



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**UNIFICATION STRATEGY FOR NORTH AND SOUTH
KOREA: THE MOST PRUDENT U.S. POLICY OPTION TO
SOLVE THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS**

by

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September 2004

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE September 2004	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: Unification Strategy for North and South Korea			5. FUNDING NUMBERS N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Hyon K. David Lee				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
<p>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</p> <p>The North Korean nuclear issue reached a dangerous impasse in the recent months as North Korea continues to resist international pressure to halt its nuclear weapons and missile programs. North Korea watchers and nuclear experts estimate that North Korea could have up to six or seven plutonium-based nuclear bombs by now. Indeed, North Korea announced to the world in October 2003 that they now have the capability of "nuclear deterrence." All would agree that a nuclear-weaponized North Korea will have grave consequences on the Korean Peninsula and the East Asia region.</p> <p>Accordingly, this thesis contends that the Bush administration miscalculated in its policy on North Korea by letting their "preemption" doctrine cloud their judgment on what is the most feasible and prudent policy vis-à-vis North Korea. So, what now? What should the US policy toward North Korea be going forward? Given the events in the last year or so, this paper makes the assumption that North Korea already possesses nuclear weapons. Indeed, the CIA has made formal statements saying that North Korea, in essence, already possesses nuclear weapons. The intelligence service believes that conventional explosives tests, conducted since the 1980s, have allowed the North Koreans to verify that their nuclear designs would work. The agency believes North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons similar to what the United States dropped on Hiroshima during World War II.</p> <p>Given these circumstances and the policy options available to the Bush administration, the best course of action and the most elegant solution to this messy problem, is to adopt a policy of unifying the two Koreas. A reunified Korea would satisfy most U.S. interests and would solve the most pressing and dangerous problem: the nuclear issue. Granted, it is not the most optimal option and there are some potential drawbacks but, nevertheless, it is the best option available. In this scenario, there is no "good" option; one has to choose the "least-worse" policy option. In essence, the U.S. has to make the best of a bad situation.</p>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS North Korea, South Korea, Korean Peninsula, Korean Unification, Korean Reunification, Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Policy, Northeast Asia Security			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 125	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

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PRUDENT U.S. POLICY OPTION TO SOLVE THE NORTH KOREAN
NUCLEAR CRISIS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

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ABSTRACT

The North Korean nuclear weapons issue reached a dangerous impasse in the last eighteen months as North Korea continues to resist international pressure to halt its nuclear weapons and missile programs. North Korea watchers and nuclear experts estimate that North Korea could have up to six or seven plutonium-based nuclear bombs by now. Indeed, North Korea announced to the world in October 2003 that they now have the capability of “nuclear deterrence.” All would agree that a nuclear North Korea will have grave consequences on the Korean Peninsula and the East Asia region.

Accordingly, this thesis contends that the Bush administration miscalculated in its policy on North Korea by letting its hard-line ideology cloud its better judgment on what is the most feasible and prudent policy vis-à-vis North Korea. Given the events in the last year or so, this thesis makes the assumption that North Korea already possesses nuclear weapons. Indeed, the CIA has made formal statements saying that North Korea, in essence, already possesses nuclear weapons. The intelligence service believes that conventional explosives tests, conducted since the 1980s, have allowed the North Koreans to verify that their nuclear designs would work. The agency believes North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons similar to what the United States dropped on Hiroshima during World War II.

Given these circumstances and the policy options available to the Bush administration, the best course of action and the most elegant solution to this messy problem, is to adopt a policy of unifying the two Koreas. The argument is that a reunified Korea -- united diplomatically with the U.S. leading the way in a multilateral forum -- would satisfy most, if not all, of U.S. interests by: 1) resolving, once and for all, the North Korean nuclear problem; 2) eliminating the possibility of another Korean war; 3) neutralizing or even weakening China’s growing influence over South Korea and East Asia; 4) strengthening the United States’ role and influence on the Korea peninsula and the region; 5) eliminating Japan’s primary security threat and paving the way for a stronger alliance between the U.S., a united Korea, and Japan; and 6) fulfilling the obligation to unify the two Koreas after almost sixty years of illegitimate separation. In essence, it is in the United States’ overall interest (including both strategic and values-based interests) to reunify the two Koreas.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Ed Olsen. He is a scholar in every sense of the word and my education at NPS would not have been complete without his mentorship and tutelage. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Gaye Christoffersen for her encouragement and guidance, and for instilling in me the devotion and affection for Asian studies. Finally and most of all, I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Judy; my two precious daughters, Hana and Kara; and my parents, Kwang-hi and Kun-ye for their enduring love and support.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The North Korean nuclear issue reached a dangerous impasse in the last eighteen months as North Korea continues to resist international pressure to halt its nuclear weapons and missile programs. North Korea watchers and nuclear experts estimated that North Korea could have up to six or seven plutonium-based nuclear bombs by the end of 2003.¹ Indeed, North Korea announced to the world in October 2003 that they now have the capability of “nuclear deterrence.”² At the heart of this issue is whether the U.S. and the international community can tolerate a North Korea that possesses the operational capability of nuclear weapons. The clear answer of most political scientists and East Asia regional experts is an emphatic “no.” From all indications, a nuclear-weaponized North Korea is not tolerable by any measure because it goes against all U.S. national interests and can have seismic geopolitical implications in the East Asia region.³

The challenge for U.S. policymakers, thus, is how to deal with a North Korea that is developing or already possesses nuclear weapons capability. Despite numerous economic sanctions and international pressure to halt its nuclear weapons program, North Korea has been resolute in its drive to develop nuclear weapons and medium range missiles for their delivery. There are two main schools of thought on how to deal with North Korea: 1) Engagement -- the Clinton administration’s approach that was more geared toward diplomacy and eventually led to the 1994 Agreed Framework. Critics labeled it “appeasement” and contended that the U.S. was rewarding bad behavior and was setting a bad precedent on how to deal with rogue nations. 2) Hard-line -- the Bush administration’s more hawkish approach, refusing to negotiate bilaterally until North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons program. Critics contend that it is giving North Korea valuable time and allowing it to further develop nuclear weapons.

¹ See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with former Secretary of Defense William Perry, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/themes/what.html, February 2003, last accessed on August 2003

² From CNN Correspondent Sohn, Jie-Ae, “*NK ready to unveil Nuclear Deterrence*,” 16 October 2003, www.cnn.com, last accessed on October 2003

³ Laney, James T., Shaplen, Jason T., “*How to Deal With North Korea*,” Foreign Affairs, New York, March/April 2003

Neither of these approaches, however, has been proven effective in preventing North Korea from pursuing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capability. One lingering question is how did this happen? Why did the U.S. and the other major powers allow a rogue state like North Korea to possess nuclear weapons? Or, was it inevitable that North Korea, virtually isolated from the world community and on the verge of collapse, would attempt to develop nuclear weapons, which has become in this new international order, about the only thing that can ensure its survival. Indeed, many political scientists believe that nuclear weapons capability is the ultimate deterrent for attack by a more powerful country.⁴

It was just three years ago that Secretary of State Madeline Albright was having toasts with Kim Jong-il when she visited North Korea, becoming the highest ranking U.S. official to visit North Korea since the Korean War. Just sixteen months later, however, President Bush denounced North Korea and included it as part of the “Axis of Evil” along with Iran and Iraq. As a result, tensions started to escalate and in February 2003, North Korea announced that it was restarting its plutonium-based nuclear program at the Yongbyon complex. The ensuing attempts at negotiation were stalemated as both the U.S. and North Korea were unwilling to give in to each other’s demands. In the meantime, the stalemate provided North Korea valuable time to reprocess the spent-fuel rods to develop plutonium-based nuclear weapons.

The purpose of this thesis is to first, examine the true national interest of the U.S. vis-à-vis the two Koreas and secondly, offer options and recommendations on the resolution of the North Korean nuclear standoff. This thesis will trace the roots of this conflict back to the end of World War II and the creation of the two Koreas, and analyze how it has come to this dangerous impasse, and present policy options and recommendations for its resolution.

The fact that North Korea, from all indications, now possesses nuclear weapons brings up many intriguing questions. Was it a policy miscalculation on the part of the Bush administration? Was it an oversight due to the Iraqi conflict? Or was it by design?

⁴ Kenneth Waltz expresses this view in “Conversations with History: Institute of International Studies,” UC Berkeley, 10 February, 2003, Can be accessed on <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people3/Waltz/waltz-con0.html>, last accessed on August 2004

What are the short and long-term implications to the delicate balance of power in East Asia? It is highly doubtful that it was by design because that would presume that the Bush administration would feel they can accept a North Korea with nuclear weapons capability. A nuclear North Korea, however, is not tolerable by any measure due to its severe implications in the East Asia region. Thus, a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula should be the top priority of U.S. policy in the region.

Accordingly, this thesis contends that the Bush administration miscalculated in its policy on North Korea by letting its hard-line ideology cloud its better judgment on what is the most feasible and prudent policy vis-à-vis North Korea. So, what now? What should the U.S. policy toward North Korea be going forward? Given the events in the last year or so, this paper makes the assumption that North Korea, because of the miscalculations by the Bush administration, already possesses nuclear weapons. Indeed, the CIA has made formal statements saying that North Korea, in essence, already possesses nuclear weapons.⁵ The intelligence service believes that conventional explosives tests, conducted since the 1980s, have allowed the North Koreans to verify that their nuclear designs would work. The agency believes North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons similar to what the United States dropped on Hiroshima during World War II.

Given these circumstances and the policy options available to the Bush administration, the best course of action and the most elegant solution to this messy problem, is to adopt a policy of unifying the two Koreas. A reunified Korea would satisfy most U.S. interests and would solve the most pressing and dangerous problem: the nuclear issue. Granted, it is not the most optimal option and there are some potential drawbacks but, nevertheless, it is the best option available. In this scenario, there is no “good” option; one has to choose the “least-worse” policy option. In essence, the U.S. has to make the best of a bad situation.

⁵ See article by Lumpkin, John “*CIA: North Korea verifies nuclear designs,*” The Washington Post, 9 November 2003, pg. A.10

A. RESEARCH QUESTION AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The overarching research question this thesis hopes to answer is whether a U.S. policy of unifying the two Koreas is the best option available and whether it will eliminate the North Korean nuclear and terrorist threat to the U.S. and the international community, and overall better serve the U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula and in the East Asian region. The thesis will answer this question by addressing issues such as: What are U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula and the East Asian region? What are the U.S. policy options and its consequences? What is North Korea's true motivation? What does South Korea want? What is China's role and interests? What is Japan's role and what does it desire?

To provide background, the next section of Chapter I will provide a chronology of events that has led to this standoff. In order to lend context to the current situation, Chapter II of the thesis will examine the relationship between the U.S. and Korea before and after its division. Although this chapter will provide some historical background on Korea, its main focus is to analyze the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and the two Koreas. This chapter will examine the rationale and the motivation behind the establishment of the two Koreas in the chaotic aftermath of World War II. It will then analyze the evolution of events that has led to the current situation.

Chapters III and IV will analyze the geopolitics of the Northeast Asia region from a cultural and historical context and provide conclusions on the intricate relationships between the two Koreas, China, and Japan. It will examine the renewed alliance between South Korea and China and its implications for the balance of power in the East Asia region. It will then explore Korea's complicated relationship with Japan and examine Japan's role and interests in the resolution of North Korea's nuclear standoff.

Chapter V will examine the U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula where, since the mid-twentieth century, North Korea has presented the principal regional threat and is the key to maintaining regional peace and stability. Deterring threats to U.S. security and maintaining regional peace and stability in Northeast Asia are enduring U.S. goals in the region. To that end, maintaining a nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula should be the top priority of the U.S. policy toward North Korea. The Bush

administration's actions, however, do not seem to advance this notion. Indeed, the Bush administration, at least on the surface, seems to have resigned themselves to a North Korea with nuclear capability.

Next, Chapter VI will analyze the major U.S. policy options available for North Korea: 1) the hard-line policy, as espoused by the Bush administration; 2) the engagement policy, the Clinton administration's policy; and 3) the proposed policy of reunifying the two Koreas. These three broad policy options will be examined and evaluated using the United States' national interests as the key criteria.

Chapter VII will offer a detailed implementation strategy for the unification approach. The implementation should be carried out in a carefully planned step-by-step strategy in five distinct stages, starting with a covert preliminary step, which is to set the stage with China. The next stage entails making concessions to Pyongyang to stop its nuclear program. This will then be followed by the normalization of relations with Pyongyang by the major powers. In addition, during the next stage, the major powers will provide aid and investment to North Korea to modernize and develop its economy. Finally, the last stage would involve reunifying the two Koreas under a system of confederacy or under some other framework.

Chapter VIII contains the conclusion and comments on possible future scenarios of the Northeast Asia region, in the aftermath of Korean reunification. The Korean unification process will have great implications on the future alliance structure of the region. The on-going process of the Six-Party Talks and the future talks on the reunification, with each of the four major external stakeholders (U.S., China, Japan, and Russia) trying its best to protect and advance its interests, can be viewed as a microcosm of the coming power struggle in the Northeast Asia region. These talks, on the political future of the Korean peninsula, can determine the nature of the regional balance of power and to a large extent, determine the future role of the United States in the East Asia region.

B. BACKGROUND

The fight for supremacy between two superpowers divided the Korean peninsula almost 60 years ago, and today, despite the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the Korean peninsula remains a hotbed of conflict and instability. The Korean War of 1950-1953 became a national struggle for reunification but it ended in a stalemate and devastated both countries. The war also involved four external powers -- U.S., Soviet Union, China, and Japan -- all of which still remain actively involved and exert influence to varying degrees, on the Korean peninsula. National reunification has been a permanent struggle for the two Koreas ever since its division in 1945.

There have been dramatic and profound changes in the international landscape but the fundamental problems of a divided Korea still remain today and may have even been heightened by the collapse of the Soviet regime. With the end of the Cold War in 1989, North Korea lost Soviet patronage and as a result, lost the security guarantees and the economic support that had sustained it for 45 years. In retrospect, it should not have been a surprise that North Korea would attempt to develop nuclear weapons once the Soviet Union fell and its security guarantees were lost.

1. Nuclear Brinkmanship

Indeed, in 1989, through spy satellite photos, the United States learned of new construction activities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex. The U.S. intelligence officials suspected that North Korea, which had signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985 but had not yet allowed inspections of its nuclear facilities, was in the early stages of building an atomic bomb.⁶ In response, the U.S. pursued a strategy in which North Korea's full compliance with the NPT would lead to progress on other diplomatic issues, such as normalization of relations. As a result, in May of 1992, for the first time, North Korea allowed a team from the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), then headed by Hans Blix, to visit the facility at Yongbyon. Over the next several months, North Korea repeatedly blocked inspectors from visiting two of Yongbyon's

⁶ See *Kim's Nuclear Gamble*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/frontline/shows, last accessed on August 2003

suspected nuclear facilities. As a result, Blix announced that the agency can no longer provide “any meaningful assurances” that North Korea was not producing nuclear weapons.⁷

In April of 1994, North Korea raised the stakes and announced it was going to move its stock of irradiated fuel from its five-megawatt reactor and reprocess the fuel from the reactor, which would give North Korea enough plutonium to develop five or six nuclear weapons.⁸ In response, the Clinton administration decided that it would take every possible action to try to and stop the North Korean nuclear weapons program. The Clinton administration considered a surgical air strike on the Yongbyon facility but concluded that the consequences would be catastrophic if a war would break out (the U.S. military commander in South Korea at the time, General Gary Luck, estimated that a war on the Korean peninsula would have killed nearly a million people including 100,000 US troops).⁹

The administration instead decided to impose U.N. sanctions, which North Korea saw as a declaration of war, since the U.N. was a signatory on the Armistice Agreement. In response, North Korea threatened to turn Seoul into a “sea of flames” and vowed to have a “total war” if the U.S. preemptively attacks Pyongyang’s nuclear facilities. The situation was worsening by the day and the U.S. prepared for a possible war. It is under this context that former President Carter, despite opposition from some members of the Clinton administration, traveled as a private citizen on a peace mission to North Korea. Carter met with Kim Il-sung and brokered a deal that would allow the inspectors back in and for North Korea to go back to the negotiation table. In July of 1994, however, Kim Il-sung died suddenly of a heart attack. He was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-il, who had been linked to terrorism against South Korea, including a 1983 bomb that killed four

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Laney, James T. and Shaplen, Jason T., “How to deal with North Korea,” Foreign Affairs, March/April 2003

government ministers and a 1987 blast aboard a South Korean airliner that killed 115 civilians. It is important to note that Kim Jong-il was also the founder of the Yongbyon nuclear complex.¹⁰

2. 1994 Agreed Framework

It is under this backdrop that the controversial 1994 Agreed Framework was negotiated. As part of the agreement, North Korea agreed to shut down the Yongbyon complex and cease plutonium production. In return, the U.S. agreed to construct two modern light-water reactors to alleviate North Korea's energy problems. Additionally, the U.S. agreed to provide 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually until the construction on the light-water reactors was completed. When the deal was announced, many Congressional Republicans were outraged. Critics claim that the deal was "appeasement" and "blackmail" because it rewarded North Korea for bad behavior.¹¹ Since the Agreed Framework was only an agreement and not a treaty, Congress did not get a chance to ratify it, an outcome which did not make many senators happy and contributed to the antagonistic relationship between the Clinton administration and the Senate. With increased opposition from Congress, the Agreed Framework muddled along with no firm commitment from the Clinton administration or the Congress. As a result of strong opposition from Congress and continued defiance by North Korea (it had launched a missile test over Japan on 31 August 1998), the Clinton administration essentially walked away from the deal.¹²

The Clinton administration, however, continued to engage diplomatically with North Korea to normalize its relations. In 1998, after North Korea fired a medium-range missile over Japan, President Clinton appointed the former Secretary of Defense William Perry to conduct a thorough review of U.S. policy toward North Korea. The main

¹⁰ See *Kim's Nuclear Gamble*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/frontline/shows, last accessed on August 2003

¹¹ See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with William Perry, former Defense Secretary in Clinton administration, can be accessed on www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline, February 2003, last accessed on August 2003

¹² See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with Charles Kartman, member of the Special Envoy for Korean Peace Talks in 1998, can be accessed on www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline, February 2003, last accessed on August 2003

recommendation in Perry's 1999 report titled, *Review of U.S. Policy Toward North Korea*, was to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs through negotiation and diplomacy. His conclusion was that the U.S. had no other option, save war.¹³

In October 2000, Secretary of State, Madeline Albright visited North Korea, becoming the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Pyongyang. It was a feel-good moment in the nascent relationship between North Korea and the U.S. and the images of Secretary Albright having toasts with Kim Jong-il were televised worldwide. The prospects for normalization of the relationship looked promising, especially in light of the progress made by South Korean president Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy," a policy of engagement with the North for which Kim won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000.¹⁴ Kim Dae-jung visited Pyongyang in June 2000 for a summit with Kim Jong-il and was welcomed warmly by the Kim regime and the North Korean people.¹⁵ After the successful visit, the Koreans and the international community were hopeful of a peaceful reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.¹⁶

3. Continued Nuclear Brinkmanship

Despite these advances, however, suspicions of Pyongyang's true intentions remained. Conservative hardliners in Washington as well as Seoul believed North Korea's aggressive behavior stemmed from its ultimate goal of uniting the two Koreas under the communist flag and subjugating the South under the North, using weapons of mass destruction to achieve its goals. Pyongyang's past record of terrorism, sponsorship of other terrorist states, and violation of human rights, made the engagement policy very

¹³ See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with William Perry, former Defense Secretary in Clinton administration, can be accessed on www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline, February 2003, last accessed on August 2003

¹⁴ For full coverage, see Wehrfritz, George, and Lee, B.J., "Korea's Mr. Sunshine Kim Dae-jung wins the Noble Peace Prize: Can this lifelong democrat unify Korea?," *Newsweek (International ed.)*, 23 October 2000, pp.62

¹⁵ For full coverage of the visit, see French, Howard, "2 Korean leaders speak of 'making a day in history'," *New York Times*, 14 June 2000, pg. A.1

¹⁶ For commentary on the visit and the prospects for unification, see Sims, Calvin, "Summit glow fades as Koreans face obstacles to unify," *New York Times*, 22 June 2000, pg. A.8

hard to defend. As such, when the Bush administration, with its neoconservative views, took over in 2001, the U.S. policy changed dramatically.

President Bush halted all diplomatic efforts with North Korea until a thorough policy review was conducted by his administration. Intelligence reports indicated that North Korea may have restarted its nuclear weapons program.¹⁷ Then, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush labeled North Korea as a member of the “axis-of-evil” in the State of the Union address.¹⁸

Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visited North Korea in October 2002 and presented undeniable evidence of North Korea’s highly-enriched-uranium (HEU) nuclear program. In a stunning admission, the Kim regime confessed to the program.¹⁹ Following the admission, in December of 2002, North Korea announced to the world that it was restarting its frozen plutonium-based nuclear program at Yongbyon. This was much more disturbing in that they can process plutonium much faster than uranium and once it is up and running, they have the capability to produce five to seven plutonium-based nuclear weapons in six months. North Korea watchers and nuclear experts estimated that North Korea could have up to six or seven plutonium-based nuclear bombs by the end of 2003.²⁰ In October of 2003, North Korea announced to the world that they now have the capability of “nuclear deterrence,” alluding to the fact that they now have nuclear capability.²¹

The CIA has made formal statements saying that North Korea, in essence, already possesses nuclear weapons. The intelligence service believes that conventional explosives tests, conducted since the 1980s, have allowed the North Koreans to verify

¹⁷ Laney, James T., Shaplen, Jason T., *How to Deal With North Korea*, Foreign Affairs, New York, March/April 2003

¹⁸ See transcripts from the 2002 State of the Union address, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>, 29 January 2002, last accessed on August 2003

¹⁹ See Laney and Shaplen, 2003

²⁰ See William Perry interview, Feb 2003

²¹ Sohn, Jie-Ae, “*NK Ready to Unveil Nuclear Deterrence*,” CNN, 16 October 2003, www.cnn.com, last accessed on October 2003

their nuclear designs would work. The agency believes North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons similar to what the United States dropped on Hiroshima.²²

4. The Six-Party Talks

The first round of the Six-Party Talks ensued on 27-29 August 2003 in Beijing. The two Koreas, the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia concluded three days of talks in Beijing with seemingly little progress towards the ultimate goal of eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. During the talks the U.S. delivered its unequivocal and united message that it will not tolerate a nuclear Korean peninsula. In response, North Korea used the multilateral forum to deliver a message that it possesses nuclear weapons and the capabilities to deliver them, and that it intends to prove so to the world by conducting a nuclear test. North Korea also stated its long-standing position that it is willing to end its nuclear ambitions in exchange for a security guarantee, energy assistance, and diplomatic recognition from the United States. Washington, however, has remained steadfast in its stance that North Korea must first act to verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its nuclear programs.²³

The second round of Six-Party Talks was held from 25-28 February 2004 with no real progress. Many reports have indicated that it was a tactical victory by Pyongyang in the way it has crafted the talks into an excuse to do nothing.²⁴ Furthermore, North Korea watchers contend, the U.S. is playing into Pyongyang's calculations to stall the talks until the November elections to see if they could get a better deal with a new administration, or worse yet, to give itself eight more months to continue its development of nuclear weapons.²⁵ Indeed, the third round of the talks, held from 23-26 June 2004 in Beijing,

²² Lumpkin, John, "CIA: North Korea verifies nuclear designs," The Washington Post, 9 November 2003, pg. A.10

²³ Kwak, Tae-Hwan, *The Six-Party Nuclear Talks: An Evaluation and Policy Recommendations*, International Studies Association Convention, Montreal, Canada, 16 March 2004. Also see, Hwang, Balbino Y., *The "Six-Party Talks: Much Ado About Nothing,"* The Heritage Foundation, Research and Analysis, can be accessed at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm333.cfm>

²⁴ See (author unattributed), "No Surprise From North Korean Talks," Far Eastern Economic Review, Hong Kong, 11 March 2004

²⁵ See (author unattributed), "North Korea Waits for Kerry," Christian Science Monitor, Boston, MA, 5 March 2004; Also see Magnier, Mark and Demick, Barbara, "Pyongyang May Stall During Nuclear Talks, Hoping for Better Deal for a New President," Los Angeles Times, 25 February 2004

showed little progress. The U.S., however, was seen as softening its stance when it offered Pyongyang a series of incentives, including a significant infusion of foreign aid. The Bush administration had previously insisted on complete disarmament as a first step to improved relations and aid. It was reported that Washington was prodded by China, South Korea, and Japan to abandon its hard-line stance.²⁶ Then, in July 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell met with North Korea's Foreign Minister in what was the highest level meeting between the two countries in two years. The meeting lasted for about 20 minutes and both sides tried to clarify their positions on proposals advanced during the third round of the Six-Party Talks in June. From all indications, however, there was no real progress to speak of as North Korea remained guarded and did not offer any compromises on its nuclear weapons program.²⁷

²⁶ See Marquis, Christopher, "*Powell Meets Foreign Minister of North Korea to Discuss Arms*," New York Times, 2 July 2004.

²⁷ See Marquis, Christopher, "*Powell Meets Foreign Minister of North Korea to Discuss Arms*," New York Times, 2 July 2004

II. U.S.-KOREA RELATIONS

For more than half a century, the United States and South Korea have been united in a strong alliance, albeit an unequal one, that mutually benefited both countries. In part due to this alliance, geographically and symbolically, in the heart of the strategic crossroads of the Cold War, the U.S. was able to prevail over the Soviet Union in the Cold War and become the unquestioned economic and political hegemon in the East Asia region and the world. South Korea benefited greatly as well, developing from a poor, agrarian, authoritarian state into a modern, democratic state with the eleventh largest economy in the world, largely as a result of riding on the economic coattails of the United States. However, with the increasing economic prosperity of South Korea and the progressive policies of the Roh Moo-hyun administration, which took office in 2003, coupled with the Bush administration's penchant for unilateralism, this once rock-solid alliance is showing signs of deep cracks.

Indeed, the anti-American sentiment in South Korea is reaching very disturbing levels. According to a Gallup Korea survey of 1,054 adults, South Koreans now view the U.S. most negatively just behind Japan and well ahead of its Cold War enemies, Russia, China, and North Korea.²⁸ This rising anti-American sentiment could potentially jeopardize the future of the U.S.-South Korea relations. So, what is the source of this sentiment? It can be argued that it has been fermenting for some time due to the unequal nature of the relationship between the two countries. The fact that it has come to the fore in the last couple of years may be due to the Bush administration's inclination toward unilateral action.

The intent of this chapter is to highlight past U.S. policies toward South Korea and comment on the resulting evolution of the relationship between the two countries. Toward that end, this chapter will argue that the strained relations between the two countries, if left unchecked, will provide a strategic opportunity for China to bring South Korea back into its sphere of influence. Indeed, there are indications that this is already

²⁸ The poll indicates 53.7 % has negative image of the U.S., 58.6% for Japan, 37% for North Korea, 24.1% for Russia, and 23.6% for China. For more info, see Kim, Choong-nam, "Changing Korean Perceptions of the Post-Cold War Era and the U.S.-ROK Alliance," *Asia Pacific Issues*, East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, April 2003, No. 67

happening. This dramatic shift in alliance relations can have lasting repercussions on the East Asia region and will be a severe blow to U.S. efforts to neutralize China's growing power and influence in the region.

A. IN THE BEGINNING: U.S.-KOREA RELATIONS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

East Asia was “opened” by Western Imperialism in the mid-19th century. Interestingly, the biggest and the most powerful country was the first to succumb, as China was forced to sign the unequal treaties when it lost the Opium Wars of 1839-42. Japan was next to submit to Western powers with the famous or the infamous, depending on one's views, landing in Edo by Commodore Perry in 1853 and the subsequent unequal treaties imposed on the Japanese. Of the three countries in Northeast Asia, Korea was the last to give way but finally signed its first international treaty in 1876, not with a Western power but with Japan, which was trying to emulate the Western powers by imposing unequal treaties on its neighbors. Korea's descent into the vortex of imperial rivalry was quick after that as Japan imposed a Western-style unequal treaty, giving its nationals extraterritorial legal rights and opening several Korean ports to international commerce.²⁹

The United States' treaty with Korea followed in 1882 but not without great resistance from the Koreans who were intent on remaining closed to all foreign intrusions. Official American interest in developing formal relations with the kingdom of Korea dates from the 1840s, but little was done until William H. Seward's tenure as Secretary of State in the mid-1860s.³⁰ The expansionist Seward wanted to open up Korea to advance U.S. interests and authorized efforts to approach the Korean government. After the successful opening of Japan by Perry, the U.S. first formally tried to open up Korea in 1866, when the heavily armed, merchant schooner, *General Sherman*, sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang. Despite warnings from the

²⁹ Cumings, Bruce, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997, pg. 87

³⁰ See Chang, Gordon H., “Whose ‘Barbarism’? Whose ‘Treachery’? *Race and Civilization in the Unknown U.S.-Korea War of 1871*”, *The Journal of American History*, March 2003, pp. 1331-1365

Koreans to turn back, the Sherman forged ahead and fired upon the hostile crowds that had gathered on the shore. When the ship got grounded by low tide, the Koreans killed all its crew in battle and burned the ship.³¹

The U.S. retaliated in 1871 with a mission headed by Fredrick Low, the newly appointed minister to China and a former congressman and California governor, to negotiate a treaty with the Korean kingdom. By this time, the U.S. government decided to open Korea by force, and in what many historians term as the “forgotten Korean war,”³² ensued. In this the “Little War with the Heathens,” as the New York Herald called it at the time, the Low mission included the warships *Monocacy* and *Palos*, plus four steam launches, and twenty boats, conveying a landing force of six hundred and fifty-one men, of whom one hundred and five were marines.³³ Fighting ensued and in the end, 650 Koreans died but not before putting up a courageous fight. Commander Low thought that the Koreans fought back with a courage “rarely equaled and never excelled by any people,” and thought that “there was something irrational in their fighting.”³⁴ This may be one of the reasons why the Americans did not go back to Korea until 1882 when the U.S. and Korea successfully concluded a treaty of “amity and commerce,” which was the first between Korea and a Western power. Admiral Robert Shufeldt, the leader of the 1882 expedition, hoping to not repeat the mistakes of the Low mission, was much more conciliatory toward King Kojong. The result was the U.S.-Korea Treaty of Amity and Commerce of May 22, 1882, which was relatively benign and can be viewed as comparatively enlightened considering the level of submission in other countries’ treaties with Western powers during this period.³⁵

In many respects, these first formal U.S. encounters with Korea and its ensuing treaties and relations that followed represent an important point of analysis for subsequent U.S.-Korea relations in the post-Cold war period. First, one can argue that the U.S.-Korea relations today, as was the case during the late 19th century, can be

³¹ Cumings, 1997, p. 97

³² For a full treatment on this war see Chang, March 2003, pg. 1331

³³ See Cumings, 1997, p. 97

³⁴ See Chang, 2003, p. 1355

³⁵ See Olsen, Edward A, *Toward Normalizing U.S.-Korea Relations: In Due Course?*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002, p. 8

characterized as primarily a one-way, unequal relationship, with the U.S. dictating the terms and Korea, having no choice but to follow them. The divergent views on the reunification of the two Koreas and the fact that it still remains a divided nation, long after the end of the Cold War, is a testament to the unduly strong influence that the U.S. exerts over South Korea that persists to this day. From all indications, the two Koreas want to be re-unified, so there is no valid reasons, in this post-Cold War security environment, that Korea should have remained a divided nation, save for U.S. interests in the region. Due to various reasons, U.S. foreign policy has undermined Korean efforts to create a unified Korea, and to encourage a new paradigm for Korea.³⁶ Indeed, Korea experts have commented critically on the lack of “normalization” of relations between U.S.-Korea since the first encounters during the 19th century and continuing to this day.³⁷

The lessons of the 1866 conflict and the 1871 war show the unyielding resolve and defiance of the Korean people to submit to foreign encroachments into its territory. Some sympathizers to the North Korean cause have even compared U.S. attempts to “open” Korea in the 19th century to its recent efforts to deal with, or “open” North Korea.³⁸ Indeed, the North Korean regime can be compared with the Korean “Hermit Kingdom” of the 19th century -- not in terms of the alleged terrorist acts or other unsavory behavior, but in the manner of its closed society in relation to the rest of the world. In dealing with North Korea, the U.S. can draw upon many lessons from the 1871 clash and the much more conciliatory encounter that led to the first U.S.-Korea treaty in 1882. The Low mission of 1871 went into Korea with its guns blazing and its assumptions about Korean barbarism and American moral superiority. The very premise of the mission, which aimed to force Korea to join the “civilized” nations of the world in regularized intercourse, was that Korea occupied not just a backward legal position, but an inferior moral position.³⁹ Moreover, it was assumed that the U.S. represented advanced civilization in a system of international relations in accord with the natural order.⁴⁰ What

³⁶ For more perspectives on this position, see Martin Hart-Landsberg, *Korea: Division, Reunification, and Foreign Policy*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998

³⁷ For full treatment on this topic see Olsen, 2002

³⁸ See Cumings, 1997, p. 95

³⁹ See Chang, March 2003, p. 1353

⁴⁰ See Chang, March 2003, p. 1353

resulted was a bloody battle in which the Koreans “fought like demons” and 650 Koreans were killed. Consequently, the Low mission failed to impose any treaties on Korea and largely due to this experience, the U.S. did not return to Korea for more than a decade.

Conversely, the Shufeldt mission of 1882 was much more diplomatic in its approach. In a letter to King Kojong before his mission, Shufeldt expressed his wish to bring about an “amicable intercourse” between the two countries, which “owing to a misunderstanding had been unfortunately interrupted,” as he wrote in oblique reference to the 1871 conflict.⁴¹ As such, the end result for Shufeldt was diplomatic success, not war. Of course, it is much too simplistic to compare the events of 1871 to the current North Korean nuclear crisis. Nevertheless, the self-righteous attitudes and the tone of the rhetoric of the 1871 mission and the attitudes and rhetoric of the current Bush administration seem eerily similar. If there are any lessons to be learned, it is that the Koreans, whether they are North or South Koreans, have a deep sense of pride that comes from thousands of years of Confucian heritage. As the Shufeldt mission of 1882 has revealed, showing proper respect for Korea, as a sovereign nation, can go a long way towards achieving one’s goals.

B. U.S.-KOREA RELATIONS DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Understandably, the U.S.-Korea relations during the Japanese occupation of Korea represent an odd period for both countries. The U.S., as was the case with other Western powers, became bystanders as Japan, China, and Russia fought over Korea. In surprising fashion, Japan was victorious over both China and Russia and claimed the rights to the Korean peninsula, signaling its arrival as a major power on par with the other Western powers. Accordingly, the U.S., itself trying to establish a colonial stature in Asia, leaned in favor of Japan over Korea’s cause. The U.S. went as far as signing an agreement with Japan for mutual acknowledgement of its respective interests in the Philippines and Korea. As such, there were no real U.S.-Korea relations to speak of because the U.S. formally recognized Japan’s colonial rule over Korea. As E.A. Olsen writes, “...the U.S. rather blatantly sold out Korea and complied with Japanese desires

⁴¹ See Chang, March 2003, p. 1362

for a free hand in its backyard. U.S. actions can be viewed as pragmatic in light of U.S. imperial goals of the day....Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to see these policies as ethically or morally principled. Korea was used by the U.S. as a means to an end, thereby sacrificing it to Japanese interests.”⁴² In the extreme, one could argue that the U.S. was complicit in this injustice and should be viewed accordingly, especially from the Korean viewpoint.

For the Koreans, it represented a period of disgrace and humiliation for the country. The Japanese deemed the Koreans as uncivilized and barbaric and attempted to expunge its culture, forcing them to adopt Japanese names and speak the Japanese language. Strategically, Japan exploited Korea to support its imperialistic thrust into China and the Pacific and forcibly recruited millions of Koreans as soldiers and laborers for its war machine, as well as 100,000 to 200,000 teenaged “comfort women” who were provided to the Japanese soldiers for their sexual enjoyment.⁴³ Needless to say, the Japanese occupation of its country was a very traumatizing event for the Korean people.

Adding to the deterioration of U.S.-Korea relations was the fact that many Koreans fought in Japanese uniforms against the U.S. during World War II and that the Korean industrial base and labor was critical to the Japanese war effort. Commenting on Korean involvement with Japan against the U.S., E.A. Olsen writes, “To be sure, U.S. leaders got word that Koreans should not be held accountable for Tokyo’s actions because the Korean nation was a captive nation operating as puppet of Japanese policy. Nonetheless, there was enough residual U.S. ambiguity about the precise degree of Korean victimization versus the extent to which some Koreans had become voluntary participants in Japan’s aggressive game plan. The possibility existed that many Koreans were collaborators—thereby fostering the idea that there could be Korean versions of the Quisling and Vichy underlings.”⁴⁴

⁴² Olsen, 2002, p. 9

⁴³ Yi, Kil J., “*In search of a panacea: Japan-Korea rapprochement and America’s Far Eastern problems,*” Pacific Historical Review, November 2002

⁴⁴ Olsen, 2002, p. 11

In sum, the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Korea during this painful period for the Koreans was pretty much non-existent and Korea scarcely registered on the U.S. foreign relations agenda.

C. THE DIVISION OF KOREA

The prevailing theme of U.S. relations with Korea in the post-World War II years is that of diplomatic neglect shown by the U.S. toward Korea. Seemingly always caught between the two “whales,” the “shrimp,” or the “big shrimp” as it has been upgraded to in recent times, Korea has always been an afterthought in U.S. foreign relations. Even in the heyday of Western imperialism in the 19th century, Korea was an afterthought in the overall scheme of expansionism by the Western powers.

In planning for the post-World War II future of Korea and Japan, the U.S., Britain, and China had declared in the Cairo Conference of 1943 that “*in due course*, Korea shall be free and independent,” and at the 1945 Yalta Conference President Roosevelt proposed a U.S.-Soviet-Chinese trusteeship over Korea. Beyond these words, there was no agreement among the wartime allies and no practical planning in Washington about the postwar future of the Korean peninsula. It was reported in 1945 that Secretary of State Edward Stettinius did not even know the geographical location of Korea and had to ask somebody.⁴⁵

These events along with the Potsdam conference on postwar negotiations toward the end of World War II, when Korea was not even mentioned, reflects the level of woeful diplomatic neglect of Korea by the U.S. and other major powers.⁴⁶ As Gregory Henderson, a former U.S. Foreign Service Officer and noted Korea scholar, wrote in 1974, “No division of a nation in the present world is so astonishing in its origin as the division of Korea; none is so unrelated to conditions or sentiment within the nation itself at the time the division was effected; none is to this day so unexplained; in none does blunder and planning oversight appear to have played so large a role. Finally, there is no

⁴⁵ See Oberdorfer, Don, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Basic Books, 2001, p. 5

⁴⁶ For more detailed information on the post-WWII Korea negotiations, see Miller, Jerry, “50 years later: How Korea’s web got so tangled,” *Naval History*, Annapolis, April 2003, Vol 17, pg. 20

division for which the U.S. government bears so heavy a share of the responsibility as it bears for the division of Korea.”⁴⁷

Moreover, Bruce Cumings writes, “There was no historical justification for Korea’s division: if any country should have been divided it was Japan (like Germany, an aggressor). There was no internal pretext for dividing Korea, either: the thirty-eighth parallel was a line never noticed by the people of, say, Kaesong, the Koryo capital, which the parallel cut in half. And then it became the only line that mattered to Koreans, a boundary to be removed by any means necessary. The political and ideological division we associate with the Cold War were the reasons for Korea’s division; they came early to Korea, before the onset of the global Cold War, and today they outlast the end of the Cold War everywhere else.”⁴⁸

In the end, what divided Korea was the United States’ interest in Japan and planning for its occupation, and the relative disinterest in Korea. Accordingly, Japan found itself reconfigured into the cornerstone of an emergent U.S. strategy for containing the Soviet Union in the Asia-Pacific region. Korea, by contrast, again became a victimized innocent bystander.⁴⁹

D. THE COLD WAR YEARS

With the division of Korea, the U.S. and Korea became inextricably tied to one another. Still, the U.S. was slow to take its role seriously. As a case in point, the Soviets moved swiftly to occupy all the major cities north of the 38th parallel after the demarcation was established. The U.S., however, arrived in Inchon harbor on 8 Sept 1945, almost a full month after the Soviets crossed the border into Korea.⁵⁰ After training and equipping a formidable North Korean army, the Soviets withdrew their troops in 1948. The U.S. withdrew its troops in 1949, leaving behind a lot of material and about 500 military advisers. The U.S. did not help the South Koreans very much and

⁴⁷ Quoted in Oberdorfer, 2001, p. 7

⁴⁸ Cumings, 1997, p. 186

⁴⁹ Olsen, 2002, p. 16

⁵⁰ Miller, Jerry, “50 years later: How Korea’s web got so tangled,” Naval History, Annapolis, April 2003, Vol 17, pg. 20

consequently, the South Koreans were far behind the North in development of its military and industrial base. To compound the situation, the Americans undertook a massive downsizing and restructuring of the U.S. military in the aftermath of World War II. Again, South Korea did not figure prominently in the United States' plans and little attention was paid to South Korea's plight.

Unfortunately, it was not until the Cold War started heating up in Europe, and the Soviets had solidified North Korea's military and its infrastructure that the U.S. started taking its role more seriously in South Korea, albeit slowly. Provocations from the North from as early as 1946 indicated a serious threat but the invasion still caught the Americans off guard. The causes of the invasion are still hotly debated. Soviet records show that, on at least two occasions in 1949, Stalin turned down Kim Il-sung's request for an invasion, but in early 1950, he approved the war plan due to "changed international situation."⁵¹ One of the reasons that is attributed to the changed Soviet stance, are the statements made by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, which excluded South Korea from the U.S. defense perimeter.⁵² It was most likely a combination of events that triggered the Korean War. Still, it serves as just another example of South Korea being victimized by diplomatic neglect on part of the United States.

The Korean war and its aftermath led to profound changes in the U.S.-Korea relations. It led the U.S. to shift decisively away from post-World War II disarmament to rearmament to stop Soviet expansionism. The war firmly established the Cold War and brought Korea to the center of global attention. South Korea now stood as a symbol of U.S. democracy and its fight against Communism. With its role in South Korea no longer questioned, the U.S. cemented its relationship with South Korea in its fight against China, the Soviet Union, and Communism. As a result, South Korea became a willing client state of the U.S., which was now seen as the rescuer of South Korea. Conversely, North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union were now seen as the mortal enemies of South Korea.

⁵¹ Oberdorfer, 2001, p. 8

⁵² Oberdorfer, 2001, p. 8

For most of the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods, South Korea has welcomed and even encouraged increased U.S. interest and commitment. South Korea, like many other countries in Asia, has a vital interest in keeping close economic and security relations with the United States. The U.S. has been the largest market for the export-oriented South Korean economy and has provided South Korea with security, a critical contribution to its continued economic success. South Korea recognizes the importance of U.S. power and leadership in world politics and regards close relations with the U.S. as the backbone of its foreign and defense policies.

Recently, however, there have been deep divisions between the two countries on how to deal with North Korea and other security matters. These deep divisions can have lasting repercussions in the delicate balance of power that exist in Northeast Asia.

E. CURRENT U.S.-KOREA RELATIONS

The election of Roh Moo-hyun as president in December 2002, in an upset win over the more powerful Grand National Party candidate, Lee Hoi-chang, marked a watershed moment in, what has become, as of late, a very contentious relationship between the U.S. and South Korea. Roh's main campaign platform was to seek a more independent and equal relations with the U.S. and to continue engagement policies with North Korea, despite U.S. call for tougher measures against North Korea's nuclear posture. In pre-elections speeches, Roh denied that he wanted to end the half-century alliance with the U.S. but he did declare that "we should proudly say we will not side with North Korea or the United States."⁵³ Moreover, he suggested that in the event of a war between North Korea and the U.S., South Korea might attempt to mediate.⁵⁴ Political analysts predicted that once these comments got out, Roh would have no chance to win the elections. Indeed, there was some criticism but surprisingly, the Korean public embraced his tough talk against the U.S. and elected him president.

In many ways, it should not be surprising that, given its economic prosperity and increased world standing and given the history unequal and abnormal relations with the

⁵³ Quoted in Struck, Doug, "*Alliance Falls Apart on Eve of South Korean Elections*," The Washington Post, 19 December 2002, p. A20

⁵⁴ Struck, 2002, p. A20

U.S., South Korea is beginning to question its relationship with the United States. Thus, Korea's strong anti-American sentiments played itself out on the biggest stage in Korean politics, the presidential elections, where an unknown liberal candidate without any political experience, running on the theme of gaining "independence" from the United States won the presidential election. Roh's election should have served as a forceful wake up call to the Bush administration to focus more of its attention on South Korea and to attempt to bring South Korea back into the fold. The anti-American sentiment is reaching disturbing and possibly unacceptable levels in South Korea today and should be a cause for serious consternation to the Bush administration.

The causes of this fissure are many. First and foremost, it is the result of "abnormal" relations throughout the history of U.S.-Korea relations, starting from the 1882 unequal treaty, to the Japanese-controlled Korea during the Japanese occupation, to the division of Korea and its subsequent client state relationship during pre and post-Cold War periods.⁵⁵

Secondly, the proclivity toward unilateralism by the U.S. has thoroughly undermined South Korea's attempt to become a more equal partner in the security of its own country. Indeed, during the 1993-1994 nuclear crisis, the Clinton administration prepared military options for use against the North without ever consulting the South Koreans.⁵⁶ In the current North Korean nuclear crisis, the Bush administration has explicitly refused to rule out any option, and seem unconcerned about Seoul's desires. Senator John McCain is on record as saying, "While they may risk their populations, the U.S. will do whatever it must to guarantee the security of the American people. And spare us the usual lectures about American unilateralism. We would prefer the company of North Korea's neighbors, but we will make do without it if we must."⁵⁷

Third and lastly, it is clear that the North Korean issue has brought to the forefront the thorny issue of South Korean sovereignty and its desire for full freedom and independence "in due course," as promised in the Cairo Declaration of 1943. This issue

⁵⁵ For a full treatment on the topic of "abnormal" relations, see Olsen, 2002, p. 7 (Chapter 2: *Tracing U.S.-Korea Abnormality*)

⁵⁶ See Milbank, Dana, "U.S. Open to Informal Talks with N. Korea," The Washington Post, 30 December 2002, p. A4

⁵⁷ McCain, John, "Rogue State Rollback," Weekly Standard, 20 January 2003

of Korea “independence” has manifested itself in growing public sentiment toward North Korea and the possibility of reunification. Adding fuel to the fire, the Bush administration’s uncompromising policies toward North Korea has tended to undermine South Korea’s ambitious engagement efforts with Pyongyang. Conversely, Roh is on record as saying that “In no circumstances will we cut our dialogue with North Korea.”⁵⁸

The North Korean issue has become a larger-than-life issue for many Koreans. There are many reasons for this sacrosanctity of reunification in Korean society. Besides the ethnic and cultural homogeneity between the two Koreas, many Koreans still have close family members on the other side of the DMZ since the war ended half a century ago. For most of them, they do not even know if their loved ones are still alive. And many are known to have passed away with the deepest pain and regret imaginable. Many newlyweds were known to have been separated during the war and many of those have not remarried since, hoping to be reunited with their spouses someday.⁵⁹ Ever since Kim Dae-jung embarked on his “Sunshine Policy” to re-unify the two Koreas, there have been reports of romantic sympathy and feel-good stories in both North and South Korea. Crying has become a ritual whenever Koreans of North and South meet, as was witnessed in several occasions in peace delegation meetings in Pyongyang. The North Koreans, including many small children who may not understand the complex ramifications of division and reunification between the two Koreas, burst into tears during the official farewell ceremonies for the departing South Korean delegates. Some romantics go as far as believing that North Korea will not use a nuclear bomb to attack South Korea even if it develops one because the people of South and North are compatriots.⁶⁰

It is against this backdrop that the Bush administration took office and went about changing its North Korean policy in a dramatic fashion. The inclusion of North Korea as one of the members of the “Axis of Evil” further undermined Korean efforts and

⁵⁸ Struck, 2002, p. A20

⁵⁹ Bak, Sangmee, “*Suddenly, Three’s a Crowd in South Korea*,” The Washington Post, 26 January 2003, p. B1

⁶⁰ Bak, 2003, p. B1

alienated a large share of the Korean public and government officials. Thus, it is understandable that the level of anti-Americanism has reached such high levels.

Adding to the complex nature of the relationship is the Pentagon's plan for a broad force restructuring which includes withdrawing 12,500 troops from South Korea and moving 8,000 U.S. troops away from the demilitarized zone and out of Seoul.⁶¹ The South Korean government has pleaded with the U.S. to pull its troops out more gradually, for fear of sending a signal of lack of resolve to North Korea. As an indication of the level of mistrust, there is widespread speculation among the South Korean population that the U.S. is moving its troops away from the DMZ and out of harm's way in preparation for military strikes against North Korea.

F. IMPLICATIONS

The continued strained relations between the United States and South Korea can have far-reaching repercussions in the delicate regional security arrangement in Northeast Asia. However surprising or naïve it may seem, the South Koreans (the public and the government, to a lesser degree) have lost their fear of Communist regimes in North Korea and China. To these North Korean sympathizers, the Bush administration and the U.S., at least according to poll results, is now the enemy who are trying to block Korean reunification and the ultimate independence and freedom of a united Korean nation. Of course, these views may only be a short-term trend and South Korea may once again become a loyal ally of the United States. Indeed, some Korean scholars have noted that concerns were also raised about Kim Dae-jung when he took office, and yet he ended his presidency as perhaps the most pro-American president in Korean political history.⁶²

Nevertheless, a top priority in the United States' East Asia policy should be to sustain a strong U.S.-Korea relationship and continue to maintain a strong U.S. influence on the peninsula as well as the region.⁶³ It is essential to achieving U.S. objectives on the

⁶¹ Gertz, Bill, "South Korea Troop cuts tied to restructuring," *The Washington Times*, 21 June 2004

⁶² See Cha, Victor, "Keep Calm on Korea," *The Washington Post*, 20 December 2002, p. A43

⁶³ It should be noted that "maintaining a strong influence" does not necessarily mean physical presence on the Korean peninsula. Rather, a close and loyal relationship between the two countries, with or without the basing of the U.S. military in Korea, will help U.S. maintain its influence.

Korean peninsula, especially a potential unified Korea. The interests of China, Japan, Russia, and the United States will likely continue to intersect on the Korean peninsula, which has become the strategic crossroads of Northeast Asia. As such, China, Japan, and Russia have sought to control the Korean peninsula for centuries for strategic dominance. China, as the nearest peer-competitor to the U.S. poses the biggest threat for the U.S. It is critical for the U.S. to maintain a strong regional influence to neutralize China's growing power. To maintain influence essential to achieving U.S. strategic objectives in the short and long terms, a prudent U.S. policy would support South Koreans and seek to retain a strong U.S.-Korea political, economic, and security relationship.

If the U.S. continues to undermine South Korea's efforts for reunification and for a more equal relationship, however, it may drive a permanent wedge between the traditional loyal allies. The effects of the fallout can have profound implications on the delicate security balance in the Northeast Asia region, which, with the emergence of China as a potential superpower, will probably become one of the most dynamic economic regions in the world. The national interests of the U.S. in the region will only increase in the future.

If the U.S. fails to "Koreanize" some of its South Korean foreign policies, South Korea will gravitate toward China. Indeed, there are indications that this is already happening as China has become a critical economic partner for South Korea. In 2003, China surpassed the United States as South Korea's largest export market. Bilateral trade between China and South Korea was worth \$63.2 billion in 2003 and is expected to reach \$100 billion within the next year or two.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, direct investment in China, as reported by the Korean government, totaled \$1.72 billion in 2002. This constitutes 34 percent of South Korea's total outward foreign direct investment, and has overtaken the U.S. for the No. 1 spot.⁶⁵ According to Chinese statistics, which include local reinvestment, South Korea's investment in China came to an even larger \$2.7 billion in 2002.⁶⁶ For those who argue that Korea will always be a client state of the U.S. due to its

⁶⁴ Demick, Barbara, "Who Needs English?; As South Korea's economy grows closer to China's, more people are studying Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 2004, pg. A.1

⁶⁵ Kwan, Chi-hung, "Why South Korea Does Not Perceive China as a Threat," *China in Transition*, 18 April 2003, <http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/china/03041801.html>

⁶⁶ Kwan, 2003

economic dependence, these statistics should serve as a sobering reminder that China's export market is just as valuable to the South Koreans as the United States' market.

Another sobering reminder is that 55% of South Koreans that were surveyed view China positively versus only 37.2% for the United States.⁶⁷ Of course, these statistics alone cannot undo more than 50 years of loyal alliance between the U.S. and South Korea. Still, it does serve notice that China will be more than happy to fill the void left by the U.S. and get South Korea back into its sphere of influence. A South Korea more aligned with China than with the U.S. offers a potentially very unsettling scenario for the Korean peninsula and the region. A re-Sinicized South Korea could potentially pave the way for the reunification of the two Koreas under Chinese guidance, and without any meaningful role or influence from the United States. This would spell disaster for U.S. relations with a unified Korea, which would forever view the United States as the villain which kept its country divided for its own selfish purposes for over half a century. For the region, it could potentially inflame old rivalries with Japan and cause an outbreak of a nuclear arms race. It would pit Korea and China against Japan. With its security threatened, Japan would have no choice but to develop nuclear weapons of its own. The role the U.S. would play in this scenario remains a question mark. Would it join Japan in its competition against China and Korea? Would it pull out of Northeast Asia altogether leaving Japan in the lurch?

These are interesting questions to ponder but decidedly unfavorable ones. The U.S., with enough foresight, should never let it get to that point. The current unrest in South Korea, after over half a century of U.S. presence and dramatic shifts in geopolitical conditions, is a sure sign that U.S. needs to do something revolutionary on the Korean peninsula before the situation worsens.

G. SUMMARY

After more than 50 years of being a loyal client state of the U.S., South Korea is no longer satisfied with playing the role of "little brother" to the U.S.'s "big brother" role.

⁶⁷ Kim, Choong-nam, "Changing Korean Perceptions of the Post-Cold War Era and the U.S.-ROK Alliance," Asia Pacific Issues, East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, April 2003, No. 67

As evidence of this discontent, the South Koreans voted into office as president a very liberal candidate who advocated for more equality in its relationship with the U.S. and continued reunification efforts with North Korea, despite contrary views by the Bush administration. Moreover, there are disturbing levels of anti-American sentiment that threatens future military presence in South Korea and the overall relations between the two countries. The genesis of anti-American sentiments that is pervasive in Korean society today can be traced back to the many flawed U.S. policies that can best be characterized as woeful neglect, at best, and at worst, morally unjustifiable. The resulting relationship is that of a forced client-state relationship and a grudging partnership.

III. CHINA'S ROLE AND INTERESTS IN KOREAN REUNIFICATION

Reflecting the profound changes in the geopolitics of the region and possibly foreshadowing the beginnings of new political order in East Asia, there is a China craze going on today among the South Koreans.⁶⁸ In the eyes of many in the Asia-Pacific region, China, oddly enough, has suddenly become the good guy. Conversely, having tired of Washington's penchant for unilateralism and overbearing influence, especially in its hard-line policies against North Korea and ending the hopes of a reunification, many Koreans now view the U.S. and its role in foreign affairs in an increasingly negative manner. Indeed, according to the Gallup Korea survey of 1,054 adults, South Koreans now view the U.S. most negatively just behind Japan and well ahead of its Cold War enemies, China, North Korea, and Russia.⁶⁹ Additionally, 55% of those surveyed view China positively versus only 37.2% for the United States.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, many South Koreans still have not forgotten that China fought against the South Koreans in the Korean War. Additionally, the fact that China is still a communist regime and may have ulterior strategic motives, still trouble many Koreans and government officials.

As China emerges as a great power in East Asia, as well as the world, South Korea's position is typical of many Asian countries: hopeful yet apprehensive, excited and a little scared at the same time, and mainly encouraged to see the balance of power shifting, albeit slowly, away from the U.S. and Japan and towards its traditional patron. However, given China's history of questionable human rights record and its anachronistic political system, it is questionable whether China will emerge as a positive or a negative force in the region. Still, most East and Southeast Asian countries are hopeful that China will, at the very least, neutralize some of United States' hegemonic power in the region.

⁶⁸ For a complete report on the "China craze" in South Korea, see Norris, Michelle, "*Profile: State of relations between China and South Korea*," All Things Considered, National Public Radio (NPR), Washington, D.C., 19 February 2004, pg.1

⁶⁹ The poll indicates 53.7 % has negative image of the U.S., 58.6% for Japan, 37% for North Korea, 24.1% for Russia, and 23.6% for China. For more info, see Kim, Choong-nam, "Changing Korean Perceptions of the Post-Cold War Era and the U.S.-ROK Alliance," *Asia Pacific Issues*, East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, April 2003, No. 67

⁷⁰ See Kim, April 2003, No. 67

China's emergence as a potential superpower and a peer-competitor to the U.S. brings up many intriguing scenarios and implications. Toward that end, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the state of China-South Korea relations and evaluate China's role and interests in the resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis as well as a possible Korean reunification. Given its common history and shared heritage it is only natural that South Korea has gravitated toward China, in light of its strained relations with the United States. Beijing has also coveted a stronger alliance with Seoul, in order to bolster its position vis-à-vis the U.S. in the East Asia region. A China-South Korea alliance, at the expense of the U.S., will provide strategic geopolitical opportunities for both countries to advance its interests. Consequently, this new alliance, if it comes to fruition, will alter the fundamental security structure of East Asia.

This chapter will present three arguments to support the case that given current U.S. policies toward the two Koreas, a shift in alliances may be in the offing. First, in order to lay the theoretical groundwork, the balance of power theory will be analyzed and applied. The realism theory of international relations advances the notion that states will act to even out the balance of power if it gets too tilted in favor of a hegemonic power. Indeed, the U.S., as the unquestioned leader in the East Asia region has seen its influence and prestige slip in the last couple of years due to various reasons. Second, South Korea will rebel against the increasingly unilateral doctrinal policies of the current Bush administration regarding the North Korean security and unification policies. Third, China's long, historical bond with Korea will bring them closer together, especially if it is in its geo-economic and geo-political interests to do so. The chapter will conclude with a section on the implications of such a scenario and what the U.S. can do to protect its interests on the Korean peninsula and the region.

A. THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

In order to better understand why China approaches the international system the way it does, a brief survey of realism is in order. The theory of structural realism attempts to provide fundamental insights about world politics and state action by explaining the order or the "structure" of the international system. The structure of the

international system is defined first and foremost by its organizing principle, which is anarchy.⁷¹ As opposed to domestic systems which are centralized and hierarchic, international systems are decentralized and anarchic. In this environment, where there is no recognized central authority figure, everybody is left up to their own devices and anarchy vice hierarchy, becomes the ordering principle of an international system.

According to Kenneth Waltz,⁷² the father of structural realism, the international structure is the principle determinant of outcomes at the systems level. The structure encourages certain actions and discourages others. For Waltz, understanding the structure of an international system allows us to explain patterns of state behavior, since states determine their interests and strategies on the basis of calculations about their own positions in the system. Waltz's structural theory has one major dependent variable, which is the war-proneness of international systems. This attribute can be best explained by the polarity of the system, which is an independent variable of the theory. The theory resides entirely at the system level: war-proneness is a system property, and polarity is a structural characteristic of the system.⁷³ And most importantly, balancing is a key outcome, the most common dynamic in this system.

Moreover, anarchy encourages states to behave defensively and to maintain rather than upset the balance of power. The first concern for states is to maintain its position in the system. When this system gets upset, such as when one state obtains too much power or when great powers behave aggressively, the potential victims usually balance against the aggressor and thwart its efforts to gain power.⁷⁴ In sum, balancing checkmates offense. Furthermore, Waltz argues that great powers must be careful not to acquire too much power, because excessive strength is likely to cause other states to join forces

⁷¹ For a full treatment on this theory, see Robert O. Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*, Columbia University Press, 1996, Chapter 4, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Political Structures*

⁷² Kenneth Waltz's book, *The Theory of International Relations* in 1978 gave birth to the theory of structural realism, also commonly referred to as neorealism.

⁷³ Richard N. Lebow, *The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism*, Columbia University Press, Ch. 2., pg. 27

⁷⁴ See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Powers*, W.W. Norton & Co, 2001, Ch. 1., pg. 20

against them, thereby leaving it worse off than it would have been had it refrained from seeking additional increments of power.⁷⁵ With this survey of structural realism as a backdrop, its salience for China can be explored.

1. Structural Realism in the Current International Context

In many respects, this dynamic describes the dilemma that the U.S. is facing today, and explains to a certain extent, the emergence of China as a potential peer-competitor to the United States. With the demise of its traditional Cold War adversaries, the U.S. has become the unquestioned economic and political leader of the international community. It follows reason, then, that the U.S. should hold more sway over other nation states. According to the structural realism school of thought, however, that is not the case. Rather, it advances the notion that the other nations will band together to try to neutralize the United States' hegemony. Indeed, the fierce international opposition, even from some long-established U.S. allies, to a U.S. proposal for military action in Iraq, is a perfect example of the balancing dynamic that is currently being played out. The subsequent unilateral action by the U.S. and the ensuing international backlash, even in light of overwhelming U.S. military victory, only reinforces the notion of an anarchic order and the balancing mechanism of the international system.

The case applies equally well in the East Asia region, where the U.S. has, with the end of World War II, established itself as a major power in the region, and with the end of the Cold War, as the region's most influential actor. The U.S. presence in Northeast Asia, both economically and politically as well as culturally, is pervasive throughout. One cannot go into Seoul, Tokyo, and even Beijing without seeing the all-encompassing influence that the U.S. has on the region. The U.S., in little over 50 years since the end of World War II, has achieved unprecedented power in East Asia. With great power, however, as Waltz has pointed out, comes the inevitable backlash and attempts by other states to balance the system and bring it back to its rightful anarchic order, vice a hierarchical order.

⁷⁵ See Mearsheimer, 2001, pg. 20

Indeed, there is evidence that this is already occurring. Recognizing the need to reassert itself in the region, China embarked on a new Korea policy formally establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992. For China, it was a step towards gradually edging out U.S. influence and establishing its own on the Korean peninsula.⁷⁶ For Korea, it was a very practical move both politically and economically. Since then both countries have gone through its respective economic miracles and have forged even closer ties.

There are those, however, who believe in the “status quo-ness” of Chinese foreign relations policy, that Chinese diplomacy is more accepting of extant international institutions, international norms, and U.S. dominance of the international and regional power structures than any time since 1949.⁷⁷ Waltz would argue, however, that the balancing dynamic is an independent variable, an inherent trait of the international structure where anarchy is the ordering principle. In other words, “balancing” in the international system is deterministic and is not of free will. In that sense, the international structure is sufficiently constrained that China would have no choice but to act as a balancer. The fact that the U.S. is the lone superpower, the realist would argue, is only a temporary state and a country or a coalition of countries (at least in a temporary coalition for a higher cause) such as the European Union, will rise to challenge the U.S. hegemony.

Meanwhile, in what can be construed as an act of “balancing,” South Korea’s relations with the U.S. have suffered. Due mainly to recent events regarding the accidental killing of two Korean girls by a U.S. tank, as well as the two countries’ divergent views on reunification efforts, anti-American sentiment is rampant in Korea. South Korean anti-Americanism has emerged from the confines of radicalism and has invaded the realms of mainstream Korean political discourse. Further, the creation of a viable democracy in South Korea has allowed a reinterpretation of Korean history and a reevaluation of the Korean national identity. This reflection of its own history and the

⁷⁶ For more commentary, see Sun, Lena H., “China, S. Korea Establish Full Relations; Seoul Withdrawing Recognition of Taipei,” *The Washington Post*, 24 August 1992, pg. A10

⁷⁷ For full commentary, see Johnston, Alastair Iain’s chapter titled, *China’s International Relations: The Political and Security Dimensions*, for the book, *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, Edited by Samuel S. Kim, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2004

role the U.S. has played in it along with the increasingly overbearing nature of U.S. security policy toward the Korean peninsula, has dramatically altered the view of the U.S. in the minds of both the elder and younger generation in today's South Korea.

Thus, the second argument is that the continued diplomatic neglect and unilateralism will drive South Korea toward new alliances, mainly with China.

B. SOUTH KOREA AND CHINA'S RENEWED ALLIANCE

1. The Original "Big Brother"

China for centuries had been the ultimate superpower in East Asia and reigned supreme over all other East Asian nations, with the possible exception of Japan. China's history is enormously long. No other society has maintained or kept so meticulous a record of its own doings over such a long span (close to four thousand years) as has China.⁷⁸ No other nation could rival its size, population, resources, statecraft, and cultural refinement. As such, China established a tributary system among East Asian nations in which the nations paid "tribute" to China in exchange for diplomatic recognition. In this "Chinese world order," China's emperors bestowed the cloak of "civilized people" on non-Chinese people who subscribed to China's view of world, which was to recognize the supremacy of China's emperor and live by the teachings of Confucius. In this regard, Korea and Vietnam were China's most reliable traditional allies. In exchange, China promised to defend the domains of neighboring kings who signed up to China's world order.

An elaborate set of diplomatic rules developed over the centuries. Diplomatic or tributary missions shuttled back and forth between the various capitals of the Chinese dynasties and Korean kingdoms. Each time there was a significant event in China, such as deaths, birthdays, marriages, Korea's monarch dispatched a tribute mission to China. As Jonathan Spence writes in *The Search for Modern China*, "The most frequent mission were those from Korea, which came every year; Korean visitors mingled freely with Qing scholars and officials, and left vivid accounts of the social and cultural life in Peking and

⁷⁸ For a detailed look at China's history, see Spence, Jonathan D., *The Search for Modern China*, W.W. Norton and Company, 1990

of the political attitudes of the Confucian literati.”⁷⁹ China’s monarchs responded in kind and gradually the exchange of tribute assumed the additional role of facilitating trade. China’s military and economic supremacy was essential to this world order. So long as China’s hegemony was unrivaled, Korea willingly allowed China to manage its foreign affairs. Confident in Chinese ability to deter or deal with any invaders, Korea did not maintain any significant military forces after the 1598 expulsion of Japan’s samurai invaders.

Thus a major theme running through Korean history is the impact of the successive waves of Chinese influence that over time made Korea the most thoroughly sinicized non-Chinese state in East Asia.⁸⁰ In fact, many have commented that the Koreans are more “Chinese” than the Chinese, a reference to Korea’s still strong Confucian culture and China’s rejection of Confucianism in favor of socialist ideology.⁸¹ Indeed, the geographical proximity and the cultural bond that has been established over thousands of years, offers very compelling inducement for a future alliance. Many scholars in Korea have written to this effect and seem hopeful that a mutually beneficial and trusting relationship can be established with China.⁸²

Many U.S. Korea watchers and academics have also commented on the special relationship between the two countries. Don Oberdorfer writes, “Of the major powers, China had by far the greatest influence and was the most acceptable to the Koreans....the Korean kings embraced Chinese culture, paid tribute to the Chinese emperor, and received recognition and a degree of protection in return.”⁸³ Hence, the broad theme running through the China-Korea relations in pre-Japanese occupation period is that of a willing “big brother, little brother” relationship.

⁷⁹ Spence, 1990, pp. 118-119

⁸⁰ From Miller, H. Lyman, *History and Cultures of East Asia*, class notes, Naval Postgraduate School, 2003

⁸¹ For comments to this effect, see Moon, Ihl-wan, “*Korea’s China Play*,” *Business Week*, 29 March 2004

⁸² For native Korean views on this topic, see compilation of papers submitted for the conference on “Assessing Key Trends in U.S.-China-Korea Relations: Implications for Korean Peninsula Stability,” co-sponsored by the International Security Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies and Seoul National University’s Center for International Studies, held 18-19 November 2003, can be accessed at www.csis.org/isp/sinokorea_papers.pdf, last accessed on July 2004

⁸³ Oberdorfer, Don, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Basic Books, 2001, pp. 3-4

2. The Fall of China

The Chinese world order crumbled with the arrival of Western imperialists in the 19th century. China's defeat in the Opium and Arrow Wars and the ensuing Western encroachment and influence precipitated a string of events that eventually led to the fall of China's traditional imperial order. With their defeat, China was forced to adopt a Western style of international trade and relations. It could no longer impose its tribute system on foreign states. The tribute system was the cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy and its belief that the "Son of Heaven" was the link between the universal order and all of humanity, not just the Chinese. It was a sobering period for both China and Korea, which would no longer have the "big brother" to protect it from foreign encroachment. Indeed, Korea fell into the hands of Imperial Japan after it had defeated a severely weakened China over the rights to Korea.

The ensuing demise of China also brought on a very unstable and painful period for the Koreans as well. Whether it is by coincidence or due to some other factors, the periods of prosperity for both countries have come during periods of strong alliance between the two countries. Conversely, the periods of hardship have also coincided with periods of separation between the two countries. Although there have been many complaints about the abuse of power by the Chinese, all would agree that in retrospect, the period under Chinese patronage was relatively peaceful and prosperous time for the Koreans.

3. Toward a More Equal Alliance

Although the burgeoning China-ROK relationship has transpired into a feel-good story for the citizens of both countries, there are still lingering issues that need to be addressed. First and foremost, at least in the minds of the South Koreans, is the nature of the relationship and whether it will take on the "big brother, little brother," patron-client relationship of the past or if it will take on a more equitable form. After serving as a pawn for the major powers for nearly all its history, South Korea, on the basis of its economic strength, finally seems as though it can stand on its own, as an independent,

sovereign nation. Toward that end, from all indications, South Korea seems intent on establishing, at the very least, an equal relationship with China. The recent dispute over the ethnic origin of the ancient Korean Goguryeo Kingdom offers a glimpse of the new dynamic in this budding relationship.⁸⁴

In January of 2004, Chinese academics taking part in a government-run project, released documents that claimed Goguryeo as an ethnic kingdom of ancient China. The claim seems to be an effort to ward off future border disputes with a potential unified Korea. As soon as the Chinese made this claim, the condemnation by Korea, both North and South, was swift. While officials in Beijing claim that the dispute is purely a matter for academic debate, the Koreans took it more personally and its outrage boiled over into a national campaign to protest China's claim. Moreover, it seems to have reinvigorated Korean nationalism on part of both North and South Koreans. The Goguryeo issue and other issues of Korean nationalism such as changing the spelling of Korea back to its original "Corea" form and changing the name of Sea of Japan to the East Sea, seem to have increased ethnic bonding between the two Koreas. The implication is that South Korea and especially a unified Korea will no longer tolerate a lesser status in its relationship with China.

C. IMPLICATIONS OF A STRONG SOUTH KOREA-CHINA ALLIANCE

The burgeoning China-ROK relationship coupled with the continued strained relations between the U.S. and South Korea can have far-reaching repercussions in the delicate regional security arrangement in Northeast Asia. If the U.S. continues to undermine South Korea's efforts for reunification and for a more equal relationship, it may irrevocably damage the relations between the traditional loyal allies. Many regional experts have noted that the foreign policies of the current Bush administration have validated South Korea's already suspicious view that Washington has no true desire for

⁸⁴ For full story, see Faiola, Anthony, "Kicking up the dust of history--China makes novel claim to ancient kingdom, and both Koreas balk," The Washington Post, 22 January 2004

Korea reunification. Beijing, on the other hand, is perceived in a much more positive light, with most South Koreans viewing China's role as accommodating and contributing to the ultimate goal of reunification.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, as if its affection for superpower states is a zero-sum game, South Koreans now view the Americans with increasing suspicion. As an indication, 55% of South Koreans that were surveyed view China positively versus only 37.2% for the United States.⁸⁶ Even more disturbing is that 39 percent of Koreans now view the U.S. as their biggest national security threat versus only 33 percent who view North Korea as the biggest threat.⁸⁷ South Korea's political liberalizations, its meteoric economic ascendancy into the upper ranks the world's economies, along with its flourishing trade with China, have fed the perceptions in South Korea, perhaps falsely, that it can now stand on its own, without Washington's strong hand in its political, security, and economic affairs. As a result, China's rising share in Korea's external economic and political relations will inevitably constrain Korean political cooperation with the U.S. in the event of future U.S.-China confrontations.⁸⁸

For the region, a strategic alliance between Seoul and Beijing could potentially inflame old rivalries with Japan and could alter the underlying security structure in the region. Leaders of both China and Korea have vivid memories of the Japanese aggression and remain wary of Japanese intentions. Seoul is as vocal as Beijing in its criticism of Japan's increasing militarism and its "whitewashing" of its imperial history. Beijing has been firmly on the side of Seoul in its disputes with Tokyo. In 1996 Beijing quietly expressed its sympathy for Seoul when it supported South Korea in its territorial dispute with Japan over Tokdo/Takeshima Island.⁸⁹ While some countries in Asia see

⁸⁵ Scott Snyder writes in NBR, "President Bush's 'axis of evil' comments and the overall reluctance of the Bush administration to engage North Korea during the second DPRK nuclear crisis have reinforced South Korea public perceptions that the United States is either an obstacle to, or irrelevant for, the process of Korean reunification, while China is perceived as supportive and helpful." For full article, see Snyder, Scott, "*Sino-Korean relations and the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance*," NBR Analysis, June 2003

⁸⁶ Kim, Choong-nam, "Changing Korean Perceptions of the Post-Cold War Era and the U.S.-ROK Alliance," Asia Pacific Issues, East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, April 2003, No. 67

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Scott Snyder expresses this view in "*Sino-Korean relations and the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance*," NBR Analysis, June 2003

⁸⁹ *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), 14 February 1996, in FBIS/China, pp. 4-5

Chinese power as a potential threat, South Korea to some extent welcomes it as a balance against its closer and potentially more powerful Japanese neighbor.⁹⁰

Still, the South Korean public as well as the lawmakers are notoriously fickle and political sentiments can turn in an instant, as evidenced by the heated and emotional disputes over the ancient Goguryo kingdom that has threatened to undo twelve years of diplomacy-building. In a survey early in 2004, eighty percent of South Korean parliament members said China was South Korea's most important economic partner. By contrast, in a survey of lawmakers in August of 2004, after China's claims of the Goguryo Kingdom became public, only 6 percent of the respondents showed a similar esteem for China.⁹¹ Now, Korean editorialists and scholars routinely warn South Koreans about Sinocentrism, the rise of Chinese nationalism and the return of a Middle Kingdom to dominate Asia. "The anti-U.S., pro-China atmosphere has changed recently as we saw the hegemonic side of China," a prominent professor commented.⁹² Another scholar commented, "...anti-China sentiments could quickly lead Korea to take a pro-U.S. stance and cooperate more with Japan...the recent China bashing in South Korea should be harnessed into a new opportunity not only to rethink China's strategic intentions toward the Korean Peninsula but also to dispel the self-centered 'China fantasy' many of us have held up to now."⁹³

As a further sign that the tide of South Korean sentiment may be turning back toward the U.S., the Chairman of the liberal-leaning, ruling Uri Party, Shin Ki-nam, reaffirmed Seoul's loyalty to Washington in July 2004, commenting, "We have demonstrated our loyalty and friendship not only with our words, but with our actions...even after an innocent young Korean civilian was kidnapped and brutally murdered by a terrorist group in Iraq, we have stood by our commitment to send additional South Korean soldiers to Iraq."⁹⁴ Seoul sent a five-member delegation to

⁹⁰ Nathan, Andrew J and Ross, Robert S., *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997, p. 95

⁹¹ Brooke, James, "Seeking peace in a once and future kingdom," *New York Times*, 25 August 2004, pg. A.3

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Kang, Connie K, "S. Koreans Affirm Close Ties to U.S.; A delegation of top lawmakers stops off in Los Angeles to say, 'We need each other.'," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 2004. p. B.4

Washington, D.C., New York and Los Angeles to “explain and clear up some misunderstanding” over the changing relationship between the two nations and to “consolidate and reinforce” the alliance, and to reinforce the understanding that, “we need each other.”⁹⁵

Nevertheless, the courtship of Seoul by Beijing is genuine and should be taken seriously by Washington. In order to maintain a strong alliance with Seoul, Washington needs to reaffirm its commitment to South Korea, as Seoul has done with its delegation, and firmly establish itself as a more dependent and beneficial ally than other major powers. As shown by the recent events, Seoul is not completely comfortable with the prospect of a multi-dimensional alliance with the PRC. In order for the U.S. to strengthen its ties to Seoul, it needs to improve its consideration of Seoul’s security interests and desires in its foreign policy formulations. This means giving Seoul a greater say in U.S. troop restructuring as well as reunification efforts with North Korea.

D. SUMMARY

China’s relationship with South Korea has undergone profound changes over the past century. In some regard, their fates seem intertwined with one another. Both have gone through tragic episodes in its nation’s history, mainly as a result of foreign encroachments, and have emerged as stronger nations. Throughout most of the 20th century both countries established separate alliances, mainly out of need for political survival rather than any common bond it shared with its Cold War alliances. Beginning in 1992, however, with normalization of their relations, China and Korea have embarked on a new relationship that has washed away Cold War paradigms and re-invoked its past relationship, albeit on a much more equal setting.

Moreover, after more than fifty years of being a loyal client state of the U.S., South Korea is showing signs that it is no longer satisfied with playing the role of “little brother” to the U.S.’s “big brother” role. As evidence of this discontent, the South Koreans voted into office a candidate who advocated for more equality in its relationship with the U.S. and continued reunification efforts with North Korea, despite contrary

⁹⁵ Kang, 2004

views by the Bush administration. Moreover, there are disturbing levels of anti-American sentiment that threatens the future U.S. military presence in South Korea and the overall relations between the two countries. The genesis of anti-American sentiments that is pervasive in Korean society today can be traced back to the many flawed U.S. policies that can best be characterized as woeful neglect, at best, and at worst, morally unjustifiable.

The strained relations between the U.S. and South Korea, if left unchecked can have lasting repercussions. China will try to seize upon the opportunity to advance its strategic goals and attempt to bring South Korea back into the Sinic realm, which will irrevocably alter the delicate balance of power that exists in Northeast Asia today. The courtship of China and Korea, however it may turn out, is real and should be taken seriously. How the alliances shift due to this renewed relationship will depend largely on the diplomatic initiatives of South Korea's other "big brother," the United States.

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IV. JAPAN'S ROLE AND INTERESTS IN KOREAN REUNIFICATION

Despite enormous advances in the bilateral relationship between South Korea and Japan, the recent news from Seoul that the chairman of South Korea's dominant Uri Party will resign after disclosures that his father was a collaborator during the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula, underscores the painful and the powerful memories that still linger in the minds of most South Koreans.⁹⁶ It highlights the antagonistic nature of South Korea and Japan relations, even after almost sixty years after Japanese defeat in World War II and the end of Japanese occupation of Korea. South Korea and Japan have much in common – same enemies and friends, social and cultural affinity (they may even be the same people in terms of their common ancient origins), shared security interests, and similar political and economic objectives – so a natural alliance and strong bilateral relations would be expected.

The nature of the relationship, however, is still largely defined by past Japanese aggressions against Korea, particularly the three decades of Japanese colonial rule in Korea from 1910 to 1945. Korea's (both North and South) unwillingness to forgive and Japan's often patronizing attitude toward South Korea, has prevented the two countries from establishing strong bilateral relations. As a result, the two countries are linked by its alliance with the U.S. but still remain largely distrustful of one another, although the relations have improved considerably in the last decade. Indeed, contrary to the conventional wisdom, and as some regional experts have commented, South Korea-Japan cooperation has grown steadily over time in both frequency and depth.⁹⁷

The thorny issue of Korea-Japan relations has played a significant role in the fragile nature of power balances in the Northeast Asia region, and has taken on added importance in the last eighteen months as the U.S. and other major stakeholders attempt to solve the North Korean nuclear issue. Indeed, the ongoing Six-Party Talks to resolve

⁹⁶ Faiola, Anthony, "S. Korean Quits after father's past surfaces," The Washington Post, 20 August 2004, pg. A.16.

⁹⁷ Most notably, see Victor Cha's chapter titled, "Positive and preventive rationales for Korea-Japan security cooperation," in the book, *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building toward a "Virtual Alliance,"* CSIS Press, 1999

the North Korean nuclear crisis has been marred by talks of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens, and Pyongyang's demands to bar Japan from participating in the talks, because it believes Tokyo is not trustworthy.⁹⁸ So, what is the nature of Korea-Japan relations and how does it affect Japan's role and interests in the possible reunification of the two Koreas? The reunification of the two Koreas will result in a fundamental structural transformation of security relationships in the East Asia region. How the major powers handle this process will ultimately determine the nature of future security cooperation and formation of alliances. This chapter will attempt to explore these questions and the diverse scenarios that could come about as a result of changing geopolitics, and present conclusions about Japan's role and interests on the Korean peninsula.

A. HISTORY OF KOREA-JAPAN RELATIONS

The current state of Korea-Japan relations is the result of a long and storied history and interaction between these two proud countries. Due to its intense rivalry, the two countries' shared histories are of much debate and argument. Because of the legacy this history has for Japan's contemporary policy toward Korean reunification, it is worth reviewing the historical roots of the dispute. At the forefront of this controversy is the debate regarding the origin of the Japanese people.

1. All in the Family?: The Protohistory of Japan

In a scenario reminiscent of the premise of the book and the movie, "Planet of the Apes," where the dominant, "intelligent" apes discover that the "dumb," inferior humans were the forebears of its civilization, there is a growing and mounting, if not overwhelming, evidence that the Japanese culture and race may have descended from Korea, much to the dismay of Japanese conservatives. The evidence, both anthropological (bones) and archaeological (artifacts) suggests that migration from the

⁹⁸ Len, Samuel, "North Korea wants Japan out of future talks," New York Times, 8 October 2003, pg. A.5

Korean peninsula began about 2,400 years ago with perhaps a few hundred people from the southern tip of the Korean peninsula crossing the Korea Strait to the Japanese island of Kyushu.⁹⁹

The aboriginal Jomon people of Japan, in 400 B.C., were primarily hunter-gatherers, who still used stone tools.¹⁰⁰ This is in contrast to mainland East Asia, just across the Korea Strait where, by this time, China already had developed intensive agriculture more than six thousands years ago and which Korea had used for over 2,000 years. Around 400 B.C., however, archaeological finds on the Japanese island of Kyushu of metal tools and full scale agricultural tools, suggest a dramatic shift to a new mode of living for the Jomon people.¹⁰¹ Archaeological excavations reveal that the agriculture came in form of irrigated rice fields, with canals, dams, banks, paddies, and rice residues. The pottery found during this period, termed the Yayoi period,¹⁰² reveal distinct similarities between Korean pottery and the new Jomon pottery. Many other elements of the new Yayoi culture were unmistakably Korean and previously foreign to Japan, including bronze objects, weaving, glass beads, and styles of tools and houses.¹⁰³

The farming culture spread quickly from Kyushu to the adjacent main islands of Shikoku and Honshu, reaching what is now the Tokyo area within 200 years.¹⁰⁴ Northern Honshu, however, was abandoned by the farmers because they could not compete with the Jomon hunter-gatherers. For the next 2,000 years, northern Honshu remained a frontier zone, beyond which the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido and its Ainu hunter-gatherers were not even considered part of the Japanese state until its

⁹⁹ See Diamond, Jared, “*Japanese Roots*,” *Discover*, June 1998, pp. 86-95

¹⁰⁰ Diamond, 1998

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Archaeologists termed the new way of living Yayoi, after the Tokyo district where the new type of pottery was first recognized in 1884. See Diamond, 1998

¹⁰³ Diamond, 1998, pg. 11

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

annexation in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In all, the Japanese culture underwent far more radical change in the 700 years of the Yayoi era than in the ten millennia of the Jomon period.¹⁰⁶

So, who are the modern Japanese more like, the Jomon people or the people from the period of Yayoi? Examination of the skeletal remains of the Jomon and the Yayoi people show that the two were very different. Whereas the Yayoi people resemble the modern Koreans and Japanese, the Jomon people were shorter, with more wide-set eyes, shorter and wider faces, and much more pronounced facial topography, with strikingly raised brow ridges, noses, and nose bridges.¹⁰⁷ In all these respects, Jomon skulls differ from those of modern Japanese and are most similar to those of modern Ainu, while Yayoi skulls most resemble those of modern Japanese. Similarly, geneticists attempting to calculate the relative contributions of Korean-like Yayoi genes and the Ainu-like Jomon genes to the modern Japanese gene pool have concluded that the Yayoi contribution was generally dominant.¹⁰⁸

Given the empirical anthropological, archaeological, and genetic evidence, it is safe to assume that, no matter how unappealing it may be to the Japanese, the Yayoi transition represents a massive influx of immigrants from Korea, bringing Korean farming practices and culture and overwhelming the Jomon people and its gene pool. Yet, many Japanese still cling to the myth of the nation's divine origins and prefer to keep it shrouded in mystery, refusing to listen to scientific evidence. Even when the evidence is presented in an overwhelming fashion as it has been, there is very little media coverage among the Japanese. Indeed, many political commentators have expressed a concern for a lack of Japanese awareness on this topic because the mass media has not really covered and reported on these findings.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Diamond, 1998, pg. 11

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Diamond, 1998

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Peter Landers expresses this view in an article for Far Eastern Economic Review, writing, "Yet, perhaps the most striking part of the story is how little attention it has received among most Japanese. In an echo of prewar beliefs, many intellectuals still prefer to suppose that the origins of Japan are shrouded in the distant past, beyond the ken of science. The close identification of Japan with Korea also makes many uncomfortable." Landers, Peter, "*All in the family*," Far Eastern Economic Review, 17 December 1998, pp. 38-41

In order for progress and improved relations between South Korea and Japan to develop, especially in these times of highly charged security environment in Northeast Asia, both countries need to fully realize that they are one of the same. As Jared Diamond concludes in his article, “History gives the Japanese and the Koreans ample grounds for mutual distrust and contempt, so any conclusion confirming their close relationship is likely to be unpopular among both peoples. Like Arabs and Jews, Koreans and Japanese are joined by blood yet locked in traditional enmity. But enmity is mutually destructive, in East Asia as in the Middle East. As reluctant as Japanese and Koreans are to admit it, they are like twin brothers who shared their formative years. The political future of East Asia depends in large part on their success in rediscovering those ancient bonds between them.”¹¹⁰

2. The Origin of Japan’s Imperial Court

In a statement that was both promising and shocking to the Japanese as well as the Koreans, Japanese Emperor Akihito, in December of 2001, all but declared his own Korean ancestry. Speaking of the culture and technology brought to Japan via Tsushima (a Japanese island in the Korea Strait), Emperor Akihito said that “it contributed greatly to Japan’s subsequent development.”¹¹¹ Then, he added, “I, on my part, feel a certain kinship with Korea,” and went on to cite an ancient chronicle that says the grandmother of his eighth century imperial ancestor, Kammu, was from a Korean kingdom.¹¹² Some in academic circles were not surprised that the emperor professed his Korean lineage, but were taken aback that the Japanese people were shocked at the revelation. It is widely known among academics and regional experts that the Japanese imperial line was a direct descendent from the Korean Paekche Kingdom.¹¹³ Nevertheless, it was surprising that

¹¹⁰ Diamond, 1998, pg. 11

¹¹¹ French, Howard, “*Japan rediscovers its Korean past,*” New York Times, 11 March 2002, pg. A.3

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Professor Ronald Toby, a historian at Tokyo University and the University of Illinois, comments, “In a way, what is surprising about Akihito’s statement isn’t that he said it, but that people were surprised. Because it is quite clear that in the seventh and eighth centuries, the emperor’s family was descended from Koreans from the Paekche Kingdom. Why at this moment did the emperor decide to say something which everyone secretly knew already?” See French, 2002.

the emperor said it, and it may be viewed as a way for Japan to extend an olive branch and attempt to overcome the bitter historical legacy of Japanese occupation.

What the emperor announced to the world in December of 2001, and what many in close academic and political circles knew, and what is, in 2004, still relatively unknown to most of the world, especially Japan,¹¹⁴ is that there is very strong archaeological and historical records evidence that the Japanese imperial line is an offshoot of the Paekche dynasty which reigned over southwestern Korea for the 1st century B.C. to 660 A.D. The reason why there is no definitive conclusion that everyone can agree on, is that it is still very controversial and both sides (or three sides if one counts North Korea) have attempted to use it to gain political advantage over the other.

What the growing evidence shows, Korean scholars suggest and corroborated, for the most part, by Western scientists and regional experts,¹¹⁵ is that the “horsesriders” in Japan’s theory on the origin of the modern Japanese, were not the mysterious horsemen from unknown origin, and nor were they from Manchuria, but were noble Koreans from the Paekche kingdom. The “horserider” theory was first presented at the “Symposium on the origins of the Japanese people and culture and formation of the Japanese state” in 1948 and postulates that horseriders from a Manchurian imperial race moved through the Korean peninsula and into Japan around the second or third century A.D., spreading culture and setting the foundation for the development of a modern Japan.

Korean scholars argue that archaeological evidence and historical documents show that the “horseriders” were nobles from the Paekche Kingdom and the first Yamato

¹¹⁴ Howard French writes, “In light of what most Japanese are taught about their history, Mr. Terada’s lack of knowledge about the subject [Japan’s Korean heritage] can easily be excused. Japan is said to produce the largest number of archaeologists per capita of any country, and one of their most popular pursuits is showing that the foundations of Japan’s culture pre-date contact with Korea and China.” See French, 2002

¹¹⁵ See Diamond (1998) and also, Sarah Nelson’s review of Wontack Hong’s book, *Relationship between Korean and Japan in the early period: Paekche and Yamato Wa*, in the Journal of Asian Studies, August 1989

emperor was in fact a 4th century Paekche prince named Homuda-wake or Onjin.¹¹⁶ Still, Japanese academics have been generally reluctant to examine the matter. The Japanese Imperial Household Agency, an arcane and rigid bureaucracy, prefers to leave the origins of the Japanese shrouded in mystery and has opposed opening major archaeological sites that might offer definitive evidence.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that there is a strong kinship between the royalty of Paekche and Yamato, and many other undeniable similarities in technology, culture and governmental systems.¹¹⁸

These revelations have been shocking to many Japanese. The assertions of a superior race afforded a rationale for domination over other Asians by asserting that the Japanese had not only had a mandate to uplift their neighbors but, as a superior race, could hardly help doing otherwise.¹¹⁹ Some Japanese officials during the Meiji period even advanced the argument that they were of the Aryan race because they were able to adapt so well to Western civilization. So superior were the Chinese and other Asians in intelligence that they must be related to the Europeans and Americans instead.¹²⁰ In a society where the purity and the superiority of its race were used as a justification for Japan's expansion into East and Southeast Asia, it is not surprising that there is such a resistance to this notion. On a positive note, future alliance building efforts between Seoul and Tokyo can look to the shared lineage as the basis for its cooperation, as Emperor Akihito attempted to do with his announcement.

¹¹⁶ Most notably Won-tack Hong of Korea who has published two books on the topic, *Relationship between Korea and Japan in the early period: Paekche and Yamato Wa*, published in 1988 by Pan Korea Book Corporation, and *Paekche of Korea and the Origin of Yamato Japan*, published in 1994 by Kudura International. Also see, Schoenberger, Karl, "Controversial theory traces Japanese emperors' roots to an old Korean town," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1988, pg. 18. For more recent articles, see Wherfritz, George and Takayama, Hideko, "The ties that bind; Japanese are just beginning to come to grips with their Korean heritage," *Newsweek*, 18 March 2002, pg. 24.

¹¹⁷ Schoenberger, Karl, "Controversial theory traces Japanese emperors' roots to an old Korean town," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1988, pg. 18. For more detail on the archaeological findings and similar conclusions, see Covell, Jon Carter and Covell, Alan, *Korean Impact on Japanese Culture: Japan's Hidden History*, Hollym International, 1986

¹¹⁸ See Hong, Won-tack, *Paekche of Korea and the origin of the Yamato Japan*, Seoul: Kudura International, 1994, Ch. 3

¹¹⁹ See Duus, Peter, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 414-5

¹²⁰ Duus, 1995, pg. 414

3. Japanese Aggression and Occupation of Korea

In 1592, with the ultimate goal of conquering China, Toyotomi Hideyoshi assembled some 200,000 troops and invaded Korea, setting off a bloody war that lasted six years. The Japanese samurai warriors, by some accounts, killed more than one million Koreans, which was close to one-third of the Korean population at the time.¹²¹ They also brought back tens of thousands (some say close to 100,000) of noses and ears hacked off corpses and live Koreans during their invasion. Today, there is a 30-foot high war memorial in Kyoto where the ears and noses of the Koreans are buried. The mourners, mostly native Koreans and some Japanese, recently gathered at the burial site known as the Ear Mound, or Mimizuka, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the site.

The Ear Mound and the specific events of the 1592 invasion are still unknown to most Japanese. It was until only recently that the Japanese textbooks even acknowledged the infamous Ear Mounds. Today, about half of the high school level textbooks mention the Ear Mounds.¹²² These shameful events, however, are very well known to the Koreans. In the 1970s, then president, Park Chung-hee, proposed to level the Ear Mounds because it brought shame and disgrace to the Koreans.¹²³ Needless to say, these events, which occurred more than 400 years ago, still serve to fuel the animosity between the two countries.

More than any other event in the history of Korea-Japan relations, though, the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910-1945 has become the defining event in the relations between the two countries. For 35 years, the Japanese occupied Korea and all but abolished Korean culture and language, forcing the Korean to adopt Japanese names and to speak the Japanese language. The Japanese justified its occupation the same way that the European colonizers justified theirs -- that they needed to bring civilization to a racially inferior and uncivilized society.

¹²¹ Kristoff, Nicholas D., "Japan, *Korea and 1597: A year that lives in infamy*," New York Times, 14 September 1997, pg. 1.3

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

The Japanese, at the time, viewed the Koreans with extreme derision and thought of them as almost sub-human. A Japanese Diet member observed at the time, “If you look closely [at the Koreans], they appear to be a bit vacant, their mouths open and their eyes dull, somehow lacking...Indeed, to put it in the worst terms, one could even say that they are closer to beasts than to human beings.”¹²⁴ The travel accounts of the Japanese during this period describes the Koreans as, “happy-go-lucky, smelly, dirty, pitiful, weak, disorderly, barbarous, lazy, and withdrawn; their vices encompassed swindling, larceny, gambling, bribery, adultery, viciousness, and intrigue; and their impoverished living conditions little or no better than those of primitive aborigines.”¹²⁵ The travel accounts did not so much dehumanize the Koreans as infantilize or primitivize them, likening them to the Ainu. The overwhelming perception was that the Koreans were no more capable of taking care of themselves than were any backward people and were to be treated by children rather than adults. What the country needed, the Japanese believed, was a “clean-up,” a “grand laundering,” a “sanitization of the slough of inequity that produces so many vices and abuses,” and once such a thorough cleansing was done, a “bright sunshine and air” would be let into the country.¹²⁶

In the end there were two views, the Japanese concluded. “The first view is that the Koreans are a degenerate people full of lies, bereft of moral sense, weak in endurance and courage, who will never raise themselves up as civilized people. The second view says that while they may lack a moral sense and courage they are a people by no means inferior to the Japanese in industry and endurance, who, if they have the proper leadership, will have a bright future.”¹²⁷ Most Japanese took the second view and went about providing the “proper leadership” and thus, the justification for the occupation and the genocide of the Korean culture. To the Japanese, they were helping the Koreans to improve themselves; it was not exploiting them.

For the Koreans, it was a period of disgrace and embarrassment, an event so traumatic to a country’s psyche that many Korean historians still refuse to write about it

¹²⁴ Quoted in, Duus, Peter, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, University of California Press, 1995, pg. 398

¹²⁵ Quoted in Duus, pg. 402

¹²⁶ See Duus, 1995, pg 406

¹²⁷ See Duus, 1995, pg 408

after all these years. As Bruce Cumings comments, “At the end of another century we can say that Koreans have by no means gotten over this experience. Japanese imperialism stuck a knife in old Korea and twisted it, and that wound has gnawed at the Korean national identity ever since. That is the fundamental reason why so little modern history is written: and that is what so dignifies those few Koreans and Japanese who have stood outside this death urge toward silence and written good history anyway.”¹²⁸

B. CURRENT RELATIONS

The news that a native Korean had sacrificed his life to save a Japanese person made headlines all over Japan and Korea in January of 2001. A South Korean language student and a Japanese photographer attempted to rescue a drunken Japanese man who fell into the subway track in front of a speeding commuter train, but all three died when they could not get out in time. In a society where its citizens are distrustful of foreigners, particularly Koreans, the fact that a Korean would give his life to save a Japanese man brought remorse and shame to those who held traditional beliefs about Koreans. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori attended his funeral and spoke of him as a “role model for young Japanese.”¹²⁹ Education Minister Nobutaka Machimura commented, “I think that message recalls for us something which we once used to have, but now we don’t have much.”¹³⁰

The gestures were sincere and heart-warming but the fact that the Japanese and the Koreans were so surprised by the attempted rescue, underscores the disturbing point that the two countries still view each other more as enemies than friends. Still, the relationship between South Korea and Japan has made great strides in the recent years, and the incident serves as a microcosm of the current state of relations between Seoul and Tokyo.

¹²⁸ Cumings, 1997, p. 140

¹²⁹ Togo, Shigehiko and Struck, Doug, “*Japan searches its soul to fathom fatal gesture*,” The Washington Post, 30 January 2001, pg. A.13

¹³⁰ Ibid

1. Warming Relations

Despite being allied with the U.S. and confronted with powerful communist enemies right on its borders, South Korea and Japan refused to accept each other for twenty years after the end of World War II. They remained that way until 1965 when the U.S. brokered a deal to normalize relations between the two vital American allies.¹³¹ Despite the normalization, however, there remained a deep mutual mistrust and the two sides remained acrimonious throughout the Cold War. This was largely due to the lingering effects of the occupation, primarily Seoul's obsession with obtaining a formal apology and Tokyo's refusal to come clean on its past and offer one. The two countries have differing perspectives on the apology issue. The Koreans feel that the Japanese, by whitewashing their past actions, have not shown sincere contrition and cannot be trusted. The Japanese, on the other hand, feel that Korea and other Asian countries are too shortsighted to understand that post-war Japan is fundamentally different from pre-war Japan, and is using the apology issue to extract more aid and undermine Japan's growing political power.

Although the two countries remained politically distant, South Korea and Japan became increasingly dependent on each other for commercial trade. Japan, in 1999, became South Korea's leading intra-industry trading partner, surpassing the United States.¹³² Besides economic interdependence, there were many other factors that dramatically altered the political and security landscape of Northeast Asia and the nature of Korea-Japan relations in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War, the rise of China and beginning of a new order in Northeast Asia, North Korea's nuclear threat, South Korea's fledgling democracy, and the election of Kim Dae-Jung, all paved the way for a historic summit between President Kim Dae-Jung and Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo in which Tokyo issued an unprecedented written apology to South Korea for the occupation of Korea. The statement, signed by both Kim and Obuchi, reads:

The two leaders concurred that it is important for both countries to face the past squarely and develop a new relationship for the 21st century based on mutual

¹³¹ The deal was brokered by Edwin Reischauer and Winthrop Brown, the U.S. ambassadors to Tokyo and Seoul, respectively. See Yi, Kil J., "In search of a panacea: Japan-Korea rapprochement and America's 'Far Eastern problems'," *Pacific Historical Review*, November 2002,

¹³² For full story, see Kim, Taegi, and Kim Hong-kee, "Korea's bilateral trade with Japan and the U.S.: A comparative study," *Seoul Journal of Economics*, Fall 1999, pp. 239-57

understanding and trust and firmly grounded in friendship and cooperation. Prime Minister Obuchi, looking back on the relations between Korea and Japan in this century, humbly accepted the historic fact that Japanese colonial rule inflicted unbearable suffering and pain on the Korean people and expressed painfully deep repentance and a heartfelt apology for the ordeal. President Kim sincerely acknowledged the Prime Minister's perception of history, expressed appreciation and mentioned that it is a necessity of the times that both Korea and Japan make concerted efforts to overcome their unfortunate past and build a future-oriented relationship based on the spirit of reconciliation and friendship.¹³³

The statement was remarkable in that it was the first time Japan had issued a written apology for its wartime actions. Also noteworthy was the fact that it was addressed specifically to Korea and not to any other Asian country. Needless to say, it went a long way toward healing old wounds and setting the foundation for improved security, political, and economic relations. Indeed, Tokyo offered \$3 billion in financial assistance to Seoul when it was reeling from the Asian financial crisis in 1998. South Korea, in turn, relaxed its trade restrictions on Japanese automobiles and has allowed the Japanese to compete with Korean automakers. Their navies now conduct joint search and rescue training exercises.¹³⁴ Granted, these are only small steps toward establishing a true alliance but the gestures were, nevertheless, promising signs to the U.S. that its two most important allies in East Asia were finally coming together.

The co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup took the relationship to another level. The feel-good moment which saw the two historical enemies coming together to host the biggest sporting event in the world, had the citizens of both countries buzzing and rooting for one another, and politicians calling for renewed vigor in their relationship. Writing in a Japanese political magazine, a Korean official commented, "Never in the history of Korea-Japan relations has there been as stirring a moment as this. It is now the

¹³³ Lam, Sang-er, "*The apology issue: Japan's differing approaches toward China and South Korea*," *American Asian Review*, Fall 2002, pp. 31-55

¹³⁴ For more information, see Lam, Sang-er, "*The apology issue: Japan's differing approaches toward China and South Korea*," *American Asian Review*, Fall 2002, pp. 31-55

responsibility of the intelligentsia of both countries to ponder with open minds the historical significance of having co-hosted the World Cup and to consider how to build on this experience.”¹³⁵

Still, animosities lingered as Japan continued to send mixed signals regarding its Meiji period actions and Koreans still obsessed over Japan’s seeming lack of true remorse. The latest controversy involves the visits by Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine and the revisionist textbook issue. Much to the dismay of Seoul and Beijing, Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine, a memorial to the fallen Japanese soldiers, a total of four times since 2001. But despite the urging of right wing conservatives to visit on August 15th, the anniversary of Japan’s defeat, Koizumi never satisfied the nationalists’ demands to do so. Still, he has been much more enthusiastic about visiting the shrine than any of his predecessors and as a result, has renewed bitter feeling among the Koreans and Chinese. Regarding the visit, President Kim remarked that Koizumi’s visit only sowed mistrust.¹³⁶ Adding to the bitterness was the publication of a new middle-school history textbook which downplays Japanese wartime atrocities. Neutralizing some of the effect was the fact that only six school districts out of 532 nationwide chose to use the book.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Seoul was quick to reply as Kim commented,

To our disappointment...some people in Japan are attempting to distort history, casting dark clouds over Korea-Japan relations again. Many conscientious Japanese citizens watched with apprehension the distortion of history and their prime minister’s paying tribute to the controversial war shrine...How can we make good friends with people who try to forget and ignore the many pains that inflicted on us?...How can we deal with them in the future with any degree of trust? Those are questions that we have about the Japanese.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Lee, Dai-soon, “*World Cup 2002: A new era in Korea-Japan ties*,” Japan Echo, October 2002, pp. 53-7

¹³⁶ Prusher, Ilene R., “*Asian anger still simmers over Japanese history views on the anniversary of Japan’s surrender, a shrine visit and new book draw more protests*,” The Christian Science Monitor, 16 August 2001, pg. 7

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Quoted in Prusher, 2001

Consequently, Seoul halted defense official exchange programs with Tokyo and also suspended its Navy search and rescue exercises with Tokyo, although both were quickly resumed. It is clear that, despite the great progress in the last decade, South Korea-Japan relations still have a long way to go in order to achieve a trusting relationship. The quick reconciliation, though, testifies to the increased desire and commitment of both countries for greater security cooperation.

2. The Beijing Factor

One of the key contributing factors that may facilitate closer South Korea-Japan relations is the specter of a South Korea-China alliance or worse yet, of a future united Korea-China alliance. This state of affairs, if it comes to fruition, is seen, by many regional experts, as the nightmare scenario for both Japan and the United States.¹³⁹ Indeed, a strong alliance between a unified Korea and China would dramatically alter the power balance in the region. This scenario would pit a China-Korea alliance against a U.S.-Japan alliance for regional dominance and could possibly lead to a regional arms race and severe security ramifications.

Due largely to the fact that it will intensify the rivalry between the two powers, the worsening of relations between Beijing and Tokyo is of special concern to this region. The conspicuous omission of an apology to the Chinese when President Jiang Zemin made a formal visit only a month after the Kim visit, can be construed as Japan distancing itself from China, for various reasons. First, Japan views China as an emerging power and a regional rival, and as a result, a potential threat to Japan, whereas Seoul is still not viewed in this manner. Second, deep mutual distrust still remains between the Jiang regime and Tokyo. This is in sharp contrast to Kim Dae-jung, whom Japanese officials praise for his principled approach. Third, Tokyo is suspicious that Beijing is using the apology issue to pressure Tokyo on the Taiwan matter and to bolster Chinese nationalism.¹⁴⁰ Tokyo's refusal to offer formal, written apologies in the same

¹³⁹ This notion is put forth by Michael Armacost and Kenneth Pyle. See Armacost, Michael H., and Pyle, Kenneth B., "*Japan and the Unification of Korea: Challenges for U.S. policy coordination*," NBR Analysis, March 1999

¹⁴⁰ For more perspectives, see Lam, Peng-er, "*The apology issue: Japan's differing approaches toward China and South Korea*," American Asian Review, Fall 2002, pp. 31-55

manner it did to South Korea, along with Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, has prompted Beijing to withdraw Koizumi's invitation from a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the peace and friendship treaty, and Koizumi has been persona non grata ever since.¹⁴¹

How the reemergence of China as a major power plays out in the region will go a long ways toward determining the stability of the region. As in the past, it looks more and more like the power struggle between China and Japan will get played out on the Korean peninsula. Seoul and Tokyo could go one of two ways: the two countries could be driven apart by Beijing's assertive courtship of South Korea, or Seoul and Tokyo could form an alliance, with full backing from the United States. Many see the latter scenario as the most natural and desired, given the current geopolitical conditions but one can just as easily see a Korea-China alliance. What is not likely to happen is that China and Japan will be able to coexist harmoniously and independently, without the formation of strategic alliances and security structures.

Conceivably, South Korea could ally with either China or Japan, but there is too much historical enmity between China and Japan for any prospect of a bilateral alliance between them. This leaves Seoul in a familiar and delicate situation of choosing its allegiance. In the past it has sided with China but the U.S. will have a big say and will try to steer South Korea toward the U.S.-Japan alliance. On the other hand, there are some East Asia regional experts who suggest that those who portray Sino-Japanese relations as sullenly hostile is at least 25 years out of date and that Tokyo and Beijing quietly buried the hatchet in the 1970s and have entered into an increasingly close alliance.¹⁴² Furthermore, they suggest, Americans are too naïve to understand that Japan foresees the demise of U.S. hegemony and is hedging itself by courting China to align itself with the future superpower.¹⁴³ As such, the nature of the security structure remains

¹⁴¹ Doi, Ayako, "Asian enmities: China and Japan revert to hostility, and hope for reconciliation fades," *The Washington Post*, 29 August 2004, pg. B.2

¹⁴² For full article, see Fingleton, Eamonn, "The sun and the dragon: America's wishful thinking about Sino-Japanese relations," *The American Conservative*, 2 August 2004; also can be accessed on Fingleton's website, http://www.fingleton.net/view_art_un.php?AID=307, last accessed on September 2004

¹⁴³ Ibid

to be seen but it is becoming increasingly apparent that the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and the possible reunification of the two Koreas will play a critical role in determining future alliances.

C. JAPAN'S INTERESTS IN KOREAN UNIFICATION

Japan's improved relations with South Korea offer enticing opportunities for Tokyo to advance its interests. Both countries are strong allies of the U.S., share common concerns about North Korea, enjoy common values of democracy and capitalism, and have no real geopolitical differences over matters such as the Taiwan-China issue.¹⁴⁴ The Japanese have been very impressed with South Korea's burgeoning democracy and its rapid rise as an economic power and as a result, the Japanese public opinion of Koreans has improved significantly in the last decade. Accordingly, there is a strong undercurrent among the Japanese to establish better relations with its closest neighbor.

1. Japan's Interests

Although it maintains a low profile in the North Korea talks, Japan has considerable interests at stake in the Six-Party Talks and the possible reunification of the two Koreas. Foremost on Tokyo's agenda is the matter of security. When Pyongyang launched its Taepodong missile -- a three-stage missile estimated to have a range of 3,800 to 6,000 km -- over the Sea of Japan in August of 1998, it caught the Japanese off guard and prompted vigorous debate over its peace constitution. The missile launch proved that Pyongyang can launch an attack on Japan at any time if it wished. Just as unsettling was the fact that Japan was severely constrained by its pacifist constitution to respond accordingly. As a result, the Japanese parliament enacted new "contingency" laws making it easier for its armed forces to respond quickly to attacks at home.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, protecting itself from an unfriendly unified Korea is at the top of the list of Japan's interest on the Korean peninsula. As a leading Japanese strategic thinker

¹⁴⁴ See Lam, 2002

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

succinctly put it, “Japan seeks a united Korea that is friendly to Tokyo and Washington, that is economically viable and politically open, and that will allow a token U.S. presence to remain.”¹⁴⁶

Accordingly, second on the list is Japan’s economic and commercial interests on the Korean peninsula. Japan and South Korea have forged a strong bilateral trade relationship and have become very interdependent on each other’s economies. Any disruption to this flow could have dramatic effects on their respective economies as well as the region’s economic health. The extensive interdependence of their economies was evident in the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Japan contributed billions of dollars to help rescue the South Korean economy and thus also cover the exposure of Japanese banks, which held more than a third of South Korea’s foreign debt.¹⁴⁷

Third on the list of Tokyo’s interests is the post-Korean unification alliance structure and its relationship with the major powers, particularly with Washington.¹⁴⁸ A strong unified Korea would exponentially increase the complex and delicate nature of power balances in the East Asia region. How the two Koreas reunify and what roles each of the major powers play in the process will ultimately determine the new alliance arrangement in the region. For Japan, its primary interest is to maintain its strong alliance with the U.S. and to align a unified Korea toward the U.S.-Japan alliance vice Beijing. A unified Korea tilted more toward China than Japan or the U.S. can cause severe reverberations throughout East Asia and would force the U.S. to re-think its East Asia strategy. Consequently and more importantly for Japan, such a scenario would force the U.S. to re-think its bilateral relations with Tokyo. It is highly unlikely that Japan would be abandoned by the U.S. but nevertheless, a Sino-centric post-unification East Asia is not in the best interest of Japan. With all that is riding on the reunification of the two Koreas, one wonders if Japan even desires this outcome.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted attributed to Masashi Nishihara, a leading strategic thinker at Japan’s National Defense University, quoted in Armacost, Michael H., and Pyle, Kenneth B., “*Japan and the Unification of Korea: Challenges for U.S. policy coordination*,” *NBR Analysis*, March 1999

¹⁴⁷ See Armacost and Pyle, 1999

¹⁴⁸ Armacost and Pyle present this view in the NBR article. See Armacost and Pyle, 1999.

2. What Does Japan Want?

In a post-Cold War strategic context, Japan realizes that it needs South Korea more than South Korea needs Japan, as evidenced by the recent series of overtures by Tokyo toward Seoul. During the Cold War, despite the fact that both were strategically aligned with the U.S., neither country made a concerted effort to improve bilateral relations with one another. With the U.S. focused on winning the Cold War, both countries were well protected by the U.S. security blanket, so there was no strategic gain to be made by improving their bilateral relations, unless of course, they were forced to do so by Washington, as was the case with normalizing their relations in 1965. Victor Cha explores this aspect in his book, "Alignment Despite Antagonism," and puts forth the notion of "quasi-alliance," in which two states (Korea and Japan) remain unallied but share a third party (U.S.) as a common ally.¹⁴⁹ Cha correlates the perceived level of U.S. commitment toward South Korea and Japan to the level of cooperation in their bilateral relations and concludes that the less the U.S. commitment, more likely they are to cooperate and establish better security relations.

Indeed, it can be argued that the post-Cold War environment has lessened U.S. commitments in the region and in turn, precipitated a dramatic change in the security calculations of Tokyo as well as Seoul.¹⁵⁰ The fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union signaled to both Tokyo and Seoul that they could not continue to rely on the security guarantees that came from forward deployments of U.S. troops in Japan and Korea. With a belligerent North Korea at their doorsteps and the rising power of China, and the perceived lessening of U.S. commitments in the region, Tokyo and Seoul have no choice but to turn to each other. Indeed, with the recent announcements of a broad restructuring of U.S. troops in East Asia,¹⁵¹ Tokyo and Seoul may feel even more compelled to establish a strong security alliance.

¹⁴⁹ See Cha, Victor, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The U.S.-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, Stanford University Press, 1999

¹⁵⁰ C.S. Eliot Kang and Yoshinori Kaseda also explores this aspect of Korea-Japan relations in their article, "Confidence and security building between South Korea and Japan," in the *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Summer 2000, pp. 93-109

¹⁵¹ The U.S. plans to withdraw 12,500 troops from South Korea. For full details, see Gertz, Bill, "South Korea troop cuts tied to restructuring," *The Washington Times*, 21 June 2004, can be accessed on <http://www.washingtontimes.com/national/20040621-124413-4356r.htm>, last accessed on September 2004

Under this geopolitical context, Japan is stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place vis-à-vis Korean reunification. On one hand, if Tokyo is perceived to be opposing reunification and undermining its efforts, Japan would be characterized as attempting to weaken the Korean state to promote its own selfish interests. On the other hand, if Tokyo plays a prominent role in the unification efforts, the other major powers would be widely suspicious of Japan's motives. Either way, Japan would be criticized for attempting to advance its own interests at the expense of others. This may explain why Japan has been very ambiguous in its official position on the Korean reunification issue.

Objectively, however, the Korean reunification issue goes to the heart of Tokyo's strategic calculations on its future role and viability in a new security alliance order in East Asia. Any miscalculations by Tokyo could irreparably jeopardize its vital national interests. Victor Cha puts forth the argument that Japan's strategic thinking is best characterized by the defensive realist approach, which holds that a state's survival is best attained by pursuing just enough power to achieve a balance where no one other power can threaten the system or a country's national security.¹⁵² Under this framework, Cha concludes that Japan does not oppose unification on the peninsula; actively seeks alignment with powers on the Korean peninsula as a hedge against China; seeks to engage Korea in order to preempt Korea revanchist inclinations; and seeks to reconstruct the "ideational" base of its relationship with Korea (i.e., history).¹⁵³ Indeed, one can see most, if not all of these overtures from Tokyo to Seoul.

In this regard, a slow process by which Tokyo maintains the status quo as long as possible is seen by some Japanese officials as the best way to proceed. As Armacost and Pyle write, "...most Japanese policymakers have quietly concluded that their wisest course is not to hasten unification, but rather to pursue a course that maintains the status quo of a divided Korea for as long as possible, all the while supporting American policies of deterrence, hoping to contain tensions and foster cordial ties with South Korea, and

¹⁵² Cha, Victor, "*Defensive realism and Japan's approach toward Korean reunification*," NBR Analysis, June 2003

¹⁵³ Ibid

favoring policies that promote a gradual reconciliation rather than a rapid and potentially violent reunification, which might produce new problems for Japan.”¹⁵⁴

Such a flexible and accommodative approach could prove effective if it were not for China’s growing influence in the region, as evidenced by the leading role it has taken on in the Six-Party Talks. Accordingly, this thesis argues that, instead of maintaining a low profile, Japan should take on a more prominent and proactive role in Korean reunification efforts. As risky as it may appear on the surface, the potential benefits of such a strategy far outweigh the possible pitfalls.

Despite fighting against China in the Korean War, South Korea has gradually gravitated back toward the Chinese sphere of influence, which should be a very disturbing development to both Washington and Tokyo. The reasons for Seoul to embrace Beijing are varied: strained relations with the U.S.; China’s emerging power coupled with assertive courtship by China; Japan’s continued displays of nationalist views; and most importantly, Seoul’s perceptions that its traditional allies are undermining its efforts at reunification. Whether Beijing’s actions are a calculative strategy to advance its interests on the Korea peninsula remains to be seen. It is readily apparent, however, that Beijing has taken on a much more prominent role in Korean affairs, particularly the Six-Party Talks, to the surprise of many. Perhaps Beijing senses a strategic opportunity to form an alliance with South Korea and a possible unified Korea. Or perhaps, Beijing has just tired of Pyongyang’s antics and wants to solve the North Korean nuclear problem once and for all. Either way, it does not bode well for Tokyo and Washington if Beijing succeeds in disarming North Korea and takes the lead in reunification efforts. In this scenario, China would be seen by Koreans as the catalyst in reuniting its country and as a result, a unified Korea would be more inclined to be aligned with China than with the U.S. and Japan.

In order to preclude this from happening, Japan, in close coordination with the U.S., needs to build on its improved relations with South Korea and openly advocate for the reunification of the two Koreas. The reunification of Korea through diplomatic means with Japan playing a vital role, would satisfy most, if not all of Japan’s interests. A unified Korea aligned with Tokyo and Washington would eliminate Japan’s most

¹⁵⁴ Armacost and Pyle, 1999, pg. 9

immediate security threat and provide the U.S.-Japan-Korea alliance with an upper hand in its efforts to neutralize China's growing power in the region. Moreover, a peaceful merger of the two Koreas will prevent any major disruptions to the region's economic activity and trade. Finally, it remains to be seen whether the U.S. will still have a significant military presence in Korea and Japan if the North Korean threat is eliminated.

A case could be made that a strong Korea-Japan alliance would obviate the need for U.S. military presence in the region. Instead of forward deployed troops in the region, the U.S. could maintain its influence through its strategic alliance with Korea and Japan. If this scenario would play out, one could even make a case that Beijing would opt to join the alliance rather than opposing such a formidable coalition. Indeed, Ralph Cossa of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) suggests that a U.S.-Japan-Unified Korea alliance not only will have a profound impact on the broader geopolitical environment but will help define the nature of the U.S.-Japan-China relationship and other regional triangles and broader multilateral configurations.¹⁵⁵

In sum, South Korea and Japan have shown great progress in the last decade in improving their bilateral relations. Still, they have a long way to go before they can establish a meaningful security alliance with mutual trust and understanding. In the current geopolitical context in East Asia, it is in the critical interest of both Tokyo and Washington that Seoul be more aligned with Japan than with its traditional patron, China. The implication for the U.S. is that a strong Korea-Japan security alliance would lead to enhanced long-term stability in East Asia and as a byproduct, would lessen the security burden of the U.S. in the region.

A surefire way to promote this alliance is for Tokyo to take a more involved and constructive role in the Six-Party Talks. In many respects, the current Six-Party Talks can be viewed as a prelude to the Korean reunification talks, with the major powers jockeying for position and influence. This may partly be the reason why the talks have bogged down and the reason it has become much larger in scope than just finding a resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue. China has volunteered to coordinate the talks and has taken the lead role in trying to resolve the nuclear crisis. In order to neutralize Beijing's growing influence and courtship of Seoul, Tokyo needs to take a

¹⁵⁵ See Cossa, Ralph (editor), *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building toward a 'Virtual Alliance,'* CSIS Press, 1999

more proactive and sincere role in reunifying the two Koreas as a means to solve the North Korean nuclear crisis and to advance its own interests in the Korean reunification process. Continuing with its measured and adaptive, low profile approach to Korean reunification would unnecessarily risk Japan's considerable stake on the Korean peninsula as well as in the East Asia region.

V. U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

The U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula during the Cold War, at least on the surface, were largely unquestioned.¹⁵⁶ It was to bolster South Korean democracy and contain communism. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism in many parts of the world, however, the common threat for the South Koreans and the U.S. had all but disappeared. For North Korea, the end of the Cold War brought with it harsh political realities. With China embarking on its own reforms, North Korea became mostly isolated and was for the most part, abandoned by the international community. As a result, it became desperate for its own survival. Accordingly, a dynamic and complex relationship between the three countries has emerged. Yet, U.S. foreign policy has failed to recognize this new dynamic and adjust its policies accordingly.

The demise of the Soviet empire, signified by the fall of the Berlin Wall, occurred almost fifteen years ago and changed the entire landscape of the geopolitical and security environment in Northeast Asia. Yet, U.S. foreign policy toward the Korean peninsula remains largely unchanged from the Cold War period although the U.S. national interests have changed dramatically. Due in large part to the anachronistic foreign policy toward the two Koreas, the U.S. has alienated the South Korean people and is at risk of losing its strategic foothold on the Korean peninsula and the Northeast Asia region.

With the continuing non-resolution of the North Korean nuclear weapons problem, coupled with the emergence of China as a regional power, a clear articulation of U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula is needed more than ever. The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze U.S. national interests in the context of current U.S. foreign policy toward the two Koreas, and offer a critique and propose recommendations on how to redefine U.S. national interests in the post-Cold War geopolitical and geo-economic environments.

¹⁵⁶ Some regional experts, however, believe that the true U.S. interest was Japan and Korea was used to protect U.S. interests in Japan. As E.A. Olsen writes, "...thanks to U.S. planning for Japan's occupation, and the relative disinterest in Korea, Japan found itself reconfigured into the cornerstone of an emergent U.S. strategy for containing the Soviet Union in the Asia-Pacific region. Korea, by contrast, again became a victimized innocent bystander." See Edward A. Olsen, *Toward Normalizing U.S.-Korea Relations: In Due Course?*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002, pg. 16

Toward that end, this chapter will first explore in detail the concept of national interest in generic terms separate from Korea policy. It will then follow up with some background on the U.S.-Korea relationship. An analysis of China's role and influence will be presented along with its implications for U.S.-South Korea relations. Given this context, this chapter will explore what the national interests *should* be, in light of the ever-changing geopolitical landscape in the East Asia region.

A. THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The U.S. decision to invade Iraq has brought to the forefront many questions regarding the nature of U.S. national interests. Critics contend it was a war-of-choice rather than a war-of-necessity.¹⁵⁷ Others argue that it was in the national interest as well as international interest, to bring an end to the Saddam Hussein regime and installing a democratic government.¹⁵⁸ This debate regarding the legitimacy of the Iraqi war is a good example of the emotional and wide-ranging discussions about how to define the national interest. Much of the confusion stems from the geopolitical complexities of the post-Cold War world, not to mention the post-9/11 world. Writing about the national interest, Samuel Huntington asks, "Without the Cold War, what's the point of being an American? If being an American means being committed to the principles of liberty, democracy, individualism, and private property, and if there is no evil empire out there threatening those principles, what indeed does it mean to be an American, and what becomes of American national interests?"¹⁵⁹

During the Cold War, the overriding U.S. national interest was to contain and defeat communism. All other goals and interests that clashed with this purpose were subordinated to it. For forty years, virtually all the great American initiatives in foreign policy, as well as many domestic policies, were justified by this overriding priority: the

¹⁵⁷ Senator Edward Kennedy called the invasion of Iraq "a war of choice, not of necessity." For full story, see CNN, "*Inside politics: Kennedy: Iraq war based on politics*," 15 January 2004, <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/01/14/kennedy.iraq/>, last accessed on July 2004

¹⁵⁸ For more perspectives on this view, see Nobel Peace laureate, Jose Ramos-Horta's article in *Wall Street Journal*, "*War and Peace*," 13 May 2004, p. A.12

¹⁵⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, "*The erosion of American national interests*," *Foreign Affairs*, New York, September/October 1997, p. 28

Marshall Plan, NATO, the Korean War, nuclear weapons and strategic missiles, intelligence operations, the space program, military alliances with Japan and Korea, support for Israel, overseas military deployments, the Vietnam War, the openings to China, support for Afghan Mujahideen and other anti-communist insurgencies.¹⁶⁰ Without the Soviet threat, there is no justification for most of these major initiatives. During the Cold War, the existence of a common threat galvanized the Americans and promoted identity and cohesion. It can be argued that the much of the economic, technological, and social progress in the U.S. was the result of World War II and the Cold War.¹⁶¹

1. Definition of National Interest

With the end of the Cold War and with growing interdependence among nations and no real peer-competitor to the U.S., there have been wide-ranging and divergent views on how to define and prioritize national interests. Generally speaking, there are two basic schools of thought about how national interests should be defined. The realist school of thought which includes statesmen such as Otto van Bismarck in the nineteenth century and Richard Nixon in the twentieth, holds that national interests should be defined in terms of a state's tangible power and sphere of influence relative to those of other states.¹⁶² The single most important form of tangible power is the military and a nation's ultimate challenge is to maintain a balance of military power that is favorable to its country. The other school holds that national interests should be defined more broadly to encompass values such as human rights, economic freedom, and political freedom. In the contemporary age, most of the prevailing thought on national interest is geared more toward the latter thought. Having said that, however, most people's definition is sufficiently vague that it is tough to categorize it in one camp or the other, and many encompass both views.

¹⁶⁰ Huntington, 1997, p. 29

¹⁶¹ Huntington argues this point in the 1997 Foreign Affairs article.

¹⁶² James F. Miske, "National Interests: Grand purpose or catchphrase?," Naval War College Review, Washington, Autumn 2002, pg.1

Joseph Nye broadly defines national interest as a set of interests that are widely shared by Americans in their relations with the rest of the world.¹⁶³ Samuel Huntington views the national interest as a public good of concern to all or most Americans; a vital national interest is one which they are willing to expend blood and treasure to defend.¹⁶⁴ Some even point to Alexander Hamilton's vision of national interest at the beginnings of the Republic, who said that his aim was not to "recommend a policy absolutely selfish or interested in nations; but to show, that a policy regulated by...interests, as far as justice and good faith permit, is, and ought to be, the prevailing one."¹⁶⁵

Thus, at a minimum, U.S. national interests should articulate whether its interests include values as well as strategic interests, and whether international interests should be a major influence on national interests.

2. Strategic Interests Versus Values-Based Interests

Nye argues that national interest is broader than private interest and also broader than protection against geopolitical threats. In this regard, Nye makes a distinction between strategic interest and national interest, commenting that, "strategic interest is part of, but not necessarily identical to, the national interest. In a democracy the national interest is what a majority, after discussion and debate, decides are its legitimate long-run shared interests in relation to the outside world."¹⁶⁶ These interests can include moral values, human rights, or a sense of national pride. Foreign policy initiatives based on moral values-based interests can often times go against how others perceive the strategic interests of the United States. National interests, thus, is broader and encompasses many more aspects than strategic interests alone.

The U.S. support of Israel is a good example of morals and values-based interests taking priority over strategic interests. Most would agree that U.S. support for Israel is not in the strategic interest because the United States' primary interest in the Middle East

¹⁶³ See Nye, Joseph S., "Why the Gulf War Served the National Interest," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1991, Vol. 268, pp 56-64

¹⁶⁴ Huntington, 1997, p. 32

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in James Chace, "The National Interest," *World Policy Journal*, Winter 1993, p. 109

¹⁶⁶ Nye, 1991, p. 57

is oil. One could even argue, from a purely strategic viewpoint, that the Middle East would be much more stable if Israel were to perish. By continuing to support Israel, the U.S. is going directly against its strategic interests. The support for Israel, however, extends far beyond its strategic interests and involves core fundamental values. The support is based partly on shared Judeo-Christian beliefs. It is also based on a sense of historical guilt related to the Holocaust.¹⁶⁷ Americans, by and large, have great admiration for the Israeli democracy and its underdog role in the Middle East. Moreover, strategists who believe alliances are crucial, consider the United States' continued commitment to Israel as an integral part of U.S. efforts at a new world order. Thus, morals and values-based purposes play an integral part in defining U.S. national interests, and sometimes even outweighing the strategic interest, as exemplified in U.S. foreign policy toward Israel.

Huntington agrees with Nye in this regard, pointing out that national interest usually combine security and material concerns, on the one hand, and moral and ethical concerns, on the other. Huntington writes, "Military action against Saddam Hussein [1st Gulf War] was seen as a vital national interest because he threatened reliable and inexpensive access to Persian Gulf oil and because he was a rapacious dictator who had blatantly invaded and annexed another country. During the Cold War the Soviet Union and communism were perceived as threats to both American security and American values; a happy coincidence existed between the demands of power politics and the demands of morality."¹⁶⁸

Condoleezza Rice also agrees, arguing that "there are those who would draw a sharp line between power politics and a principled foreign policy based on values. This polarized view -- you are either a realist or devoted to norms and values -- may be just fine in academic debate, but it is a disaster for American foreign policy. American values are universal. People want to say what they think, worship as they wish, and elect those

¹⁶⁷ Nye advances this notion in his article, "Why the Gulf War served the national interest." *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1991, Vol. 268, pp. 56-64

¹⁶⁸ Huntington, p. 4

who govern them; the triumph of these values is most assuredly easier when the international balance of power favors those who believe in them.”¹⁶⁹

There are those, however, who argue that moral preferences have no place in defining national interest. Foreign policy experts, who are aligned with the realism school of thought argue that such values cannot and should not be part of the national interest.¹⁷⁰ They prefer to identify the national interest with the strategic interest and warn against the pitfalls of confusing moral preferences with strategic interest. Max Boot of the Wall Street Journal points out that, “Realpolitikers scoff at intrusions by morality into foreign policy. They believe that nations are governed by immutable geostrategic imperatives and that ideology counts for little in international relations. Realpolitikers preach stability; Wilsonians prefer revolution.”¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, it is clear that values-based interests have always had and always will play an integral part in defining American national interests. In analyzing and understanding foreign policy, however, it is critical to recognize the dividing lines between strategic and values-based interests and the role it plays in the overall formulation of national interests.

3. National Interests Versus International Interests

Some have argued that it is becoming very difficult to distinguish between national interests and international interests because Americans share an interest in world order.¹⁷² Because of increased security and economic interdependence, coupled with advancements in information technologies that allow for instant information access, even slight instabilities halfway around the globe can cause severe economic and security

¹⁶⁹ Rice, Condoleezza, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000, Vol. 79, pg. 47

¹⁷⁰ For representation of dissenting realism thought in foreign policy, see Leon Hader, “*Neo-Cons ‘Out’? Realists ‘In?’*,” [Coalition for Realistic Foreign Policy](http://www.realisticforeignpolicy.org/content/), 13 January 2004, www.realisticforeignpolicy.org/content/

¹⁷¹ For full article, see Max Boot, “*George W. Bush: The W Stands for Woodrow*,” [The Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com), 1 July 2002, p. A14

¹⁷² For full treatment on the globalization phenomena, see Thomas Friedman’s book, “*The Lexus and the Olive Tree*,” Anchor Books/Doubleday, 2000. The central theme is that globalization--the Lexus--is the central organizing principle of the post-cold war world, even though many individuals and nations resist by holding onto what has traditionally mattered to them--the olive tree.

concerns. Nye argues that it is becoming ever more difficult for the Americans to isolate what happens inside the U.S. and what happens outside.¹⁷³ Many internationalists would agree that, in essence, world interests *are* American national interests.

Of course, many have differing views. Condoleeza Rice argues that foreign policy should, "...proceed from the firm ground of the national interest, not from the interests of an illusory international community."¹⁷⁴

The bottom line is that national interests will always take precedence but the line between the two is becoming increasingly blurred. A combination of technological, commercial, and political trends is shortening distances, opening borders, and connecting far-flung cultures and economies. The growth of the global marketplace, along with the deepening and widening of interdependence among regions and countries makes international interests America's own interests.

4. Questions of Merit

Despite its seeming importance, there are various criticisms on the mere concept of national interest. Many have charged it with being ambiguous, undemocratic, irrational, obsolescent, and exclusivist.¹⁷⁵ They argue that the notion of national interest is ineffectual in formulating foreign policy. J. David Singer comments that the "concept is nearly useless for guiding us in the choice of policies in the future or as a yardstick for evaluating those that were followed in the past. There are no consistent criteria beyond the vague and the abstract...the criteria of interest lead to interventionism on one occasion and distancing on another, to urgency here and patience there, to a concern individual rights in one case and to "national honor" in another, to hanging tough against one rival and to showing flexibility in another, to economics over security here and vice-versa there...the concept is vacuous and politically mischievous."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Nye, p. 2

¹⁷⁴ Rice, Condoleezza, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000, Vol. 79, pg. 9

¹⁷⁵ J. David Singer, *Review of "The Two Faces of National Interest," American Political Science Review*, March 1995, Vol. 89, p. 1

¹⁷⁶ Singer, p. 3

However, Condoleezza Rice, criticizing the Clinton Administration for a lack of a clear, prioritized list of national interests, argues that,

In a democracy as pluralistic as ours, the absence of an articulated national interest either produces a fertile ground for those wishing to withdraw from the world or creates a vacuum to be filled by parochial groups and transitory pressures...American foreign policy should refocus the U.S. on the national interest and the pursuit of key priorities.¹⁷⁷

Further criticizing the Clinton Administration for its internationalist views, Rice comments,

Many in the U.S. are (and have always been) uncomfortable with the notions of power politics, great powers and power balances...this discomfort leads to a reflexive appeal instead to notions of international law and norms, and the belief that the support of many states or even institutions like the United Nations, is essential to the legitimate exercise of power. The 'national interest' is replaced with 'humanitarian interest' or the interests of the 'international community.' The belief that the U.S. is exercising power legitimately only when it is doing so on behalf of someone or something else was deeply rooted in Wilsonian thought, and there are strong echoes of it in the Clinton administration. To be sure there is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect.¹⁷⁸

To further complicate the issue, President Bush himself is labeled as Wilsonian. Writing about a statement in which President Bush called for the overthrow of Yassar Arafat, Max Boot of the Wall Street Journal observes, "...a more accurate description would be to say this represents the triumph of -- for want of a better term -- Wilsonians over realpolitikers, a development of considerable long term consequence."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Rice, Condoleezza, "Promoting the National Interest," Foreign Affairs, Jan/February 2000, Vol. 79, p. 45

¹⁷⁸ Rice, p. 46

¹⁷⁹ Max Boot, 2002

5. The National Interest in the Post 9/11 Period

“The 9/11 attacks have changed *everything*,” is how many U.S. strategists have characterized the security environment. Indeed, the National Security Strategy (NSS) released in September of 2002, dramatically shifted American military strategy from the traditional concepts of containment and deterrence toward unilateralism and pre-emptive action against hostile states and terrorist groups. The NSS goes on to say that the U.S. will exploit its military and economic power to encourage “free and open societies,” rather than seek “unilateral advantage.”¹⁸⁰ It calls this union of values and national interests “a distinctly American nationalism.”

The NSS sketches out a far more aggressive approach to national security than at any time since the height of the Cold War. The document also states that, while the U.S. will seek allies in the battle against terrorism, “We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively.”¹⁸¹

The first test of this new resolve, as outlined in the NSS, is currently being played out in Iraq. And judging by the comments from the administration, the administration’s vision includes getting rid of the evil from what they call the “axis of evil,” and next in line seems to be North Korea. The Far Eastern Economic Review reports, “After the United States security role in Iraq is reduced, hawks in the U.S. administration say Washington will look to tighten the noose around North Korea and its nuclear-weapons program.”¹⁸² Moreover, President Bush himself has commented, “I loathe Kim Jong-il. I’ve got a visceral reaction to this guy because he is starving his people. It appalls me. I feel passionate about this. They tell me, well we may not need to move too fast, because the financial burdens on people will be so immense if this guy were to topple. I just don’t buy that.”¹⁸³ Judging by these statements, the only thing keeping the administration

¹⁸⁰ The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, p.2

¹⁸¹ NSS, p. 3

¹⁸² For full article, see (author unattributed), “U.S. Hawks Look to Korea Post-Iraq,” Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 2004, p. 8

¹⁸³ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004

from undertaking a regime change in North Korea are the current problems in Iraq. This begs the question of whether a military attack and regime change in North Korea is in the U.S. national interest, even in this post-9/11 era.

B. REDEFINING U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

It is against this backdrop that the U.S. must evaluate and define its national interests on the Korean peninsula. The national interest should be used as a criterion to judge the effectiveness of a particular foreign policy. This section will explore four main U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula.

Since the mid-twentieth century, North Korea has presented the principal regional threat and is one of the key factors to maintaining regional peace and stability. Deterring threats to U.S. security and maintaining regional peace and stability in Northeast Asia are enduring U.S. goals in the region. Toward that end, maintaining a nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula should be the top priority of U.S. policy toward North Korea.

Another separate but not totally mutually exclusive objective is to prevent an outbreak of another Korean War. Another war on the Korean peninsula will have profound implications for security and stability throughout Northeast Asia, a region that is home to 100,000 US troops and three of the world's top 12 largest economies.¹⁸⁴ North Korea has a million-man army, possibly one or two nuclear weapons already, and a huge arsenal of conventional weapons. Its artillery is especially fearsome: More than 10,000 guns, along with 2,500 rocket launchers capable of launching 500,000 shells an hour into Seoul.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, another Korean war would cause reverberations around the world and forever change the political landscape of the East Asian region. How would China react? Which side would it be on? How about Russia? How about the role of Japan? Each of these major powers will undoubtedly become politically, if not militarily, involved in the conflict in order to protect its interests on the Korean peninsula. Aside from the security and political issues, it would also cause global economic chaos.

¹⁸⁴ James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen, "How to deal with North Korea," Foreign Affairs, March/April 2003

¹⁸⁵ See Commentary, "Negotiate with North Korea," The Progressive, March 2003, www.progressive.org/March03

Another top priority is to sustain a strong U.S.-Korea relationship, or to be more specific, to maintain a strong U.S. influence on the peninsula as well as the region. It is essential to achieving U.S. objectives. The interests of China, Japan, Russia, and the United States will likely continue to intersect on the Korean peninsula, which has become the strategic crossroads of Northeast Asia. Accordingly, the major powers will seek to control the Korean peninsula for strategic influence and dominance. China, as the nearest peer-competitor to the U.S. poses the biggest threat (or opportunity for partnership, depending on one's worldview) for the United States. Either way, it is critical for the U.S. to maintain strong regional influence to neutralize China's growing power. Essential to achieving U.S. strategic objectives in the short and long terms, is a prudent U.S. policy that will support South Koreans and seek to retain a strong U.S.-Korea political, economic, and security relationship.

In the realm of values-based interests, a top interest should be to reunify the two Koreas for humanitarian reasons as well as to live up to its moral obligation to reunify the two Koreas. As part of the U.S.-Soviet Union agreement, Korea was administratively divided for what was supposed to be only long enough to reconvey sovereignty and self-determination to the Korean nation.¹⁸⁶ This endgame was supposed to be achieved "in due course" as promised by the U.S., China, and Great Britain via the wartime Cairo declaration in 1943.¹⁸⁷ It has been almost sixty years since the division and fifteen years since the Soviet Union collapsed and Korea still remains senselessly divided. This is in large part due to U.S. policies toward the two Koreas in which it has mostly undermined reunification efforts. Many South Koreans still have living family members in the North and the U.S. has the moral obligation to reunite the two Koreas before this generation passes on. Moreover, there are reports of widespread famine with victims numbering in the millions. There are also reports of "political penal labor colonies" which hold as many as 200,000 prisoners barely surviving day to day.¹⁸⁸ Some have even compared the North Korean labor camps to Hitler's concentration camps and have urged the

¹⁸⁶ Olsen, Edward A., "The U.S. and the Korean Peace Process," Kwak, Tae-hwan and Joo, Seung-ho (editors), *The Korean Peace Process and the Four Powers*, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003, Ch. 5, pg. 79

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Havel, Vaclav, "Time to act on N. Korea," The Washington Post, 18 June 2004, pg. A.29

international community to take action to stop the abuse before it gets to Holocaust-level conditions.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, if the U.S. is serious about fulfilling its values-based interests as well as its strategic interests, as its past foreign policy initiatives has shown, then the reunification of the two Koreas as the solution to solve the multitude of values-based issues should be right in line with the current Bush doctrine.

Lastly, the collapse, or rather the end of the Kim regime, should be one of the top priorities. However, this is much easier said than done as the Kim regime has continued to survive for close to sixty years despite predictions to the contrary.

C. SUMMARY

Despite the Bush administration's rhetoric on maintaining a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, it is apparent that its main focus is to end Kim Jong-Il's reign and promote a regime change in North Korea. By doing so, however, the U.S. has lost focus on the more-important issue of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. As the Perry report recommended, the overriding objective of U.S. policy should be to end Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programs. The magnitude of the consequences is so great that the U.S. should do everything it can to ensure Pyongyang gives up its nuclear ambitions. Accordingly, the top U.S. national interest should be to maintain a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.¹⁹⁰

Secondly, the U.S. should do all it can to avoid another war on the Korean peninsula. Unlike Iraq, where there were relatively low casualties, the casualty estimates for another Korean war are as high as twelve million people including over 100,000 U.S. troops. This scenario all but eliminates the military option and should be used as a last resort to keep North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons.

¹⁸⁹ Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic expresses this sentiment in an editorial in the Washington Post. See Havel, Vaclav, "Time to act on N. Korea," The Washington Post, 18 June 2004, pg. A.29

¹⁹⁰ Selig Harrison writes, "The central goal of American policy should be getting North Korea to rule out the development of nuclear weapons." For this and a detailed narrative on the history of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula, see Part IV (*Toward a Nuclear-Free Korea*) of Harrison's book, *Korean Endgame*, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 197-283 (quote is on pg. 278)

Next on the list is to maintain the U.S.'s influence on the Korean peninsula. Maintaining a strong strategic influence on the Korean peninsula can mean the difference in a possible clash with China for dominance in East Asia. With the anti-American sentiment reaching disturbing levels in South Korea, it is critical, more than ever, to maintain its strong alliance with Seoul. In this regard, the U.S. needs to be more flexible in its North Korean policies and let South Korea have a bigger say in its desire for reunification.

Fourth, the matter of reunifying the two Koreas for humanitarian purposes -- to bring an end to widespread suffering of the North Korean people at the hands of the brutal Kim regime, and to reunite the Korean people after sixty years of separation -- should be one of the top priorities. Although it is not a strategic interest, these types of morals-based interests have been an integral part of American foreign policy calculations since the inception of the U.S. republic.

Fifth on the list is bringing about an end to the Kim regime. A distinction should be made here in the two ways of ending the Kim regime. One is the implosion or collapse of the regime scenario, which many experts have predicted ever since the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994. The other is a peaceful change in regime. Judging by its actions and remarks, the Bush administration's strategy seems to be that of bringing about a regime change in either of these two ways. A collapse of the Kim regime, however, will bring about great chaos and uncertainty, and could prove to be very harmful to the stability of the region. To that end, a peaceful regime change is in the best interest of the United States and the international community. It seems highly unlikely, however, that either one will occur without great external pressure, either politically or militarily. In all, this is the lowest priority since a regime change does not guarantee stability on the Korean peninsula.

In sum, the number one national interest of the U.S. -- to keep North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons -- should be achieved at all costs. The actions of the Bush administration, however, seem to indicate that the U.S. can tolerate a North Korea with nuclear weapons at its disposal. The Bush administration seems to have lost sight of this all-important national interest and seem too narrowly focused on not giving any

concessions to Pyonyang. The clear message from the Bush administration is that it wants a regime change, even at the risk of providing Pyongyang valuable time to produce multiple nuclear weapons. By remaining inflexible in its strategy to not negotiate bilaterally with North Korea, it has locked the negotiations into a stalemate with no signs of progress.

A clear articulation of the U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula can serve to set priorities and bring this issue back into focus. Accordingly, the U.S. policy toward the two Koreas should be formulated to achieve this overriding national interest.

VI. KOREAN REUNIFICATION STRATEGY

In this chapter the Korean reunification policy strategy will be introduced. In order to compare and contrast the broad policy options and to gain full appreciation for the recommended option, the policies of the Bush administration and the Clinton administration will be examined.

A. THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S NORTH KOREA POLICY

Judging by their actions and President Bush's comments, the Bush administration's view of the U.S. national interests on the Korean peninsula can be best described as that of promoting a regime change. Simply put, they want to get rid of Kim Jong-Il. The Bush administration's original strategy was to lead the allies in a campaign to squeeze North Korea into submission. When South Korea and other allies balked and North Korea responded with a policy of brinkmanship, U.S. had little choice but to change strategies. Subsequently, the post-9/11 Bush administration seems to be caught between trying to do what they *want* to do (a preemptive military action to end Kim's reign) versus what they *should* do (negotiate an agreement to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons program). The Bush administration greatly desires to remain consistent in their hard-line policies against rogue states, but they also understand that their doctrine of preemption, if applied to North Korea, can have dire consequences.

This may explain why the Bush administration's actions seem very indecisive and disjointed. On one hand, they are refusing to negotiate with them for the fear of being viewed as appeasing to North Korea. On the other hand, they are refusing to take any preemptive military action, as they did in Iraq, whom many experts consider to be the lesser of the axis-of-the-evils. Instead, they seem to be wedged in the middle between diplomacy and military action, stalling for time until they can resolve the Iraqi conflict and focus their efforts on North Korea. In the process, however, they are providing valuable time to the North Koreans to develop its nuclear weapons as well as the missiles to deliver them.

As the talks have stalled, North Korea is well on its way, if it already has not, to developing a nuclear bomb, as well as the missile technology for its delivery. The CIA estimates that North Korea already has two nuclear weapons and is well on its way to making many more, perhaps as many as one a month.¹⁹¹ Time is critical because the difference between having two bombs and ten or more is crucial. It can mean that North Korea can conduct tests, sell nuclear weapons on the black market, conduct offensive strikes, and use them for defensive purposes, as well.¹⁹² A nuclear armed North Korea will have severe repercussions throughout the Northeast Asia region and the world. Foremost, it will change the balance of power in Asia, which could prompt Japan to intensely re-arm itself, possibly setting off an arms race and military instability in the region. The history of conflict between Japan, Korea, and China, would surely resurface, this time with far greater political and economic consequences to the international community.

The neoconservatives, the main pillar of foreign policy thinking in the Bush administration, view the Pyongyang regime as a major threat to U.S. post-Cold War security. Their position on “rogue states” has been consistent and inflexible -- “no persuasion and no compromise.”¹⁹³ According to this camp, the U.S. and rogue states are pitted against each other in irreconcilable conflict. Because U.S. values and its economic system threaten to undermine the foundations of such regimes, rogue states will attempt to upset the international order the U.S. has worked to build under its hegemony.¹⁹⁴ Anything resembling a compromise would be considered appeasement.

If one analyzes the alternative options and their possible consequences, however, it is clear that the Bush administration has no choice but to try to negotiate. By being so intent on trying not to be viewed as appeasers, they seemed to have lost focus of the big picture. As a result of the stalemate, the North Koreans have gained valuable time to produce more nuclear weapons, to use for bargaining. Overwhelmed by the Iraqi

¹⁹¹ See article by John Lumpkin, “CIA: North Korea verifies nuclear designs,” The Washington Post, 9 November 2003, Associated Press

¹⁹² See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with Ashton Carter, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline, February 2003

¹⁹³ See William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “*The Present Danger*,” The National Interest, Spring 2000

¹⁹⁴ See Kristol and Kagan, 2000

situation, the Bush administration chose to try to stall and bide as much as time as possible. Time, however, is not on United States' side and North Korea has used it very effectively to their advantage.

To understand the Bush administration's rationale for its North Korean policy and its severe aversion to anything resembling "appeasement," one has to analyze the Clinton administration's policy toward North Korea.

B. THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S NORTH KOREA POLICY

During the 1994 nuclear standoff, the Clinton administration was prepared to bomb the Yongbyon facility rather than see it start up. They realized, however, that military action could trigger a war costing tens or hundreds of thousands, or even a million Korean and American lives. Instead, they chose to negotiate with Pyongyang. As a result, the Clinton administration's policy on North Korea is inextricably tied to the controversial 1994 Agreed Framework that came out of those negotiations. Republican members of Congress viewed this agreement as "appeasement" and believed it to be bad deal for the United States. Some senators went as far as calling the Clinton administration treasonous and called the president a traitor.¹⁹⁵

Granted, one may concede that it was appeasement, but upon closer analysis, however, it can be shown that the positive outcomes of the agreement far outweighed the negative aspects. The best justification of the agreement was that the agreement worked. First and foremost, it averted a potentially catastrophic situation, that of a possible war on the Korean peninsula. Secondly, it froze North Korea's nuclear weapons program, not only the activities at Yongbyon, but potential activities at other reactors as well, in various stages of construction.¹⁹⁶ Lastly, there was no other viable alternative except to overthrow the Kim regime.

¹⁹⁵ Senator John McCain (R-AZ) called them treasonous. See transcripts of PBS Frontline interview with William Perry, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline, February 2003, last accessed on February 2004

¹⁹⁶ See transcripts of interview with Charles Kartman, Executive Director of KEDO, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/themes/what.html, February 2003, last accessed on February 2004

Critics also argue that the agreement did not work because North Korea never lived up to their end of the deal. From all indications, however, the U.S. was as much to blame for failure of the agreement as the North Koreans were. Indeed, the Secretary of Defense at the time, William Perry, freely admits that the U.S. did not live up to its side of the agreement due to fierce opposition from the Republican-controlled Congress.¹⁹⁷ In sum, the Agreed Framework did provide very positive outcomes and failed only because of the political realities of the time. More importantly, it showed that the U.S., with the right combination of “carrots” and “sticks,” can negotiate with the Kim regime and have them live up to the agreement.

Following the Agreed Framework, engagement toward North Korea gradually replaced the Cold War strategy of containment as the main policy, both in Washington and in Seoul. Kim Dae-Jung’s election as president of South Korea and his “Sunshine Policy” further boosted engagement activities. The advocates of the Sunshine policy viewed North Korea’s erratic and hostile behavior as stemming from its sense of insecurity and vulnerability, and that diplomacy is the best way to deal with the regime.

The Sunshine policy drew support from the Clinton administration, which realized that it had no other viable option. Indeed, in October 1999, a team of policy analysts led by former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry reviewed U.S. policy toward North Korea and recommended engaging Pyongyang. The Perry report called for continued progress toward comprehensive normalization of relations with the DPRK once it abandoned its nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs. It further states, “The urgent focus of U.S. policy toward the DPRK must be to end its nuclear weapons and long-range missile-related activities.”¹⁹⁸

With tacit approval from the Clinton administration, a series of personal exchanges and economic collaboration between the two Koreas led to the historic June 2000 summit meeting between the Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong-Il. More importantly, though, Washington and Pyongyang also exchanged top-level emissaries. It culminated

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, see transcripts of interview with William Perry

¹⁹⁸ See William J. Perry, *Review of U.S. Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations*, 12 October 1999, Office of the North Korea Policy Coordinator, U.S. Department of State

with Secretary of State Madeline Albright's visit to North Korea, becoming the highest ranking U.S. official to visit North Korea. In what has now become an almost surreal scene, pictures of Secretary Albright toasting with Kim Jong-Il were broadcast all over the world. Following this visit, there was serious consideration for President Clinton to make a formal historic visit to North Korea to possibly pave the way to normalize relations with North Korea.¹⁹⁹

Despite these advances, however, suspicions of Pyongyang's true intentions remained. Conservative hardliners in Washington as well as Seoul believed North Korea's aggressive behavior stemmed from its ultimate goal of uniting the two Koreas under the communist flag and subjugating the South under the North, using weapons of mass destruction to achieve its goals. Indeed, Pyongyang's past record of terrorism, sponsorship of other terrorist states, and violation of human rights, makes the engagement policy very hard to defend. As such, when the Bush administration, with its neoconservative views, took over, the U.S. policy changed dramatically.

C. MOTIVATION BEHIND NORTH KOREA'S PURSUIT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The structural realism school of thought is based on the core belief that anarchy is the defining characteristic of the international system and that it compels states to make security their overriding concern. Anarchy forces security-seeking states to compete with each other for power, because power is the best means to survival. Under this notion, North Korea's vigorous pursuit of nuclear weapons should not have been surprising and should have been expected. Considering the circumstances, from North Korea's perspective, it has no choice but to try to acquire nuclear capabilities. The U.S., undeniably the most powerful nation in the world, has declared your country to be part of an "axis of evil," along with Iran and Iraq, which it just annihilated in a war and brought about a regime change. Moreover, the U.S. has 38,000 troops stationed in South Korea, with whom North Korea is still technically at war. The distribution of capabilities in conventional weapons is resoundingly in favor of the United States. North Korea's only

¹⁹⁹ See Frontline, *Kim's Nuclear Gamble*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim

ally, China, seems to be distancing itself from Pyongyang and North Korea has become even more isolated from the world community. To top it all off, North Korea is on the verge of total economic collapse.

In this kind of international environment, all states, regardless of lower unit-level factors, would behave in the same way, which is to make security their paramount concern, in order to ensure their survival. Under this premise, Kim Jong-II is not a crazed lunatic after all. Rather, he is behaving logically, in accordance with realism, the widely accepted form of international relations theory. Robert Jervis, a political scientist, describes this scenario as “compulsion in extreme circumstance,” as he argues, “the greater the external compulsion, the greater the homogeneity of behavior and therefore the less the need to study decision-making...Imagine a number of individuals, varying widely in their predispositions, who find themselves inside a house on fire. It would be perfectly realistic to expect that these individuals, with rare exceptions, would feel compelled to run toward the exits...Surely, therefore, for an explanation of the rush for the exits, there is no need to analyze the individual decision that produced it.”²⁰⁰ For North Korea, Kim Jong-II perceived the fire, as any other leader would, as soon as they were labeled an axis-of-evil state by the United States. Since North Korea cannot ensure their security with only conventional weapons, it follows reason that they would try to develop nuclear weapons. If self-help is the necessary principle of action in an anarchic order, then North Korea is acting in accordance with prime tenets of realism theory. In other words, the structural characteristic of the international system is forcing them to behave in this manner. If they do not, they will be punished, i.e., they will cease to exist as a state.

Additionally, in analyzing North Korea’s history of behavior before the “axis-of-evil” statement, one can see that North Korea never intended to give up their nuclear weapons program, as evidenced by their initiative to build the Yongbyon nuclear complex in 1989, just 4 years after they signed the NPT. The events that led up to the 1994 Agreed Framework (threats to reprocess fuel from the reactors which give them

²⁰⁰ See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 19

enough plutonium to process six nuclear weapons, and to turn Seoul into a “sea of flames”) is especially troubling because the threats by the North Koreans in 1994 seem so eerily similar to threats they are making in the current crisis. In the ensuing ten years, there were major domestic changes for both countries. North Korea’s “great leader,” Kim Il-Sung died in 1994 and was succeeded by his son, Kim Jong-Il, and the U.S. went from Bush I to Clinton to Bush II. Through these changes, North Korea remained steadfast in their determination to develop nuclear weapons.

North Korea’s dogged pursuit of nuclear weapons highlights a couple of very important lessons in the realism theory. It highlights the relatively constant behavior of North Korea regarding nuclear weapons in light of major domestic changes (succession from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-Il) and external changes (major policy change from Clinton to Bush). Since one can argue that North Korea always had the intention of acquiring nuclear weapons, their behavior never really changed over time, even though the Clinton and Bush administrations had far different policies toward them. The unit-level, domestic determinants of the U.S. never mattered to them, only the structural constraints of the international system. From North Korea’s viewpoint, acquiring nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the distribution of capabilities across the system. It would have a dramatic system-level effect.²⁰¹ Realists would argue that North Korea never had the intention of adhering to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) they signed in 1985, or rather, that they would be forced to violate the treaty due to structural constraints posed on them by the international system. As a case in point, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the NPT in 1993 (it did withdraw in January 2003) and to restart its nuclear weapons program. A nuclear crisis was averted with the negotiation of the Agreed Framework in 1994, which the critics labeled as appeasement and blackmail. Realists would argue that if the Clinton administration followed their prescription and understood the constraints of the system, the U.S. never would have agreed to the 1994

²⁰¹ It should be noted that Kenneth Waltz, widely considered as the founder of Structural Realism, initially viewed nuclear weapons as unit-level capability. He has since upgraded the role of nuclear weapons, arguing that they have been the second force working for peace in the post-war world and conceded that the introduction of nuclear weapons, a unit-level change had a system-level effect. For full treatment, see Richard N. Lebow, *The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism*, Columbia University Press, Ch. 2., p. 27

framework and would have taken a tougher stance to resolve the issue. As a result, they would contend, the international community is being blackmailed with nuclear weapons again, just as it had been in 1994.

Realism is very enduring because it focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system and the resulting security dilemma. What it tells about the current crisis is that North Korea, given its present circumstances, will fight for its survival at all costs and views nuclear weapons as its savior. What it also shows is that North Korea, no matter what kind of policies are in place, whether the U.S. tries to engage or contain North Korea, it will be resolute in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. To Pyongyang, it is the only path to ensure its survival as a sovereign nation state.

D. THE REUNIFICATION POLICY

The overriding objective for U.S. policy should be to immediately stop North Korea's nuclear weapons development. As it has been shown, however, both the Bush administration's hard-line policy and Clinton administration's co-opted Sunshine policy, albeit to a lesser extent, has failed to prevent North Korea's nuclear ambitions. So, if both engagement and containment has proven to be ineffective, what is the best course to take? As discussed previously, most would agree that the most rational thing for North Korea to do is to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrent against stronger nations. Accordingly, it is very unlikely that North Korea would give up its nuclear ambitions unless it felt that its security was not threatened. In other words, as long as North Korea does not have any security guarantees from any of the superpowers and has to depend on itself for its security, the only rational thing for them to do is provide their own security measures. The fact that it is developing WMD should not have been a surprise to any political experts. Taking these factors into consideration, a U.S. policy to reunify the two Koreas is the best policy option available.

A reunified Korea would immediately resolve the nuclear issue and also eliminate the possibility of another Korean war. Assuming the implementation was well planned and executed, with the U.S. leading the way in a multilateral negotiation, it would also serve to maintain or even increase U.S. influence in the region. Maintaining influence is

essential to achieving U.S. strategic objectives in the short and long terms. A prudent U.S. policy would support South Koreans and seek to retain a strong U.S.-Korea political, economic, and security relationship before, during, and after reunification. Certainly, many Korea and regional experts have advocated for the reunification of the two Koreas as a formal U.S. policy. As Selig Harrison writes, “In charting new policies in Korea attuned to post-Cold War realities, the starting point for the U.S. should be an expression of regret for the U.S. role in the division of the peninsula addressed to both the South and the North, accompanied by a declaration of support for peaceful reunification much more explicit and much more positive than the 1992 Bush Statement.”²⁰²

Due to various reasons, however, U.S. foreign policy has undermined Korean efforts to create a unified Korea, and to encourage a new paradigm for Korea.²⁰³ Were Korea to unify, it could be financially expensive for the U.S., could lead to a loss of U.S. strategic access and leverage over Korea, could adversely affect Korea’s role in U.S.-PRC relations, and could prove damaging to U.S.-Japan relations.²⁰⁴ With the nuclear crises looming, however, the U.S. can no longer afford to undermine unification efforts. It is in the best interests of the Korean people and U.S. foreign policy as well. Measures will need to be implemented so that a unified Korea will eventually reflect South Korean democratic and market economy values. There is no reason to believe why it should not, considering the relative conditions of the two countries. In the short-term, however, accommodations may need to be made to placate Pyongyang, if for only face-saving purposes. Whether a unified Korea will pursue an independent security policy, transform the ROK-U.S. alliance, tilt toward China, or pursue some other arrangement will depend on the implementation strategy and the role of the U.S. in those negotiations.

²⁰² In 1992, President George H.W. Bush told the South Korea National Assembly on January 6, 1992, that the American people favored “peaceful unification on terms acceptable to the Korea people,” a statement that conveyed a sanguine attitude toward the prospect of indefinite division. See Harrison, Selig, *Korean Endgame*, Princeton University Press, 2003, pg. 108

²⁰³ For more perspectives on this position, see Martin Hart-Landsberg, *Korea: Division, Reunification, and Foreign Policy*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998. Also, Selig Harrison writes, “Until 1992, the U.S. was not explicitly committed to reunification as a goal of U.S. policy.” Harrison, Selig, *Korean Endgame*, Princeton University Press, 2003, pg. 107

²⁰⁴ Edward Olsen, “The U.S. and the Korean Peace Process,” Kwak, Tae-hwan and Joo, Seung-ho (editors), *The Korean Peace Process and the Four Powers*, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003, Ch. 5, p. 86

E. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY -- VISION 2010: A UNITED KOREA

The implementation should be carried out in a carefully planned step-by-step strategy in five distinct stages. First, the U.S. needs to convince China that it would be in Beijing's best interest for the two Koreas to unify, and for the two powers to preside over the unification. Second, concessions would have to be made so that North Korea will stop its nuclear weapons program immediately and comprehensively. Third, the major powers will need to normalize relations with North Korea and lift all economic sanctions. Fourth, the major stakeholders, U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea, will have to provide aid and investments in order to develop North Korea's economy. An economically healthy North Korea would be much easier to absorb and would not be such a shock to the Korean economy as well as the regional economy. Finally, at a date no later than the year 2010, the two Koreas would formally be reunified. The year 2010 holds great significance because it marks 100 years of either a division or foreign occupation of Korea -- 1910 was the last year that Korea was a unified, sovereign nation.

1. Stage 0: Setting the Stage with China

All considered, this is the most important stage because China holds the key to getting the North Koreans to cooperate and to have confidence in the process. Without Beijing's full endorsement and participation, it would be very difficult, if not almost impossible, to carry out good-faith negotiations with Pyongyang. Since this is a make-or-break deal, this stage should be carried out behind-the-scenes, in a covert manner, hence the term, Stage Zero. It is stressed that the U.S. should not pursue this policy if it cannot obtain Beijing's full endorsement. That said, there is no reason why Beijing would oppose such a plan. North Korea, in recent years, has become a big liability for Beijing, as China aspires to join the ranks of world's superpowers. Certainly, with its recent accession into the WTO and its continuing albeit limited pro-democracy reforms, China has transformed itself into a modern, free market-based economy, and the last thing China wants is to take on the liabilities of a failed state. China is already complaining vigorously about the worsening refugee problems across its borders. If China does resist,

however, the U.S. should not be averse to applying some coercive pressure. China is North Korea's sole patron and Beijing should start taking some of the blame and more responsibility for North Korea's problems.

Since the President officially formulates all foreign policy, the White House staff should coordinate with all stakeholders (State, CIA, Defense, Commerce, Treasury), and then appoint the State Department as the lead agency to implement this policy. The State Department, as the lead agency, needs to engage Congressional leaders and various Senate and House committees as soon as it is feasible to pre-coordinate all efforts. In fact, it is recommended that a cross-functional task force on Korean unification be formed that includes representatives from all the stakeholders identified above, including congressional committee members, to coordinate all efforts.²⁰⁵ That said, there needs to be one person who would oversee all efforts, and the most logical choice, as the Secretary of State, is Colin Powell. Powell has the credibility among the international community, and unlike other members of the Bush administration, Powell does not seem to hold the same neoconservative beliefs about Korea, as evidenced by his statement shortly after his appointment that, "we do plan to engage with North Korea and pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off. Some promising elements were left on the table."²⁰⁶

Granted, there will be strong opposition to this plan within the Bush administration as well as from many members of Congress. More specifically, influential members within the administration as well as various think tanks and agencies, with strong neoconservative leanings such as Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle, would pose opposition to this plan based on their zero-sum view of the world and international politics. In the end, however, everyone would have to acknowledge that the North Korea has the upper hand in this standoff, and the alternative to a negotiated agreement -- a possible nuclear war -- is unacceptable.

²⁰⁵ As suggested by Edward A. Olsen, "The U.S. and the Korea Peace Process," Kwak, Tae-hwan and Joo, Seung-ho (editors), *The Korean Peace Process and the Four Powers*, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003, Ch. 5, pg. 96

²⁰⁶ See Frontline, *Kim's Nuclear Gamble*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim

Based on this analysis, any opposition to this plan would have to acknowledge the merits and the benefits of this plan. Moreover, it would be an easy way out of this foreign policy mess. Many consider the fact that North Korea now possesses nuclear weapons as a major foreign policy failure and attribute it mainly to neglect and miscalculation by the Bush administration foreign policy team. For an administration that is in a severe foreign policy slump -- the Iraq situation is not getting any better and the ambitious Middle East peace process has all but been abandoned -- they would welcome an easy victory in the foreign policy arena. Granted, it is not going to be easy, but compared to Iraq and the Middle East, it would be relatively simple given the fact that the U.S. would be following the lead of South Korea in this regard.²⁰⁷ Progress in the Korean peace process could divert attention away from other foreign policy shortcomings in what promises to be a very lively debate on the merits of the Bush administration's foreign policy matters.

Once China and the U.S. agree to implement this plan, South Korea would be brought in (all still in a covert manner) and briefed on the plan and a round of negotiations with Seoul would begin. Once this has been accomplished, Japan and Russia would be brought in and briefed on the plan and their input would be solicited. Once the main stakeholders buy into the unification strategy, China would engage North Korea and present the plan to Pyongyang and gauge its interest. Of course, Beijing would be expected to use its considerable influence on Pyongyang to accept the offer, or at the very least, to come to the negotiation table and consider ending its nuclear ambitions.

Once all the parties have agreed to the plan, the formal policy to unify the two Koreas by no later than 2010, would be formally announced to the world and multi-party negotiations would begin immediately.

²⁰⁷ For more commentary on this topic, see Edward Olsen, *The U.S. and the Korean Peace Process*, Kwak, Tae-hwan and Joo, Seung-ho (editors), *The Korean Peace Process and the Four Powers*, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003, Ch. 5, p. 81

2. Stage 1: Stop North Korea's Nuclear Program

The most urgent matter in this crisis, as the Perry report pointed out, is the nuclear weapons issue. From North Korea's perspective, what they desire the most is security guarantees and economic aid. To that end, the US, China, Japan, and Russia will jointly provide security guarantees to North Korea as well as immediate economic aid. In exchange, Pyongyang needs to agree to stop its nuclear weapons and missile development programs and subject themselves to immediate, intrusive, and comprehensive inspections by the IAEA.²⁰⁸

So, why would this work now when it did not work before? What would stop North Korea from stalling and renegeing on the deal, as it did before? The difference this time would be the overt pressure by Beijing. Because of this fact, China becomes the most critical player in this process. China is the only country that holds that much influence because, without Beijing's support, the Kim regime knows that they cannot survive. The main incentive for the North Koreans, however, is the prospect of reunification (Kim Il-sung envisioned reunifying as a Korean confederacy as early as the 1960s²⁰⁹) and it would motivate Pyongyang to cooperate.

3. Stage 2: Normalize Relations and Lift Economic Sanctions

Once North Korea has been certified by the IAEA, the major powers would lift all economic sanctions on North Korea and normalize its relations. Japan, in particular, would normalize its relations with North Korea and pay war reparations. Again, this begs the question of why Japan would be willing to do this. For Japan, having a sworn enemy and a rogue state like North Korea as its closest neighbor has to be very unsettling, especially since its military capabilities are limited by its constitution. Although a strong unified Korea would pose some problems, a benevolent unified Korea would be far better than having North Korean nuclear mid-range Nodong missiles aimed at its country. The North Korean threat has also been very destabilizing to its domestic politics as more

²⁰⁸ See James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen, "How to deal with North Korea," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2003

²⁰⁹ See Ming Liu, "An obsessed task: Prospects, models, and impact of Korean reunification," *East Asia International Quarterly*, Brunswick: Winter 1999, Vol. 17, Iss. 4, pg. 30

nationalistic sentiments are voiced and gain more widespread support. A unified Korea would pose an economic threat but not necessarily a security threat, and certainly not to the extent that North Korea does now.

For its part, the U.S. needs to formally put an end to the Korean War, normalize relations with Pyongyang, and replace the anachronistic 1953 armistice agreement with a new peace structure.²¹⁰ The armistice agreement was set up in 1953 as a temporary and expedient measure to oversee the cease-fire but has lingered on for more than fifty years. As part of the normalization of relations, the U.S. would also sign a formal non-aggression pact with North Korea at this stage. These overtures by the U.S. would serve to soften North Korea's paranoid attitude toward the U.S. and send a message that Washington is very sincere in its efforts to unify the two Koreas. Political pressure by Beijing along with these inducements should be enough for North Korea to disarm.

4. Stage 3: Promote North Korean Economic Development

North Korea's economic development will be critical to a smooth transition to a unified Korea. It is recommended that North Korea follow China's model of transitioning from a centrally-planned economy to a market-based economy by first establishing special economic zones and gradually reforming to a capitalist economy. It has been reported that, during Secretary Albright's visit to North Korea, Kim Jong-il expressed the view that he had been studying alternative economic systems for North Korea.²¹¹ Additionally, North Korea introduced some rudimentary elements of capitalism into its constitution, including limited private land ownership, state enterprise reforms, and a slight easing of internal travel restrictions.²¹²

With China's help and active investments by the four powers plus the European Union, North Korea should be able to improve its economic viability. If the economic

²¹⁰ Selig Harrison argues for these steps to induce Pyongyang to give up its nuclear ambitions. See Harrison, Selig, 2002, Ch. 13 (Ending the Korean War), pg. 154

²¹¹ See Harrison, Selig S., "Time to Leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs*, New York: March/April 2001, Vol. 80, Issue 2, p. 62

²¹² Hong, Soon-young, "Thawing Korea's Cold War: The Path to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *Foreign Affairs*, New York: May/June 1999, Vol. 78, Issue 3, pg. 8

development of other East Asian countries is any indication, North Korea should be able to improve its economic health in a very dramatic manner. This would pave the way for unification and lessen the economic burden.

5. Stage 4: Korean Unification

Once the hard work in the previous stages has been completed, the final stage would be to work out the details of the formal reunification. What would a unified Korea look like? The key is to find a solution that would be acceptable to all parties involved, particularly the two Koreas. In his book on Korean unification, Kim Dae-jung offers up a three-stage approach. Kim calls for the establishment of a Korean confederation. This system of “one nation, two states, and two governments” would last for a ten-year period of peaceful coexistence and institutionalization of inter-Korean exchanges. Key elements of the confederal structure would be mutual recognition, a peace treaty, and bi-national decision-making bodies. This would be followed by a federal system of “one nation, one state, and two regions,” where foreign relations and national defense would be conducted by a central government with internal issues handled by the two regional governments. Unification would be completed under a central government with either integration of the two regions or federalization with provincial “states,” similar to a German or American system.²¹³

The ideas of a Korean confederal system are not new. Kim Il-sung initially put forth his confederation system proposal in the 1960s, subsequently presented as the proposal for a “Confederal Republic of Koryo” on June 23, 1973, as part of a “Five-Point Program for Unification.”²¹⁴ The proposition was further developed as the “Democratic

²¹³ For more detail, see Lee, Hee-ho (translated by T.C. Rhee), *Three-stage Approach to Korean Unification: Focusing on the South-North Confederal Stage*, University of Southern California Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies and the Kim Dae-Jung Foundation for the Asia-Pacific Region Press, 1997

²¹⁴ See Ming, Liu, “An obsessed task: Prospects, models, and impact of Korean reunification,” *East Asia International Quarterly*, Brunswick: Winter 1999, Vol. 17, Iss. 4, pg. 30

Confederal Republic of Koryo” proposal in October of 1980, and explained in detail in Kim Il-sung’s “Ten-Point Program for the Great Unity of the Korean People for Unification” in 1993.²¹⁵

Critics have argued that, given the vast differences between the two countries, a confederal system is impractical, especially given historical experiences with confederalism in America, Germany, Egypt, and Syria.²¹⁶ An alternative to a confederal regime is a Korean Commonwealth, first proposed by Roh Tae-woo in 1989 and revised by his successor, Kim Young-sam in 1993. The concept of commonwealth is neither a federal system nor a confederal arrangement, but a far looser system that follows the example of the European Community and the British Commonwealth.²¹⁷

As one can see, the nature of the political system will be a very contentious matter and the U.S. needs to be careful not to “Americanize” the unification by exerting too much influence. The process needs to allow the two Koreas to come up with a system that is acceptable to both countries. No matter which system is decided upon, it underscores the point that the two Koreas have been thinking seriously about reunification for a very long time.

6. U.S. Policies Toward a Post-Unification Korea

There are differing views on what the U.S. policy should be toward a united Korea. On one side, there are those who are advocating for a phased disengagement from the Korean peninsula before and after the unification. Selig Harrison concludes that the goal of the United States should be to disengage most of its forces from Korea gradually during a transition of roughly ten years while seeking to encourage a confederation diplomatically by shifting to a new role as an honest broker.²¹⁸ Harrison contends that the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the region combined with a regional neutralization agreement in which China, Russia, the U.S., and Japan would all pledge to keep out of

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ See Ming, 1999, pg. 30

²¹⁸ See Harrison, 2002, pg. xxiii (overview)

the peninsula militarily, would promote stability in Northeast Asia.²¹⁹ On the flip side, regional experts such as Robert Dujarric recommends a continued strong U.S. presence on the Korean peninsula after the unification, as he comments, "...the U.S. and its allies should plan for a large and prolonged U.S. military presence in Korea and Japan after Korean unification."²²⁰

Dujarric and other regional experts such as Derek Mitchell²²¹ argue on the basic premise that the United States must have forward-based forces in Asia to protect its interests in Asia. A united Korea with potentially a formidable economy and a population of 65 million would be an enticing ally for any of the major powers. Furthermore, a unified Korea not firmly in the orbit of Washington could be potentially threatening to Japan. Toward that end, Derek Mitchell recommends that the U.S. maintain a military presence on the post-unification peninsula as a symbol and guarantor of continued U.S. security commitments to the peninsula as well as the region. Mitchell also recommends broadening the U.S.-Korean alliance to encompass regional security matters, which will require the U.S. to remain comprehensively engaged in the political, diplomatic, economic and military affairs of the entire region.²²² For U.S. policymakers, the most important point in post-unification considerations is that the U.S. must be proactive in initiating serious discussions with its Northeast Asian allies about post-unification security structures in East Asia, to ensure that prudent policy considerations will be in place once the unification occurs.

F. U.S. POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND VIEWS

Any change in U.S. foreign policy, and especially in the dramatic fashion that is proposed here, would require enormous interagency effort in formulation and coordination of the proposed changes. In order to characterize the general attitude of the

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Dujarric, Robert, *Korean Unification and After: The Challenge for U.S. Strategy*, Hudson Institute, Inc., 2000, pg. viii

²²¹ See Mitchell, Derek, "A blueprint for U.S. policy toward a unified Korea," The Washington Quarterly, Winter, 2003

²²² See, Mitchell, 2003, pg. 131

American body politic toward the North Korean nuclear issue, the following section surveys the differing views on how to deal with Pyongyang.

1. Executive Branch Views

There seems to be a tug-o'-war between the hawks and the doves in the Bush administration. It is, however, decidedly in the favor of the hardliners. President Bush is deeply ideological and believes the U.S. should exploit its military and economic power to encourage "free and open societies," rather than seek unilateral advantage. He calls this union of values and national interests "a distinctly American internationalism."²²³ His vision includes getting rid of the evil from what he calls the axis of evil: Iraq, Iran, North Korea. Regarding North Korea and Kim Jong-II, President Bush has commented:

I loathe Kim Jong II. I've got a visceral reaction to this guy because he is starving his people. It appalls me. I feel passionate about this. They tell me, well we may not need to move too fast, because the financial burdens on people will be so immense if this guy were to topple. I just don't buy that.²²⁴

Condoleezza Rice's role seems to be that of a moderator between the camps but she also leans heavily toward the hawks.²²⁵ As one of the main contributors to the preemption doctrine, she is a leading advocate of an aggressive approach to national security. Vice President Dick Cheney, the leader of the neo-conservative camp is the most hawkish of the President's advisers. Woodward's book describes him as having the "fever" in going after Iraq.²²⁶ Cheney has the full trust of the President. Bush will not make a decision without consulting with Cheney alone.²²⁷

Secretary of State Colin Powell seems to be the lone prominent moderate in the administration and is often times the odd man out. Still, he is loyal and will support the

²²³ Sanger, David E., "Bush to Outline Doctrine of Striking First," *New York Times*, September 19, 2002; Also see *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>, last accessed August 2004

²²⁴ Woodward, Bob, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, pg. 67

²²⁵ Woodward, 2002

²²⁶ Woodward, Bob, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004

²²⁷ Woodward, 2004

administration's cause despite his personal views. Powell's presentation to the United Nations on Iraq's WMD connection is a good example. He may, however, be more cautious in the future to advocate for the administration's views again since he feels somewhat burned by the Iraqi presentation. Certainly, though, he does have misgivings about the current hard-line strategy against North Korea. When asked about his views on North Korea soon after his appointment, he commented, "we do plan to engage with North Korea and pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off. Some promising elements were left on the table."²²⁸

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld seems more pragmatic than ideological. He does not really belong in the neo-conservative faction or any other ideological camps.²²⁹ If pressed, he would lean toward the hawk camp but the lessons from Iraq would definitely make him think twice about other military interventions under the administration's preemption doctrine.

2. Senate Leadership Views

Senator John McCain was the most vocal critic of the 1994 Agreed Framework brokered by the Clinton administration. Sen. McCain viewed this agreement as "appeasement" and believed it to be a bad deal. He went as far as calling the Clinton administration treasonous and called the president a traitor. On military action against North Korea, he is on record as saying, "While they may risk their populations, the U.S. will do whatever it must to guarantee the security of the American people. And spare us the usual lectures about American unilateralism. We would prefer the company of North Korea's neighbors, but we will make do without it if we must."²³⁰ Recently, however, Sen. McCain has been advocating for a more proactive approach. On the White House's assertion that it is not a crisis, he comments, "the administration can start by calling it a

²²⁸ Frontline, Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), *Kim's Nuclear Gamble*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows, last accessed May 2004

²²⁹ Woodward, 2004

²³⁰ McCain, John, "Rogue State Rollback," *Weekly Standard*, 20 January 2003

crisis, which it is.”²³¹ Senator McCain supports the current hard-line stance against North Korea but not at the cost of providing North Korea time to develop nuclear weapons.

Senator Ted Stevens (Chairman of Senate Appropriations Committee) along with other members (Senators Cochran, Inouye, Domenici, and Roberts) of the Appropriations committee visited North Korea in 1997 “to try to understand the views of the government in Pyongyang on the preliminary talks for the four-party process.” He has also commented, “We stated the complete unanimity between the United States and the Republic of Korea on our shared objectives -- promote confidence-building measures, reduce tensions, and eliminate the possibility of a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula.”²³² Of course, this was during the Clinton administration with a far different North Korea policy. It is safe to conclude that Senator Stevens supports diplomacy but does not want to go against the position of the administration.

Senator Byrd (ranking Democratic member of Appropriations Committee) is very critical of current policies and has commented in formal Senate remarks that,

This (Bush) administration has steadfastly refused to engage in direct talks with North Korea or even to characterize the threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons program as a crisis. Instead, the President and his advisers have continued to hurl invectives at Kim Jong Il while shrugging off increasingly alarming reports that North Korea is stepping up its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It is time – if it is not already too late – to drop the false bravado of indifference to the threat from North Korea and engage in face-to-face negotiations with the North Koreans.²³³

Senator Warner (Chairman of Armed Services Committee) supports the Bush administration's policies and has commented, “the situation in North Korea continues to

²³¹ Fox News, Senator Calls for North Korea Talks, 5 January 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,74637,00.html>, last accessed May 2004

²³² Federation of American Scientists, Sen. Stevens Visits North Korea, <http://www.fas.org/news/dprk/1997/bmd970412.htm>, 11 April 1997

²³³ United States Senate, *Sen. Byrd Remarks: Gathering Storm Clouds over North Korea*, U.S. Senate homepage, http://www.senate.gov/~byrd/byrd_newsroom/, 1 August 2003

worsen, there's no question about it. This is very serious today, as it has been for months. And I think our president has very clearly said that no solution can be achieved simply by the United States and North Korea; it must be a multinational decision, that is China as a full partner, South Korea as a full partner, and, indeed, Japan as a partner on this issue.”²³⁴ On former Secretary of Defense Perry’s criticism of President Bush’s policy, Sen. Warner, rebuts, “I happen to know Secretary Perry very well, and I have a very high professional opinion of him, I worked with him closely here when he was in the Department of Defense...I must say I differ with the conclusion that he is reaching that we're on the brink of war or that there is no policy in this administration.”²³⁵

Senator Levin (ranking Democrat on Armed Services Committee) has called on the Bush administration to talk directly to North Korea to ease tensions over its nuclear program. “That does not imply capitulation. It does not imply concessions. It just simply means face to face we are going to discuss the differences ... in order to avoid miscalculation,” Levin is on record as saying that North Korea poses a bigger threat to the United States than Iraq does. He credited Bush for not pursuing military action against North Korea, but said administration comments that it could fight the two countries simultaneously “plays right into North Korean paranoia.”²³⁶

Senator Biden (ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee) has called on the Bush administration to negotiate with North Korea. He commented, “Our challenge is clear: We must stop North Korea from going into production of fissile material and nuclear weapons. If we do not, we will face many dangers. Including the likelihood North Korea could become a plutonium factory, selling fissile material to the highest bidder.”²³⁷

In summary, it has been shown that, during the last couple of years this latest nuclear crisis has been ongoing, the hard-line approach does not work. As such, there is

²³⁴ United States Senate, Senate Republicans Media Availability, U.S. Senate Homepage, 15 July 2003, <http://warner.senate.gov/pressoffice/statements/20030715.htm>, last accessed May 2004

²³⁵ Ibid

²³⁶ Fox News, Senator Calls for North Korea Talks, 5 January 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,74637,00.html>, last accessed May 2004

²³⁷ United States Senate, “*Biden and Lugar Call on Administration to Open Dialogue With North Korea*,” U.S. Senate homepage, 4 February 2003, <http://biden.senate.gov/pressapp/record.cfm?id=190152>, last accessed May 2004

a growing sentiment among both the Republicans and the Democrats that the Bush administration's hard-line stance on North Korea and its insistence on not having bilateral negotiations with North Korea is flawed. Many members of Congress now feel that the hard-line policy of the Bush administration is only providing the North Koreans more justification to develop nuclear weapons. Most importantly, however, they fear that it is providing Pyongyang the time to develop multiple nuclear weapons. The time is ripe to introduce creative policies to protect and advance U.S. interests in the region.

VII. CONCLUSION

The latest North Korean nuclear crisis has reignited concerns over how to deal with this problematic country. This situation presents an enormous military and political crisis. A North Korea with nuclear weapons presents vast and complex problems. This issue goes to the heart of Northeast Asian security structure, to the future alliance arrangement of the U.S., China, Japan and South Korea, and to the broader issue of nuclear proliferation. Because of the imminent threat that a nuclear weaponized North Korea would pose, the U.S. can no longer muddle through in its policy toward Pyongyang. As the policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations have shown, North Korea's nuclear threats cannot be effectively confronted through either containment or engagement.

The hard-line containment policy, as carried out by the Bush administration, has only heightened tensions and has encouraged the North Koreans to be even more resolute in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. The Bush administration and its preemption doctrine have only raised the level of belligerence by Pyongyang. Liberal engagement policies without any built-in punitive measures have also proven to be ineffective in eliminating North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Given the severe consequences a nuclear weaponized North Korea would pose, the most prudent policy is to promote a reunification of the two Koreas, thereby resolving the nuclear issue once and for all and also eliminating the possibility of another Korean war that would devastate the region. If done correctly, with the U.S. leading the way in a multilateral negotiation, the U.S. can maintain and even strengthen its influence. Simply put, a unified Korea is in the best interests of all the stakeholders involved and most of all, the United States.

From all indications, the reunification of the two Koreas is only a matter of time before it happens. The process seems to have built up enough momentum in the last couple of years that it really cannot be stopped. One has to look no further than the 2004 Olympics where, despite the on-going confrontation over nuclear weapons, North and South Korea once again marched together hand-in-hand during the opening ceremonies in Athens. North Korea's central television broadcasted the event and the announcers

commented that, “no one in the world could block our nation from marching forward under the flag of unification.”²³⁸ There is even talk of fielding one Korean team for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The symbolism of this occurring in China is particularly important. If the reunification is going to happen anyway, the U.S. needs to take every measure to ensure that its interests are met. Otherwise, China is more than willing to lead the process and advance its own interests. Indeed, China has taken on a much more involved role in the on-going six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue. A U.S.-led reunification of the two Koreas, vice a China-led effort, would immediately resolve the two most pressing problems for the United States vis-à-vis its relations with South Korea: the North Korean nuclear issue and maintaining its strategic role as the primary patron for Seoul. The U.S. would also fulfill its obligation to reunify the two Koreas, after thoughtlessly dividing it more than fifty years ago in the chaotic aftermath of World War II.

Assuming the implementation was well planned and executed, with the U.S. leading the way in a multilateral negotiation, it would also serve to maintain or even increase U.S. influence on the Korean peninsula and in the region. Always remaining mindful of growing Chinese influence on South Korea and the region, maintaining influence is essential to achieving U.S. strategic objectives in the short and long terms. A prudent U.S. policy would support South Koreans and seek to retain a strong U.S.-Korea political, economic, and security relationship before, during, and after reunification. The strained relations between the two countries if left unkempt can have lasting repercussions. Mainly, it will have the effect of bringing South Korea back into the Sinic realm, which would dramatically alter the delicate balance of power that exists in Northeast Asia today.

Moreover, it is the right thing to do. This is the mess left behind from the Cold War and the United States should feel obligated to clean it up. In what was supposed to be an expedient and temporary division to appease the two superpowers at the time has turned into a permanent separation of the Korean people for almost sixty years and more than fifteen years after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. An

²³⁸ See “*North Korean TV relays Athens Olympics opening ceremony*,” Korean Broadcasting Station, 15 August 2004, http://english.kbs.co.kr/news/newsview_sub.php?menu=8&key=2004081510

arbitrary and thoughtless line drawn along the 38th parallel has now become a permanent fixture and the only line that matters on the Korean peninsula. It was a game played by the great powers in their struggle for dominance. The game, however, ended a long time ago but they neglected to tell the Koreans. Any objective observer of this situation would find it exasperating and astonishing that Korea remains a divided country after all these years. The endgame -- that of a sovereign and independent Korea -- was promised by the major powers (the U.S., China, and Great Britain) in the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the U.S. has an obligation to fulfill it. Korean reunification is a long overdue promise and with the current conditions in North Korea, is the most prudent policy option for the United States.

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