

# The Sixth Korea-U.S. West Coast Strategic Forum

June 8, 2011

Bechtel Conference Center, Stanford University



세종연구소



THE WALTER H. SHORENSTEIN  
ASIA-PACIFIC RESEARCH CENTER



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sixth session of the Korea-U.S. West Coast Strategic Forum was held in the Bechtel Conference Center at Stanford University on June 8, 2011. Established in 2006 by Stanford University and now convening semi-annually alternating between Stanford and Seoul, the Forum brings together distinguished South Korean (Republic of Korea, or ROK) and American scholars, experts, and former military and civilian officials to discuss North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK), the U.S.-ROK alliance, and regional dynamics in Northeast Asia. Stanford University's Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Shorenstein APARC) is co-organizer of the Forum with the Sejong Institute of Korea. Operating as a closed workshop under the Chatham House Rule of individual confidentiality, the Forum allows participants to engage in candid, in-depth discussion of current issues of vital national interest to both countries.

The sixth session focused on the situation in the wake of major developments on the Korean Peninsula during the past fifteen months, especially North Korea's sinking of the South Korean naval ship *Cheonan* on March 26, 2010; the "coming out" of the apparent designated successor to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, his son Kim Jong Un, in the fall of 2010; the North's revelation to an American scholar on November 12 that it has outfitted a uranium enrichment facility at its Yongbyon nuclear center; its shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island on November 23; and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's May 2011 trip to the PRC, his third visit there in just the past year. Participants discussed the motives behind North Korea's increasingly aggressive behavior; the internal situation in North Korea as the succession proceeds; China's role on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia as a whole; and the response of South Korea and of the ROK-U.S. alliance to the recent developments.

Participants engaged in informed speculation about the reasons for North Korea's military attacks on South Korea and its increasingly belligerent rhetoric. Many participants felt that the ongoing succession process in Pyongyang may have increased factional fighting, and that the North's expressions of hostility to the South may be intended to bolster domestic solidarity. Others said that the North's actions serve further to divide an already polarized South Korean polity in advance of the National Assembly election in April 2012 and the ROK presidential election in December 2012, in the hope that South Korean progressives will defeat the conservatives and again pursue a "sunshine policy" toward the North.

Participants noted how unusual it is that Kim Jong Il has visited the PRC three times in just the past year. This suggests that Pyongyang is relying increasingly on Beijing for external support, as additional UN sanctions imposed on it in the wake of its 2009 nuclear and rocket tests have further isolated it from South Korea and the international community as a whole. Participants discussed the extent to which Kim is seeking Chinese help with the North Korean succession process, economic development, and diplomatic efforts. Participants agreed that China should play a larger role in encouraging better North Korean behavior and discouraging and limiting North Korean misbehavior, including nuclear and other WMD proliferation. Participants held various views about Chinese intentions toward North Korea, with some asserting that the PRC wishes to monopolize North Korea's external economic relations and others taking the view that Beijing has made significant, if insufficient, efforts to address the problems North Korea poses.

Participants were extremely skeptical that North Korea is prepared to fully give up its nuclear weapons program in the foreseeable future. Several Americans expressed concern that the current lack of bilateral and multilateral dialogue means that North Korea will continue on its current nuclear weapons trajectory, producing more and better bombs, resulting in an increasingly serious situation on the Korean Peninsula. They urged the early resumption of negotiations with North Korea based on a coordinated U.S. and ROK approach, and the offer to Pyongyang of economic assistance and normalization of relations, among other things, if North Korea undertakes not to conduct further nuclear tests, build more nuclear bombs, or engage in nuclear proliferation. They also expressed concern about inadequate safety measures at the North Korean nuclear facilities, including the light water reactor now under construction, and the implications for South Koreans' safety. They argued that the United States and South Korea need to work now at least to reduce risks on the peninsula until North Korea's full denuclearization can be achieved.

Other American and many Korean participants expressed great skepticism that North Korea would give up nuclear weapons through such negotiations. Some argued for more pressure, including national and international sanctions; enhanced efforts to block North Korean proliferation; and greater South Korean and alliance efforts to deter and defend against North Korean conventional attacks. Some said that our approach should focus on containment of the North Korean threat, as we contained the Soviet threat during the Cold War. Some participants predicted that the North Korean system will not long survive.

Many South Korean participants expressed concern about American staying power in the face of North Korea's nuclear weapons development and conventional attacks on the South. Some suggested that the United States might eventually accept North Korea's possession of a limited nuclear arsenal or the United States might even withdraw its forces from the South in exchange for North Korean pledges not to proliferate further and engage in other misbehavior. Many expressed doubts about the credibility of the American nuclear umbrella over South Korea under the current situation. A few argued that South Korea needs to move toward developing its own nuclear weapons. Others urged instead that the United States should reintroduce tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea. Many Korean participants and virtually all American participants strongly argued that the costs to South Korea of "going nuclear" would outweigh any benefits, and that reintroducing

tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea would contradict the Obama administration's effort to seek a world without nuclear weapons.

Many Korean and some American participants expressed concern about the planned transfer from the United States to South Korea of wartime operational command over South Korean forces in 2015 and the abolition of the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command. An American expert said that the move would be interpreted by Pyongyang as a weakening of the alliance; the United States needs to focus not only on what is needed to win if North Korea attacks, but also on deterring any North Korean attack by better understanding North Korea and the political-military signals we send or do not send to it. Other Americans argued that South Korea is capable of exercising operational command over its own forces, and that planned changes in alliance arrangements will maintain deterrence while enhancing the political sustainability of the presence of U.S. forces in South Korea.

Participants agreed that the U.S.-ROK alliance has contributed to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the region for six decades. They also noted that relations between Washington and Seoul have perhaps never been better. They also agreed, however, that the challenges the two governments face in the region, especially from North Korea, warrant even closer consultation and coordination, and the development of more effective combined diplomatic and military strategies.



## THE SIXTH KOREA-U.S. WEST COAST STRATEGIC FORUM

### I NORTH KOREA

An American expert began the session by providing updates on the DPRK's current nuclear status. He said that he and his colleagues were shown a refurbished, modern-looking, and apparently new facility at Yongbyon during his visit to North Korea in November 2010, where he witnessed rows of sophisticated P2 centrifuges. According to this expert, the capacity of the facility that he saw in the DPRK is consistent with fuel requirements for the experimental light water reactor (LWR) that North Korea is constructing.

In the American expert's assessment, what he saw at Yongbyon required decades of North Korean research and development, procurement, training, and testing. He presumed that the DPRK has at least one more, clandestine enrichment facility, likely dedicated to the production of highly enriched uranium (HEU). He also surmised that the scope of the clandestine facility is still limited by a lack of key materials and components.

The expert said he believed the DPRK's claim that it is converting Yongbyon to an LWR and uranium enrichment facility. He quoted a high-ranking DPRK foreign ministry official as saying that the LWR has not only economic but also symbolic importance to the DPRK.

The expert expressed concerns about safety measures at these facilities—that is, their emergency response preparedness and disaster management capabilities, especially in light of the recent nuclear disaster in Japan.

The American expert also expressed his concern about the experimental LWR, since it could be used to produce plutonium. However, he explained, this is not a major concern because LWRs are not well suited to producing weapons-grade plutonium. The real threat is the fact that enriched uranium is required for LWRs, and an LWR program could be used as a cover for HEU production as well. Moreover, even if a uranium enrichment program were not used for the production of nuclear weapons by the DPRK, the resulting materials and technologies could be exported to outside parties.

The American expert recommended a policy toward North Korea of “three no's and one yes”: no more bombs, no improved bombs, and no export of bombs or bomb-related materials, and “yes” to our side's seeking to address the fundamental reasons for

DPRK insecurity. Another American expert backed this view, saying it is important that the United States and South Korea undertake a joint initiative leading to a new approach to the North, and that this strategy should be based on the “three no’s and one yes.” While a number of participants pointed out the difficulties involved in verifying the three no’s and fleshing out the one yes, proponents of the approach argued it would result in a reduction of risk, risk that will increase greatly if not otherwise addressed, while the one yes, when detailed and elaborated on, will not only work but could gain political support. The one yes, an American expert added, would include major economic assistance to the DPRK, full diplomatic recognition, and the installation of a U.S. embassy in Pyongyang.

Both American and Korean participants seemed to be in consensus that the DPRK would not voluntarily surrender its bombs in the foreseeable future. Some advocated a reengagement policy, whereas others urged maintaining or increasing pressure on North Korea to change course. Some called for strengthening South Korean defense capabilities.

Most agreed that if the problem cannot be solved, efforts should be made to reduce risks, but there was no consensus on how to achieve risk reduction. A number of American experts stressed the importance of blocking the flow of key materials into the DPRK. Participants agreed that China should make greater efforts to limit the flow of materials and components needed for nuclear development into and out of North Korea, since most of these materials pass through China’s territory or airspace.

However, there were divergent views on whether China’s role in North Korean affairs is increasing or decreasing. One South Korean expert said that China has very limited political leverage in North Korea. An American expert added that many North Korean officials have indicated in private meetings that they are unhappy with North Korea’s economic dependence on China. A Korean expert insisted that China does not have as large a role as the media suggests, and that the DPRK is far more independent than portrayed.

Opinions also diverged on the subject of China’s technical assistance to North Korea’s nuclear program. One Korean participant pointed to the possibility of China’s involvement in the development of the DPRK’s nuclear programs. An American expert disagreed, saying that China has played no role in the technical development of the DPRK’s nuclear program and that the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities have been as much a surprise to Chinese officials as they are to Americans and South Koreans. However, many participants, including this American expert, agreed that China has played an indirect role by not doing more to prevent the flow of key materials into North Korea.

Many participants commented on the DPRK’s technical capabilities in terms of nuclear development and how frequently we have underestimated the DPRK’s capabilities in the past. One American expert who has visited the Yongbyon facilities said that the North Koreans seemed to want his group to report what they had seen to the rest of the world. The American expert explained that North Korea has impressive technical capabilities and human resources, owing to the fact that the DPRK trains its specialists and engineers from their early years and allows them to accumulate a lifetime of hands-on experience.

One American expert suggested that North Korea’s recent invitation to American experts to visit its nuclear facilities, along with the sending of a DPRK economic delegation to the United States, may signal that the DPRK wants to get back to doing business with the United States and to create the secure, normal relationship with the United States that



*Participants at the Sixth Korea-U.S. West Coast Strategic Forum at Stanford University.*

it has always hoped for.

An active discussion of Kim Jong Il's recent visit to Beijing followed, with a Korean expert focusing on the increase in verbal attacks on South Korea that came in the wake of Kim's trip and the implications of such attacks. He suggested that the DPRK may be using this dynamic to split South Korean public opinion, damage the South Korean government, and avoid future dialogue so as to advantage progressive parties in the National Assembly and presidential elections in the South next year.

Many participants agreed that the DPRK's increasing hostility indeed probably has much to do with South Korea's domestic politics and upcoming elections. An American expert pointed out that everything that the DPRK does is very much centered on South Korean domestic politics and that Americans tend to miss this dimension. A South Korean participant also said that Kim Jong Il seems to be doing all he can to help the opposition party, which advocates a return to the Sunshine Policy, to win the upcoming elections.

One American expert, on the other hand, held that the DPRK's increasingly hostile policy toward South Korea was underway even before Kim's trip to China and that such a development in inter-Korean relations is nothing unusual. What was unusual about the trip, he said, was that the Chinese counterpart delegation was dominated by international department officials, not foreign ministry officials.

Another American expert said that the DPRK's hostile rhetoric might be a substitute for hostile action. Since China demanded that the DPRK take no more provocative actions against the South following last year's Yeonpyeong Island shelling, North Korea has refrained from going beyond strong rhetoric.

Another American expert assessed that this rhetoric may be the DPRK's response to growing pressure from China. He argued that part of what China is doing to respond to American concerns after the Yeonpyeong incident is its attempt to restart some form of negotiation. To this pressure the DPRK is responding: "It's the South Korean government that's preventing the resumption of talks. Don't blame us for not doing what you're asking us to do." He argued, further, that what the DPRK seems to want at this point is the resumption of economic assistance; the DPRK is manipulating South Korea's domestic politics to obtain that.

A South Korean participant pointed to the lack of systematic studies of the North Korean political system and China and Russia's strategies toward North Korea.

The main point of debate was whether a hard-line approach or a policy of reengagement would be a better path at this point in dealings with North Korea. While

many seemed to agree that it is important not to lose contact with the DPRK, some argued that engagement has failed to work in the past and that prospects are even bleaker now.



*Forum participants gather for a group shot outside Encina Hall.*

An American expert outlined what he believed should be the next steps for the United States and South Korea in addressing North Korean nuclear problems. He insisted that it is obvious that the two countries should reengage with North Korea. He said he is sympathetic to South Korea's feelings and its current approach to the DPRK, but does not support it because it has failed to produce results due to the DPRK's view of the policy as confrontational. The expert maintained that we must not wait for new administrations to come to power in the United States and South Korea, but rather take action immediately to try to reach a strong and positive agreement regarding reengagement with North Korea. He said that such reengagement is difficult but absolutely necessary in view of the increasing risks.

An American expert said that some U.S. officials express frustration that U.S. policies are driven by South Korean decision-making and that the United States cannot engage with North Korea unless South Korea also agrees to do so. The real problem is that there is no alternative.

An American expert said that the most difficult part has to do with domestic politics in the United States and South Korea. To get either of the two countries to be willing to take the political risks of engagement, he said, we must convince our publics that the

security costs of allowing North Korea to continue on its present trajectory are too great. He added that we have to deal with North Korea as it is and not as we wish it to be. And we have to deal with the United States and South Korea as they are, rather than waiting for changes within governments or administrations. The idea of three no's, he added, is really based on risk reduction when a solution to the nuclear problem remains in the future.

One South Korean expert urged the United States to allow the ROK to extend the range of its missiles to cover the whole of North Korea. He argued that we need to create a regional situation in which China and North Korea fear South Korea.

Another South Korean expert proposed what he called a “co-evolution strategy”—that is, a new policy focus, such as an economy-first policy, to replace North Korea's military-first policy as the leadership transition occurs. He explained that it is inevitable that North Korea will pursue a policy based on domestic development; consequently, we must create an environment that will accelerate this change in policy. He said that the first step should be to figure out how to foster such an environment in North Korea.

Many of the South Korean experts did not support policies of reengagement. One South Korea expert observed that South and North Korea have had some 600 talks and entered 150 agreements since 1971, yet none of the agreements has been kept. He argued that sanctions are in some cases more effective than inducements. South Korea maintains a confrontational stance with North Korea because it is still premature to acknowledge North Korea as a normal state, since normal countries keep promises and North Korea does not.

Advocates of reengagement admitted that reengagement has been unsuccessful in the past. One noted that President Obama's political advisers undoubtedly counsel him that the domestic political risks of engagement are great. Advocates argued, however, that political engagement does buy us some things—including containment and time.

## **II THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

A Korean security expert noted that the U.S.-ROK alliance has successfully maintained peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia for six decades. The security system also provided the framework for South Korea's economic development and democratization, and created a favorable environment for economic prosperity in all of East Asia, including China. The Korean expert noted, however, that the alliance system now faces a serious challenge from North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The regime's sinking of the *Cheonan* and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island last year suggest that it may now feel less constrained about employing its conventional arms to attack and intimidate the South.

North Korea's attacks have had several consequences for the South, the Korean expert continued. First, the people of South Korea have begun to have a more realistic understanding of the North Korean nuclear threat. Second, the attacks have underlined that the planned transfer of wartime operational control (OpCon) from the United States to the ROK in 2015 and the concomitant abolition of the Combined Forces Command are unwise, especially as long as North Korea constitutes a nuclear threat. It is vital to have a unified command structure in time of war, and the planned coordination mechanism between ROK and U.S. forces will not be an adequate substitute for the Combined Forces

Command. Third, domestic opinion will now require any South Korean political leader to respond much more firmly in the case of another North Korean attack. This could easily lead to escalation, and thus it is very important prevent such a crisis, not only for the security of the Korean Peninsula but also for the region as a whole. We must impress upon China that it is not in its interest to support or tolerate North Korean misbehavior. Finally, it is not wise to respond to North Korean provocations on a case-by-case basis; we need to develop a U.S.-ROK political-military grand strategy to deal effectively with the challenges posed by North Korea.

The Korean expert concluded that North-South Korean coexistence is almost impossible. North and South Korea are not like the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Koreans, North and South, have the same history and the same background. We need to take an approach toward the North that is analogous to the United States' handling of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Unification is the ideal solution, and eventually North Korea will change, probably in part at least in response to various pressures.

An American security expert said he detects significant differences of view between Americans and South Koreans on security issues. Americans tend to focus on establishing the means to defeat aggression in order to achieve deterrence, while South Koreans see deterrence as the prevention of war altogether, rather than what is needed to defeat the enemy. How will North Korea perceive the transfer of operational control from the United States to the Republic of Korea? Will it not be seen as a weakening of deterrence?

The American expert said he believes that the United States needs to focus more



*Dr. Siegfried Hecker provides analysis of DPRK nuclear issues while Shorenstein APARC director Dr. Gi-Wook Shin and Sejong Institute president Dr. Dae Sung Song listen.*

on deterrence per se. He noted that the ROK has said that in the event of another North Korean provocation it will retaliate in force, but that entails significant risks. Kim Jong Il will not care, indeed he will probably benefit from, a U.S.-ROK attack on one of his military divisions, which he can use to rally domestic political support. Thus, we are confronted

with the question of how to really impose costs on Kim Jong Il to achieve deterrence.

Credibility is also an issue, the American expert said. For example, in 2006, President Bush announced a red line against North Korean nuclear proliferation, yet the United States did nothing in response to the subsequent revelation of North Korea's proliferation to Syria. Deterrence must be structured to be both effective and credible.

Attempting to achieve deterrence exclusively with military means involves the risk of immediate, steep escalation, the American expert said. But North Korea's provocations are conducted to strengthen the regime at home; thus, if we deter provocations, we are by definition weakening the regime. The North Korean attack on Yeonpyeong was conducted primarily for domestic political reasons. So how do we leverage such political issues? Actually, there are many areas in which Kim Jong Il is very weak. In 1985, almost no one predicted that the USSR would soon collapse. The world is a very uncertain and unpredictable place. If North Korea collapses tomorrow, we are not prepared and the result could well be a disaster. The United States and the ROK together need to think through the various possible scenarios and prepare thoroughly.

A Korean expert stressed that, although progressive South Korean leaders had sometimes talked about moving more toward the PRC, the ROK's relations with the United States are uniquely comprehensive. Korea's relations with the PRC are called a "strategic partnership" but are based primarily on shared economic interests. The ROK and Japan have similar interests and values but suffer from a lack mutual respect due to historical issues, and thus their relationship is fragile. The U.S.-ROK relationship, however, is one in which the two countries share interests, values, and mutual respect.

Yet another South Korean expert said that almost everyone now agrees that North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons. South Koreans are increasingly uneasy about North Korea's nuclear weapons and its other asymmetric capabilities. Those perceptions and the North Korean attacks last year have propelled a public debate in South Korea about the formerly taboo subject of South Korean nuclear armament. Sentiment for nuclear armament is likely to increase unless the North Korean threat is effectively addressed.

Continuing, the South Korean expert said that the biggest impediment to South Korean nuclear armament is not North Korea or China, but the United States. Supporters of nuclear armament, however, say it would help both the ROK and the United States. As a democratic country a nuclear ROK would, like Israel, not constitute a threat to the United States. South Korean nuclear armament might even eventually allow the United States to withdraw its forces from South Korea without a loss of South Korean security. Moreover, if the ROK moves toward nuclear armament, China may be prompted to press North Korea to denuclearize. China fears that South Korean nuclear armament could lead to nuclear armament by Japan and even Taiwan.

The South Korean expert warned that there is increased fear in South Korea that North Korea may engage in more provocations against the ROK, in part to affect the outcome of National Assembly and presidential elections there in 2012. North Korea is aware that there is a good possibility that supporters of the previous sunshine policy toward North Korea may win those elections. But such an outcome would be disastrous for American policy toward North Korea as well. For example, many South Koreans do not want to pass the North Korean human rights bill for fear it may anger Kim Jong Il, and under the previous progressive president, many in the ruling party felt that China would

be more important to South Korea than the United States.

Another Korean security expert reiterated that North Korea's provocations in 2010 had ignited and intensified debates about national security in South Korea, especially concerning nuclear weapons. He noted that many South Koreans have begun to question the strength of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. As a consequence, South Korean opinion is divided among those who argue for maintenance of the status quo, South Korean nuclear armament, and the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea. The Korean security expert advocated the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. He argued, first, that North Korea is determined to keep its nuclear weapons program. Second, the Six Party Talks have no prospect of leading to North Korean denuclearization. Third, Washington would oppose South Korean nuclear armament. He said that reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons would reassure South Koreans about their security and the alliance with the United States; it would also reassure Japanese and silence emerging voices there in favor of Japan's own nuclear armament; and it would put pressure directly on North Korea, and indirectly through China, for North Korean denuclearization. He rejected arguments that the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons might make North Korea's nuclear armament become permanent or that it would only anger China. He opposed South Korean nuclear armament, arguing that the costs would outweigh the benefits.

An American expert said he opposed both South Korean nuclear armament and the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea. He recalled that in the 1970s South Korea had pursued a clandestine nuclear program as a consequence of the perception of U.S. strategic withdrawal. South Korea at the time was concerned about the possibility of U.S. abandonment, which had been fed by the United States' withdrawal of the Seventh Division from South Korea and the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, along with the United States' engagement of the PRC. The United States had seen South Korea's nuclear program as a threat to the alliance. Directly put, the United States said that South Korean nuclear armament would mean the very end of the alliance. At the same time, the U.S. saw that it needed to do more to address ROK fears of abandonment.

The American expert said he did not know the results of the current U.S.-Korean discussions in their Extended Deterrence Committee, but he believed it was important that the United States discuss issues related to the nuclear umbrella with the ROK to reassure South Koreans. Regarding a policy toward North Korea of only military deterrence and containment, he said that such an approach would imply acceptance of North Korea's indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. Regarding nuclear weapons, the United States has the means to retaliate against North Korea even without U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea. Moreover, he asked rhetorically how the ROK would feel if Japan "went nuclear," since South Korean nuclear armament might prompt Japan to do the same.

We should signal as explicitly as possible our willingness to use nuclear weapons in retaliation for any North Korean use of nuclear weapons. The American expert said he agreed with South Korean President Lee's response to North Korean provocations. The American expert also said he agreed with a Russian scholar's proposed policy of "subversive engagement" to promote change within North Korea. Reluctantly, he said, the only prospect for an end to North Korea's nuclear program was change within the North. He said he believed we could accomplish nuclear risk reduction even in the absence of

intensive negotiations, including by making greater efforts to induce China to block North Korean proliferation. He said he hoped that the ROK and the United States would engage in more discussions about extended deterrence and also about concepts such as subversive engagement and containment.

A South Korean expert rebutted, noting that the situations in the 1970s and today are very different. China is on the rise and the United States faces serious financial challenges. North Korea now has nuclear weapons, and with the ongoing succession there the domestic situation is very uncertain and possibly unstable. South Koreans were made extremely uneasy by former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's decision to withdraw



*(left) Associate director of the Korean Studies Program David Straub listens to insights from Governor Yong Ok Park.*

a significant percentage of U.S. forces from Korea and to transfer wartime operational control to South Korea. There are numerous practical and deterrence problems with the Rumsfeld security policies toward South Korea, policies that the Obama administration continues to implement. Regarding nuclear weapons, North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons through engagement; we do not have the means to induce change within North Korea leading to denuclearization; and over the long term Japan will become a nuclear power. Meanwhile, the U.S.-ROK Extended Deterrence Committee is ineffective because it is too low-level and too narrowly focused.

Another South Korean expert said he did not agree that the South Korean public really supports South Korean nuclear armament. Yet another Korean expert said that North Korea's nuclear program is primarily a proliferation problem for the United States, while for the ROK it is a matter of life and death.

An American expert said that the reintroduction of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea was a bad idea, and South Korean nuclear armament was worse. Such actions would make the ROK less safe and less prosperous. He noted that North Korea had made a decision to focus on building nuclear weapons rather than on using nuclear power to



*Conflict and cooperation specialist Dr. Susan Shirk comments while Shorenstein APARC associate director for research Daniel C. Sneider listens.*

promote its prosperity. The result was that North Korea today enjoys neither security nor prosperity, while South Korea, which has focused on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, is now both an economic and a nuclear powerhouse. The ROK will soon become the world's largest exporter of peaceful nuclear facilities.

The American expert reiterated that the reintroduction of tactical nuclear weapons into Korea is an entirely bad idea. The origin of tactical nuclear weapons lies in the Cold War U.S.-USSR confrontation in Europe. For the United States, nuclear weapons are weapons of last resort, and the United States is now trying hard to rid the world of tactical nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, Russia is not ready, due to its concerns about instability in countries along its southern border. But, he asked rhetorically, who in the world would ever use tactical nuclear weapons?

The American expert noted that Pakistan says it fears India might attack it, and therefore it is using plutonium for tactical nuclear weapons. The situation is very serious. The ROK today is both secure and prosperous. How could both of those successes be derailed?—if something goes wrong with China. China has been very restrained in its nuclear weapons development program, building far fewer weapons than it could. If the United States reintroduces tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea, China might well build up its nuclear arsenal much more rapidly.

A Korean expert said we should pay close attention to security trends in Northeast Asia. Both China and North Korea are engaging in aggressive military buildups. North Korea has almost completed a new base in the troubled West Sea (Yellow Sea) for air-cushioned landing vessels. Both North Korea and China have developed sophisticated cyber attack capabilities. Many South Koreans are concerned about the perception of a rising China and a declining United States. The U.S. and ROK defense establishments need to develop new perspectives on a more effective alliance capable of proactive deterrence.

Another Korean security expert argued that the ROK should become a nuclear

weapons state. He noted that Israelis privately say that if their neighbors continue to provoke them, they will use their nuclear weapons. If North Korea has nuclear weapons but the South does not, the North-South Korean situation will be analogous to the Israeli-Arab situation. Extended deterrence is dependent on politics. Perhaps in the future North Korea may engage in secret talks with the United States for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea. That is not happening now, but who knows what the future holds?

For fifteen years, the Korean expert continued, we have tried to stop the North Korean nuclear weapons program, without success. The Six Party Talks have already failed, and there is no prospect they will succeed. If South Korea pursued nuclear weapons, China might take a significantly more positive approach toward the Korean Peninsula. In response to Chinese complaints, the United States could tell China that, just as China says it cannot change North Korea, the United States cannot change South Korea.

An American expert noted that tactical nuclear weapons are still nuclear weapons and capable of causing enormous destruction. A nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula would be devastating for all concerned. He said, however, he recognized from our discussion that the United States has not been able fully to reassure its South Korean ally. Regarding assertions that that China supported North Korea after North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, he said that that was not correct. In response to the crisis, China had tried to bring about a resumption of the Six-Party Talks. A United States' reintroduction of tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea would make China feel that talks with the United States were useless, and it would side dramatically closer with North Korea. China currently is clearly unhappy with North Korea's actions. We should keep in mind that containment and deterrence entail much more than just military and nuclear means. To be effective they must also include diplomacy.

A South Korean expert said that debate in the current session seemed to focus on two poles of opinion in the United States and South Korea, but the solution probably lies in the middle. South Korea is a democracy and the issue of the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons there is very controversial. Most South Koreans prefer a policy of complex deterrence without South Korean nuclear armament or the reintroduction of U.S. nuclear tactical weapons. Complex deterrence involves extended deterrence, strengthened conventional deterrence, and political deterrence with the United States and China. If South Korea pursues nuclear armament and North Korea retains nuclear weapons, the future of the Korean Peninsula and the twenty-first century will be dismal. Because of its nuclear development, the North Korean regime faces its own demise sooner or later. The ROK does not need nuclear weapons.

An American expert reiterated that deterrence of North Korea is key. South Korean nuclear weapons or the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Korea would only create a target for North Korean nuclear weapons. We need a clear strategy. In the Cold War, the strategy was "mutually assured destruction" but it was very problematic. Why not adopt the "accessory principle?" In other words, we should warn North Korea that if provides nuclear weapons to a third party that subsequently uses them, North Korea would be just as guilty as the other party. The basis of deterrence is superiority in conventional forces, which will make it possible to avoid using nuclear weapons.

A Korean expert said that the differences expressed in this session reflect frustrations about the North Korean situation, which will likely continue for the foreseeable future. It

is said that nuclear weapons are bad options for everyone, but the fact is that a number of states, including the United States, have them. Nuclear weapons themselves do not hurt economies. The source of USSR and North Korean economic difficulties was not their nuclear weapons programs but their lack of liberal economic systems. Most South Koreans do not support nuclear weapons, but there is an ongoing debate in South Korea now about them as a result of frustration about the North Korea problem.

### **III NORTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL DYNAMICS**

A Korean expert briefed on the evolution of the South Korean-Chinese-Japanese (KCJ) summit as a case of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Since 2008, it has been an annual gathering of the Korean president and the Chinese and Japanese premiers. The hosting order is Japan, China and Korea, and each meeting is named by stating that year's host country first, followed by the next and the third hosts. The fourth summit was held in Japan in May of this year.

The first-ever Korean-Chinese-Japanese tripartite summit was held in 1997 at the invitation of ASEAN as part of "ASEAN+3." In 1999, the KCJ leaders began a separate and unofficial breakfast meeting at the Manila ASEAN+3. In 2003, the three leaders issued their first-ever joint declaration, at the Bali ASEAN+3. In 2005, the KCJ summit was suspended after Japanese Premier Koizumi paid a visit to Yasukuni Shrine. It was resumed in January 2007 at the Cebu ASEAN+3.

From the 2005 suspension, we can see that there is no guarantee that the tripartite summit will always be held. For the summit to be maintained and developed, its agenda should be carefully selected. Discussion of such sensitive topics as sovereignty, historical perceptions, and nationalism need to be postponed as long as possible. The agenda for cooperation needs to be focused and include such issues as a joint response to global financial crises and constructing a cooperative system for disaster control and nuclear safety.

As mentioned, the first KCJ summit held apart from ASEAN was the December 2008 session in Fukuoka, Japan, with the participation of President Lee Myung-bak, Premier Wen Jiabao, and Prime Minister Taro Aso. Responding to ASEAN's concern about this separate meeting, the three leaders emphasized that their meeting would "complement" rather than "replace" existing regional cooperation systems. In a joint response to the international financial crisis at that time, the leaders agreed to raise the Korean-Japanese and Korean-Chinese currency swap limits to 30 billion dollars each. They also adopted a joint declaration on cooperation in disasters in the wake of the magnitude 7.9 earthquake in eastern Sichuan Province in May 2008 that claimed 87,652 lives and injured another 370,000 people.

The second separate summit was held in Beijing in 2009–2010 with the participation of President Lee, Premier Wen, and Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. The leaders issued a joint declaration commemorating the decennial of KCJ cooperation. Premier Wen briefed his Korean and Japanese counterparts about the recent visit of Kim Jong Il to China. The leaders discussed the denuclearization of North Korea amid the suspension of the Six-Party Talks but did not disclose details.

The third summit was held on Jeju Island in Korea in May 2010, again with President

Lee, Premier Wen, and Prime Minister Hatoyama. They released four documents: Memorandum for the Establishment of the Summit Secretariat in Korea in 2011, Tripartite Cooperation—VISION 2020, Joint Declaration on the Cooperation for Standards, and Joint Declaration on the Reinforcement of Cooperation for Scientific Innovation. VISION 2020 consists of 41 projects in five fields, but neither security nor nuclear safety issues were included. The leaders discussed developments in Northeast Asia, including the sinking of the South Korean military vessel *Cheonan* in March 2010. It was the first time that a major politico-security topic was discussed at the forum.

The fourth summit was held in Tokyo in May 2011, as North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il was visiting China. President Lee and Premier Wen again participated, while this time Japan was represented by Prime Minister Naoto Kan. The leaders' main topic of discussion was working together to respond natural disasters, prompted by the 9.0-magnitude earthquake, tsunami, and ensuing nuclear disaster that had ravaged northeastern Japan only two months earlier. They also discussed the need to build an intra-regional cooperative system to address nuclear power plant safety concerns.

The KCJ summit is a significant dialogue. Although the three leaders cannot have in-depth discussions about security issues yet because of insufficient mutual confidence, their meetings contribute to stability and security in Northeast Asia. Moreover, the summit can serve as a symbol of cooperation in an area that still lacks strong regional cooperative institutions.

From South Korea's perspective, the participation of the Korean head of state in the annual meetings with his counterparts from the world's second- and third-largest economies enhances Korea's national image. The summit also bolsters stability on the Korean Peninsula in the midst of inter-Korean confrontation, especially since China is North Korea's chief international supporter, even though for the time being the summit will have to continue to focus on cooperation-building measures rather than on conflict resolution.

An American expert commented that it is interesting that the trilateral Korea-China-Japan forum is proceeding well, especially compared to the Six-Party Talks. Given the fact that President Obama is probably the most forward-leaning American president ever in support of East Asian regional forums, it is ironic that the Six-Party Talks are stalled. Meanwhile, Track II and Track 1.5 multilateral forums that seek to involve North Korea have encountered difficulties. North Korea is not participating, and it is not possible



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to have five party meetings or “six minus one” meetings due to Chinese reluctance to participate without the North Koreans. The expert underlined the difficulty of working with the North Koreans, commenting that such efforts clearly represented an act of faith rather than of reason. Such programs are a kind of test of North Korean intentions.

The American expert expressed little hope that North Korea would implement



*Dr. Dae Sung Song, president of forum co-organizer Sejong Institute, engages in a dialogue with Dr. William J. Perry.*

market reforms. The PRC sincerely hopes that North Korea will implement economic reforms and that this will contribute to positive overall change within North Korea. In any event, the North Korean central planning system has collapsed, and corruption and barter are common.

Regarding China’s policy, the American expert commented that U.S.-Chinese relations deteriorated substantially in 2009–2010, as had China’s relations with its neighbors. This had been largely the result of Chinese internal politics, including the emergence of new actors and a lack of coordination among decision-makers. The growth of Chinese nationalism due to the increased availability of media sources and the IT revolution had contributed to Chinese leaders’ increased feelings of insecurity. In fact, they have become hyper-responsive to Chinese nationalism. However, such developments have not had much effect on China’s North Korea policy, which is determined primarily by the Beijing elite. Chinese nationalist sentiment is focused much more on Japan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

The American expert said that China’s response to the *Cheonan* sinking was one of its worst foreign-policy blunders in a long time. In effect, it did indeed stand with North

Korea after the incident. This had exposed a dilemma in the Chinese policy. China wants to be friends with all, but what if one of its friends stages a military attack on another of its friends?

In making North Korea policy, the American expert said, the Chinese foreign ministry has been marginalized. The foreign ministry is at the center of China's "a friend to all" policy. Many Chinese academics believed that North Korean misbehavior as in the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong attacks provided China with an opportunity to make a strategic shift in its North Korea policy. But China's leadership is not strong, and in fact is growing weaker, so Beijing does not have a careful decision-making process on North Korea. One might even say that China's decision-making process on North Korea is like logrolling.

The harder Chinese foreign policy of 2009–2010 provoked a very negative reaction in the region. The United States, Korea, Japan, and ASEAN sent very strong signals to China that if it continued in such a manner it would find the region divided into two hostile blocs, something China has long sought to avoid. From December 2010, however, the PRC seems to have recalibrated its foreign and security policy. Evidence for this includes Dai Bingguo's essay, the positive Chinese media reporting on President Hu's visit to the United States, the recent visit to the United States of the chairman of the PLA general staff, who took a very conciliatory approach, and the remarks of the Chinese defense minister during his recent visit to Southeast Asia and at the Shangri-La conference. It seems that President Hu and the Chinese Communist Party Standing Committee realized that they had a problem. Can they, however, sustain this wiser approach with a leadership succession in Beijing underway? Nevertheless, the American expert said, the positive signs coming from Beijing in spite of the difficult internal situation there are encouraging. The United States may reciprocate these more positive signals coming from China, but it is unclear if ROK is as willing to forgive and forget after China's support of North Korea's last year.

Asked about the sources of popular Chinese nationalism, the American expert replied that on some issues the PRC leadership mobilizes public opinion. China's North Korea policy, however, is not based on popular nationalism. Those deciding North Korea policy include the military, the party, the foreign ministry, security agencies, and the propaganda department.

Asked if perceptions of a more aggressive Chinese foreign policy over the past two years were exaggerated, a Korean expert blamed the Senkakus incident on the new Democratic Party of Japan leadership wanting to send a signal to China and the world that it was going to be tougher than the previous LDP government. It wanted to express its intention of keeping the Chinese out of the Senkakus area. This had been a serious Japanese miscalculation. An American expert added that China-Japan relations are distinctive, driven very much by domestic politics in China. A Korean expert said he believes that China has recently taken a much more positive foreign-policy approach than that adopted immediately after the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel. The typical pattern is that the Chinese military will act one way, while the PRC Foreign Ministry acts more positively.

An American expert said that the situation in China is in flux. There will be even more change when the next generation of leadership is installed. The most interesting thing about Kim Jong Il's recent visit to China is that the Chinese foreign ministry was barely involved. There seem to be considerable factional divisions within the Chinese leadership,

with the princelings tending to be bolder and linked to the military. The existence of these princelings stems from Deng Xiaoping's actions in 1993, when he authorized leading families to designate one young person from each of their families for eventual leadership positions in the party, government, or military. The American expert also noted there is much unhappiness in China about the rich-poor gap and rampant corruption.

Returning to the subject of North Korean economic reform, a Korean expert said it would be very hard for North Korea to succeed even if it followed the Chinese path. North Korea has no Hong Kong, nor does it have a massive overseas diaspora like China. Moreover, China has a large potential domestic market that attracts huge amounts of foreign direct investment, but again North Korea does not. The North Koreans themselves know it will be very difficult to make Chinese-style economic reforms succeed in their country.

A Korean expert noted that the Korea-China-Japan trilateral summit in May 2010 issued a joint summit statement acknowledging the issue of the sinking of the *Cheonan* and expressing opposition to all actions against peace and security in the region. South Koreans regarded this as a diplomatic victory, as it was the first time for the PRC to discuss the North Korean security situation at one of the trilateral summits. Then, in the 2011 China-Japan-Korea summit, Premier Wen told his Korean and Japanese counterparts that the PRC had invited Kim Jong Il to visit China to observe the Chinese economy. This was contrary to the usual Chinese practice of not confirming or commenting on Kim Jong Il's visits to China until after they are completed. Again, the ROK viewed this as a positive change, i.e. China wanting to be transparent with the ROK and have a normal relationship with North Korea.

An American expert said that in earlier years China had gotten ahead of the United States in supporting multilateral regional efforts in East Asia. More recently, China has signaled that it is not trying to push the United States out of the region. The Obama administration's signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and its joining of the East Asian summit mark significant U.S. support for East Asian regional cooperative efforts. But major issues remain, including which forum is to do what, how the forums fit together, and the extent to which ASEAN should be in the driver's seat. Everyone politely says that ASEAN leadership of regional efforts is fine, but China, the United States, Japan, and the ROK all believe that stronger regional leadership is needed. Meanwhile, the United States is trying hard not to appear domineering. The American expert said it is important to use many forms and organizations in the region. However, China and the United States do not have huge hopes that multilateral regional forums in East Asia will be able to solve the major security issues.

As for North Korean market reforms, the American expert said there are many reasons to believe they would succeed if the North actually implemented them. In fact, there is a broad diaspora of Koreans throughout the world. Although most are South Koreans, many would be willing to work with North Korea if it took a different approach. It is in South Korea's interest that North Korea reform its economic system. China is quite sincere in wanting North Korea to pursue economic reforms. China does not want to monopolize North Korea's trade, in part because economic dealings with the country involve huge risk.

Asked about reported opposition within South Korea to any trilateral U.S.-China-

Japan summit meetings, a Korean expert said that the ROK government's position is not that such meetings should not be held but that the ROK should be included if Korean Peninsula issues are discussed. He said that security issues are not generally discussed in the Korea-China-Japan summit meetings, in part perhaps because the parties feel that security issues are not resolvable without the participation of the United States.

A Korean expert said that South Korean feelings toward China after the *Cheonan* sinking were very bad. After the *Cheonan* sinking and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, Chinese leaders only repeatedly stressed the importance of peace and stability, rather than take a responsible position. Chinese-South Korean relations are very complex and interdependent. Another Korean expert said that the South Korean media has been reporting that Kim Jong Il was very disappointed by his reception during his recent visit to China. For example, Kim Jong Il frequently used the phrase "generation after generation," but the Chinese did not repeat it. Kim Jong Il also wanted the Chinese government itself to engage in large-scale cooperation with North Korea on economic projects, but Premier Wen had spoken only of "normal business practices." Meanwhile, Kim Jong Il made no mention of China's three-step proposal for the resumption of Six-Party Talks. Even though President Hu had urged Kim Jong Il to deal with South Korea, only three days after Kim Jong Il returned to Pyongyang the National Defense Commission had threatened a physical attack on South Korea. Such behavior suggests that the situation in North Korea is unstable.

An American expert said that, ultimately, only President Hu and the Standing Committee of the Politburo can decide China's North Korea policy. Another U.S. expert noted that the Chinese Communist Party's International Department handles the PRC's foreign relations with Vietnam, Cuba, Albania, and Germany, in addition to North Korea. North Korea media reports say that Kim Jong Il visited eight places in China, and their focus is on the people that Kim Jong Il met. The American expert said he has seen no evidence that Kim Jong Il was disappointed by his visit. It is puzzling, however, that the PRC media is reporting so little about the visit.

A Korean expert who attended the Shangri-La conference noted that the PRC defense minister's remarks there against North Korean risk-taking behavior were not included in his prepared remarks but made during the question-and-answer session. Nevertheless, his remarks in that regard lasted nearly ten minutes, which suggests that they had been prepared in advance.

An American expert noted that U.S. officials all say they are convinced that the PRC strongly warned North Korea against further attacks after the Yeonpyeong shelling, but it is not clear if that belief stems from anything more than Chinese assertions and it is not clear that the Chinese actually did intervene with the North Koreans. Another American added that the U.S. administration was very concerned about the risk of escalation after the Yeonpyeong shelling, not only in regard to the North-South situation but also to the risk of a U.S.-China confrontation.

A Korean expert noted that Kim Jong Il's recent visit to China was the third in only a year. He said such frequency suggests that there is an urgent problem that Kim Jong Il needs to discuss with the Chinese leadership. North Korea faces three major problems: economic hardship, international isolation, and political succession. Since the first two are chronic, it suggests that the urgent issue is the political succession.



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