

Exercising American Internationalism: U.S-North Korea Relations During the Bush Administration

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INTRODUCTION

The Clinton administration based its foreign policy, for the most part, on “liberal internationalism,”¹⁾ the traditional diplomatic and security policy ideology of the Democratic Party. This policy line depended on multilateral negotiations, and stressed dialogue. In addressing international issues, it encouraged the cooperation of concerned parties rather than a hard-line policy that threatened the use of force.

The previous administration was also mindful of the need for maintaining the *status quo* in U.S. foreign policy, and thus sought a “strategy of engagement and enlargement”²⁾ to expand U.S.

1) On the characteristics of liberal internationalism after the inauguration of the Clinton administration, see Richard G. Lugar, “American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Period,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Winter 1994; Lee Sam-sung, “North Korea’s Nuclear Issue and the Characteristic of the Clinton’s Diplomacy,” *The Korean Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (1994), p. 190.

2) On strategy of engagement and enlargement of the Clinton administration, see

influence. Under this strategy, the U.S. policy to engage North Korea was established and naturally its primary objective was to expand U.S. influence over the isolated country. The rationale behind it was that expansion of U.S. influence would keep in check China's expansion, allowing the U.S. to remain the sole most influential country in the Northeast Asian region, equipped with even more clout. In particular, during the last days, the Clinton administration adopted more aggressive efforts to improve bilateral relations, possibly because it was concerned about the election of the Democratic presidential candidate to the White House.

On the part of North Korea, it did not make sense to reject favorable U.S. overtures to improve relations, as it wanted assurances from Washington about the survival of its regime and its economic recovery. As a consequence, on October 9-12, 2000, Kim Jong-il's special envoy Vice Marshal Cho Myong-rok made a visit to Washington. The following month, on October 23-24, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited North Korea as agreed upon in the U.S.-North Korea Joint Communiqué. Perhaps, on Washington's agenda was the wish to persuade North Korea to abandon its weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), to take North Korea under its influential wing, and to ultimately have the entire Korean peninsula and even the Northeast Asian region under the U.S. umbrella.

The Bush administration, on the other hand, has emphasized U.S. global leadership and national interests. It has promoted a realistic foreign policy based on the Republican Party's traditional diplomatic and security policy ideology of "American internationalism,"³⁾ which does not exclude the possible use of force. This policy line has been evaluated as a neo-isolationist tendency, putting the highest priority on the U.S. national interests.⁴⁾ A string

The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1994).

3) George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism," A speech at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, November 19, 1999.

of recent unilateral actions by the U.S. serve as good examples: withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), refusal to sign up to the Mine Ban Treaty, and rejection of a Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) protocol.

The strong foreign policy line adopted by the Bush administration is reflected in its policy toward the Korean peninsula. In particular, the Bush administration's emphasis on Asia⁵⁾ has brought the Korean peninsula into the international arena. In other words, for the Bush administration, the Korean peninsula is "a huge question mark for U.S. policy in the region."⁶⁾ This situation not only limits the two Koreas' ability to take a leading role in resolving Korean peninsula issues, but has also damaged the improved relations between the U.S. and North Korea at the end of the Clinton administration. One clear reason for the harsh U.S. policy toward North Korea is Pyongyang's bid to develop and secure WMDs. As North Korea began to "put the U.S. ahead of South Korea" in its dealings, the strained U.S.-North Korea relationship also started taking its toll on inter-Korean relations that had been showing much progress since the historic inter-Korean summit talks of June 2000.

This paper will examine the U.S. policy line toward North Korea since President George W. Bush took office and examine the current status of bilateral negotiations. It will also attempt to forecast U.S.-North Korea relations by analyzing the major agenda for their talks.

4) Korea Research Institute for Strategy, *Strategic Balance in Northeast Asia 2001* (Seoul: KRIS, 2001), pp. 50-52.

5) Asia is a key area of concentration for President Bush's national security team. Asia has replaced Europe as the prime focus of the U.S. defense community. Andrew Scobell, "Crouching Korea, and Hidden China: Pyongyang and Beijing," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (March/April 2000), p. 345.

6) Michael J. Green, "The United States and East Asia in the Unipolar Era," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2001), p. 41.

NORTH KOREA-U.S. RELATIONS AFTER THE LAUNCH OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

The Bush Administration's Perception of North Korea

Given the Bush administration's "highly skeptical view of prior U.S. policy initiatives toward North Korea,"⁷⁾ the hard-line U.S. position toward Pyongyang could have been expected. As a result, U.S.-North Korea relations that had seen rapid progress toward the end of the Clinton administration are at a stalemate. In addition—at least, in the first months of his presidency—Bush cast a dark shadow on President Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy" toward North Korea.⁸⁾ Furthermore, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. has placed a national security priority on the prevention of terrorism and has thus applied more pressure to North Korea, which is still on the U.S. list of countries that support terrorism.

The Bush administration wants to talk to North Korea—at least officially. On the other hand, however, it has openly questioned the North Korean leadership. On March 7, 2001, President Bush expressed skepticism toward North Korean leader Kim Jong-il at a joint press conference shortly after the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit Meeting. During South Korea-U.S. summit talks on October 19, 2001, he described the unresponsive Kim Jong-il again as "suspicious" and "secretive."⁹⁾

President Bush harbors a fundamental distrust of the North Korean regime. For instance, he designated North Korea—along with Iran and Iraq—as the "axis of evil" in his State of the Union address

7) Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Bush Administration and Northeast Asia: In Search of a Strategy," *The Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2001), p. 6.

8) Andrew Scobell, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

9) *Chosun Ilbo*, October 20, 2001.

on January 29, 2002.¹⁰⁾ On February 15, in a special interview with reporters from South Korea, Japan, and the United States before embarking on a trip to Seoul and Tokyo, Bush denounced North Korea, calling it a nation lacking transparency and freedoms, and a producer of weapons of mass destruction, even as its people lay dying of hunger. On February 20, 2002, in a joint press conference immediately after the end of South Korea-U.S. summit talks, Bush's skepticism about North Korea again emerged. In order not to embarrass President Kim Dae-jung, he refrained from strong terms like "axis of evil." He continued, however, to criticize the regime for "tolerating starvation," and for its "lack of transparency."¹¹⁾

U.S.-North Korea Relations after the Inauguration of the Bush Administration

The Bush administration's adoption of the policy of "strict reciprocity" vis-à-vis North Korea has negatively impacted prospects for U.S.-North Korea talks. In particular, the Bush administration expects an agreement or monitoring and verification from the North Korean regime in order to resolve the problem of North Korean WMDs, including nuclear weapons and missiles, which the North, on the other hand, sees as vital for sustaining its regime. So North Korea will not make any concessions to the U.S. unless it is sure to receive comparable returns from the U.S.

The U.S. hard-line was further expressed on January 26, 2001 when U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell met his Japanese counterpart Yohei Kono for talks. He commented at the time that

10) The *International Herald Tribune* forecasted that the "axis of evil" remark would aggravate the already deadlocked North Korea-U.S. relations, damage the domestic and foreign policy of South Korea, and put pressure on the Kim Dae-jung administration's internal policy implementation in its last months. *International Herald Tribune*, February 1, 2002.

11) *Chosun Ilbo*, February 21, 2002.

U.S. policy toward Pyongyang would be based on “raw reality.”¹²⁾ This was undoubtedly a clear demonstration of U.S. intentions to stress monitoring and verification in its policy toward North Korea. A North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman responded through the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the official North Korean information channel, “We can address U.S. security concerns only when the U.S. exhibits through substantial actions that it wishes to change its hostile attitude toward us.”¹³⁾

After some preliminary steps—an internal policy review, Undersecretary Richard L. Armitage’s Seoul visit, and coordination through the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) among South Korea, the U.S. and Japan, the Bush administration unveiled its policy outline toward North Korea on June 6, 2001, in a presidential statement. This statement reiterated “transparency,” “verification” and “reciprocity,” and proposed three agenda priorities including stepped-up efforts by North Korea to implement the Geneva Agreed Framework, verifiable deterrence, an export ban on missiles, and the elimination and easing of conventional weapons. Of course, the statement said, if North Korea reacted positively, the United States could provide economic assistance and propose a comprehensive package to improve bilateral relations.

A week later, on June 13, working-level talks took place in New York between U.S. special envoy for Korea Peace Talks Jack Pritchard and North Korean ambassador to the United Nations Ri Hyong-chul. While Pritchard again proposed the three agenda points, Ri strongly criticized “the hostile U.S. policy,” demanding compensation for lost electricity, fifty-percent material compensation for losses suffered because of halted missile exports and the withdrawal of U.S. Forces stationed in South Korea.¹⁴⁾ Notably, the official North Korea reaction to the U.S. three-point agenda came on June 18 through a Foreign

12) *Joongang Ilbo*, January 27, 2001.

13) *The North Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA), February 21, 2001.

14) *The Yonhap News Agency*, June 18, 2001.

Ministry announcement, which stated that the three-point agenda was “unilateral and hostile in nature, and nothing but a plot to disarm North Korea.”¹⁵⁾

On July 27, on a visit to Seoul, Secretary Powell said that the United States was willing to meet North Korea at any time or place convenient to Pyongyang and with no strings attached. He further added that the U.S. would also consider humanitarian food aid to North Korea, separately from the resumption of talks between the U.S. and North Korea. President Bush confirmed the U.S. position toward the Washington-Pyongyang talks on October 19 at the APEC Summit Meeting. At the press conference before sitting down for summit talks with President Kim Dae-jung, he said that the door for dialogue with the United States was always open to North Korea.

In sharp contrast, Bush’s State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, designated North Korea, Iraq and Iran as countries forming the “axis of evil,” leading to a further deterioration in U.S.-North Korea relations. Against this backdrop, in the press conference following South Korea-U.S. summit talks, on February 20, President Bush re-confirmed that the United States was willing to engage in talks without any preconditions. However, he made further controversial remarks that were viewed by the North as an effort to divide the North Korean people from their government. Two days later, the North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman lashed out at the remark, calling it proof of U.S. intentions not to resume dialogue with North Korea.

In an attempt to defuse the situation, South Korea intervened to stimulate U.S.-North Korea dialogue. Special Presidential Advisor for National Security and Unification Lim Dong-won was dispatched to the North as a special presidential envoy in early April, where he delivered a letter signed by President Kim Dae-jung, encouraging Kim Jong-il to resume talks with the United States. Later Kim Jong-il

15) *KCNA*, June 13, 2001.

accepted a visit by a U.S. envoy to Pyongyang.

A few days after Lim's visit to Pyongyang, on April 11, the North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman stated on a positive note that U.S.-North Korea dialogues should be held on "a level-playing field." It went on to say that to ease tension on the Korean peninsula, it was necessary to resume talks with the United States, and that North Korea was willing to do so "when conditions were met, but not now."¹⁶⁾

The White House announced in a statement released on April 30 that it would decide within a few days when to send a special envoy to North Korea. On June 10, Secretary Powell announced in his address to the Asia Society that the United States expected to resume dialogue with North Korea soon, and was making appropriate preparations, based on North Korea's willingness to improve its relations with the United States. In other words, Powell laid down the following preconditions for a dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea: a halt in production of WMDs and development of long-range missiles, concerted efforts to clean up its "rogue state" image, and improvements in the quality of life of its people. And he also called for transparency and verification of the food aid provided by international organizations to North Korea.¹⁷⁾

On June 13, the North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman responded via KCNA that the United States was practically setting conditions for bilateral dialogues, and if there was to be any progress, the U.S. would have to give up its hostile policy toward Pyongyang.¹⁸⁾

Then, on June 29, North Korea launched an armed provocation in the West Sea, clashing with the South Korean Navy, not only dampening inter-Korean relations, but also damaging U.S.-North Korea ties. As a result, the hard-won plan for the U.S. to dispatch its

16) The (North) Korean Central Broadcasting Station, April 11, 2002.

17) *The Yonhap News Agency*, June 11, 2002.

18) The Ministry of Unification, *Weekly on North Korea*, Issue 595 (June 8-14, 2002), p. 23.

special envoy to North Korea was dropped. The North's introduction of economic reform measures in early July, however, indicated that it desperately needed outside assistance. And on July 25 in a dramatic reversal of attitude, it expressed regret over the West Sea naval clash and proposed the resumption of inter-Korean ministerial talks.

On July 31, North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun met with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell during the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). During their talks, they reaffirmed that the United States and North Korea should soon resume dialogue. However, Powell again made it clear that a future agenda should include the non-proliferation of WMDs, the implementation of the 1994 Agreed Framework, and the reduction of conventional weapons. This signaled that the underlying U.S. attitude toward North Korea had not changed and that the road ahead for future U.S.-North Korea talks could be rough.

MAJOR AGENDA FOR FUTURE U.S.-NORTH KOREA NEGOTIATIONS

The Bush administration's perception of North Korea is that despite economic difficulties, North Korea is employing every means available to obtain a strong military capability to guarantee the survival of its regime. To contain North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles, the Bush administration is simultaneously pursuing a non-proliferation policy and counter-proliferation policy toward North Korea; the former is a diplomatic approach while the latter would use military force, if necessary. In addition, the Bush administration is deeply concerned about the forward deployment of massive North Korean military forces along the demarcation line. Accordingly, the administration has expressed a desire to broaden the scope of its dialogue with Pyongyang to include a more

comprehensive agenda.¹⁹⁾

A year before, on June 6, 2001, the basic agenda for the U.S.-North Korea talks had been set after a series of North Korea policy review processes: the improved implementation of the Agreed Framework relating to North Korea's nuclear activities, verifiable controls over North Korea's missile programs, a ban on its missile exports, and a less-threatening conventional military posture.²⁰⁾ And in the days since September 11, North Korea's chemical and biological weapons capability and its inclusion in the list of countries that sponsor terrorism have been receiving widespread publicity. These issues are likely to form an intrinsic part of the major agenda for future U.S.-North Korea negotiations.

North Korea's Nuclear Weapons

North Korea's nuclear weapons are the biggest issue facing future U.S.-North Korea negotiations. The U.S. suspects that North Korea could have diverted sufficient plutonium to produce one or two nuclear weapons before 1994, when the Agreed Framework was signed, and demands that there should be verification of North Korea's past nuclear activities, as well as a nuclear freeze in North Korea.

Based on the Geneva agreement, the Bush administration is stepping up pressure against Pyongyang saying that North Korea should consent to nuclear inspections by the International Atomic

19) The Bush administration seems to be taking the advice proffered by a 1990 study group that included Richard Armitage and Paul Wolfowitz. The group, headquartered at National Defense University in Washington, recommended the U.S. to undertake a proactive "comprehensive approach to North Korea" on issues including nuclear, missiles, and conventional forces. Andrew Scobell, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

20) President George W. Bush, "Press Statement," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, June 11, 2001, [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/release2001/06/20010611-4.html>].

Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify its past nuclear activities before it is offered core components for the light water reactors. On June 6, 2001, President Bush had announced in his statement on North Korea policy that he would “seek the improved implementation of the Agreed Framework with regard to North Korean nuclear activities.” However, North Korea is dismissing the U.S. demand, saying that the Framework Agreement allows North Korea the right to negotiate with the IAEA shortly before the core components are delivered to Pyongyang.

Needless to say, strong pressure from the Bush administration on the North Korean nuclear program will likely aggravate U.S.-North Korea relations. Recognizing this, the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) recommended on September 18, 2001 that North Korean issues should be given diplomatic priority and bilateral talks should be resumed soon in order to avert another round of tensions on the Korean peninsula that could result in North Korea possibly reopening its nuclear program, frozen in accordance with the Agreed Framework since 1994.²¹⁾

Even if U.S.-North Korea talks are resumed, differences in opinion regarding the timetable of an IAEA nuclear inspection and North Korea’s strong demand for compensation for the delay in the construction of the light water reactors, originally slated for completion in 2003, will influence bilateral ties in one way or another. Of course, there is a possibility that Pyongyang might react favorably, but only if Washington guarantees the survival of the regime and offers economic compensation.

North Korean Missile Issues

The fact that North Korean long-range missiles with WMDs might pose a threat to mainland United States in the not-too-distant future is forcing the missile issue to the top of the agenda in U.S.

21) *Donga Ilbo*, September 20, 2001.

policy toward North Korea. With North Korea's current missile capability, it can produce medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) and it is known that its long-range missiles can threaten some parts of the U.S. mainland. In fact, on March 11, 2002, Robert D. Walpole, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency strategy and nuclear planning officer, testified before the Senate International Security Subcommittee that North Korea might be ready to test-fire a missile with nuclear warheads capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. He went on to say that North Korea possessed a second-stage Daepo-dong II missile that could carry hundreds of kilograms of warheads as far as 10,000 km. On top of which, if North Korea was successful in developing 3-stage missiles that could travel 15,000 km, then it could strike the entire North American continent.²²⁾

In the post-Cold War era, North Korea achieved its security objective through the development of missiles by using them as bargaining chips to exact political and economic benefits from the United States. Most of all, North Korea is capitalizing on its threatening long-range missile program to secure assurances from the United States for the survival of its regime through, for example, a U.S.-North Korea peace agreement.²³⁾

Currently, the Bush administration is calling strongly for monitoring and verification and trying to induce North Korea into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Despite this pressure, North Korea is still attempting to use its missiles to obtain assurances for the security of the regime, to secure tangible benefits and to gain an advantageous position in future negotiations. North Korea wants Pyongyang and Washington to pick up where progress began during the Clinton administration.

Considering both positions, if the missile talks are resumed, there will be comprehensive discussions on the export, development, and

22) *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, March 13, 2002.

23) Hong Yong-pyo, *North Korea's Missile Development Strategy* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 1999), p. 57.

deployment of missiles, as well as on future scrapping of the missile program and the verification thereof.²⁴⁾

North Korea will demand a high price for abandoning its missile program. Without doubt, the key to the missile issue lies in what the United States is willing to give North Korea in return for the North's scrapping of its missile development.²⁵⁾ Without mentioning compensation, however, the Bush administration is in a position to fundamentally re-examine the North's missile threat, and see to it, through verification, that North Korea implements its promises.²⁶⁾ On the down side, unless one party is willing to make concessions first, prolonged frictions over North Korea's missiles can be expected.

North Korea's Conventional Weapons

The United States justifies including the North Korean conventional weapons threat in the major agenda for their talks, pointing to the North's 1,700 aircraft, 800 vessels including submarines, 12,000 field artillery weapons and 500 long-range artillery that can reach Seoul. Furthermore, North Korea deploys 70 percent of its military capability within 144 km of the demarcation line.²⁷⁾ Given the severity of the threat, the Bush administration wants to reduce North Korean conventional weapons through direct negotiations.

24) Park Jong-chul, *U.S.-North Korea Missile Negotiations and South Korean Countermeasures* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2001), p. 1.

25) Robert Manning's recommendations for the U.S. to get North Korean concessions in missile negotiations are as follows: (1) To deal with the missile issues step by step: first export, second development, third missiles that are already deployed, (2) To link missiles to electricity, (3) To provide in-kind goods that do not contain sensitive technology, rather than cash. Robert A. Manning, "Testing North Korea: The Next Stage in U.S. and ROK Policy," *CFR Task Force Report* (September 2001).

26) Park Jong-chul, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

27) Thomas A. Schwartz, "Annual Report to the U.S. Senate by Commander in Chief of the U.S. Forces in Korea," (in Korean) *North Korea*, Issue 364 (April 2002), p. 77.

North Korea considers that unilateral U.S. demand for reduction and rear deployment of North Korean conventional weapons goes against the regime's very survival. Hence, the North is extremely reluctant to accept U.S. demands outright. In fact, North Korea countered that, "The U.S. is practically demanding disarmament," and it again called for the withdrawal of U.S. Forces in South Korea.²⁸⁾ In future negotiations, North Korea is highly likely to vigorously seek economic assistance as well as the withdrawal of U.S. forces in South Korea in return for the reduction of its conventional forces. In other words, if the U.S. wants to talk about reduction of North Korean conventional forces, the U.S. should prepare itself for discussions on withdrawal of its forces in South Korea.

To sum up, North Korea is strongly resisting U.S. demands to include conventional weapons in the agenda because Pyongyang views it as a threat to the survival of the regime. Finding a solution to the North Korea conventional weapons threat without confidence-building and proper compensation will be all the more difficult.

Removing of North Korea from the List of Terrorism Sponsoring Countries

When bilateral talks resume with the U.S., North Korea will undoubtedly want to discuss being taken off the list of nations sponsoring terrorism, since it could lead to Washington lifting economic sanctions against Pyongyang. The United States had placed North Korea on the list in January 1988 because of the North's complicity in the bombing that brought down a Korean Airlines plane in 1987, killing 115 innocent civilians.

There have been three rounds of negotiations since March 2000 to deal with the possible removal of North Korea from the list. In the

28) Lee In-ho, "The 'Axis of Evil' Remark by President Bush and U.S.-North Korea Relations," (in Korean) *Kukdong Munjae*, The Institute for East Asian Studies, Issue 277 (March 3, 2002), p. 29.

process, the United States has sought a commitment from North Korea that it would not commit terrorist attacks within the next six months, that it would join international terrorism-prevention conventions, and would take necessary action to distance itself from its past. At present, it is widely considered that North Korea has largely met the first three conditions, except for the last one, since it still shelters kidnappers from the Japanese Red Army.²⁹⁾

The September 11 terror attacks galvanized U.S. hostility toward North Korea, which has for many years been exporting conventional weapons, missiles and related technology to Middle East countries. The United States made it clear that it would strongly react if North Korea, Iraq or any other so-called rogue states used their WMDs to support terrorism, and would as a consequence, consider them terrorist countries. The United States is especially concerned that North Korea might be supporting terrorism by exporting nuclear technology and missiles.

The day after September 11, however, a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman condemned the terrorist attacks and expressed that as a member country of the United Nations it was against all manner of terrorism and opposed to any form of support for terrorist organizations. On October 5, 2001, Ri Hyong-chul, North Korean ambassador to the UN reaffirmed Pyongyang's anti-terrorism position in the plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly. Apparently trying to distance itself from terrorism-sponsoring countries, on November 3, North Korea joined two international anti-terrorism conventions, "International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism," and "International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages," officially signing on November 12.

Nevertheless, the U.S. State Department again designated North Korea as a terrorism-sponsoring country on May 21, 2002, along with Iran, Cuba, Syria, Libya and Sudan. On May 27, North Korea

29) Lee In-ho, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

responded through KCNA that “it is a stupid plot to tarnish our national international image and it makes us question the U.S. intention to hold a dialogue.”³⁰⁾

The United States would only be willing to exclude North Korea from the list when it is assured that Pyongyang will take responsibility for its past terrorist acts and will not support terrorism in the future. If North Korea deports members of the Japanese Red Army and takes active measures to prevent terrorist attacks, for instance, by cooperating to gather information on the global terrorist network, U.S.-North Korea relations could progress surprisingly quickly. Then, North Korea could be removed from the list, which could allow the North to receive loans and investment from international financial organizations.

CONCLUSION

The most important outstanding issues in U.S.-North Korea dialogue include the North’s early acceptance of nuclear inspections, a halt in the development and export of missiles and bio-chemical weapons, and conventional weapons near the demarcation line, plus removal of North Korea from the list of terrorism-sponsoring nations. If these issues are resolved to the satisfaction of the United States, the U.S. will want to increase its influence over the Korean peninsula and seek to maintain and strengthen its hegemony in Northeast Asia.

On the other hand, North Korea will take advantage of its nuclear capability and missile weapons as a bargaining chip to extract the maximum from its talks with the United States. If successful, North Korea could extend the Kim Jong-il regime and break the chains of economic hardship.

30) *The Yonhap News Agency*, May 28, 2002.

However, if U.S.-North Korea ties remain deadlocked, tension may continue to rise on the Korean peninsula, as it did in 1993 when the North withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Now the ball is in the North Korean court to resume dialogue with the U.S. But Pyongyang is hesitant, considering the agenda items proposed by the United States that could threaten the survival of the North Korean regime. Therefore, unless North Korea seeks to transform itself voluntarily, the chances for dialogue among South Korea, North Korea and the United States are slim, and any rapid progress in U.S.-North Korea relations is unlikely.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration is saying that it wants talks with North Korea “with no strings attached.” However, the U.S. is not poised to offer the “compensation” that North Korea is requesting, sticking instead to its hard line of “strict reciprocity,” “monitoring” and “verification.” This is making it more difficult to bring North Korea to the negotiating table. In fact, North Korea still demands that bilateral relations return to the level seen at the end of the Clinton administration, while denouncing Bush’s policy toward Pyongyang. It is fair to say that North Korea is holding its weapons of mass destruction card for the last hand in order to sustain its regime. Unless the U.S. ensures the security of its regime and economic recovery, the North will simply refuse to accept the U.S. agenda for dialogue. Consequently, we cannot expect rapid progress in U.S.-North Korea relations any time soon.

South Korea finds itself in a very awkward situation: It wants to improve inter-Korean relations despite North Korea’s “preference for the United States as a negotiating partner.” At the same time the United States continues to maintain its hard-line policy toward Pyongyang. Even though the North pays lip-service to “inter-Korean cooperation,” North Korea is more interested in improving ties with the U.S., than the South. And the United States creates subtle frictions with South Korea in its dealings with North Korea, in spite of the fact that it stresses mutual cooperation in its policy toward North Korea. In particular, discord between Seoul and Washington

regarding their North Korea policy is inevitable in the sense that the United States sees the Korean peninsula from the standpoint of its global strategy, while South Korea sees it from the perspective of bringing about peace and unification on the Korean peninsula. If the gap between these differing approaches could be reduced, a proper coordination of the two North Korea policies could be effective in inducing North Korea to embrace reform and open up to the outside world, in turn providing the opportunity for peace to prevail on the Korean peninsula.