

**UNDERSTANDING AND
MANAGING NORTH KOREA'S
NUCLEAR AMBITIONS**

BY

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The February 2007 agreement reached with North Korea to shut down its nuclear reactor and give up its nuclear weapons program was heralded by many as a significant breakthrough following the shock of North Korea's nuclear weapons test in October of the previous year. This optimistic assessment, however, fails to consider the significant hurdles that will confront negotiators as they attempt to fulfill the promise of the February accord. The North Korean regime's 'hierarchy of nuclear motivations' including its perception of the security, leverage and prestige offered by the possession of nuclear weapons as well as the significant time and energies it has invested in developing a nuclear device, make an actual verifiable dismantling of this program unlikely. Further, the historical tendency for negotiations with North Korea to produce few positive results bodes ill for future success. Extant hurdles are further compounded by a U.S. negotiation position that heightens North Korea's security concerns, leaves little room for compromise, and has, unwittingly, encouraged North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. Without some unforeseen and dramatic change in position by either side, the ongoing negotiations regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons program are unlikely to succeed in the near term. The best hope lies in

gaining a complete understanding the North Korean position and developing a flexible strategy of engagement and containment. Such a strategy could address the security concerns of the Kim regime while limiting North Korea's ability to proliferate nuclear technology and providing security for the U.S. and its allies. Such an approach, however, would likely require the U.S. to set aside, at least temporarily the potentially costly and unrealistic goal of North Korean denuclearization.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

On October 9, 2006, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK or North Korea), in response to what it called an "extreme threat of a nuclear war and sanctions and pressure"¹ from the United States, followed through on an earlier threat to conduct a nuclear test. The weapons test, while generally considered to have yielded less than designed, nevertheless confirmed North Korea's membership in the exclusive club of nuclear nations. The world community swiftly Condemned North Korea's actions; even North Korea's most stalwart ally, China, joined in a unanimous Security Council Resolution that imposed a series of sanctions on the DPRK and called on it to return to multilateral talks on the issue.² Despite North Korea's proclamation that the U.N. sanctions amounted to a 'declaration of war', the DPRK did return to six party talks in Beijing and, in February 2007, reached an agreement to shut down its Yongbyon nuclear facility, open it to international inspectors and work toward the abandonment of its entire nuclear program. In exchange, the DPRK received commitments by the U.S. and Japan to begin bilateral talks, for the U.S. to begin removing the DPRK as a state-sponsor of terrorism, and for the provision of emergency energy assistance to North Korea.³

While heralded by some as a significant breakthrough in negotiations this optimistic assessment fails to consider the significant hurdles that can be expected to confront the negotiators as they attempt to fulfill the promise of the February accord. Given the North Korean regime's perception of the security, deterrence, leverage and prestige offered by the possession of nuclear weapons as well as the significant time and energies it has invested in developing and detonating a nuclear device, an actual

verifiable dismantling of this program is unlikely. Further, the historical tendency for negotiations with the North Korea's Kim regime to produce little positive results and for the North to exercise tactics of deceit and brinkmanship bodes ill for future success.

Such hurdles are further compounded by a desire by the current U.S. administration to negotiate from a position that leaves little room for compromise, exacerbates North Korea's security concerns, and has likely resulted in a more aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons on the part of the DPRK. Without some unforeseen and dramatic change in the position on either side, the ongoing negotiations regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons program are unlikely to succeed in the near term. The best hope for the United States lies in developing a thorough understanding of the North Korea's rationale for developing nuclear weapons and developing a flexible strategy of engagement and containment that addresses the DPRK's concerns while continuing to provide security for the U.S. and its allies and limiting North Korea's ability to proliferate nuclear technology. Such a strategy may require that the U.S., for the moment, set aside the potentially costly and unrealistic goal of North Korean denuclearization until such a time as more favorable environment presents itself.

North Korea's Nuclear Rationale

In order for the U.S. to develop an appropriate strategy to address North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile systems, it is first necessary to understand North Korea's rationale for developing these weapons. While North Korea's actions are frequently characterized as irrational actions of a rogue state led by an unstable absolute dictator with one of the world's largest militaries, this may be a misleading characterization. Fredrick Strain has suggested that by examining a state's

nuclear ambitions, or its 'hierarchy of nuclear motivations', we can gain insight into how that state may use these capabilities. Further, by identifying those key concerns of a state, policies can be tailored to address that state's desire for nuclear weapons.⁴ Thus, a closer examination of the motivations and objectives behind the North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles including its perspective on regime survival, national security and vital interests, are important to understanding the potential effectiveness of various counter-strategies.

Regime Survival: The External Perspective. One of the most fundamental reasons for North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons as well as the ballistic missile capabilities to deliver them (not to mention chemical and biological weapons), may well lie in the Kim regime's survival instincts and its overwhelming perception of its own insecurity. This insecurity stems from a number of basic underlying issues. First, this sense of insecurity is founded on the geographic division of the Korean Peninsula at the end of the second World War into what is now Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its capital at Pyongyang and Republic of Korea (the ROK or South Korea) with its capital in Seoul, both of which claim to be the sole legitimate governments of Korea and its people. In addition, Kim Il-Song, the founder of the DRPK and father to its current leader Kim Jong Il, was also deeply influenced by Korea's weakness militarily which led to its occupation by Japan in the early 20th century, a country which sought the eradication of Korean culture,⁵ as well as the power of American atomic weapons that subsequently contributed to Japan's defeat and unconditional surrender.⁶

More recently, a U.S. penchant for regime change, as reflected both in its planning process as well as through its actions, has contributed to the DPRK's survival

fears. The 1998 version of OPLAN 5027, the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command basic war plan, reportedly saw a major change from previous plans. Whereas, prior plans focused on halting an invasion by the North, and pushing DPRK forces back across the demilitarized zone (DMZ), the new plan focused more on offensive operations into North Korea. A senior U.S. official reportedly said of the plan:

"When we're done, they [North Korea] will not be able to mount any military activity of any kind. We will kill them all." The goal of the revised plan was to "abolish North Korea as a functioning state, end the rule of its leader, Kim Jong Il, and reorganize the country under South Korean control."⁷

With the key elements of the plan reported on extensively in the media, and with more recent updates to the plan reportedly reinforcing the concept of regime change, the North Korean security perception is not without foundation.

A hostile U.S. policy towards the Kim regime was also part of the more aggressive posture presented by the Bush Administration. Coming into office in 2001, the administration reacted strongly to the events of 9/11, and took a hard line toward North Korea, categorizing it, along with Iraq and Iran as an "axis of evil" and with terrorist organizations as "a grave and growing danger"⁸. In the National Security Strategy of 2002, this position was further solidified by calling North Korea's nuclear program "a looming threat to all nations"⁹ and by openly advocating a strategy of preemption¹⁰ against imminent threats to U.S. interests. Further, the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review of January 2002 classified North Korea as a "chronic military concern"¹¹ and highlighted the U.S. nuclear options that could be utilized to address these concerns including the development of bunker busting bombs and ballistic missile defense. Some felt this review outlined the U.S. government plans "for a greatly

expanded nuclear capability—increasing both the number of countries targeted and the circumstances under which the use of nuclear weapons could be authorized.”¹² Rather than potentially deterring North Korea, the DPRK may have viewed this document in the same manner as the Indian Defense Minister, George Fernandes, who indicated that the lesson to be drawn was that “Before one challenges the United States, one must first acquire nuclear weapons.”¹³

The aggressive U.S. preemptive posture and penchant for regime change, especially in light of its ability to quickly dispatch non-nuclear regimes including the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in 2003, demonstrated the vast superiority of U.S. conventional forces. North Korea understood that it needed to find ways to deter U.S. from making the Kim regime the next in line for elimination from the ‘axis of evil’ list, and the asymmetrical capabilities offered by nuclear weapons seemed to fit the need. With nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, North Korea could look to deter U.S. attempts at regime change by focusing on the defeat of early entry of U.S. forces, causing casualties, destroying key U.S./coalition units or systems, and fragmenting alliances.¹⁴

With the North Korea’s economy in shambles and little apparent willingness to undertake the necessary reforms to change that, some believe that the Kim regime’s long term survival may depend on the dangerous option of an all-out attack on the South.¹⁵ The North’s increasingly forward troop deployments indicate that it has not completely ruled out this option, and, should North Korea believe it could win, deterring U.S. intervention would be a key factor in achieving victory and nuclear weapons would

be an instrumental tool in that strategy. Understanding these realities, it is not surprising the path that the DPRK has taken.

Regime Survival: The Internal Perspective. In addition to the perceived external threat offered by the U.S., Japan and South Korea, Kim Jong Il has a significant number of internal issues that he must contend with. Following the death of his father, Kim Il Sung in 1994, Kim Jong Il moved to consolidate his power and, in doing so, relied heavily on the support of the Korean People's Army (KPA). As the source of his power, Kim must keep the KPA leadership appeased. Further, the collapsing economic state of the country in the late 1990's required the adoption of a 'military first' stance to ensure that sufficient resources were allocated to the military in order to maintain its support. Thus, while Kim Jong Il may be considered an absolute dictator, the regime would not exist but for the direct support of the armed forces, support that could not be taken for granted should Kim decide to forgo his nuclear program.¹⁶ Madelyn Albright, Secretary of State during the Clinton administration, met with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in October 2000. She came away from this meeting convinced that Kim truly desired better relations with the United States, but he faced internal pressure from "hard-liners, military leaders and staunch Marxists within Kim's government who do not share that objective".¹⁷ Even if the KPA did want to denuclearize, in order to preserve North Korea's national security, the KPA would likely want to modernize its conventional weapons systems, a program that the country could ill afford. As a result, there is little incentive for the KPA to support dismantling the DPRK's nuclear capabilities and it "would be extremely difficult and potentially perilous for Kim Jong Il to ignore the wishes of the armed forces."¹⁸

Kim's efforts at power consolidation to support regime survival reportedly continue today as he, at 65 and in uncertain health, looks toward establishing his successor in power through the development of a "collective leadership" made up of top military and security leaders¹⁹. Such a structure could ensure not only the smooth transition to his chosen successor but the continued preeminence of the KPA.

Deterrence. Closely linked to its survival paranoia is the concept of deterrence. Early on, deterrence of U.S., South Korean, or Japanese threats to North Korea was supported by North Korea's powerful patrons, China and the Soviet Union. However, Kim Il Sung felt disappointed by the level of support provided by his allies during the Korean War. Rather than pursuing the war until the achievement of a clear victory, both Beijing and Moscow agreed to a negotiated settlement. In addition, the Soviet Union's action were particularly disappointing to the elder Kim, who, given the go-ahead by Moscow to pursue unification, saw little commitment from Stalin to help North Korea complete this endeavor. This fear of abandonment was reinforced by what Kim saw as Soviet acquiescence to U.S. demands to remove its missiles from Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis while, beginning in January 1958, the U.S. had deployed nuclear weapons, including nuclear surface-to-surface missiles, nuclear landmines, and nuclear artillery, to South Korea.²⁰ With a potential adversary's nuclear weapons on North Korea's doorstep and a perception that his allies were unreliable, Kim Il Sung may have come to the conclusion that achieving the necessary level of deterrence meant obtaining an inherent nuclear capability.

During the 1960's a number of events reinforced North Korea's "perpetual insecurity"²¹ and thus a need for an effective deterrent. These events included refusals

by both China and the Soviet Union to sell advanced weapons to North Korea, the 1961 military coup d'état in South Korea resulting in a strongly anti-communist government; increased Sino-Soviet tensions; the Vietnam War; and North Korea's perception of the strengthening of ties between South Korea, Japan and the United States that included the normalization of Japanese-South Korean relations in 1965.²² As a result, beginning in the mid-1960's, North Korea began to shift its national priorities towards the development of the military and to pursue its own nuclear and ballistic missile programs. This shift, an outgrowth of its "Juche" philosophy or "self-reliance" was reflected in a large increase in the state's budget devoted to the military which, prior to 1966 ran at about 10%, but jumped to 30% during the timeframe from 1967-1971.²³

As the Cold War came to a close, North Korea's fears of abandonment, and with it the ability of North Korea to deter its enemies, seemed to be realized as North Korea saw the food and energy aid that it had received for decades from Beijing and Moscow quickly evaporate. The post cold-war world also impacted North Korea's defense treaties with Russia and the PRC significantly. Under these new arrangement, no longer would either country automatically come to the aid of North Korea or intervene on the peninsula should war breakout²⁴ and China, with the growing importance of the ROK as a trading partner, indicated that it no longer supported North Korea's claim to the entire Korean Peninsula.²⁵ Despite a continued military first strategy, with upwards of 40% of the countries GDP going toward its military,²⁶ the state of its conventional forces began to decline²⁷. On paper, North Korea continued to maintain one of the world's largest militaries, but the economic crisis resulted in limited access to foreign equipment, fuel shortages which restricted training, and difficulties in maintaining

operational readiness and unit effectiveness²⁸. To overcome this reality, and enhance its deterrent posture, North Korea continued to invest what scarce resources it had into both its nuclear and ballistic missile programs with these programs “practically the only areas of growth within the DPRK during the 1990’s.”²⁹

At the same time as the North Korean conventional forces were weakening, the relative and absolute strength of its perceived enemies continued to grow. On the other side of the DMZ, South Korea, which during the 1950’s and 1960’s had been one of the world’s poorest country’s, emerged in the 1980’s and 1990’s as significant economic force with rising incomes and standards of living. Levering this economic muscle, South Korea was able to modernize its military during this period, increasing the North’s perceived disparity. Today, South Korea, with a GDP of \$820-billion has an economy that is some 90 times larger than that of North Korea’s. With this sort of gap, even if North Korea continues to funnel a significant portion of its GDP toward its military, it would represent only a tiny fraction of the \$23-billion defense budget for South Korea.³⁰ With little ability economically to keep up with its potential adversaries from a conventional standpoint, the deterrent capabilities offered by nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles must have seemed quite appealing to the DPRK.³¹

North Korea’s attempts in the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles that may be capable of reaching the U.S. territory, along with its development of nuclear weapons, could be considered evidence of North Korea’s offensive threat to the U.S. However, for state actors such as North Korea, “possession is the key factor as the use of a nuclear device remains incredible due to the risk of massive response.”³² If North Korea was most interested in attacking the U.S. directly, there are other easier and less

expensive options, such as biological weapons, that can produce the same benefit while offering the potential for plausible deniability³³. Thus, North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons most closely fits with a deterrent strategy to counter U.S. intervention.

The culmination of these pressures is most clearly reflected in North Korea's statements regarding the value of its nuclear weapons program. North Korea has frequently described its nuclear capabilities as a deterrent and emphatically stated that it would not denuclearize under any circumstances.³⁴ This position was reinforced through its "annual" security assessment, which it submitted (for the first time) in May of 2007 to the 26-member ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and in which it outlined its rationale for its development of nuclear weapons. In this defense paper, North Korea indicated that it had been "forced to develop nuclear weapons"³⁵ due to a threat of a pre-emptive U.S. military strike, a plan supported by both Japan and South Korea³⁶. Viewing the close cooperation and coordination of U.S., Japanese, and South Korean militaries as "an alliance of war"³⁷, North Korea also criticized the U.S. invasion of Iraq, continued U.S. military modernization efforts, and its policy of maintaining a nuclear security umbrella around Japan and South Korea as some of the key issues that have driven it to develop nuclear weapons. In light of this perspective, the DPRK concluded it "had no other option"³⁸ than to possess nuclear weapons.

Leverage. Beyond the basic security and deterrence offered by North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, these activities also offer significant leverage that the Kim regime can utilize to threaten its neighbors and to extort from them desperately needed food and energy aid. Through the threatened use of force, these weapons become tools that can be leveraged, to achieve the regimes ends,³⁹ allowing the DPRK

to bargain and blackmail for the assistance it needs rather than having to resort to begging. With little in the way of concrete attempts to revive its economy, the regime looks to be pursuing a survival strategy that is based on acquiring outside aid, and its nuclear program allows it to periodically increase diplomatic tensions and drive additional concessions from the U.S. and South Korea. The DPRK's October 2006 nuclear test can be viewed in this context, generating commitments that included the provision of \$400-million in fuel oil and aid.⁴⁰

Investment. With decades of work going into its nuclear program, North Korea has made a significant investment in nuclear weapons and is not likely to agree to forego this investment without significant incentives. It has pursued development of ballistic missiles and WMD and has done so "with impressive single-mindedness and determination."⁴¹ The cost for such programs has been high both in human and economic terms, and the value that the regime puts on its WMD and missile programs themselves should not be underestimated nor should its determination to continue to pursue them.⁴²

This investment has also allowed North Korea to become one of the world's foremost proliferators. Long a proliferator of chemical and biological weapons,⁴³ North Korea has participated in technology exchanges with respect to its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs as well. Sales of WMD and ballistic missile technology have been a source of hard cash, allowing Kim Jong Il to shore up military support for the regime.

Prestige/Great Power Status. Finally, North Korea's nuclear capabilities also allow it to generate a level of attention that it otherwise, given its size and economic

state, would not receive. Nuclear weapons, Kim Jong Il believes, provide a degree of prestige, placing the DPRK on par with other great powers. “Simply, he thinks great powers have such capabilities while weak states do not.”⁴⁴ As one North Korean official declared when China urged cancellation of planned missile tests in July 2007, “we are not boys. We are a nuclear power”⁴⁵ The DPRK’s WMD and missile programs are a key component of Kim Jong Il’s strategy for establishing North Korea as a great power and assuming what it considers its rightful place among the nations of the world.⁴⁶

What Does it Mean?

The foregoing analysis highlights the importance of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs to the psyche of the Kim regime, and, therefore, these programs likely represent non-negotiable aspects of North Korea’s security posture. The host of internal and external security threats that the Kim regime perceives to the regime’s survival, as well as deterrent benefits nuclear weapons provide, combined with the prestige and leverage the programs offer, make these endeavors extremely valuable and, in essence, fundamental to advancing the interests of the DPRK. Unable to challenge the United States on a conventional force-on-force basis, it is only the pursuit of nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles to deliver them that enables the DPRK to achieve the security, leverage and prestige it desires. Nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles are, therefore, fundamental tools to the survival of the regime and too important to give up.⁴⁷ For this reason, as with prior agreements with North Korea, the February 2007 accord is likely to follow the same pattern as prior accords; an agreement in principle that leads to a disagreement on the proper interpretation of those

principles, and finally to a collapse of dialogue due to those disagreements⁴⁸ (at least until North Korea needs a new infusion of funds).

Does this mean that the U.S. and neighboring countries must be reconciled to a most dangerous international situation? Not necessarily. It does, however, mean that:

- The U.S. must recognize that the current approach to North Korea, because it does not take into consideration North Korea's motivations and perceptions, may have had the opposite of the desired effect and driven the DPRK to developing its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities sooner than it would have otherwise.
- The U.S. must not, as it has, take a broad approach to its declared global war on terrorism (GWOT) amassing "rogue states, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferators; terrorist organizations of global, regional and national scope; and terrorism itself...into a [single] monolithic threat,"⁴⁹ but understand the motivations that are unique to North Korea.
- North Korea, precisely because of its fundamental desire to preserve the regime and the state, is subject to effective deterrence.
- The United States must view negotiations with North Korea holistically, understanding the rationale behind North Korea's motivations, while simultaneously maintaining an equally strong deterrence against North Korean actions.

Seen in the context of North Korean's motivations for the acquisition of nuclear weapons, the actions of the Kim regime can be understood not as "irrationality, but rather as a case of a rational mind operating in a highly abnormal environment".⁵⁰ By

understanding the perspective and mindset of the Kim regime it may be possible to devise an effective strategy in dealing with the DPRK.

A New Approach

Certainly, a nuclear armed North Korea is a particularly undesirable state of affairs, especially given its history of proliferating nuclear and ballistic missile technologies, and its failed economic state making such proliferation for vitally needed cash most tempting. If, however, the current approach has produced sub-optimal results, what then is the correct course? The answer to this issue lies in a comprehensive approach that is tailored to address North Korea's 'hierarchy of nuclear motivations', helping to satisfy the Kim regimes core concerns, while addressing without compromise the security concerns of the U.S. and its allies. With the nuclear 'genie' already out of the bottle in the DPRK, such an approach may, in fact, entail allowing North Korea to retain a limited nuclear capability for the near term.

At the core for a new approach would be the elements outlined in the 2006 National Security Strategy (NSS), including the implementation of a comprehensive strategy to address proliferation of WMD, strengthening of our nonproliferation initiative, implementation of proactive counter proliferation measures designed to address WMD and missile threats, and, should these efforts fail, the capabilities to mitigate the resulting consequences WMD use⁵¹. While these steps are important in dealing with North Korea, U.S. efforts must go further and cover more ground. Faced with a single and apparently intractable issue of nuclear weapons, negotiation efforts should focus on a broader set of initiatives. By expanding the number of areas under discussion, it may be possible for each side to "exploit the difference in the relative valuations to achieve

outcomes that are better for everyone”⁵² and address the broad-based concerns that have set North Korea down the nuclear path. Such an arrangement would require a substantial increase to the incentives to North Korea to make positive moves as well as the clear disincentives for moves viewed negatively by the U.S. and the rest of the region. What such a strategy means is that the U.S. must be willing to engage North Korea in direct, substantive negotiations, and that the U.S. must demonstrate and clearly signal its commitment to both the carrots and the sticks.

The New Approach. The first step in this process must be for the U.S. to abandon any inflammatory rhetoric in order to reduce tensions with the DPRK. President Bush’s reported references to Kim Jong II as a ‘pygmy’ and ‘a spoiled child’⁵³ do nothing to enhance the U.S. negotiation position. Second, the U.S. and its regional partners should agree to a wide ranging set of negotiations, offering incentives in terms of security guarantees to North Korea, renouncing any desire for regime change in North Korea, and continuing to draw down U.S. troops on the Korean peninsula and pull back from the DMZ as part of a broader negotiations regarding conventional forces with the North. In addition, the U.S. could help promote a reinvigorated security relationship with China and Russia could help improve the DPRK’s security perceptions. Thirdly, the U.S. could provide significant economic incentives, work with China to help North Korea to move to a Vietnam style economy, lift trade sanctions with the North⁵⁴, and provide comprehensive non-nuclear solution to North Korea’s energy needs. For North Korea, having 40% of its GDP going toward the military is unsustainable in the long term and the Kim regime must be convinced that its optimal course of action in preserving the regime lies along a path of cooperation and reform – militarily,

economically and politically. Each of these activities would be designed to reinforce the Kim regimes interests in security and survival.

In return for these concessions, the U.S. would require that North Korea verifiably freeze its nuclear program, including its nuclear arsenal, but allow the DPRK to, for the moment, keep a verifiably limited number of weapons. By providing the DPRK the ability to maintain possession of its current stocks, while retaining the ultimate goal of a nuclear free peninsula, the U.S. may overcome opposition to disarmament due to the DPRK's motivations around investment and the prestige offered by the nuclear program. Further, North Korea would be required to take positive steps with respect to chemical, biological, and conventional weapons, eliminating its support for terrorist groups, counterfeiting and kidnapping, as well as eliminating WMD and ballistic missile proliferation.

Convincing the DPRK to act in a responsible manner will require not only significant 'carrots' to reward positive steps, but a visible 'big stick' to swiftly deter transgressions and for the U.S. to ensure its own security. Despite some weaknesses, North Korea remains a significant conventional and non-conventional threat. With that in mind, the U.S. military, along with its allies need to maintain an effective deterrent against DPRK aggression. While the NSS believes that deterrence is less effective with failed or rogue states, this cornerstone of U.S. nuclear strategy has, in fact, worked for more than fifty years and can continue to play a pivotal role in dealing with North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Unlike Iran, whose 'hierarchy of nuclear motivations' may be quite different from that of North Korea⁵⁵, North Korea's primary concern is that of regime survival, an unlikely end-state should it use a nuclear weapon. However, for

deterrence to continue to work, the threat of regime change must be visible and credible. To do so will require that the U.S. credibly communicate that North Korea's use or proliferation of WMD would result in severe punishment and regime change. Regime survival is one of the core elements behind North Korea's pursuit of WMD, and "[e]liminating the ruling regime is the harshest punishment that a targeted nation can face."⁵⁶ Thus, the potential threat would certainly outweigh the incentive to proliferate. The U.S. can enhance its credibility for enforcing its threat through maintaining the dominant capabilities of the U.S. military, continued U.S. leadership in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), supporting a renewed focus on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and maintaining a stated policy in dealing with the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Such actions help raise the probability the U.S. would follow through on the threat and thereby enhancing deterrence. To reinforce these areas, the U.S. should continue to maintain a dominant military position with respect to the "the three military capabilities that enhance escalation dominance – nuclear capability, conventional superiority, and airpower – will also assist in future attempts to deter the first use of WMD."⁵⁷ The U.S. military can also support U.S. deterrence through its continued expansion and exercise of its missile defense program, which offers protection to our allies through the potential of rendering North Korea nuclear weapons impotent. Finally, the recent U.S. satellite shoot down further solidifies this position.

Summary and Conclusion

To deal with North Korea effectively the U.S. must understand the rationale behind the actions of the DPRK and the Kim regime and to tailor its policy toward North

Korea in a manner that serves to address its desire for nuclear weapons while also serving U.S. interests. U.S. policy must understand that regime survival and security appear foremost in the DPRK's decision to seek the status of a nuclear weapons state, but, because of these underlying motivations, U.S. policy can be tailored to address these concerns while at the same time North Korea can be deterred from using and proliferating this technology. Simply trying to force Kim Jong Il to give up his nuclear weapons and missile programs without addressing the underlying rationale and motivations for acquiring them is to ask him to reinvent himself in a manner totally alien to this regime.⁵⁸

While North Korea remains a rogue state, widely known for its use of blackmail, counterfeiting, corruption, human rights abuses, President Bush's letter to Kim Jong Il this past December, seems to have marked a turning point in the approach the U.S. is taking toward North Korea. Described as cordial in tone it held out the opportunity for normalized relations and reinforced U.S. commitment to the six party talks⁵⁹, taking what may be the first steps toward a more comprehensive solution.

Endnotes

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²² Ibid, 4.

²³ Ibid, 5.

²⁴ Joseph S. Bermudez Jr, The Armed forces of North Korea, The Armed Forces of Asia Series, (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2001), 17.

²⁵ Sokolski, 46.

²⁶ Steven A. Hildreth, North Korean Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States. CRS Report for Congress, Updated Jan. 24, 2008. 4.

²⁷ Lee, 16.

²⁸ Bermudez, 56.

²⁹ Ibid, 213.

³⁰ Lee, 19. South Korea likely perceived its modernization as necessary steps given North Korea's larger army, increasing SOF capabilities and continued movement of troops closer to the DMZ. North Korea, on the other hand, given its security paranoia, likely viewed South Korea's efforts as impacting the balance of power.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Russell, 133. If North Korea was interested in attacking the United States, there are far better ways than nuclear weapons. Biological agents, for example, are far less costly to produce and are less technologically intensive than nuclear weapons. In addition, biological weapons offer similar opportunity to achieve strategic effects as nuclear weapons but may be delivered covertly, and more easily than a nuclear device, and present a stronger degree of plausible deniability.

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⁵⁸ Sokolski, 40.

⁵⁹ Cooper.