

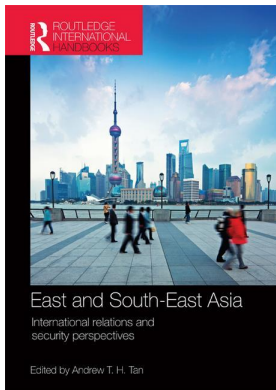
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North Korea's security perspectives

Hazel Smith

The primary goal of security, foreign and defence policies of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, more commonly known as North Korea, is regime survival (Smith 2005, 2007, n.d.). The major change to North Korean strategy in the 21st century was the formalization of the primary instrument of foreign policy as nuclear deterrence. North Korea's policy makers consider that they have been successful in achieving their primary goal as the military intervention from abroad that they feared has not materialized. Security planners attribute success to the credibility of their nuclear weapons programme. Nevertheless, North Korean leaders also understand that pursuing the nuclear option has not achieved regime security, that its alliances are uncertain and its security outlook precarious.

North Korea is much more isolated in security terms than it was in the Cold War as it is no longer embedded in a regional, ideological or international security community analogous to the bipolar balance of power between the USA and the former Soviet Union within which it was protected (Halliday 1986, 1989). North Korean security planners understand that they need to engage with the USA to find a mutually satisfactory agreement to joint security concerns. It is for this reason that a consistent goal of North Korean foreign policy since the end of the Cold War has been 'normalization' of diplomatic relations with the USA. Yet policy makers have been thus far unable to devise and implement a foreign policy that would provide political solutions to conflict and from the early 2000s the implementation of 'military-first politics' at home emphasized military-based solutions to political problems. Some military planners also no doubt believe that irrespective of any diplomatic agreement with the USA, it is only the possession of a nuclear weapons capacity that prevents invasion.

Nevertheless, diplomacy is not entirely off the agenda. In late 2011 North Korea and the USA accelerated bilateral negotiations that had continued sporadically, often in off-the-record meetings, since the breakdown of the Six-Party Talks in 2007. These talks resulted in North Korean negotiators agreeing to suspend nuclear tests and missile launches and allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials back into the country in return for food aid (McGreal and Branigan 2012). Negotiations broke down in 2012 as North Korea insisted on its right to launch a satellite into space, despite United Nations resolutions prohibiting the use and development of the ballistic technology that was necessary to propel such a satellite.

Scope of the analysis

Most analyses of North Korea implicitly interpret security, foreign and defence policy making through the rational actor model of Graham Allison's classic formulation, in that they assume a single entity that makes and implements policy (Allison 1971; Smith 2000). The rational actor model is closely allied with the common analytical interpretation of the concept of the state as a heuristic device that analysts use for the purpose of examining the activities of states in international relations (Halliday 1994). This is a perfectly adequate shorthand device for thinking about security and foreign policy and will underpin the short account in this chapter. For the sake of completeness and accuracy, however, we need to note that North Korea is, like any state, made up of various different institutions, groups and individuals, all with sometimes competing interests, and these competitive and organizational interests can sometimes provide a better understanding of outcomes in international politics than explanations that rely on an understanding of the state as a unitary actor (Allison 1971).

Key foreign policy actors included the Kim family leadership, the state institutions, the Party institutions and the military. There is plenty of speculation about the influence of various personalities and the relative power of these institutions in North Korea, but insufficient evidence to offer rigorous analysis of the relative power of these bodies, to chart change over time or to investigate if competition between these institutions was consequential in explaining incidents in North Korean foreign policy. Allison's work, for example, would suggest that apparently contradictory outputs of the foreign policy process—for example, simultaneously seeking aid from the Republic of Korea (South Korea) at the same time as engaging in border conflict—could be explained by organizational or bureaucratic in-fighting or conflict dynamics (Allison 1971). In lieu of empirical material and the access that would allow for systematic scientific investigation as opposed to speculative opinion, this chapter therefore treats North Korean foreign policy through the prism of the Allison model of a unitary actor engaging in means/ends calculations—that is, the rational actor model.

We also should note that, arguably, the real threat to regime survival comes from within society, not from outside. The goal of regime survival is unsustainable without popular support at home (Smith n.d.). To achieve this goal the government would have to secure large-scale foreign investment without which the economy cannot prosper and grow. Such policies would entail following the People's Republic of China's lead of partial liberalization. Yet North Korea fears that the government would crumble from the inside out were this to occur. For the sake of narrowing the focus of analysis, this chapter therefore confines the evaluation to threats perceived by the North Korean state as emanating from abroad.

Unchanging philosophy: changing priorities and policies

Underlying North Korea's security policy is the understanding of international relations as constituted by a hard version of the concept of sovereignty (Smith 1996). North Korea shares the globally conventional understanding of the sovereign state as constituted by independence (of other states) and legal equality (with other states). Sovereignty also implies for North Korean security planners a zero-sum game with other states. This is somewhat different from the view taken by most other states in the 21st century, which accept that it can be in the national interest for sovereignty to be understood as entailing both independence and, where appropriate, co-ordination, compromise and the sharing of decision making in alliances, international organizations and issue-based partnerships. North Korea calls its understanding of sovereignty an upholding of *chajusong*, or independence; others might easily understand this interpretation as an unreconstructed classical 'Political Realist' interpretation of the sovereign state (Smith 1996).

The basic understanding of international relations as constituted by an impermeable sovereignty remained the same for all North Korean governments since the creation of the state in 1948. Security priorities, policies and activities have, however, differed over the course of the last half a century or so.

The period from 1948 until the end of the Cold War in 1990, a few years before Kim Il Sung died in 1994, was shaped by Cold War stability that provided room for the leadership to engage in military adventures abroad, without substantially threatening North Korean security. The second era was a period of trauma and transition, from 1990 and the end of the Cold War, through famine and economic collapse at home and perceived threats from abroad of military intervention (Smith 2005). In this period the government used diplomacy to great effect to achieve its aims of regime survival. The third period is the military-first era. Military-first politics of regime survival framed and shaped the foreign and security policy and activities of Kim Jong Il until he died in 2011, and continue to shape those of his son and successor Kim Jong Un.

Cold War stability 1948–90

In the Kim Il Sung era, the dominant foreign policy and security goal was reunification of the Korean Peninsula into one state, although the Korean War of 1950–53 was Kim Il Sung's first, last, only and failed attempt at unification by force (Cumings 2002; Halliday and Cumings 1988; Hastings 1987). North Korea's large standing army of around two-thirds of a million personnel was never again used to launch large-scale ground attacks on the South because the North never again received backing from either China or the Soviet Union for another attempt to re-unify the peninsula by force. From the end of the Korean War, regime security and the protection of territorial integrity was provided by North Korea's subordinate position as a junior ally to the Soviet Union in the Cold War nuclear and political balance between the Soviet Union and the USA.

Kim only survived the war with the help of 1 million 'volunteer' soldiers sent by Chairman Mao's People's Republic of China, which had itself only been established in 1949. The northern territory created in 1945 by the USA and the Soviet Union's division of the Korean Peninsula remained more or less intact but the country was devastated. Up to 2 million of a Northern population of about 8 million died and the country was carpet bombed to the extent that a US military official informed Congress during the war that there were no targets left to hit (Halliday and Cumings 1988: 172, 200; Yang 1999: 153–54). Post-Korean War politics focused on reconstruction and building the new Kim Il Sungist society but the Cold War security umbrella provided by the bipolar balance of power allowed Kim room for opportunistic military adventures abroad aimed at the USA and South Korea. Incidents involving the USA were designed to obtain world recognition of North Korea's military prowess. Military incidents aimed at the South were designed to encourage and instigate popular uprisings against the military dictators that ran South Korea until 1987. Kim Il Sung's strategic miscalculation was to believe that should pro-democracy movements in the South be successful, they would somehow naturally gravitate towards accepting Kim Il Sung's leadership of a reunited Korean Peninsula.

Serious military incidents included, most notoriously, the capture of the US spy ship, the USS *Pueblo*, in 1968 and imprisonment of the crew for a year (Lerner 2002). North Korea-sponsored military activities included the attempted assassination of South Korean presidents (Lee 2006). In 1968 North Korean commandos attempted to assassinate President Park Chung-Hee in Seoul. North Korea was also alleged to be behind a second attempted assassination of Park Chung-Hee by a Korean resident of Japan in 1974 (Eckert *et al.* 1990: 367). In October

1983, North Koreans failed in an attempt to kill President Chun Doo-hwan in Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma), but the bombing of the South Korean high-level political delegation resulted in the killing of 17 South Koreans including Foreign Minister Lee Beom-seok, two other senior ministers and four Burmese (Lee 2006: 119–20). A North Korean national admitted planting a bomb on board (South) Korean Air Flight 858 in November 1987 which exploded in mid-air, killing all 115 people on board (Bazhanova 2000).¹ North Korea's Special Forces abducted Japanese civilians from Japan in the 1970s and early 1980s (McCormack 2007).²

These military adventures failed to achieve the strategic objective of reunification and instead succeeded in alienating North Korea from potential allies in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which Kim had hoped to win over through appeals for support on the basis of the common principles of Third World nationalism, independence and self-determination (Kim 1986, 1987). Kim developed long-lasting diplomatic relations with leading NAM members including Indonesia, India and Egypt, as well as diplomatic relations with a large number of states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australia and Europe, but these diplomatic links remained for the most part little more than paper exercises with the occasional exchange of cultural and sporting delegations.

Alliances with the Soviet Union, China and the communist bloc during the Cold War were always strained and maintained by the two communist powers because of the global and regional security balancing act performed by both, and not because either ally was in control of Kim or always supportive of North Korea's policies at home and abroad (Bulychev 2007: 185). North Korea's strategic value combined with pro-active diplomacy by Kim Il Sung resulted in the maintenance of cordial relations with China and the Soviet Union throughout the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s and 1970s, bringing tangible political and economic rewards. In 1961 North Korea signed military treaties with the Soviet Union and China (Bulychev 2007: 185). Kim received economic support from both major communist powers and from the richer East and Central European communist states including East Germany and Hungary. Kim's attempts to develop South-South co-operation through the NAM was not successful in achieving substantial diversification of trade or sources of aid and North Korea continued therefore to rely heavily on subsidies from the Soviet Union and preferential markets for North Korean exports in the communist bloc.

The stable pattern of international relations in which North Korea framed its security calculations during the Cold War was only once questioned by North Korean foreign policy makers. In 1972/73, *détente* between the Republican Administration of Richard Nixon and Mao's communist China shook Kim Il Sung's certainties but it also called into question US security guarantees for South Korea. Both Koreas were propelled into a brief rapprochement (Armstrong 2009: 228–29). In 1972 a joint communiqué established a North-South Co-ordination Commission designed to pave the way for re-unification, and met until its activities petered out in 1975 (Smith 1996: 98–99). This short-lived initiative was important as it was the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953 that North and South Korea adopted bilateral public diplomacy as a means of conflict resolution.

Trauma, transition and diplomatic triumph: 1990–2000

The first major shock to North Korean security calculations came with the end of the Cold War in 1989. No analyst from anywhere in the world had predicted the collapse of the global bipolar balance of power, including those in North Korea. North Korea lost its structural position as a secure but subordinate ally in the network of communist alliances, economic support and guaranteed markets abroad, underwent economic collapse and famine, and for a

while during the early 1990s experienced rapid cooling of bilateral relations with its two major allies, the Soviet Union/Russian Federation and China. North Korea remained anxious about its security capabilities throughout the 1990s and in what in retrospect is known as the 'first nuclear crisis' of 1994, came close to war with the USA over the country's seeming intent to develop nuclear weapons (Sigal 1998; Wit *et al.* 2005).

Trauma

Rapid loss of external support had immediate and dramatic impact on the well-being of North Koreans. The early 1990s saw the start of an economic collapse in North Korea that resulted in starvation and up to 1 million deaths from malnutrition-related sickness in the famine of the mid-1990s (Smith 2005). The armed forces and their families were not exempt from the hunger and poverty that became embedded throughout society in which a huge number of white-collar workers including Party, state, security officials and professionals suffered badly as state wages in the local currency, the won, became worthless and state distribution of basic food rations ground to a halt in most parts of the country. Only those with relatives in those rare rural areas that managed to maintain agricultural productivity or the few in the very top echelons of government were exempt.

North Korea's strategic calculations were powerfully influenced by the successful intervention by the USA in Iraq in 1990/91. The large Iraqi Army, previously understood as one of the most powerful in the Middle East, disintegrated under the fire power of the military operation, code-named 'Desert Storm'. North Korea learned that a dictatorial leadership could not guarantee military success even after decades of mobilization of the population using the symbols and tropes of nationalism.

Transition

The government responded to loss of alliances, internal fragility and perceived threats from abroad with a mix of diplomacy and threat. Fear of diplomatic isolation drove North Korea into re-engagement with the South after an interregnum of nearly 20 years and resulted in the 1991 'Basic Agreement on reconciliation and non-aggression', followed by a further North-South agreement on 'the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula' in 1992 (Takashi 2000: 85–86; Armstrong 2009: 231–32). These agreements did not produce a radical decrease in security tensions between the two adversaries but did allow a space for South Korean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to assist North Koreans and brought North Korean officials into still limited, but growing contact with South Korean politicians and officials. Inability to feed the population also propelled North Korea into appealing for help from abroad from international humanitarian agencies and wealthy states, including adversaries such as Japan and the USA (Smith 2005). Humanitarian diplomacy brought increasing engagement with foreign officials and politicians, again from countries with which North Korea had previously had few contacts and/or hostile relations.

North Korea's military insecurity had been partly assuaged when President George H.W. Bush announced in 1991 that no tactical nuclear weapons would be stationed on the Korean Peninsula: in the words of a Pyongyang publication, this action 'removed its [the USA's] nuclear threat' (Takashi 2000: 29). This thaw in tensions resulted in North Korea finally signing the Nuclear Safeguards Agreement in 1992, which as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since 1985, it was legally bound to join. The Safeguards agreement committed North Korea to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities by IAEA officials. From

1992, however, North Korea's view was that the IAEA was demanding an excessive number of 'special' inspections in addition to 'regular' inspections and that these were over-intrusive and politically motivated in order to put pressure on North Korea to abandon nuclear development. North Korea also viewed the 1993 resumption of the joint USA and South Korea military and naval exercises, the 'Team Spirit' exercises, suspended in 1992 in order to ease tensions on the peninsula, as constituting a warlike escalation of hostilities (Takashi 2000: 26–34; Sigal 1998: 17–51).

Triumph

The North Korean government was increasingly fearful about its vulnerability to outside intervention as the economy remained in freefall and its alliances seemed uncertain. In 1993 North Korea announced that it intended to withdraw from the NPT. The implication globally was that North Korea intended to become a nuclear weapons state. From the North Korean perspective, the threat of NPT withdrawal was a means of forcing an end to pressures designed to undermine the regime.³

North Korea's announcement that it might withdraw from the NPT was highly risky and was understood as risky by North Korea's decision makers: North Korea's commentators referred to 'do-or-die tactics' (Jon 2000: 113; Takashi 2000: 93). No state had ever previously withdrawn from the NPT and the US view was that North Korea's moves were a *casus belli*. Both sides anticipated the outbreak of war in June 1994; it took a literally last-minute intervention by former US President Jimmy Carter in a visit to Pyongyang to meet then President Kim Il Sung, just weeks before the latter's death in July, to lead the two antagonists into serious negotiations (Creekmore 2006; Sigal 1998: 150–62; Wit *et al.* 2005: 192–246). Subsequent to Carter's visit, intensive bilateral diplomacy resulted in the 1994 Geneva Agreement. Provisions of the Agreement included the shutdown of North Korea's nuclear reactors and the formation of a consortium, the Korea Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), the major partners of which were the USA, South Korea and Japan, and the purpose of which was to fund and build two light-water reactor nuclear power plants in North Korea and to ensure the shutdown of North Korea's potentially dangerous graphite-moderated nuclear reactors that had potential to facilitate the development of nuclear weaponry (Sigal 1998; Wit *et al.* 2005). Most importantly for North Korea, the Geneva Agreement also committed both sides to work for normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations.

For the North Korean government nuclear diplomacy had achieved the longstanding aim of persuading the USA to treat North Korea as a sovereign equal state. North Korea after all remained officially at war with the USA, the most powerful nation on earth. No peace treaty had ever been signed after the end of the Korean War to replace the Armistice that had brought hostilities to a close in 1953. For the North Korean government the Geneva Agreement represented the start of a process with the aim of gaining a security guarantee from the USA and establishing 'normal' diplomatic relations between the two states.

The Geneva Agreement facilitated bilateral diplomacy between North Korea and the USA. North Korean and US officials continued to meet bilaterally and in multilateral forums and North Korea considered itself inching towards a 'normal' diplomatic relationship with the USA. Normal diplomatic relations were an essential priority for North Korean security planners who believed that they would never be free of the threat of foreign intervention without cast iron assurances from the USA of non-aggression as well as tangible evidence of non-hostile intentions. For North Korea tangible improvements meant the lifting of sanctions and the end of diplomatic hostilities.

The zenith of North Korean ambitions came with the visit of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang in October 2000. Both the USA and North Korea anticipated a visit from President Bill Clinton before he left office but the November 2000 elections that left the Al Gore/George W. Bush result hanging because of alleged voting irregularities delayed planning and the visit never took place.

Military-first politics of regime survival: 2001–

North Korea gained confidence about its negotiating skills from what it understood as the successful outcome of the 1993/94 nuclear crisis but it did not see any alleviation of its fundamental economic and security problems. The catastrophic decline in the economy bottomed out by the early 2000s, but at a very low level of economic activity (Smith 2005). North Korea continued to rely on the provision of substantial food and fertilizer aid from abroad to feed its people up until the mid-2000s. Alliances with Russia and China were reconstituted but not with the same level of uncritical support as during the Cold War.

As far as North Korean security planners were concerned the USA became as unremittingly hostile as it was possible to be after the ascension of US President Bush in 2001. North Korea's diplomacy showed signs of innovation, however, most notably in its efforts to engage in conflict-resolution negotiations with Japan as well as outreach to Western European states (Jon 2000: 236–38). Initially ground-breaking diplomatic engagement with Japan that included visits by the internationally respected Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2002 and 2004 relapsed into hostility, however, after North Korea could not provide credible responses about the fate of Japanese civilians abducted from Japan by North Korean agents in the 1970s and early 1980s (McCormack 2007). More positively for North Korea, diplomatic relations were initiated and maintained with Western European states, including the United Kingdom, a major ally of the USA. North Korea was also fortunate to the extent that the late 1990s ushered in South Korean governments committed to engagement and peaceful reconciliation with the North. Southern negotiators to a certain extent provided a buffer between the North and the US Administration, which had in its early days very influential voices—in the shape particularly of Vice-President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz—which were unequivocally dismissive of the possibilities of compromise with US adversaries, including North Korea.

Vulnerability and military-first politics

North Korean security planners were aware of the regime's continued vulnerability at home and abroad and in response developed what they called 'military-first' politics, a philosophy and strategy first articulated in 1997, which was formalized as a guiding principle of the state in the 1998 Constitution (Kim 2008). Military-first politics enshrined national security politics at the heart of decision making in domestic as well as foreign politics, institutionally and in policy terms. The National Defence Commission, a body composed of army generals and presided over first by Kim Jong Il, and after his death in 2011 by Kim Jong Un, was instituted as the central executive power in domestic politics. This was a major institutional change from the structures established by Kim Il Sung, who had ruled through the Party and the civilian governmental structures and who, as in all the other communist countries, had kept the army out of domestic politics.

Military-first politics specifically argued for 'military-first, economy-second' politics. This slogan did not mean that the governments were uninterested in economic development but

that national security trumped any other priority *in extremis*. As the government considered from 2001 onwards that the regime was engaged in an *in extremis* battle with the USA, this meant that security imperatives always came first and with the military at the heart of domestic politics, security instruments were inevitably understood first and foremost as military instruments.

The second nuclear crisis

North Korea's first major concern with Bush Administration policy was the 'Axis of Evil' speech in which North Korea was grouped along with Iraq and Iran in President Bush's State of the Union address in 2002. The second Iraq War of 2003, in which Saddam Hussein was ignominiously defeated and the country occupied, provided the tipping point for North Korea's security planners. North Korean planners became convinced that the only viable safeguard against foreign military intervention, in lieu of a watertight non-aggression pact with the USA, was the development of an independently controlled nuclear weapons capacity that could underpin a policy of nuclear deterrence. From 2002 the military-first leadership followed a twin-track and often contradictory security policy. At the same time as continuing to seek security guarantees and the 'normalization' of diplomatic relations with the USA, security planners resuscitated the nuclear weapons development programme. These nuclear plans precipitated the 'second nuclear crisis', in which North Korea proceeded with nuclear weapons development in the face of global hostility (Lee 2006; Funabashi 2007; Cumings 2007; Cha 2012).

North Korea's diplomatic relations with the Bush Administration were fractious from the start. The KEDO project was formally suspended in 2003 although it was not fully operational after 2001 as Bush Administration officials heaped opprobrium on the Geneva Agreement as a misguided and misconceived effort by the previous Clinton Administration to 'reward' North Korea for 'bad behaviour'. North Korea for its part argued that the US Administration never intended to move towards normalized diplomatic relations and accused the USA of acting in bad faith. The USA accused North Korea of trying to circumvent the Geneva Agreement by pursuing alternative means of nuclear weapons development through a secret programme using 'highly enriched uranium' (HEU). The response from North Korea in 2003 was the announcement of withdrawal from the NPT. Initially, there remained some ambiguity about North Korea's nuclear plans; announcements that the country was building its own 'deterrent' capacity were combined with other statements to the effect that North Korea did not intend to develop nuclear weapons. From 2003 North Korea participated in multilateral diplomatic negotiations along with the USA, Russia, Japan, China and South Korea, but these Six-Party Talks did not defuse the conflict and often merely provided a vehicle for North Korea and the USA to expose to the world how far apart they were (Funabashi 2007). In 2006 North Korea divested itself of all nuclear ambiguity: it staged a test of a nuclear weapon (Samore and Ward 2007).

Subordinating diplomacy to deterrence

After the 2006 test, US denuclearization efforts intensified and North Korean and US State Department officials engaged in unprecedented and sustained contact to try to come to an agreement. Talks ended acrimoniously in 2007, however, as North Korea refused to entertain the tough verification measures demanded by the USA. North Korea's view was that it showed good faith by handing over 18,000 pages of information relating to its nuclear programme. It also argued that the USA did not want an agreement as it insisted on such a broad brush interpretation of the notion of verification of the data that, effectively, the USA would only be

satisfied if US officials physically took over North Korean ministries and military establishments. For North Korea this was regime change through the back door. The multilateral Six-Party Talks were suspended in 2007.

From 2009 the US Administration of President Barack Obama initially, effectively, gave the South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak, elected in 2007 and who was sceptical of engagement policy, a free hand in leading alliance policy towards North Korea. The US Administration suspended initiatives towards North Korea—citing a policy of 'strategic patience'. Suspension of multilateral diplomacy and freezing of North-South diplomatic relations was meant as a 'punishment' for the North Korean government's perceived recalcitrance, but it also closed off engagement channels and space for conflict resolution and permitted dangerous inflammation of every incident involving the two Koreas. In 2010, for example, when a South Korean corvette, the *Cheonan*, was sunk with heavy losses of life and with the blame pinned internationally on North Korea, channels of communication were virtually non-existent and the conflict escalated dangerously (Choi and Kim 2010; Lankov 2012; Page 2012). North Korea did not respond in a conciliatory manner to the policy of 'strategic patience'. North Korea tested another nuclear weapon in 2009 and declared itself a nuclear state in 2012.

The breakthrough with the South

The most radical and profound shift in North Korea's foreign policy was the decision to engage with the South in the late 1990s (Kim and Kang 2009). The Northern government entered into secret diplomatic exchanges with the South Koreans in 1999. The North-South Summit of June 2000, between Kim Jong Il and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung, brought for the first time since the end of the Korean War direct contact and exchange between the two Korean states. North Korea's positive response to Kim Dae-Jung's unprecedented but carefully calibrated rapprochement effort was driven by economic imperatives. Diplomatic isolation, a product of the highly antagonistic North Korean relationship with the first George W. Bush Administration, provided further impetus to Northern engagement. With the election of President Lee Myun-Bak in 2007, however, engagement spluttered to a virtual halt. Lee substantially scaled back economic and humanitarian support to North Korea and made clear that under his watch South Korea would be aligning Korea policy closely with that of the US government. Lee also announced that North Korea would need to make firm commitments to de-nuclearization before diplomatic, political and economic links would resume to any substantial level. The North accused President Lee of sabotage, betrayal and selling out to the USA. Needless to say no significant advances in North-South co-operation took place during the period of the Lee administration between 2007 and 2012.

North Korean security perspectives

The consensus in Pyongyang was that if Muammar al-Qaddafi had not given up Libya's nuclear weapons, the West would not have supported the insurgency in 2011 and the Libyan regime would not have fallen (Lankov 2012). The lesson that North Korea drew was that nuclear armed states were never attacked by foreign invaders and in this sense North Korea copied the strategy of the major powers which proclaimed deterrence as the function of the possession of nuclear arsenals. Military backwardness and weakness gave North Korean security planners little option, in their own terms, to turn to the holy grail of deterrence strategy, the development of an independent nuclear weapons capacity. The conundrum for North Korean security planners is that the same security, foreign and defence policies that in their view prevented invasion also

alarmed neighbours, contributed to low-level arms racing in North-East Asia and an escalation of the threat of military conflict that could potentially involve the world's great powers (Moon and Lee 2009).

North Korean security planners, led as they are by a military-first thinking, do not take into account that nuclear redevelopment does not take place in a political or economic vacuum. North Korea is a poor country with a decrepit industrial structure and a workforce that has been largely excluded from modern scientific developments since the end of the Cold War. North Korea has technical experts who understand the theory of nuclear energy and weapons development but the country has minimal engineering, technological or resource capacity that would allow it successfully to implement sophisticated engineering projects, including nuclear development programmes. Even North Korea's much-vaunted indigenous missile capacity turned out to be little more than some minor tweaking of old Soviet scuds, purchased at the end of the Cold War (Bluth 2011; Choe 2012). Failed attempts at long-range rocket launches in 1998 and again in 2011 displayed not strength or military power, but the opposite. The successful launch of a satellite into space in December 2012 was the exception to a history of engineering failures. The major security threat to the Korean Peninsula arises therefore because of the risk of an uncontrollable nuclear accident and from the absence of systematic oversight procedures and functioning regulatory mechanisms that could ensure secure and safe handling of nuclear materials.

North Korean security policy is not particularly difficult to understand and commentators who ascribe irrationality to North Korea miss the point and end up trivializing the serious threat facing the region from North Korea's nuclear programmes. North Korea's security planners are looking for ways to guarantee regime survival and because they consider that diplomatic efforts have not brought security, they have alighted on nuclear deterrence as a policy option. From North Korea's perspective, the fear of invasion is not unfounded. The analysis that ascribes nuclear development as the answer to security dilemmas has manifestly not brought security and is therefore, arguably, mistaken. North Korean security planners are, however, no different from other states' officials in that they rarely ascribe failure to their own mistakes.

The appropriate response

Policies of strategic patience have made a bad situation worse. Non-diplomatic intervention permitted the unsafe development of nuclear programmes on the Korean Peninsula and did not provide a means of conflict resolution. The North Korean regime is not going to self-immolate voluntarily. The unpalatable political question for North Korea's interlocutors is, therefore: are they prepared to envisage the survival of this regime in the context of achieving a denuclearized Korean Peninsula? The answer to this problem is that outside interlocutors should indeed concentrate on a diplomatic solution to the dangers posed by nuclear proliferation but accept that regime change, as in South Korea with the transition to democracy in 1987, will need to come from North Koreans themselves.

Notes

- 1 The North Korean woman who admitted responsibility for the bombing of the airliner also admitted to being a North Korean agent. The North Korean government continues to deny that it had anything to do with the bombing (Bazhanova 2000: 131).
- 2 When Kim Jong Il met with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Pyongyang in 2002, Kim apologized for the abduction of 13 Japanese citizens, blaming these crimes on rogue intelligence agents.

In turn, Prime Minister Koizumi apologized for the suffering perpetrated by colonial Japan on the Korean people (McCormack 2007: 162–81).

3 For the North Korean perspective, see Jon 2000. For the US perspective, see Sigal 1998; Wit *et al.* 2005.

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