return (Sigal 2001, 3; Cha 2002, 46). Despite the overall weakness of North Korea, the use of brinkmanship tactics (e.g., the nuclear tests on October 9, 2006, May 25, 2009, and February 13, 2013) can more likely be seen as a last-ditch effort to overcome crisis by whatever means possible (Grunau 2004, 100).

Although logic and rationality dictate that international conflict should be avoided when the expected costs exceed the expected benefits, states continually engage in combative behavior, as many political analysts have pointed out (Fearon 1995). In such situations, the involved parties may be either risk averse or risk neutral. Given the constraints facing the country, a closer examination of North Korea's behavior reveals such behavior to be a survival strategy. Grunau (2004, 120) argues that because North Korea depends on nuclear weapons for its survival, it is unwilling to irrevocably surrender them—and the associated bargaining leverage—in exchange for U.S. security guarantees that could be withdrawn at any time. Namely, it seems that North Korea might be facing the fear that the United States might know its next step before it is even taken.⁷

Many outsiders view North Korea's actions as irrational, desperate measures of a regime that does not know how to address its dormant economy and possible collapse through negotiations or long-term policies. In effect, North Korea feels compelled to externally protect and internally consolidate its regime, so its nuclear policy and aggressive

7. On the Bush administration's military posture regarding the Korean peninsula, see Rumsfeld (2002), Przystup (2002), and Perkovich (2003).

stance are tolerated by the people, despite its grave economic situation. Despite his perceived lunacy, Kim Jong-il's behavior was actually quite rational, if we consider that his only goal was political survival (Madden 2003, 3). North Korea regularly criticizes the joint military drills between the United States and South Korea, claiming that the United States is fueling a war-mongering atmosphere, which indicates agitation over unstable security circumstances. North Korea has declared that it would "take preemptive action if any military measures were needed for protecting the security and sovereignty of the country. . . . We also hold the right to execute a self-defensive preemptive action if our security is threatened" (*Chosun Central News Agency*, October 9, 2006). Most analysts liken North Korea to a wounded animal caught in a trap, trying desperately to survive at all costs. North Korea has demanded one-on-one talks with the United States, but Washington has steadfastly refused, preferring the six party talks so that any compromises with Pyongyang can be framed as part of multilateral negotiations. The way Washington deals with Pyongyang affects the respect North Korea desires and the assistance North Korea needs, all the more so when North Korea's hunger for improving its relationship with the United States is more than just necessity.

Switching On and Off

Satisfactory theories for international negotiations are rare, and realistically, it seems unlikely that the problem of nuclear disarmament will ever be fully resolved (Babbage 2004, 17). The North Korea situation is particularly problematic, in that Pyongyang clearly considers nuclear weapons to be essential assets for negotiating its survival. But North Korea's tendency to repeatedly switch the negotiations on and off betrays its deeper anxiety. Why is North Korea so fretful about the negotiation process? Interestingly, while conventional wisdom might consider North Korea's behavior to be irrational, in regards to the negotiating process, they have been remarkably consistent in their *inconsistency*, such that a predictable pattern has emerged.

For more than 20 years, North Korea has regularly switched on and

off during international negotiations. For instance, at the three-party and six-party talks in Beijing, North Korea actively counteracted their initial signs of cooperation and concession by speaking out of turn and agitating the other parties. Such behavior can be attributed solely to North Korea's determination to pursue its unilateral objective without compromise in what it deems to be a zero-sum game. For example, on October 20, 2006, Kim Jong-il said that he regretted his country's nuclear test and wished to return to talks with the United Nations. A Chinese envoy quoted Kim Jong-il as stating, "If the United States makes a concession (to some degree), we will also make a concession (to some degree), whether it be bilateral talks or six-party talks." This sentiment would seem to reflect a level of impatience and anxiety on the part of North Korea. North Korea's inconsistency may be seen as a rather weak attempt to overcome its instability and exert some control over the negotiations, while ostensibly demonstrating their commitment to the process.

North Korea's instability complicates the negotiating process, in that they must try to uphold their socialist structure without risking the loss of critical benefits that might be gained through a diplomatic agreement (Byman and Lind 2010, 44). Other characteristics of North Korea may shed further light on the situation. First, due to the institution of tyranny, the North Korean people are made to believe that they must utterly submit to their leader, so they do not hold the government responsible for their dire poverty. Second, the North Korean bureaucracy has a rigid hierarchy, allowing those at the top to reinforce their power by completely controlling the flow of information. Third, the North Korean leadership continues to utilize the Kim Il-sung cult of personality as an effective, predominant political tool, promoting an ideology of self-reliance (Juche 主體) and requiring that substantive concessions be concealed behind the guise of equal exchange. Fourth, the influence of traditional Confucian norms may have sharpened North Korean sensitivity to hierarchy in negotiations with the United States. Notably, however, the negotiators themselves may have authority over and knowledge of only a limited range of issues. Their ability to negotiate is further hindered by the fact that no decision can be made without the direct approval of North Korea's

top leadership. Because of the emphasis on self-reliance, North Korea will never publicly acknowledge any concessions or change in regards to its negotiation position.

Sisyphean Negotiations: Between “Risk Adverse” and “Risk Neutral”

In general, a state which is facing the crossroads between “risk averse” and “risk neutral” would be likely to pursue a compromise between the two rather than accepting risks. This theory is based on the assumption that a state will act on its need to survive. This hypothesis presumes “optimal relevance,” which can be defined as the way of conceiving how thoughts and intentions are communicated through a speaker (state A) only conveying as much information as is needed in a given context. Thus, their intended meaning is transferred to the audience (state B) through words and actions, as well as through perceived implications. To avoid certain dangers or conflicts, a state is supposed to make a decision based on two factors: “relevance” and “ostensive communication” (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 260). Troubles arise when a lack of understanding leads to miscommunication. For example, in 2012, under new leader Kim Jong-un, North Korea suggested it would suspend nuclear tests and allow the IAEA’s inspectors to monitor the moratorium in exchange for 240,000 metric-ton food aid package from the United States.⁸ This was considered a positive first step toward complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner. However, as previously mentioned, North Korea carried out a rocket launch in late 2012. North Korea maintains that the launch was for a weather satellite while the United States, South Korea, and Japan assessed the rocket launch as a test of technology that could deliver nuclear warheads capable of hitting targets as far as the continental United States. This incident was caused by the estrangement between “relevance” and “ostensive communication.” The lack of understanding between Washington and Pyongyang is very evident, with politics factoring in greatly.

8. “North Korea Agrees to Nuclear Moratorium, IAEA Inspections,” *Reuters*, February 29, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/29/us-korea-north-usa-talks-idUSTRE81S13R20120229>.

In order to understand any conflict, such as the one on the Korean peninsula, theoretical assumptions about the conflict must be made. The relations between the United States and North Korea can be seen as a typical instance of protracted conflict with no resolution in sight. At times, the actors are able to increase their bargaining power by exaggerating their willingness to go to war. The United States has a dismissive attitude towards weak states and therefore its negotiations with North Korea seem insincere. In essence, the smug attitude of American decision-makers towards North Korea is driven by their conviction that the United States could counteract any sign of force from North Korea by easily overwhelming and destroying the North Korean regime.

However, theories about the behavior and decision-making process involved in international relations indicate that choices made by state leaders depend heavily on the context, and are not merely determined by calculations of gains and losses. Actually, the United States would probably have great difficulty taking military actions against North Korea because of the complicated logistics involved and the audience cost,⁹ i.e. the subsequent blowback to the U.S. reputation among influential domestic and international constituencies. This logic helps to account for the inclination of states to take on more risk even when their situation seems to be deteriorating.

The Trap of Stalling Tactic

When attitudes towards negotiations are not genuine, the involved parties are more likely to simply go through the motions without any commitment, which greatly increases the chances of crisis or, in this case, war.

9. Lisa Martin (1993, 406–432) has elaborated on the problem of “credible commitment,” arguing that credibility is strengthened when states make public promises and threats, thereby raising the potential “audience costs.” The higher the audience cost, the more credible the state’s commitment to upholding its responsibility becomes and thus avoids incurring those costs. Martin proposes audience costs as a way to resolve credibility issues, by altering the incentive structure so that it is more beneficial to follow through on promised actions.

Since pseudo-negotiations are often a response to an overly aggressive stance by one party, these attitudes sharply increase the risk of war. In such situations, states often adopt an attitude of *fait accompli*, and thus become less willing and less cooperative in negotiations, which inevitably results in the breakdown of negotiations and the exacerbation of disputes (Evera 1998, 5). Dangers also arise if one party perceives an offence from the other, even if it is only imagined. Indeed, in the case that states perceive a high probability of belligerent action, they are likely to respond in kind, even if their perception is false. Thus, the offence-defense hypothesis has two parallel variants: real and perceived.¹⁰

Even empirical studies have not been able to satisfactorily explain how the pseudo-negotiations between the United States and North Korea have continued for so long without leading to military conflict. North Korea, suffering from years of famine and dormant economy, routinely threatens to use its nuclear and missile capabilities in order to extract compromises and monetary benefits from the United States and its allies. Despite condemnations from hardliners who argue that appeasement merely encourages North Korea's bad behavior, the United States has not yet attempted to use military force to settle the situation. If the United States wishes to lift its economic sanctions against Pyongyang and totally or partially revoke the freeze on North Korean assets in the United States, then the Americans must consider implementing the several U.S.-North Korea agreements that have been negotiated over the years, and take concrete steps to resolve the conflict. At the very least, a liaison office in Pyongyang is required as an initial step towards establishing full diplomatic relations and facilitating personal and other exchanges.

Beyond the Trap of Stalling Tactic

Whenever North Korea took the initial steps of testing a multi-stage missile or other nuclear implements that could theoretically affect the United

10. A good example of this approach is double-edged diplomacy (Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993).

States, debate erupted in the United States over the desirable response. But rather than focusing on the specifics of a possible missile test, the United States and its allies should use such crises to reflect upon the broader dangers they face in dealing with North Korea. The coercive methods of the United States are akin to the familiar “bad cop, good cop” routine, as if by first being antagonistic, they might induce North Korea to seek reconciliation with South Korea. This approach represents an attempt to change the negotiating dynamic and prevent North Korea from making demands (Levin and Han 2003, ch. 3). The United States has not been sincere or forthcoming in its negotiations with North Korea. As Glyn Ford writes, Pyongyang and Washington agree on one thing: that they cannot trust each other.¹¹ Without trust, there can be no genuine negotiations.¹² Coercion has never proven to be an effective strategy in these situations, for coercion and isolation force regimes to adopt a defensive mindset, which makes them more likely to complicate proceedings by undertaking nuclear tests and flouting conventions.

But past failures can provide valuable lessons regarding the appropriate future attitude and policy towards North Korea. Resorting to inaction or harsh rhetoric, such as the “axis of evil” references of 2001, is not a substitute for policy and merely aggravates North Korea, compelling it to take even more risks. To be fair, Washington’s approach to North Korea must be viewed in the context of its traditional attitudes, marked by skepticism about the prospects of diplomatic progress with North Korea and a preference for seeking far-reaching changes in the U.S. policy. Given the U.S.

11. Glyn Ford, “Dead Talks Walking: North Korea and Removing the Bomb,” last modified December 20, 2006, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/dead-talks-walking-north-korea-and-removing-the-bomb/>.

12. In response to North Korea’s nuclear tests, the Bush administration pursued a two-track approach. After a meeting on October 31, 2006, hosted by China in Beijing, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said, “And I said we would be prepared to create a mechanism or working group and to address these financial issues.” That same day, however, President Bush took a different track by forming a coalition to enforce UN sanctions by imposing a blockade on North Korea. He emphasized the following: “to make sure that the current United Nations Security Council resolution is enforced but also to make sure the talks are effective.”

leadership's varied pronouncements, the heavy-handed policy towards North Korea typically focuses on two main points. First, the Bush administration argued that the Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) nuclear program was proof that North Korea had violated the letter of the 1994 Framework Agreement, aimed at freezing North Korea's plutonium program. Thus, the United States refuses to negotiate unless the complete, irreversible, and verifiable dismantlement of the program is part of the proposed settlement. Second, the United States has emphasized that high-level officials must conduct all of these initiatives. Washington's main concerns over North Korea are confined to security issues, such as WMDs, ballistic missiles, and Pyongyang's conventional armed forces, but most regional experts lack expertise on security issues and thus have little influence over the proceedings.

In order to move beyond a "stalling tactic" that disaggregates the current situation, both Washington and Pyongyang should take steps to coordinate their cooperation in future negotiations, with an eye towards peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. Pyongyang believes that Washington holds the key to opening the doors to Seoul and Tokyo, so North Korea would be willing to trade their program of nuclear weapons and missiles in return for better relations with Washington. But at the same time, they must keep the nuclear option open as leverage to ensure that Washington will hold up its end of the bargain. If Washington improves its cooperation, then Pyongyang would likely engage with Seoul within the next decade.

It is only natural for North Korea to be frustrated and doubtful of the U.S. intentions, since the United States has failed to fulfill its obligations under past agreements, simultaneously ignoring North Korea's repeated threats to abandon the agreement. North Korea's perception that the United States is reneging on its obligations—regardless of whether that perception is shared by the rest of the world—will only provoke more frustration and mistrust. In such a situation, it is only a matter of time before Pyongyang decides to play its other cards, such as missiles. In light of this, continued positive engagement with North Korea requires honoring the promises of existing agreements. At the same time, Washington

must stop exaggerating the dangers it faces and avoid responding with counterproductive belligerence. At the very least, the United States needs to abandon its intent to discipline North Korea, which only forces them into an impasse.

Using Positive Engagement

The present focus on North Korea stems from the desire to control its bad behavior and remove its access to destructive force. But this focus is often misdirected, particularly in Washington and Seoul. In actuality, the tit-for-tat actions or brinkmanship of North Korea stems, either implicitly or explicitly, from the coercive, or sometimes neglectful, negotiation tactics of the United States. North Korea has long aspired to discuss security issues, and the fact that this aspiration has never been fulfilled represents the total failure of the U.S. hawk policy toward North Korea.¹³ For almost six years, the Bush administration's policy consisted of a strange combination of harsh rhetoric and inactivity, not to mention the dissemination of ready-made stereotypes. Coercion or isolation strategies, based on non-communication, threats, and intimidation have proven to be useless and detrimental to resolving problems with North Korea. These tactics have only served to heighten Pyongyang's sense of vulnerability, pushing its leaders further into the impasse of "stalling tactic" strategies in order to, at the very least, preserve the status quo. Consequently, the North Korean nuclear program continues, which in turn raises the incentives for other nations to go nuclear, which could ultimately result in nuclear terrorism.

Since the coercive approaches have been leading negotiations in the wrong direction, more positive approaches must be implemented in order to reach a solution. The impatience and unenthusiastic negotiation of the United States must give way to positive engagement, in conjunction with the U.S.-North Korea CTR Program. The goal of this positive approach is to create conditions wherein the North Korean nuclear program can be

13. Although the author agrees with Graham Allison (2006, 9–10) that the Bush administration's policy towards North Korea was a failure, we differ on the reasons for that failure.

controlled or managed in the short term and ultimately dismantled.

Such an approach might be called the “U.S.-North Korea cooperative engagement consortium” and both sides would submit to a joint consortium controlling all nuclear facilities and weapons, with a third-party trustee acting as a reserve if either party violates the agreement. The Nunn-Lugar method, which has worked well for Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, also appears suitable for North Korea, and it would obviously be cheaper than trying to combat a nuclear-empowered terror network that could result from the secret export of nuclear technology and fissile material from North Korea.¹⁴ Such policy must seek to establish effective channels of communication and identify shared priorities with Pyongyang. Through such policy, the United States and its allies could help to change Pyongyang’s terms of reference.¹⁵

Positive Engagement: CTR as a Bold Approach

For the past decade, the North Korean nuclear issues have deteriorated or stalled, and the attempts to find a solution have failed. When we look back at the six-party talks, which began in August 2003 as a multilateral approach to ending the nuclear program of North Korea, the multilateral talks unfortunately failed to get Pyongyang agree to a verification protocol for its nuclear program. Thus, North Korea barred nuclear inspectors and restarted its program by the end of 2008. In May 2009, Pyongyang started a second nuclear bomb test, and in response the United States immediately stopped providing food aid. The following year, North Korea revealed a new uranium enrichment facility and light-water reactor in Yongbyon. In July and October 2011, during bilateral discussions between Washington and Pyongyang, Washington and Seoul both demanded that North Korea show

14. William J. Perry, “It’s Either Nukes or Negotiation,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2003.

15. When the continuation of the status quo portends losses and is perceived as costly for state A, state B can decrease A’s incentives to attack by adding value to that status quo, e.g., by promising rewards for peaceful relations (Davis 2000, 5).

its commitment to abandon its nuclear weapons and related programs before talks could resume. Moreover, as the Lee Myung-bak government, which was more conservative and less placatory toward North Korea, criticized the engagement policies toward the North carried out by his predecessors Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the relationship between the two Koreas came to a deadlock. The Obama administration signaled that it would be ready to engage Pyongyang, and an Obama administration official made secret visits to North Korea twice in April and August 2012 in an unsuccessful effort to improve relations after Kim Jong-un assumed power.¹⁶ However, the response of North Korea was one of indifference.

A multilateral approach may be the best option in such a situation, but its outcome would be highly improbable as long as North Korea seems to believe it has not acquired what it expected from past multilateral talks. All these considered, the United States and its allies need to take a bold and audacious measure of action toward North Korea. If the nuclear deadlock is to be resolved diplomatically in order to halt nuclear crisis, they should make a tempting offer so that Pyongyang may be inclined to reengage in the diplomatic process.

In hindsight, if efforts towards resolution are contaminated by a narrow political goal, there is sure to be resistance. Proceeding without a properly tailored plan and without sincerity among interested parties will only increase the dangers of North Korean nuclear proliferation. Of course, North Korea would demonstrate its willingness to negotiate with the United States to ensure the survival of its regime. However, the mutual distrust between the United States and North Korea may be the greatest obstacle to the overall quest for nuclear security. Due to the unreliable relations between the United States and North Korea, new negotiations are necessary. For various reasons, the United States should prioritize its negotiating strategy to end North Korea's nuclear program, rather than focus on other issues in Pyongyang. In particular, the nuclear program of North Korea may endanger both the security of the Korean peninsula, as well as international secu-

16. "Secret U.S.-North Korea Diplomatic Trips Reported," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2013.

rity in the following ways. First, it can undermine the regime of Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which all states must follow in international community. Second, it is likely that North Korea's neighbors and friends would consider their strategic interests in a way that forgoes nuclear arms. And third, if circumstances force the North Korean regime badly, it may sell nuclear technology to non-state entities. Furthermore, without the help of others, it is more difficult for North Korea to dismantle a fully assembled nuclear arsenal than to halt their nuclear program. Considering all of this, the United States needs to reprioritize its strategies in regards to its dealings with North Korea: rather than focusing on reforming its political and economic system, improving its human rights conditions, etc., it should focus mostly on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Pyongyang. The most promising route for resolving the worsening nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, as well as throughout Northeast Asia, is to pursue an ambitious bargain with Pyongyang through the establishment of the U.S.-North Korea cooperative engagement consortium. As the Nunn-Lugar program in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus has been very successful, it is necessary to devise means by which something similar can be impressed upon North Korea, even though it may be a long way from an agreement with North Korea on complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID).

For the CTR to be adopted in North Korea, it would need to meet the three following conditions: (1) the implementation of a possible agreement with North Korea for CVID of its nuclear weapons program, namely, all the nuclear infrastructure (i.e., nuclear weapons, nuclear materials, nuclear facilities, and so on); (2) a joint consortium to oversee all nuclear facilities and weapons of both sides with a third-party trustee acting as a reserve organization to arbitrate perceived violations of the agreement, according to terms mentioned above; and (3) joint U.S.-North Korea control of nuclear facilities in North Korea, with the supervisor states taking absolute control, as in the case of Ukraine-Russia.¹⁷ All of these conditions would help

17. "U.S., Ukraine Sign Nuclear Deal," *News24*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.news24.com/SciTech/News/US-Ukraine-sign-nuclear-deal-20110926>.

attain the final goals of cooperation between the United States and North Korea, without forcing the North to resort to stalling tactics in the process of the negotiations.

The most difficult part of this is to motivate each state involved in the nonproliferation efforts to pledge not to attack North Korea, which is necessary to induce the North to dispose of its nuclear weapons. Also, funding CTR is not rewarding North Korea for its defiance, but supporting them for dismantling their nuclear weapons. Thus, it should be viewed as a long-term investment in international security. In this way, both Washington and Pyongyang can “save face” at the negotiation table and “win” in terms of productive action through engagement. For these reasons, cooperative threat reduction is desirable; noticeably because it is not a reward for bad behavior, but to encourage “defense by other means,” referred to by U.S. former Secretary of Defense William Perry.¹⁸ As the purpose of this bold initiative is to put an end to two decades of failed negotiations, the benefits of continued implementation would far outweigh the costs of abandoning CTR.

Conclusion

For two decades, Pyongyang has been advised that the international community disapproves of weapons of mass destruction in North Korea. Although the six-party talks represent a thawing of the cold war atmosphere on the Korean peninsula, if the talks are not genuine, they will inevitably reach a dead end and North Korea will retain its nuclear arsenal. North Korea wants to negotiate with the United States to ensure that its regime survives, so the United States must show some flexibility and resume disarmament negotiations.

Engagement based on boldness with a negotiating spirit would allow interested parties to determine if North Korea’s intentions have changed,

18. William J. Perry, “Defense by Other Means,” last modified March 29, 1995, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/ctr/news/di1043.html>.

while laying the groundwork for North Korea to fulfill its obligations. Systematic and persistent positive engagement based on openness is required in order to prevent the emergence of potentially dangerous situations and nuclear proliferation, and to develop an appropriate policy for dealing effectively with North Korea. In this vein, the Nunn-Lugar program should be considered for North Korea, accompanied by control measures that would be difficult to reverse. Such engagement must also include provisions for disciplining North Korea for failing to uphold the terms of the agreement. However, the policy should also clearly state that following the terms of the agreement would provide North Korea with the opportunity to become a responsible member of the international community.

Positive engagement should involve an approach that encourages direct talks between the United States and North Korea, wherein the parties can directly share their respective positions and a policy of appropriate rewards. This can lead North Korea to associate keeping promises with benefits and breaking promises with punishments. If CTR is successful, the benefits go beyond merely resolving nuclear problems from North Korea. An additional reason that positive engagement is the requisite for solution is that the status quo is very unstable and coercive engagement has proven to be ineffective. Only through positive engagement, the art of peaceful and productive diplomatic practice, will North Korea be convinced to forsake its path of nuclearization.

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