

NORTH KOREA'S STRATEGY

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I. The Setting

Internationally unpopular, with a broken down infrastructure, a nutritionally deprived

population, a stunted younger generation, and no evident means of economic regeneration, North Korea, a half century after its foundation, exhibits an unprecedented condition for a modern, industrialized society with expanding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and long-range missile capabilities. Why did this happen? What if anything can be done about it? These are basic questions because the way the north got into this predicament tends to define and limit their long-term strategic options as well as what they can do in the near to mid-term to extricate themselves. All of this can be seen in context only if we give serious attention to the peculiar nature of the Kim family regime (KFR) and the political culture, which shapes Pyongyang's [\[1\]](#) strategic conceptions. [\[2\]](#) We will discuss the enduring characteristics of the regime, the regime's strategic options, and the significance of North Korea's WMD and long-range missiles, why so many find it difficult to grasp the essence of the "Kimist"

system, and the serious policy dilemmas facing Washington and Pyongyang.

II. Regime Characteristics and Limitations

The centrality of the military mindset can hardly be overemphasized. Shaped by his early experience as a guerrilla fighter against the Japanese, Kim Il Sung's outlook was something like a cross between Lenin's "fight-talk, fight-talk" dictum and the view expressed in *Mein Kampf* that an organism which does not fight dies.[\[3\]](#) For Kim, the economy was to produce the implements of war, the education to produce capable soldiers, and the ideology to convince the population of the inevitability of war and the necessity for absolute obedience to a military leader who would ultimately be extolled to the point of infallibility.

Guerilla Dynasty by Adrian Buzo[\[4\]](#) is an extremely useful work, in which Buzo

emphasizes the significance of the guerrilla mindset and revalidates and updates the insights set forth in the two-volume work, *Communism in Korea*.[\[5\]](#) The following quotations from Volume II are pertinent: "Unquestioning loyalty and allegiance were the determinants of survival, and the 'Party' took on an entirely military character, discipline and hierarchy being interwoven with the camaraderie of the small, determined -- often desperate -- band." "From guerrilla to governing party thus involved more a change of scope than a change of operational pattern or mind."[\[6\]](#),[\[7\]](#)

Kim's regime was born and bred in absolute hostility to any political authority in the south. Simply, the south is held to be a U.S. colony, and southern officials are viewed as nothing more than lackeys of their colonial masters. In more than a half century Pyongyang has never had anything good to say about southern officialdom, and the government in the south has been seen as

only one of many southern organizations, lacking any particular legitimacy as a government, and treated for the most part as something to be avoided, undermined, and, if possible, overthrown.

The regime operates like a kind of combination religious cult-crime family gang. Resort to violence is common, as are summary executions, often for political incorrectness rather than substantive violation of law. The regime's leaders utilize gangland practices -- counterfeiting, drug smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, and assassination -- as tools of state policy. And they show the kind of indifference one might expect to the welfare of ordinary citizens living on their piece of turf, being concerned rather with how to maintain control and how to extract anything that may contribute to their own security and comfort.

Undergirding the regime is a vast tissue of myth and fabrication.[\[8\]](#) Kim Il Sung's first great myth was that it was Kim and his guerrilla forces who expelled the Japanese

from North Korea in 1945. Two other foundation myths are the contemporary North Korean society as "paradise on earth" and the future unification of the peninsula under Kim or his son Kim Jong Il. There is also, of course, the myth of Kim Jong Il's birth on Paektu-san,[\[9\]](#) and both Kim Il Sung and his son are held to have thaumaturgical power and links with the supernatural.[\[10\]](#)

Not surprisingly, therefore, the entire society must be kept in virtual isolation, because if isolation cannot be maintained all these myths are likely to be challenged and undermined, with consequent severe damage to the belief system supporting the regime.

Again not surprisingly, the economy is failing because in a world with so much pressure for interconnectivity it is difficult to manage an economy of any significant size in the relatively isolated manner the regime attempts.

Finally, as the regime does not brook the

possibility of compromise, it is locked into a zero-sum regime survival contest with its rival to the south. Why do we expect the competition to be zero-sum?

First, because when we look at the major divided country scenarios of the past two centuries, we see that they seem to turn out that way. With so much water in between, the China-Taiwan scenario may turn out differently, but the cases of Yemen, Vietnam, Germany two times, and America in the 19th century all seem to suggest that while division may persist for what seems like an interminably long period, the forces for unity ultimately prove too strong. When unity occurs, however, it does not come about through a fair and balanced compromise respecting and preserving the interests and estates of the leadership on both sides. It's not a case of "I'm all right -- You're all right." Rather, one side dominates, and it's a case of "We'll do the ordering, and you'll do the obeying," and we witness a redundancy to the ancient

Athenian formula of "*The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must*," [\[11\]](#) with the extent of the suffering having a lot to do with the political traditions of the piece of turf in question. When that piece is Korea, it is reasonable to expect that the leaders on the losing side will not get the kind of generous treatment that, in the main, East Germany's leaders received a decade ago.

Second, the two societies on opposite sides of Korea's demilitarized zone (DMZ) are profoundly different, close to antithetical. The approaches to politics, economics, education, jurisprudence, religion, and even the meaning of life in north and south are very different. Northerners are taught to find the meaning of life in their devotion to their "great leader." The south has experienced periods of highly authoritarian rule to be sure, but at repeated critical junctures southerners have clearly opted for what we may call the imperfect decency of democracy and the

accountability of leadership rather than for the autocratic model. As one southerner was anonymously quoted in the press a few years back, "North Korea deifies its leaders. We throw ours in jail." This is hardly an insignificant difference and one which, we may be sure, is not lost on the leadership in the north. Moreover, it is very difficult to identify any significant feature of the northern system which southerners could be expected to endorse -- not the legal system, not their humanitarian accomplishments, not the success of the economic model, hardly the clarity of political thought. In sum, the trench dividing Korea is much deeper and wider than in the German case. The big boss on the Communist side is in Pyongyang, not in Moscow, and the Kim family ideology appears to be much closer to the North Korean soul than Communism was to the East German soul. Republic of Korea (ROK) media cannot access North Korea's people outside the KFR audience, there is nothing like the cross-border passage of a million West Germans into the

east prior to unification, and there is no common Korean experience comparable to the effort to build a modern, industrial, democratic society which engaged the whole of Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Finally, and most important, Korea had the war that Germany was able to avoid.

The point of all this is that in spite of the common cultural heritage prior to 1945, the differences between north and south are profound, and it is difficult to imagine how any policy crafted through the combined wisdom of Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo can make them go away.

III. What the Regime Can't Do

Currently, there seems no particular reason to believe that Pyongyang's leaders can either fix the North Korean economy on their own or "join the world" for the rational choice, "soft landing options" of

reconciliation, reform, and opening that might bring about a fix. If by "soft landing" one means that the peninsular confrontation may ultimately be resolved without war, that thought does no great violence to a realistic outlook. If, on the other hand, one means that the confrontation can be resolved while the Kim family regime remains viable in the north, that notion would seem to belong on the shelf alongside the fantasy novels of H. Rider Haggard.[\[12\]](#)

Why are the "soft landing options" so difficult? When the Secretary of State visited Korea in early 1997, she was asked whether she thought the north and south would be able to negotiate the end of the Korean War. She answered, "It's very hard to predict. It basically depends on how much the North Koreans are hurting and whether they are willing to realize that a peaceful solution to this division is the best way to go...."[\[13\]](#) That would appear to be a rational and humane formulation. But the question is, who are the "North Koreans"

who are supposed to see that a peaceful resolution is the best way to go? Are we talking about some 22 million people walking around in the country and trying to get by from week to week? Do we mean North Korea as a country? Or do we mean the privileged group at the top of the power structure who run North Korea and make all the decisions about what North Korea as a country will and will not do? A few years back a Korean political scientist explained that while anyone can posit the objective need of North Korea, viewed as a country, for the "soft landing options," no one can show the connection between that objective need and the willingness of the Kim regime to do these options, or even their ability to do them without fatal collateral damage.

What is the problem with reconciliation? North Korea's leaders have programmed themselves and their people to believe that true Korean sovereignty and patriotism are to be found only in the inheritors of the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggles of the 1930s and

1940s. This means Kim Il Sung and his fellow combatants, their descendants, and their allies. This is what defines their identity. This is who they think they are. When they talk about "one Korea," they mean *their* Korea with themselves in charge. The notion that somewhere on the peninsula there is another group of Koreans with "equal standing" with whom *they* must negotiate on equal terms about the future of the peninsula is doctrinally, strategically, ideologically, emotionally -- virtually any way you look at it -- repugnant and unacceptable, and, in spite of the June 2000 summit meeting, unless history, defectors' reports, and intelligence are all suddenly without utility, we can confidently predict that *they* will not do it.[\[14\]](#)

What about reform? A few years ago North Korean media announced that Kim Jong Il had fired a round of eighteen holes of golf in 34 strokes, some 25 shots below the recognized PGA record.[\[15\]](#) Here's a fellow who simply doesn't make mistakes.

What's to reform? We may laugh about this, but someone living in North Korea who starts to talk about the need for reform will not find it so funny. The whole idea of reform carries with it the notion that something needs fixing, that there is a better way of doing things. The implication is that something is wrong, impossible in a country with infallible leadership. Moreover, to endorse reform Kim Jong Il would have to renounce socialism, an East European mistake he has vowed he will not make, renounce the "Chuche" philosophy, and, in the end, even renounce his own father, thereby undercutting his own legitimacy as the filial son who follows his father's correct policies. If all of this were not problem enough, the whole idea of reform entails a series of troublesome decision-making intersections very disruptive for a rigid, monocratic regime. For example, when to begin reform, in what sector to begin, how fast to go, when to extend to other sectors, and whom to put in charge? Experience in other authoritarian systems suggests that

sooner or later this process is apt to produce debate about whether reform is being done in the right manner and whether the right people are doing it, a contradiction in a society where only one person is allowed to philosophize about what is right and wrong.

Opening entails many of the same problems. Northerners have been told for decades that the people of the south live in spiritual and material misery from which they must be liberated. This is dogma basic to the belief system and can't be set aside. Should northerners come to learn not only that this notion is false, but that the great mass of their southern brethren live in a kind of affluence hardly imaginable in the Kim family regime "paradise," one can imagine the consequences for the regime's political support structure and the security of the leadership. Moreover, it must be questioned whether the north has the infrastructure necessary for opening in terms of legal guarantees, financial institutions, and professional expertise. The vast majority of

the north's so-called "technocrats" have not been educated at places like MIT, the Ivy League, Stanford, or the London School, but rather at Kim Il Sung University and Moscow University, where one can only guess at how much they have learned that may be helpful in guiding North Korea's entry into the flux and turbulence of the 21st century world economy.

In sum, while these options sound reasonable for North Korea as a country, they all amount to things the regime either doesn't know how to do or would find unacceptable, or which would punch holes below the political water line, or all three. It is as if by their policies the north's leaders have tied ropes around their necks and these changes would be like pulling the trap door from beneath their feet. Three consequences would seem to follow. First, that while the KFR may cautiously hazard some limited experiments, in general they will opt to impose on their population the continuing pain of economic failure rather than to

embark on a path of revitalization that will lead to growing dependence on perceived hostile forces in the south. Second, that absent war, the superiority of the south in every aspect of life except the military will continue to grow and northerners will, as time passes, become increasingly aware of the south's superiority. Third, that if unification is not accomplished by war, economics will tend to dominate and it will be the economically superior south that will lead the process of reintegration that will precede, encompass, and continue on past political unification. While all of this may take considerable time, the entire period is arguably only an interim condition and, ironically, the longer the period, the more apparent southern superiority and the more inevitable the final result. As this process unfolds, it will become increasingly difficult for the northern regime's leaders to maintain any relevance, as they will not have the knowledge or the resources to do much that is useful.[\[16\]](#)

From all of this follows yet another important consequence: the KFR would seem to have no long-term regime survival option that is not military in nature. This notion is not popular with policymakers, or with many other observers either, for that matter. No one likes to contemplate the horrendous cost that would attend another peninsular war. But it is difficult to see how extended peaceful coexistence can lead anywhere but to the increasing appeal of the south and the gradual erosion of popular support in the north. The only way Pyongyang can escape such an eventuality is by gaining control of the entire peninsula, and it is virtually inconceivable for that objective to be accomplished by negotiation. However repugnant this idea may be, it provides a rationale for KFR conduct over time. In rejecting the options outsiders urge upon them, the KFR *acts* as if they believe it.

Finally, we would contend that to use any other template as a means of analyzing and

predicting *over time* what Pyongyang will and will not do is to set oneself up for a virtually endless series of false expectations.

IV. Strategic Options

Currently, North Korea would seem to have four broad strategic options. Two offer the prospect of long-term survival, but they are difficult and dangerous. Two others would seem to offer the means of temporary survival only.

The first obviously is to attack and win. The upside is the possibility of absolute victory. If the KFR gains control of the entire peninsula, economic failure becomes politically irrelevant, or at least much less relevant. Peninsular polarity would end, as would the economic and political challenge from Seoul. The downside is, of course, that this is the most dangerous option, as it risks total defeat and the prospect of death,

delivery into the hands of the enemy, or ignominious flight.

The second is the campaign of subversion and revolution, the strategy envisioned in their "peaceful unification" slogan adopted in 1954. The upside is that it offers the possibility of total victory with minimal risk. The problem, of course, is that since it is extremely hard to do, the possibility of success is extremely small. The would-be guerrilla operations of the mid- to late 1960s failed and there have been no attempts to revive them. As for subversion, the record seems to show that while individuals can be recruited and anti-state groups formed, the ROK society as a whole is too big and various to take down. Basic to the likely failure of this option, of course, are four factors which decrease the appeal of the KFR message: (1) the evident failure of North Korea's economic model, (2) the long and continuing track record of violence against the south, (3) the dynastic succession, which is viewed in the south as

ludicrous and anachronistic, and (4) political democratization in the south, which over time has deprived radical students of their political cover as fighters for democracy.

The third option is the so-called "soft landing," or "rational choice," option of reconciliation and economic cooperation, reform, and opening. The upside is that over time all of these might help to bring about economic and social recovery in the north. The downside is that, as already discussed, they would inevitably undermine regime foundations and lead inexorably to the collapse and end of the Kim family system. Moreover, in the interim, this option does nothing to fend off the threat from the south, as the ROK is still there and still obviously superior economically. Finally, of course, sustained pursuit of this option would tend to foreclose the first two options above.

The fourth option is what we may call an aid-based survival approach with minimal or no reform. This appears in the main to be

the strategic option the KFR has currently adopted. The advantages of this option are significant. It avoids the pitfalls of internal change. It avoids the danger of broad engagement with the ROK but allows for selective ROK business activity in the north. And it preserves the possibility of continued priority to the military and of options one and two above. The disadvantages are also considerable. There is a potential sustainability problem. Will the outside world give enough for a long enough period of time? The ROK is still there and still superior. Collapse is still possible, and there is rampant corruption, just as when the ROK pursued a similar strategy in the early to mid-1950s.

Let us now take another look at option one. It has of late become fashionable to describe North Korea's objective as survival. In the context of North Korea's economic failure and the growing gap between the south and the north, survival has come to be equated with a defensive

stance. The assumption has been that the north's military establishment must be declining along with the rest of the economy, and that the best the Pyongyang regime can do now is to try to keep information control intact and hang on somehow, even as the leadership agonizes over the inevitable decision to change course, to abandon hostility to the south, to reform, open, and accept the assistance the south can provide. Against the background of these assumptions there has been a tendency to believe that the north no longer poses a military threat, and that Pyongyang must surely have abandoned its goal of gaining control over the entire peninsula. In this context it is held that any decision to attack the south would be suicidal, an irrational decision. But these assumptions require critical evaluation.

First, here is how the north may think they can win. They may believe they can attack with little warning and that their artillery will smash forward defenses and

destroy the morale of the defenders. They may expect roads in the south will be choked with refugees to the point that CFC[17] forces will be unable to maneuver. They will expect that their large and well trained special operations forces (SOF) will create havoc in the rear, and that this along with the use of chemical and biological weapons will demoralize and panic soldiers and civilians alike. Finally, in spite of the good showing by the ROK Navy off the west coast last year, they may believe that when the war starts a substantial portion of the defending forces will either flee, or fight with little enthusiasm.

Second, Pyongyang's leaders may expect that at some point in the future the U.S. will be distracted by developments elsewhere, perhaps in the Middle East or the Taiwan Straits, and be unable to respond quickly and effectively with off-shore reinforcements.

Third, there is little doubt they have noticed the current U.S. aversion to any kind of involvement which seems likely to entail

heavy casualties. They may well calculate that if they can strike early and hard in a way that produces high casualties at the outset, Washington will come under political pressure to extricate rather than to reinforce.

Fourth, what we know about North Korean force dispositions simply does not support the idea that Pyongyang has abandoned the military option or that their overall stance is defensive rather than offensive. Since 1980, along with an increase in the size of their ground forces from 700,000 to more than a million, the north has steadily deployed combat forces forward. Key changes include significant numbers of mechanized and artillery units relocating southward. Today 70% of all combat forces, to include 700,000 troops, 2,000 tanks, and 8,000 artillery systems, [\[18\]](#) are located south of a line between Pyongyang and Wonsan, or 100 kilometers from the DMZ, as compared with 40% so deployed in 1980. Their artillery includes 500 long-range systems deployed over the

past decade. The proximity of these long-range systems to the DMZ threatens all of Seoul with devastating attack. Without moving any of its artillery, the north could sustain up to 500,000 rounds per hour against CFC defenses for several hours.

Other North Korean threats at the outset are the use of missiles and SOF actions against key targets in the Seoul area. Much of the north's military force is protected in underground facilities, including 4,000 facilities in the forward area alone. From their current locations these forces can attack with minimal preparations. North Korea's tactical doctrine emphasizes domination of the battlefield by surprise, firepower, and mobility. Critical to North Korean success are secrecy, delivery of massive amounts of firepower against extremely narrow frontages, widespread use of WMD, and the ability to methodically feed reinforcing and exploitation forces to sustain the momentum of attack.

Pyongyang's campaign plan envisions defeat of the CFC forward defense and isolation of

Seoul within seven days and exploitation operations throughout the remainder of the peninsula to defeat ROK forces and close air and seaports for arriving U.S. off-shore forces. There are, to be sure, aspects of North Korea's dispositions that are indeed defensive in nature. During the past year, coastal defenses have been improved in the forward area, combat positions have been established along major routes between Pyongyang and the DMZ, and anti-tank barriers have been emplaced in the forward area. But these dispositions should be seen in context. In any projected attack against an enemy whose strong suits are flexibility, speed, and the ability to strike deep, the north must anticipate the need for defensive operations even in an overall offensive context. Moreover, in three critical aspects, northern dispositions do not appear defensive. First, most of their artillery is deployed so far forward as to be vulnerable to surprise attack and useless in defense. Second, on the northern side of the DMZ there are no defensive fortifications

equivalent to FEBA[19] A, FEBA B, and FEBA C in the south. Third, tunnel construction under the DMZ would seem to have little utility except for offense. During the past year, North Korea has been implementing an ambitious program to improve its ground force posture. The highlight of this initiative is the deployment of large numbers of 240mm multiple rocket launcher systems and 170mm self-propelled guns to hardened sites near the DMZ. Other improvements include construction of missile support facilities, preparations for long-range missile testing, and enhancement of an already impressive camouflage, concealment, and deception effort. Production of military equipment, to include missiles, aircraft, submarines, and artillery systems, has continued, and since last summer training levels have surged to new heights.[20] All of this reflects continuing priority to the military and a remarkable allocation of resources in spite of severe overall economic deprivation.

Those who believe North Korea will not attack could in the end be right. One can imagine a whole host of reasons for Kim Jong Il to hesitate. Kim may hope his aid-based survival strategy will work indefinitely. He may worry about military sustainability and think that with time he can fix that problem. He may think his efforts to split the alliance will be successful. He may prefer to wait until the U.S. commitment weakens, or until the U.S. is occupied elsewhere, or until he can leverage withdrawal of USFK. He may believe that he can hold on indefinitely with the assistance of his world-class counterintelligence system. He may even remain indecisive, unable to make a decision until it becomes virtually too late to make a decision. But those who say North Korea is too weak to attempt the offensive solution to the survival problem might do well to remember that in the 20th century Asian opponents handed the U.S. four big military surprises: the Pearl Harbor attack, the Korean surprise (not only the 25 June 1950,

invasion but the skill and fighting ardor of North Korean forces), the Chinese intervention in late 1950, and the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. Someone predicted each of these, but the establishment dismissed the predictions. In all four cases there seems to have been a measure of contempt on our part for Asian opponents and a tendency to overrate our own capabilities.[\[21\]](#) In all four cases, we paid a heavy price when the enemy did attack in spite of all our reasons why they couldn't and wouldn't. Hindsight teaches we are better served by believing that the enemy has strength and will and the ingenuity to force us to fight by their doctrine rather than ours.

In the case of all four broad strategic options, it seems tolerably certain the KFR will place primary importance on insuring the security and comfort of the leadership, especially Kim Jong Il himself, and on maintaining internal control. At a level of secondary importance, the regime will strive

to insure that Chinese support continues for all options.

For all options except the "soft landing" approach, primary importance will also be placed on weakening and ultimately eliminating the ROK as a state. In pursuit of this, the north will attack conservative forces in the ROK through propaganda smear campaigns as well as by assassination, kidnapping, and intimidation.[\[22\]](#) The north will also continue conducting espionage and surveillance operations against the ROK, support and direct radical and subversive organizations in the south, and try to discredit and weaken the ROK military establishment. As a means of marginalizing the ROK, Pyongyang will also continue trying in any way they can imagine to split the ROK-U.S. alliance and bring about the withdrawal of USFK by converting the armistice into a "peace agreement" and by discrediting USFK through propaganda and agitation over the sovereignty issue, Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), criminal

jurisdiction, and land issues.[\[23\]](#) As a part of this effort, Pyongyang will push for removal of the "*cold war structure on the peninsula*" and seize every opportunity to thrust to the forefront its three principles of independent and peaceful unification in accordance with "grand national unity."[\[24\]](#) As a means of exerting leverage against the U.S. and Japan, the north's WMD and long-range missile capabilities will not be abandoned but pushed at all cost.[\[25\]](#)

Already the world's most hardened potential belligerent with hundreds of miles of underground tunnels and facilities, North Korea will continue sub-surface construction.

For all options except attack, the north will emphasize enhancement of its international image through diplomacy and propaganda and normalization of relations with its great enemies, the U.S. and Japan, to maintain a flow of assistance from the former and maximum reparations from the latter.

With regard to the "soft landing" option, it would seem that priority to the military and denigration of the ROK as lacking legitimacy would not fit very well, but these are fundamental KFR tenets and consideration of the regime's track record to date suggests they could not be abandoned, all of which underscores the point that, in the end, "soft landing" will likely prove to be an illusion.

In pursuing its aid-based survival strategy, Pyongyang has an assortment of carrots and sticks at *its* disposal. Carrots could be such measures as greater transparency of WMD and missile development, greater site access, site destruction, suspension of testing and deployment, initiation of confidence-building measures, amelioration of propaganda attacks, formal negotiations with the ROK, and a suspension of kidnappings, assassinations, and infiltrations. Sticks could include abrogation or threats to abrogate the 1994 U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework,

provocations along the DMZ, coastal infiltrations, missile sales, further missile testing, and suspension or threats to suspend various channels of dialogue with the U.S., Japan, and the ROK. It seems reasonable to believe, however, that so long as the Pyongyang regime aims at encouraging donations from the outside world, primarily the U.S. and the ROK, its field of maneuver will be confined between, on the lower end, a level of threat needed to motivate donations and, on the higher end, a level of provocation that would cause a suspension of donations.

V. The Significance of WMD and Missiles

The Pyongyang regime appears to consider its WMD and long-range missiles as fundamental to survival and too important to give up. Four points would seem to be clear.

First, these capabilities enable the regime to bargain and blackmail for what it needs rather than having to beg.

Second, while WMD and missile programs are important in this regard, it would be a mistake to imagine that is all they are, and to underestimate the importance attached to the programs per se and the regime's determination to pursue them. Such programs do not spring into existence overnight. Recruitment of nuclear specialists began in the 1950s. North Korea began assigning specialists to Yongbyon in the 1960s.[\[26\]](#) All of this occurred long before North Korea had cause to anticipate economic failure or the need for a negotiating "card" to cope with the consequences of such failure.

Third, WMD and long-range missiles appear integral to Kim Jong Il's notion of making North Korea a "*great and powerful state*." Simply, he thinks great powers have such capabilities while weak states do not. In this respect, he will almost certainly

consider these capabilities central to his own historic mission and, therefore to his notion of his own identity. He and his regime have always been bent on achieving these capabilities. It will hardly be easy to force them to "revert" to a posture that strips them of these capabilities, a posture that has never been theirs.

Fourth, these capabilities should be seen against the background of what has been happening all across Asia, from Syria and Israel, to the subcontinent, to China, and to North Korea itself, as second- and third-tier states develop asymmetric counters to western conventional military superiority. All of this is cogently captured in Paul Bracken's *Fire in the East*, in which he argues that as we transition not into the post-cold war era but into the post-Vasco da Gama era, Asian states are for the first time in five hundred years developing capabilities that will enable them to strike back at western states which try to impose their will by state-of-the-art military technology.[\[27\]](#)

These new capabilities will enable North Korea, among others, to hit our bases in the Pacific and, ultimately to strike at the homeland, raising the costs and hazards of our interference to dictate outcomes of our choosing far from home. As Bracken points out, Asian states are pursuing these new weapons, especially enhanced missile range and accuracy, not just to create random mass destruction, but rather to exert leverage, by force and threats of force, toward specific political objectives. If one asks what Pyongyang's specific political objective is vis-à-vis the U.S., the answer is not long in coming. They have been telling us week in and week out for decades about the need to get USFK off the Korean peninsula.

Finally, it may be instructive to remember that, whether the policy was called "equal emphasis," "military first," the "importance of guns," or "great and powerful state," North Korea under the Kims has from the beginning placed a high priority on maximizing its military power. Therefore,

in trying to force them to abandon their WMD and missiles, we are very likely trying to make them revert to something they never were.

Currently, it appears evident that the regime is pursuing its aid-based survival strategy along with efforts to subvert the ROK while maintaining and improving its ability to attack. Reconciliation, reform, and opening appear to have been rejected, although Pyongyang is prepared to simulate these options from time to time when doing so will facilitate donations from outside. It is sometimes argued that this rejection is irrational. It might, however, be more realistic to see this rejection not as a case of irrationality but rather as a case of a rational mind operating in a highly abnormal environment, one in which the divided country scenario, an extreme ideology ill suited to economic success, and a track record of hostility to the south have caught Pyongyang's leaders in a trap, one nonetheless confining even if of their own

making, depriving them of the normal options of a normal state with leaders driven by a normal goal orientation. Herein lies the tragic dilemma of North Korea's existence. What is medicine for the populace is poison to the regime, and the interests of rulers and ruled are as opposed as in any ancient despotism.

VI. Why We Don't Get It

All the foregoing is not profound. It should not be difficult to grasp the abnormality and incapacity of the KFR. Why, then, do so many smart people miss it? We can conjure up at least six reasons.

First, most of our experience is with normal states, and it is natural to think that the normal tools of diplomacy and international intercourse will be effective.

Second, we tend to miss the code words even when Pyongyang provides the code, dismissing the KFR's statements of its goals

as propaganda. One example: The 1948 Korean Workers' Party (KWP) Rules state that "the KWP struggles for the liberation of the southern half of our country from American imperialist aggressive forces and internal reactionary rule and for the attainment of the complete unification of the country on a democratic basis by firmly uniting the broad masses of North and South around itself...." [\[28\]](#) This is straightforward enough, but some seem inclined to think it no longer applies simply because it was enunciated a half century ago. Another example: In the 4 July 1972 joint north-south declaration, the two sides pledged efforts for independent and peaceful unification in accord with great national unity, yet by 15 July 1972 North Korean media were again proclaiming that all Korea would be united under Kim Il Sung. More important, Kim Il Sung himself, in interviews later that summer with Japan's daily *Mainichi Shimbun* and monthly magazine *Sekai* and in North Korean publications, explained the meaning of these

terms. "Independent" meant "to force the United States imperialists out of South Korea"; "peaceful" meant the reduction of armed forces and halt of military modernization in the south; and "great national unity" meant freedom for pro-North Korean subversive and revolutionary groups to operate in the ROK.[\[29\]](#) We should not think it inconsequential that North Korean negotiators insisted on the inclusion of this terminology in the agenda for the June 2000 summit, as each term represents a pivotal site in the struggle for dominance between two rival regimes of truth.

Third, although Korean issues seldom exhibit convolute, Byzantine patterns, there is frequently a measure of garbage strewn over the surface that makes it hard to look down and see the basic simplicity. In this case, we have strewn some of the garbage ourselves by unrealistic predictions and by formulations which do not distinguish between country interests and regime interests.

Fourth, there is a kind of policymaking trap in that while it is only natural for policymakers to conceptualize the object of policy in a manner that affords some hope of policy success, this can pull us off target analytically.

Fifth, we have tended to accept the popular notion that "globalization"

-- i.e., increased trade, the spread of technology, and the movement of ideas and people across national frontiers -- would create prosperity and a sense of common interest that would ameliorate international tensions and hostile confrontation. This principle did not work in 1914 despite active trade between Britain and Germany and the German fondness for Shakespeare. It seems particularly unsound to expect it to work in the Korean case.

Sixth, a serious appreciation of the North Korean political culture and regime intentions would tend to throw cold water on some of the hopeful expectations prevailing

in Seoul and Washington.

VII. NPEC's Questions Considered

1. What is the abiding context of U.S. strategy that any current strategy must comport with, and what major assumptions underlie and thus condition our strategic thinking about the future?

- North Korea expects the U.S. will remain the global superpower in the near to mid-term.
- North Korea's force dispositions indicate its top leadership does not expect the U.S. to launch a preemptive attack on the north.
- North Korea's leadership does expect the U.S. to defend the ROK if North Korea attacks, and entertains the possibility that the U.S. will use nuclear weapons if needed.
- U.S. aversion to high casualties appears to be considered a vulnerability to be

exploited.

- North Korea probably believes the U.S. must protect Taiwan but will try to influence the China-Taiwan rivalry so as to avoid war with China.

2. What is the evolving nature of the global strategic environment? What alternative futures are possible over the next 15-20 years?

North Korea will see the following trends:

- Pressure for the reduction and, eventually, withdrawal of USFK will increase in both the U.S. and the ROK.

- U.S. and western influence in Asia will weaken due to a lack of resolve and an increase in the military strength of China and other Asian states.

- Development of WMD and long-range missiles in Asia is the critical factor for

change in the strategic balance and will continue.

- Hi-tech terrorism will increase, as will U.S. vulnerability.

- Development of information warfare will continue.

- Chinese support for North Korea could remain as at present or weaken.

- Russia could push for a higher profile role in the Northwest Pacific in concert with China or independently.

- Japan could stay in partnership with the U.S. or could take a more independent path.

- Japan could become a nuclear power.

- War between China and the U.S. over Taiwan is possible and could be exploited by North Korea.

- Significant improvement in U.S.-Chinese relations is possible.

- Improvement in ROK-Chinese relations is possible.
- ROK economic superiority over North Korea is increasing.
- North Korea is becoming increasingly dependent on outside (U.S. and ROK) assistance.
- Korea could be united under either North Korea or ROK control.
- Attack could become the only viable option for North Korea under the Kim regime.
- The KFR could collapse.

3. Which alternatives do we prefer? Which do we wish to avoid?

- North Korea's leaders believe the U.S. will try to maintain and increase its influence in Northeast Asia.

- They believe the U.S. prefers the status quo on the peninsula, but will opt for ROK control of all of Korea if this can be realized at an acceptable cost.
- North Korea prefers a U.S. withdrawal from the region.
- North Korea prefers to gain control of all of Korea through a ROK collapse or war.
- North Korea prefers hostile relations between China and the U.S.
- North Korea prefers hostile U.S.-Russian relations.
- North Korea prefers a breakup of the hostile combination of the U.S., the ROK, and Japan.
- North Korea prefers hostile relations between Japan and China.
- North Korea prefers worsening ROK relations with the three major regional powers and breakup of the ROK-U.S.

alliance.

- North Korea (the KFR) must avoid any circumstance, or combination of circumstances, which could lead to loss of internal control and eventual ROK domination of the peninsula.

4. Who are our current and likely future competitors? Who are key third parties?

- North Korea sees the U.S., the ROK, and Japan as its competitors.

- China remains the key third party.

-- China shares the U.S. interest in preventing proliferation of WMD and long-range missiles on the peninsula, fearing that if unchecked, this trend could lead to nuclear weapons development in Japan and Theater Missile Defense (TMD).

-- China no longer endorses North Korea's ideological claim to the entire

peninsula.

-- China sees the ROK as an important trading partner and investor.

-- China sees hostilities on the peninsula as damaging to its economy.

-- But China prefers to keep a friendly buffer state on its border and sees a unified Korea allied with the U.S. as a potential threat.

-- China is uncomfortable with U.S. "hegemony" in the world and the Pacific region, but China is by no means unmindful of the advantages of stable relations with the U.S.

-- China probably expects the KFR to collapse at some point due to the mistakes of North Korea's leaders, but prefers that this occur later rather than sooner.

- With regard to North Korea-China relations, the question that has preoccupied many is whether Beijing can induce

Pyongyang to follow the Chinese model of opening up. There has been increased speculation on this question in view of Kim Jong Il's favorable comments on the Chinese model during his recent trip to Beijing. While Chinese support for North Korea appears unconditional, key Chinese officials have been saying for some time that outside observers tend to overestimate Chinese knowledge of, and ability to influence, actual conditions in the north. In any case, the following considerations appear relevant.

-- North Korea is not a huge country with thousands of years experience in managing conflict and disparity.

-- Unlike China, North Korea does not have a large agrarian base, which can be exploited to power the recovery of its industrial sector.

-- We have seen no sign in Pyongyang of the kind of policy debate that preceded policy change in China.

-- Kim Jong Il has long known that the North Korean economy doesn't work. If he has not tried to change it, we can reasonably presume it's because he is aware of the concomitant political dangers.[\[30\]](#)

-- Unlike the Communist regimes in power in China and Vietnam, Kim Jong Il and his comrades have yet to win their war of national unification and do not have the same margin for experiment. Pyongyang faces a much greater threat from Seoul than Beijing faces from Taipei.

- Russia is also a key third party and could become a significant supporter of North Korea, but this seems less likely than for China. The following generalizations appear safe.

-- Russia values its economic relationship with the ROK.

-- Russia is unhappy with the U.S. as sole superpower and would like to find a way to assert itself in the Pacific region.

-- But Russia faces westward and, unlike China, sees the Korean peninsula as thousands of miles from its vital centers of power.

- North Korea sees Russia, and even China, largely as lost allies. China, however, is an important source of economic help, and both are occasional suppliers of weapons. Pyongyang would not expect military support from either except in the case of hostilities between China and the U.S. over Taiwan.

- Russian President Putin's recent visit to Pyongyang in mid-July 2000 after talks with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Beijing appears to be part of an effort to recover Russian influence and counter U.S. dominance in the region. Russia was seen as a marginal player in the region when the peninsula reemerged as a major issue in Northeast Asia. Moscow was completely excluded in negotiations on Pyongyang's nuclear development and the four-way talks

on the peninsula. The 11-point communiqué issued by Putin and Kim Jong Il at the end of their talks 20 July appealed to the international community to oppose the U.S. plan to build an anti-missile system. If this effort is to succeed, however, Putin needs to find a way to resolve the problem of North Korea's missile development program.

According to Russian media, Kim Jong Il told Putin that North Korea will stop its missile development program if other nations provide the north with rocket boosters for space exploration.[\[31\]](#)

However, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen has expressed doubt that North Korea would abandon its ballistic missile projects in return for access to a third country's rocket programs for "space research" purposes. Cohen and Pentagon officials point out that during U.S.-North Korea talks in Kuala Lumpur in July 2000, Pyongyang's negotiators reiterated the north's intention to develop long-range ballistic missiles. "Our missile policy is to develop, to produce, and to deploy powerful missiles continuously,"

Pyongyang's top negotiator said, according to Cohen. [\[32\]](#)

5. What are our competitors' and key third parties' goals and their strategies for achieving them?

- The primary goal of North Korea (the KFR) is survival, i.e., to avoid loss of control over the piece of territory that has been theirs for more than a half century. For the time being, this can be interpreted as maintenance of the status quo, but for reasons already explained, it is unlikely this can be a long-term solution if it is decoupled from total peninsular dominance. Without control of the whole peninsula, North Korea will become increasingly dependent on the ROK with increased risk of falling under southern control. To stay alive in the near term, North Korea will selectively engage with the outside world, reaching out to the European Union, and keeping the China connection healthy, as

well as selectively engaging the U.S. and the ROK. This has little to do with opening up North Korea itself but a lot to do with obtaining assistance, allowing selective activity in the north by ROK business groups, and demonstrating to all that Pyongyang has multiple options. For a long-term solution, however, as explained in section V, North Korea must find a way to leverage USFK withdrawal and bring the south under its control.

- The Pyongyang regime has identified "sunshine," or engagement, as a policy designed to induce change in the north. In this respect the policy is seen as a threat, but the economic inducements that come with the policy are an important part of the regime's aid-based survival strategy. Pyongyang will continue to exploit the policy for its economic benefits while resisting the kind of change which could undermine the regime.

6. What is the current state of the competition? What future states are possible, and which do we prefer?

- At present, there is no apparent internal threat to the survival of the KFR. No immediate threat appears likely as long as the regime remains willing to triage the population, as long as substantial donations from the outside continue, and as long as Kim Jong Il remains in control of multiple counterintelligence agencies, whose combined capabilities amount to a world-class internal security posture.[\[33\]](#)

- Currently, the north appears to be succeeding in its efforts to improve its conventional and unconventional military capabilities. In the last 12 months, North Korea has done more to arrest a decline in readiness and improve its conventional military capability than in the last five years combined.[\[34\]](#) Ground and air exercises last winter were the largest in over a decade, and forward deployment has reached an unprecedented extent. The north's special

operations forces, largest in the world, number over 100,000 and are significant force multipliers, providing the capability to simultaneously attack both forward and rear CFC forces. Despite the Agreed Framework and efforts to engage the north in missile talks, North Korea's asymmetric threat is formidable and growing. They continue to produce and deploy long-range Nodong missiles capable of striking bases in Japan. They are also developing multi-stage missiles with the goal of fielding systems capable of striking the continental U.S. They have tested the 2,000-kilometer-range Taepodong-1 and continue working on the 5,000-kilometer-plus Taepodong-2. North Korea possesses a large number of chemical weapons that pose a threat to both our military forces and civilian population centers. USFK J2 assesses that the north is self-sufficient in the production of chemical components for first generation chemical agents. They have produced stockpiles estimated at up to 5,000 metric tons of several types of agents, including nerve,

choking, blister, and blood. North Korea has the capability to develop, produce, and weaponize biological agents, to include bacterial spores causing anthrax and smallpox and bacteria causing plague and cholera. [35] While North Korea has frozen its nuclear weapons program at the Yongbyon plant, and activity at a suspicious facility at Kumchang-ni has been forestalled, nuclear weapons development could well be continuing without our knowledge at underground facilities elsewhere.

- Pyongyang continues an unrelenting propaganda campaign against USFK's presence conducted overtly through official North Korea media and somewhat covertly through unofficial spokesmen, who push the north's agenda.

- While it is the official policy of the alliance that USFK will remain in status quo, the north can be said to have made headway in a several respects. (1) Frictions between USFK and the host society have increased dramatically due to allegations of

a massacre of civilians by U.S. troops at Nogun-ni in 1950, an accident at the bombing range near Maehyang-ni this year, and continuing arguments over the fairness of the Status of Forces Agreement. While it can hardly be said that USFK is blameless in all things, it is nevertheless true that these issues are made to order for North Korean exploitation, as Pyongyang's objectives blend with the nationalistic emotions of young journalists who did not experience the Korean War and the natural inclination of the news media to compete for consumer attention. (2) The idea of removing the "cold war structure" on the peninsula has become a popular cliché in the ROK. North Korean spokesmen are very clear about what this means. Removing the "*cold war structure*" means *getting USFK off the peninsula*.[\[36\]](#) Others who talk about ending the cold war structure are often vague about what they mean, but the formulation seems to carry the connotation that hostility between north and south was caused by the cold war and that if foreign

influence could be removed, reconciliation would somehow follow. From the historical viewpoint, this is an odd argument to make since the ROK actually owes its existence to the cold war.[\[37\]](#) (3) The notion is gaining ground in some circles that the "buyout" of North Korea's WMD must extend beyond the economic dimension into the security dimension, i.e., that if we expect the north to reduce its threat to the south, we must take action to reduce the threat we pose to North Korea.[\[38\]](#)

- How China and Japan will react should it become clear that North Korea has both nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them is problematic. Of the current principal players in the Korean scenario only China can be confident that North Korean missiles will not target them. For obvious reasons, China would presumably prefer that the north not have these capabilities, but there are as yet no indications China will exert the kind of pressure that would be sufficient to actually

prevent their development. Japan, on the other hand, can expect to be targeted. Pyongyang clearly wants to find a way to neutralize UNC bases and staging areas in Japan, and defector Hwang Chang Yop has said the north is planning to "scorch Japan" as a means of doing this. How Japan will react to the threat of being scorched or to actually being scorched remains to be seen. It may be argued that Japan will be cowed initially but then respond by building its own Theater Missile Defense (TMD) or deterrent capabilities. Either way, to be subjected to blackmail by Pyongyang will be a new and traumatic experience for the Japanese, and it is difficult to believe they will be content to remain helpless in the face of such a threat.

- The foregoing trends would seem to indicate that, for the moment, North Korea is gaining ground in the competition, as they have been able to extract increased amounts of assistance from outside while improving both their conventional and asymmetric

military capabilities and carrying on their public relations campaign against USFK. While these trends seem to indicate that, absent KFR collapse, North Korea will be an even more menacing opponent a few years hence, they do not seem to point the way to escape from the KFR's long-term strategic dilemma. From Pyongyang's point of view, there are still questions that do not have easy answers. How long can effective population control be maintained in the absence of economic recovery? Will economic recovery actually ease the problem of population control or will it only create new difficulties? Can Pyongyang continue to extract donations should it become clear that donations have not been an effective means of curbing weapons development or ameliorating Pyongyang's hostility to Seoul?

7. What major problems, enduring weaknesses, and other constraints face our competitor(s)? What are their strengths?

- It will be difficult for North Korea to maintain military opacity in the face of combined U.S.-ROK-Japanese intelligence capabilities. These combined capabilities can't ferret out everything, but they can divine enough to enable conclusions on three key questions: whether Pyongyang's hostility to Seoul has really eased, whether North Korea deployments are basically offensive or defensive, and whether North Korea is abandoning the WMD option or pursuing it.[\[39\]](#)

- Similarly, the KFR will find it difficult to both maintain and hide its hostile political posture towards Seoul. The government in Seoul may, of course, elect to ignore this and allow the general public to remain for the most part undisturbed in their current threat denial mode.

- The KFR aid-based survival strategy means continuing and very likely increasing dependence on archenemies, the U.S., the ROK, and Japan.

- Breakdown of the economy and official distribution system engenders weakening of population control in regard to movement, economic activity, lifestyle, morale, and crime and corruption.
- The regime increasingly fears ideological contamination through an influx of Christianity, capitalism, and ROK and Chinese popular culture.
- The most enduring, fundamental, and perhaps incurable weakness is that, as discussed in section III of this paper, North Korea cannot undertake the measures necessary to revitalize its economy and reinvigorate its society without instituting changes that would deny the fundamental tenets of the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il system with consequences ultimately fatal to the regime. This basic contradiction applies not only to the economy, but also to modernizing the entire social mindset, and in consequence North Korea under the KFR seems fated to remain multi-dimensionally out of sync with the world at large. To the

extent this defect can be remedied for North Korea objectively as a country, the regime will be increasingly threatened. This weakness may not matter very much if Kim Jong Il should decide on a military roll of the dice. Otherwise it is hard to see how he can get rid of this haunting specter.

- KFR strengths are the opposite face of their weaknesses. Information control and ideological indoctrination have up to now enabled the KFR to keep the population marching in the desired direction and, for the most part, resigned to the deprivations imposed upon them. The control systems in place obviate political or factional opposition and give the regime virtually total tactical flexibility even as strategic and philosophical flexibility are denied.[\[40\]](#)

Priority to the military option, almost to the point that there is no other option, has enabled the regime to maintain and improve its impressive military posture. Ironically, this very contradiction works to the advantage of the KFR in two respects. First,

it is the worrisome imbalance between the north's economic failure and menacing military posture which motivates donations from the outside world out of fear of the "cornered rat" scenario. Second, in spite of this, it is difficult for many to believe that a country with a ruined economy can still field a threatening military force. Hence the contradiction that the north's military capabilities are at once feared and underestimated.

8. In any and all cases, what are our time-phased goals for the competition -- both overall and supporting?

- Pyongyang describes our goals as establishing and maintaining world and regional hegemony and stifling the socialist way of life in the north. The overall KFR goal is still to dominate the entire peninsula, as that is the only way to secure the future of the regime. KFR supporting goals will be first, to negate U.S. goals, primarily by

keeping their economy afloat by using their WMD/missile threat to extract assistance from the outside world. Second, they will try to leverage USFK off the peninsula by threatening UNC bases in Japan and by turning ROK public opinion against USFK and effectively splitting the alliance.

9. What are our areas of advantage or leverage, including our enduring strengths relative to the challenge(s) that competition poses? What are our limitations or weaknesses?

- Pyongyang sees the U.S. as having the following advantages:
 - Rapid force projection capabilities
 - Air and sea dominance
 - Superior intelligence and battlefield surveillance
 - Nuclear weapons

- Pyongyang will also see weaknesses, which in some cases are the opposite face of our strengths. As the only superpower, the U.S. has unrivaled capabilities, but also unrivaled obligations. Pyongyang will watch for signs the U.S. is stretched too thin, too heavily engaged elsewhere, or politically fatigued and growing weary of its burdens. Knowing our aversion to casualties, the north will launch operations designed to maximize U.S. losses at the outset of hostilities. Pyongyang believes ROK and U.S. personnel will not be able to match the fighting spirit of their own Korean People's Army (KPA) soldiers.

- Pyongyang sees the ROK as having the following advantages:

- Vastly superior economic strength
- A larger and healthier population
- A superpower ally

- Pyongyang will also see weaknesses

-- A fragile, aboveground infrastructure vulnerable to artillery and missile attack

-- A weak and fractious body politic lacking consensus on national security issues

-- Ideological confusion

-- Vulnerability to chemical and biological warfare

The KFR will see their own advantages as spiritual -- absolute loyalty to the leader, unity, discipline, and ideological firmness -- and material -- a strong military, both conventional and unconventional, featuring mass, shock, and relatively unsophisticated but reliable weapon systems.

10. What basic capacities or core competencies do we need to develop, sustain, adapt, protect, and plan to leverage?

- North Korea needs to sustain, protect, and continue to leverage:

-- Conventional and unconventional military strength

-- WMD and long-range missiles

-- Information control

--- Controls on permissiveness and liberalism

--- A firewall against contamination in the form of Christianity, capitalist ideas, and ROK popular culture

- For any serious effort to undertake economic reform and engagement with the international economy, North Korea will need to develop:

-- Understanding of how the capitalist, market system works

-- Entrepreneurial skills

-- A credible legal infrastructure

- A stable foreign exchange
- Financial and banking expertise
- An internal information system and access to the Internet

Achieving these capacities will be both difficult and politically hazardous, as they will open the system to contamination and entail a measure of autonomy that conflicts with the KFR political culture.

- The ROK needs to develop:
 - More ground power
 - Better protection against chemical and biological agents
 - A better grasp of the nature of the KFR and its intentions toward the ROK
 - A more realistic educational approach to Korean history in the 20th century
 - More attention to alliance

management and the need to defend both the alliance and the ROK democratic system against internal enemies

- More basic science and R&D
- Corporate and banking reform

11. What strategies can we employ that will permit us to influence -- or even dominate -- key competitions and future trends and events? How will the KFR react to strategies designed to move it in a direction which would seem to run counter to the core values of the regime?

- The answer to this question is far from simple and perceptions of the right answer will vary depending on whether one advocates an aggressive policy or a concessionary or "engagement" policy toward North Korea's WMD and the KFR itself. If one believes that concessions in the form of economic assistance and diplomatic recognition will induce the KFR to

ameliorate its hostility to the ROK, undertake reform and opening, and abandon its reliance on WMD and conventional military strength, it would be a reasonable strategy to sustain the regime in such a manner as to render it increasingly dependent on assistance from the U.S. and key third parties, ultimately giving the U.S. sufficient leverage to dominate the relationship. If, on the other hand, one believes that such a policy will not induce the regime to abandon either its hostility or its menacing array of conventional and asymmetric weapons, the case for economic engagement is much weaker. In such a case, one could still argue for engagement, but the argument will focus more on the aim of preventing war than on any expectation of dominating the relationship. If one believes that no amount of economic assistance or engagement will cause the KFR to abandon its zero-sum view of the north-south confrontation or to abandon its priority to the military, to include WMD, the residual argument for engagement would be that it

will in time contaminate, subvert, and destroy the KFR. While the current ROK administration describes its policy toward the north as the "separation of economics and politics," it is interesting that, as Nicholas Eberstadt has pointed out, South Korean and western proponents of increased commercial ties between the south and the north argue that the process will have an ameliorating effect on Pyongyang's internal decision making, bringing about a kind of rapprochement through trade along the lines of West Germany's policy of change through rapprochement, or "Wandel durch Anaehderung."[\[41\]](#) Eberstadt goes on to provide experiential evidence that, contrary to common belief, commercial ties with, and even subsidies from, capitalist countries have done little to moderate the national security policies of Communist regimes. The point in any case is that ROK policy is not the separation of economics and politics, but the pursuit of a political goal through economic means. This is all the more apparent when one considers President Kim

Dae Jung's repeated statements about the need for a USFK presence even after unification.[\[42\]](#)

The argument for a more aggressive policy toward the KFR and its WMD is based on the expectation that engagement will neither induce the regime to alter course nor cause it to collapse, but will rather sustain the regime even as it continues to prioritize its military and improve its WMD while continuing to inflict the pain of economic failure on its population. It is argued that the regime would fail if the following sources of sustenance could be interdicted:

- Aid from the U.S.
- Aid from ROK conglomerates
- Cash inflow from Chosen Soren (an association of pro-North Korean residents in Japan)
- Remittances from Koreans in the U.S. and Canada with relatives in North Korea

- Aid from China
- Proceeds from foreign arms sales

Proponents of such a policy also urge the desirability of a more robust military posture in and around Korea to insure that Pyongyang will not see a military option as attractive even as all its other options are running out. With regard to all of the above, policy makers and advisors will have to ask themselves whether their policy recommendations stem from their analysis of the KFR and its likely reactions or vice versa.

For further discussion on Pyongyang's likely courses of action and intention to dominate by missiles and WMD see question 12 and Section VIII.

12. What is the likely range of competitor and third party countermoves? How might Pyongyang respond?

- Consideration of the track record of the KFR and its political culture strongly suggests that no amount of economic cooperation or outright assistance will induce the regime to abandon the core of its belief system. To endorse the rational choice options and ameliorate its hostility to authorities in the south would require North Korea's leaders to abandon what amounts to a national mission and to unsay all they have been saying for more than half a century to justify their own authority, the damage they have inflicted on the south, and the sacrifices they have imposed upon their own population. As all of this would have fatal consequences for the internal viability of their system, it appears likely they will shun this course of action.

- We lack the kind of data necessary to predict how the KFR would react should the U.S. and its allies attempt a full-court press to interdict the flow of sustenance from outside. Some predict this would prompt a North Korean attack. Some predict

Pyongyang would resort to naked blackmail. Some predict increasing loss of population control leading to cracks in the power structure and an end of the regime. No one can be sure.

- An aggressive policy by the U.S. would not appear feasible without the cooperation of key third parties. It would require an end to the ROK engagement or "sunshine" policy, cooperation from Japan and perhaps from China as well. Based on what is now known, China would likely try to make up for North Korean shortfalls due to loss of outside help, but if the KFR should begin to lose its grip, it is uncertain whether Beijing could accurately assess Pyongyang's needs and respond quickly enough to arrest loss of control.

VIII. The USFK Role and Pyongyang's Asymmetric Counter

From time to time Pyongyang accuses

the U.S. of trying to stifle the north. While this may not accurately reflect U.S. intentions, it does reflect the criticality of the USFK role. If, as we have argued in Section III, the only way the KFR can avoid being on the losing side of a zero-sum survival struggle is to gain control of the entire peninsula, and if the only conceivable way they can do that is by force or the threat of force, then USFK sits squarely astride their road to survival. One way or another, virtually every apologist for Pyongyang must sooner or later confront this obstacle. This is what Kim Il Sung meant by "independent" unification in 1972. In his 9 November 1999 NAPSNET piece for the Nautilus Policy Forum, Hwal-Woong Lee, a ROK Foreign Service officer from 1956-71 and more recently a fellow at Korea-2000, a Los Angeles based research council on Korean unification, argues that the Perry Report fails to recognize the long confrontation between the U.S. and North Korea, going back to 1953, when the U.S. fought a war with North Korea with the

intent to obliterate it, and that the north's WMD programs are the inevitable result of North Korea's need to defend itself against USFK. Lee says Pyongyang can't renounce its WMD programs with USFK in the south pointing guns at them. He argues that if the U.S. is serious about peace, it should recognize USFK as a threat to North Korea and eliminate the threat by consenting to a phased withdrawal in return for a total renunciation of WMD programs by Pyongyang. He proposes "a political arrangement for arms reductions and non-aggression pledges by the parties concerned." He does not spell out the implications of his recommendations for ROK national security.[\[43\]](#)

In his November 1999 interview with *Mal*,[\[44\]](#) Pak Yong Su, Vice Director of the Secretariat of the north's Committee for the Unification of the Fatherland, recalled that in February 1999 Pyongyang suggested high-level north-south talks based on three conditions: ending cooperation with foreign

powers for anti-North Korean activities, abolishing the National Security Law, and guaranteeing the unification movement. These are, of course, very close to the 4 July 1972 principles, and in both cases, the first point implies the end of USFK. Pak goes on to say, "We have no choice but to settle with the U.S. the matter of signing a peace treaty and the matter of USFK withdrawal." Pak comments only indirectly about the future of the ROK, observing that a "peace that does not result in unification is impossible." In contrast, the north's leader, Kim Jong Il, speaks bluntly and clearly about the south. An article in the 8 October 1999 *Nodong Sinmun*[\[45\]](#) quotes the "great leader" as saying, "If the U.S. had not occupied south Korea by force, our nation would never have been divided into two. And if the U.S. had not disturbed Korea's unification, we would have achieved national unification a long time ago." The article goes on to explain that the south is a complete U.S. colony and that the incumbent puppet ruling group, which put on the veil of "people," is nothing

but a group of servants for the imperialists. Therefore, the writer argues, "As long as the enemy of unification, such as the puppet ruling bunch, remains in power, the independent unification of our country cannot be expected. This is one of the reasons the U.S. troops that occupied south Korea by force and the colonial fascist 'regime,' which follows them, are cancers that block our people's independent unification." Some find it comforting to regard all this as nothing but propaganda rhetoric. We would suggest that the familiar refrain, as above, about the colonial status of the ROK and the need for USFK withdrawal has been Pyongyang's consistent position for a half century, that it is unalterable doctrine, and that it is well grounded in reality in that the only end-state peninsular condition which would be safe for the Kim regime -- unification under the regime itself -- is indeed blocked by USFK's presence, as it defies the imagination how such an end state could be achieved except by force or intimidation.

Perhaps the most straightforward presentation of Pyongyang's perception of North Korean-U.S. relations and of the regime's vision of the relationship of missiles and WMD to the future of the peninsula can be found in Kim Myong Chol's 22 October 1999 Nautilus Policy Forum piece, "U.S. Will End Up in Shotgun Marriage with North Korea." [\[46\]](#) Kim argues that to improve relations with North Korea, the U.S. must abandon its long-standing support for the ROK, maintaining that the only alternatives are a nuclear arms race or a nuclear war. He notes that with 12 operating nuclear reactors in the ROK, 51 in Japan, and 102 in the U.S. singled out as prime targets, it would take the north's KPA only a few minutes to wipe the whole of South Korea and the entire Japanese archipelago off the world map. Kim argues that the U.S. demand for renunciation of missile programs lacks justification and comes too late, as North Korea has already become a virtual ICBM power with a small fleet of missiles locked on American

targets. He observes that American authorities will have to realize there is no way of evacuating tens of millions of people from Washington, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego before incoming North Korean ICBMs strike. Having outlined the dire consequences of war, Kim argues that American military intervention in the internal affairs of Korea caused the "cold war structure" in that part of East Asia. He says the U.S. must see to it that its "cold war syndromes" are ended and that means dismantling the puppet regime in the south and abrogating all its "anti-Korean laws," including the National Security Law." Lest any should miss his meaning, Kim Myong Chol is absolutely explicit about the fate of the ROK. "It is now time that the ROK prepared itself to leave the stage of history, as its architect and parent, the U.S.A., is taking a series of steps to move toward eventual normalization with the DPRK to end the cold war. The ROK totally lacks any Korean national credentials and

legitimacy, which the DPRK alone enjoys as it was founded by anti-Japanese armed partisans." He closes with a statement in consonance with Kim Jong Il's above and indicative of the North Korean regime's core doctrine: "Whichever started the Korean War, had the American forces not been fully involved, the Korean People's Army might have emancipated the whole of South Korea and achieved territorial unification with minimum bloodshed." Kim undoubtedly exaggerates the North Korea's current capabilities, but, like defector Hwang Chang Yop, he has long served the regime and doubtless knows its mindset. He probably reflects accurately the Kim regime's perception of ends and means and the way Pyongyang's WMD and missile programs relate to their desired end state for the peninsula. He clarifies what Pyongyang means by the end of the "cold war structure" on the peninsula, and this may be no small service in view of the prevailing tendency to use this term carelessly. Finally, he reminds us that North Korea's notion of legitimacy is

grounded in the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle of the 1930s and 1940s. This idea not only justifies the 1950 invasion. It also defines the identity of the leaders of the "guerrilla dynasty." To them, "*One Korea*" has always meant *their* Korea with the KFR *themselves* in charge.

Kim Myong Chol's threatening argument is couched in the context of nuclear weapons. It might be comforting if this were all there were to worry about, since fear of an overwhelming U.S. response might be expected to deter use of such weapons. But as Richard Betts, Director of National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, explains, the new and most troublesome threat of mass destruction would appear to be biological weapons, with nuclear weapons second, and chemicals a distant third. Betts makes three points about the new world of mass destruction. First, such weapons will not represent the technological frontier of warfare but will increasingly be the weapons of the weak, of

states that cannot compete with U.S. conventional superiority. Second, the kind of deterrence and arms control that marked the cold war are not likely to be effective. Third, responses that might most effectively cope with the new threats are not likely to find a warm welcome. In particular, the response that should have highest priority, a serious civil defense program, is one that is apt to be ignored, opposed, or ridiculed, especially as it tends to reduce popular confidence in government reassurances about national security and could have undesirable economic impact as well. The most troubling conclusion for American foreign policy as a whole, however, is that to reduce the danger of attacks against the U.S. it might be necessary to pull back from involvement in some foreign conflicts, as American activism to maintain stability provides the prime motive for such attacks. [47] *Jane's Intelligence Review* notes that experience in World War II and the Iran-Iraq War demonstrates that the political and psychological impact of surface-

to-surface missile attacks far outweigh the physical destruction caused, observing that, "The subtlety behind a missile's ability to exert terror is twofold: firstly, the suddenness or short warning time of an attack presents a sense of helplessness among civilians...and secondly, the anxiety from the ambiguity surrounding the type of missile warhead being delivered." [\[48\]](#)

The threat that biological weapons pose is, of course, in no way mitigated by widespread reluctance to even contemplate their effect or by ignorance. As one expert observes:

"One of the side effects of the closing of the American bio-weapons program was that the United States lost its technical understanding of biological weapons. There has long been a general feeling among American scientists -- it's hard to say how widespread it is -- that biological weapons don't work. They are said to be uncontrollable, liable to infect their users or unworkable in any practical sense.... The

current generation of American molecular biologists has been spared the agony of having created weapons of mass destruction, but, since these biologists haven't built them, or tested them, they don't know much about their real performance characteristics." [\[49\]](#), [\[50\]](#)

IX. The June 2000 North-South Summit

The big question about the mid-June summit is the question we have always had about North Korea at each critical juncture: Is North Korea really changing, or will we get the same old wine in a new bottle? Only time will tell, but in view of Pyongyang's track record and in the absence of compelling evidence, prudence would dictate that our expectations should be kept low. What seems evident already, however, is that the summit contributes to both diminished threat perception and devaluation of USFK, and encourages a set of trends that are developing to Pyongyang's

advantage.

While we do not know for sure why Kim Jong Il agreed to a summit meeting with President Kim Dae Jung, available evidence suggests three principal factors: (1) his increased confidence that his aid-based survival strategy will work, at least in the near term; (2) his perception that he needed assistance badly and that he could get more, and faster from the ROK than from any other source; and (3) his perception that in the Kim Dae Jung administration he would have a compliant partner in that President Kim had already talked about revising the National Security Law, a possible change in the status of USFK, and reunification based on a confederal system, and had referred to Kim Jong Il himself as a person with "a considerable degree of judgment, ability, and knowledge as a leader."[\[51\]](#)

In short, Kim Jong Il may have concluded that forces sympathetic to Communism and to collaboration with North Korea were gaining ground in the

south and that Kim Jong Il was in a position to give them powerful assistance. In any case, the June summit meeting in Pyongyang has added a new dimension to the competition and reinforced some of the trends already identified. In the formal sense, the summit represents a forward step in that, unlike earlier North-South accords in 1972 and 1991, the leaders of the ROK and North Korea in their official capacities signed the June agreement.

What is striking about the earlier agreements, however, is that a reading of each might cause one to wonder why any subsequent agreement covering essentially the same ground should be necessary. This illuminates one worrisome aspect of the recent summit. It is, after all, like past accords, only an agreement in principle, committing each side to little in the way of specifics. One suspects that it may ultimately fit the pattern of earlier agreements, when the first stage was agreement on a set of principles without

specific commitments, the second was disagreement over correct interpretation of the principles, and the third was the breakup of the dialog amid mutual recriminations and Pyongyang's accusations that the ROK had betrayed the spirit of the agreement.

Whether the present case will be an exception due to the north's economic plight remains to be seen. The north's need for assistance would appear to be an important new factor, but it is as yet uncertain whether Kim Jong Il is only after a quick kill prior to anticipated political changes in the U.S. and the ROK, or whether he is prepared to manage over an extended period the balance between the need to obtain outside assistance and the need to maintain regime integrity.[\[52\]](#)

In any case, ROK reaction to the summit has been even more euphoric and unrealistic than the reaction to the widely hailed "breakthroughs" in 1972 and 1991. In spite of repeated cautionary statements by President Kim Dae Jung,[\[53\]](#) many have

simply taken the summit, as portrayed in the media, at face value, and assume that the north and the south are finally on the path to better relations and, ultimately, peaceful unification. This serves to solidify a kind of threat denial mindset already increasingly apparent in the ROK over the past decade.

Uninformed about North Korea's impressive military exercises this year, many southerners wrongly assume that economic failure has enfeebled the north's military to the point that it can no longer pose a threat to the south. Many see the "threat" as little more than a concoction of previous authoritarian regimes. Few are ready to seriously contemplate the horrendous possibility of another war on the peninsula. Most Koreans have no memory of, and little education about, the U.S. role in the Pacific War or the Korean War and tend to see U.S. forces more in terms of criminal jurisdiction and land issues. Finally, the pro-Pyongyang element in the ROK is much better organized and more

effective than most South Koreans realize. This relates especially to ongoing agitation against USFK and to attacks on "conservatives" who take a cautious view of north-south reconciliation and advocate retention of USFK. [\[54\]](#) At this point few Koreans appear to grasp that the anti-USFK campaign is but the early stage of a broader campaign that will ultimately be anti-ROK.

If there is still some uncertainty about Kim Jong Il's intentions, his gains from the summit are readily apparent. (1) Increased economic assistance. How much President Kim Dae Jung may have led Kim Jong Il to expect is unknown, but according to the Ministry of Unification on 6 July, ROK economic aid in the first half of this year totaled 75 billion won (\$67.2 million), up 48% from the same period last year, and 85% of this total was government aid, including 200,000 tons of fertilizer in the April-June period; on 26 July the ROK government announced another 100,000-ton shipment. (2) Rehabilitation of Kim Jong

Il's personal image, as he became an overnight media star in the ROK. (3) Increasing calls for reduction or withdrawal of USFK. (4) Increasing ideological ferment and partisan strife in the ROK.

The campaign against USFK relates to demands for revision of the ROK-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement and to mounting sensitivity to various frictions between the command and the host society, to include crime and environmental issues. It is also an issue that tends to fuse motives and interest groups, i.e., the desire to sell newspapers and TV footage, the nationalistic passions of younger journalists, the prejudices of a xenophobic society with historical reasons for fear and suspicion of foreign influence, and the anti-USFK, anti-ROK objectives of leftists and pro-Pyongyang activists.

Kim Jong Il seems for the moment to have altered his tactical approach to the problem of USFK. In an interview on 30 June with a U.S. based journalist, Kim Jong Il observed that “We have been telling the

USFK to get out all this time, but...the U.S. must first change its own thinking.... The U.S. must itself figure out the USFK problem and make a bold decision that should substantially assist the unification of the Korean people."

As Seoul's Sogang University Prof. Yi Sang U has pointed out, this remark should be seen in the context of an anti-USFK movement in the ROK that has already acquired significant momentum. By restraining his rhetoric, Kim Jong Il, in effect, defends this movement against the charge that it serves Pyongyang's cause. Rather than trying to pressure USFK out, he seeks to let the playing field tilt so that USFK may simply fall off.[\[55\]](#) While North Korean media have stopped their attacks on the ROK Government, they have continued harsh attacks against what they call "anti-unification" elements in the south, especially former President Kim Yong Sam, opposition Grand National Party head Yi Hoe Chang, and the Choson Ilbo, which appear aimed at

taming conservative forces in the south. These attacks have sparked tense political disputes in the ROK, with the opposition accusing the Kim Dae Jung administration of being overly meek in response to Pyongyang's attacks. [\[56\]](#)

Conservatives also complain that in the rush toward engagement with the north, the accomplishments of an anti-Communist ROK over the past half-century are now being cavalierly dismissed even as progressives argue that preoccupation with what they call "cold war" divisions will impede north-south reconciliation. While the charge by one opposition legislator that there are pro-North Korean figures in the Blue House may not represent a consensus even among conservatives at this point, conservatives are increasingly voicing suspicion that important information about North Korea and north-south relations is being withheld, and that protecting the security of the ROK may not be getting its rightful priority. As all sides see these

issues closely bound up with the critical question of who controls the country after the 2002 ROK presidential election, the ferment and strife are not likely to subside.

X. The Policy Dilemmas

For a realistic hope of fundamental policy change in Pyongyang it would seem that one must have either a plan to induce change in the KFR, which seems rather close to a political mission impossible, or a plan to force the KFR off stage, which doesn't look very easy either. Failing either of these, it would seem that we must take down the expectation of change as the central case for policymaking. Whatever inducements we may provide, the reality is that when we talk about fundamental change in North Korea, i.e., reform and opening on a significant scale, we are talking about undermining the regime. We don't always seem to understand this, but Kim Jong Il does. [\[57\]](#)

Since the nuclear issue emerged, we have tried by a number of means, such as the Agreed Framework, KEDO, [58] food aid, the four-party talks, missile talks, and the offer of normalized relations, to induce positive changes in North Korea. Despite the freezing of activity at Yongbyon and very limited north-south economic cooperation, it seems quite clear that the KFR remains all too aware that opening and reform will deal it a fatal blow. The reality seems to be that (1) despite external aid, the KFR can't fix the economy without reform and can't do reform without undermining the system; (2) the KFR will not bargain away its asymmetric advantages because they are fundamental to regime survival; (3) as the problem is one of substance, it will not likely be fixable by any new and imaginative structural devices; and (4) the so-called "rational choice," or "soft landing," idea is more of an evaporating hope than a viable policy.

The characteristics of what we may call

the "post-soft landing delusion" phase would seem to reveal Pyongyang's dilemma: (1) the more time passes, the more limited are the KFR's strategic options; (2) with reform and opening ruled out, the regime has no choice but to seek aid from the ROK, the U.S., Japan, and Europe, but even if it can tolerate dependence on its arch enemies in this manner, the more aid it takes, the less it will be able to cope on its own with its internal contradictions, so that preserving the status quo in this manner does nothing to dispel the specter of failure; and (3) in the meantime, the north's asymmetric weapons programs will continue.

The dilemma this poses for us is that while decisive action to force the north to give up its WMD and missiles could lead to increased risk of war, or at least the perception of increased risk, inaction could mean that in a few years we could face an equally hostile enemy with even more menacing capabilities.

While it is arguable that engagement

provides the right environment for ROK economic recovery and buys time, the question is, *time for whom and for what?* If our policy is to offer rewards to North Korea in the hope of encouraging reform, abandonment of WMD, and N-S reconciliation, it would seem to have no prospect of success. There is nothing else wrong with it. It is certainly morally well grounded, but there seems little reason to believe that we can tame this tiger into a kitten by stroking it.

If, on the other hand, the objective is to preserve the status quo, the problem is that the status quo looks inherently unstable, as it means (1) continuing KFR hostility to the ROK even if the north accepts southern assistance, (2) bigger and better missiles and more WMD, (3) increasing North Korean dependence on outside aid, and (4) the danger that aid could be suspended at any point due to provocation by the north or due to a shift in the political power balance in one or more of the donor countries. This,

it may be argued, is not movement toward resolution but rather a process of raising the stakes all around the table.[\[59\]](#)

Both Seoul's and Washington's policies have been attacked as grounded on unrealistic assumptions and as superficial demonstrations of problem management rather than actual problem solving. But one gets the impression that even those who criticize do not really grasp the difficulty of the problem -- the depth, intensity, and necessity of KFR hostility to the ROK. The problem is not the inadequacy of the Agreed Framework or the failure of the four-party talks and engagement. Whatever one thinks of these devices, they are not the problem, but only symptoms of the problem.

The conclusion is not necessarily that those who urge diplomacy and engagement are wrong, and those who urge strangulation are right. The conclusion is more basic: (1) that the regime in Pyongyang is locked on a course from which it can't deviate without serious risk of fracture; (2) that the north's

enormous internal contradictions and the anomic forces they may unleash mean that any policy, no matter how well thought out and how carefully crafted, will have only a very limited ability to influence Pyongyang or to provide us with a measure of control over events; and (3) that for better or worse, at some point in the not too distant future we could again transition from incremental history to a moment of convulsive change.

A final word about USFK may be in order. As noted above, Pyongyang frequently accuses us of trying to stifle the north. We don't think that way, and North Korea's force deployments (and defectors' reports) do not indicate that Kim Jong Il expects attack. Nevertheless the combination of an increasingly wealthy ROK backed up by U.S. military power is a threat to the whole Kim family system, because it tends to confine north-south competition to the economic dimension in which the ROK is unquestionably superior. Euphoria in the ROK over the June summit

(there's been little media coverage in the north on the aftermath of the summit) has generated an atmosphere in which both Korean and American publicists could well come to view reduction or withdrawal of USFK as necessary to sustain an unfolding process of reconciliation. It is even conceivable that some will argue that USFK is a barrier to the start of such a process. If this argument dictates events and should USFK be withdrawn, we can imagine two sets of judgments by future historians. If the north-south confrontation should ultimately be resolved by peaceful means, the decision to withdraw will, at worst, be seen as an unwise risk that we nevertheless got away with. If, as seems more likely in view of North Korea's continuing military preparations, a decision to withdraw leads to another disastrous and heart-rending Korean conflict, that decision will stand out as a piece of spectacular folly in hindsight's pitiless gaze.

[1] The names of Korean places and names (except for some such as ROK President Kim Dae Jung, North Korea's Kim Il Sung, and his son Kim Jong Il) are Romanized in accordance with the McCune-Reischauer system, less diacritical marks.

[2] The term "*Kim family regime*" is applied for three reasons. First, many of the regime's elite are related by blood or by marriage. Second, because, as explained in section II, the regime operates much like a crime family. Third, because we have witnessed one "dynastic succession," and there are reports that another is contemplated.

[3] For a recent reaffirmation of this view, see "If we fight against the imperialists, we will live. If we succumb to them we will die," *Nodong Sinmun*, 12 May 2000. The article attributes this insight to "the great leader comrade Kim Jong Il."

[4] *Guerrilla Dynasty*, Adrian Buzo, Westview Press, 1999, p. 241.

[5] *Communism in Korea*, Scalapino and Lee, University of California Press, 1972

[6] *Communism in Korea*, Scalapino and Lee, University of California Press, 1972, p.783

[7] See also *Party-Military Relations in North Korea*, Suck Ho Lee, Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, 1989, especially pp. 231-251.

[8] This point need not draw us deep into the study of myth. In his *Theorizing Myth* (University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 17), Bruce Lincoln makes the

point that, "In *Homer*, *mythos* often denotes what it normally does in *Hesiod*: a blunt and aggressive act of candor, uttered by powerful males in the heat of battle or agonistic assembly." Lincoln cites statistics provided by Richard P. Martin in *The Language of Heroic Speech and Performance in the Iliad*, Cornell University Press, 1989, indicating that 93% of the time "mythos" or the verb "mytheomai" appears in the *Iliad*, the situation is one in which a powerful male either gives orders or makes boasts. In this context "mythos" is always a speech of power, performed at length in public, by one in a position of authority. Normally it forces assent from those addressed, and only those equal in status to the speaker are free to contest a proclamation that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed. Lincoln goes on to make the point that in the epic "mythos" did not mean "symbolic story" or "false story" or anything of the sort. Nevertheless, the comparison with 20th century totalitarian states, which have exploited falsehood on a mass scale, is intriguing. The Swedish philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who died the year Kim Il Sung was installed by the Soviets in Pyongyang, pointed out in his *Myth of the State*, 1946, that in our own great technical age myths are manufactured just like any other weapon, e.g., machine-guns or artillery pieces. This is more like the style of the Pyongyang regime.

[9] Paektu-san, on the North Korean-Chinese border, is the highest mountain in Korea (2,744 meters), and the site where a deity is said to have descended to earth and begotten Korea's mythical founder, Tan'gun. It is thus sacred to Koreans in both north and south.

[10] A recent example was a 19 April 2000 Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) broadcast in English which cited double rainbows in the sky on 14-15 April as proof that Kim Il Sung was a "peerlessly great man born of heaven."

[11] Enunciated by the Athenians when they occupied the island of Mytilene 428-427 B.C. during the Peloponnesian War. A line in a Japanese popular song of the 1880s may be even more to the point: "There is a Law of Nations, it is true, /but when the moment comes, remember, /the strong eat up the weak."
Embracing Defeat, John W. Dower, Norton, p. 21.

[12] Haggard, a practicing barrister in 19th century London, authored sensational books such as *She*, *Dawn*, and *King Solomon's Mines*.

[13] Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, address to troops in Korea's DMZ, 22 February 1997, as released by the office of the State Department spokesman in Seoul.

[14] This does not mean that they will not meet formally with ROK official counterparts, as they did in 1972, 1991-92, and the recent June summit, when they calculate that it is to their advantage to do so. This does not mean a readiness to accept the ideological and moral legitimacy of the ROK. For Pyongyang's view of negotiations as a form of combat see Chuck Downs, *Over the Line: North Korea's Negotiating Strategy*, The AEI Press. See Section IX for further discussion of the June summit

[15] *Time*, 22 May 1995, p.32

[16] This is why we cannot expect Pyongyang to pay much attention to Seoul's assurances that the south has no intent to absorb the north. The threat of absorption does not stem from ROK government intentions any more than absorption in Germany came about because of West German intentions.

[17] Combined Forces Command, the ROK-U.S. war-fighting component established in 1978 and headed by a U.S. four-star general who is directed by the National Command and Military Authorities of the U.S. and ROK. He concurrently commands the United Nations Command (UNC) and United States Forces Korea (USFK).

[18] North Korea's total artillery pieces are estimated at 12,000.

[19] Forward Edge of Battle Area (FEBA), concentric defense lines clearly observable south of the DMZ but not in the north.

[20] The foregoing data derive from an unclassified, Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence J2 (ACofS J2), USFK, North Korea Threat Briefing, May 2000.

[21] See *While We Slept*, Gordon W. Prange, McGraw-Hill, 1981, pp.34-36 and 124-126. In his incredibly detailed account of the Pearl Harbor operation, Prange explains that U.S. leaders went astray through overconfidence in Pearl's defenses and underestimation of Admiral Yamamoto's imagination and will.

[22] Assassination and kidnapping within the ROK are extremely rare, but there are occasional suspicious cases. On the night of 15 February 1997, an unidentified gunman shot Yi Han Yong at the doorway of an apartment where he was staying in Pundang, southern Seoul. Yi died eleven days later. Yi, who defected in 1982, was the nephew of Song Hye Im, mother of Kim Jong Il's oldest son. Yi, whose real name was Yi Il Nam, allowed his defection to be made public only after Song Hye Im and her sister, Yi's mother, reportedly disappeared from their Moscow apartment in early 1996. Yi's killer has not been

found, but it is theorized that he was killed by North Korean agents in retaliation for the Song sisters' case and a critical book Yi had written about Kim Jong Il. While there is no proof, the case has reportedly had an intimidating effect on conservative writers in the ROK who might otherwise publicly criticize Kim Jong Il.

[23] This does not mean that all complaints by southern groups over these issues are directed by Pyongyang, but, justified or not, agitation of this kind contributes to Pyongyang's objectives.

[24] The north will also propagandize for "confederal unification" -- one country, two systems -- but it does not appear that this idea will have credibility or practical application in the predictable future.

[25] This does not mean that North Korea will not make tactical concessions from time to time by slowing or suspending some of its weapons programs, but there is a difference between suspending a program and abandoning it. Moreover, the ability to monitor underground nuclear weapons development and other underground WMD activities from outside North Korea is limited to say the least.

[26] This is what defectors have told us. See, for example, statements by defector Kim Yong Song near the end of Kim Tong Hyon's article, "North Korea Must Go To War," *Monthly Choson*, April 1994.

[27] *Fire in the East, the Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age*, by Paul Bracken, Harper Collins, 1999.

[28] Cited in *Communism in Korea*, Scalapino and Lee,

University of California Press, 1972, Vol. II, p. 1332.

[29] See *Kim Il Sung, the North Korean Leader*, Dae-sook Suh, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 256-257.

[30] See the section "Kim Jong Il, a Hamlet with Doubts" in Cho Kap Che's "The Information War with North Korea," *Monthly Choson*, September 1990, for information on a tape of a conversation with Kim Jong Il brought out by ROK film director Sin Sang Ok when he escaped from North Korean control in 1986. On the tape Kim Jong Il can be heard admitting that in spite of 30 years of socialism, "We're bogged down in our own contradictions" and "can't even feed our people and provide them a living unless we rely on the western world."

[31] See "Putin's Visit to North Korean Brings New Power Paradigm to Peninsula," *Seoul Yonhap in English*, 21 July 2000.)

[32] See "Cohen Doubts North Korean Missile Offer," online Internet at www.usdefense.com, 25 July 2000

[33] We are, of course, cognizant of expectations on the part of some observers that Kim Jong Il will fall victim to a military coup. Suck Ho Lee explains at some length why this does not appear likely. He notes that one can hardly point to a military coup in a Communist country and attributes this to the fact that in Communist countries, the Party is sovereign and the military learn the Party's ideology. In his comparative study of the military in the USSR, China, and North Korea, he finds that in North Korea the military were never abused by the top leader, as in the USSR, and never played an independent political role, as in China, but rather have always stood

squarely and monolithically in support of Kim Il Sung and his son. See Lee pp. 231-251.

[34] Testimony, 7 March 2000, before Senate Armed Services Committee by General Thomas A. Schwartz, Commander in Chief, UNC/CFC/USFK.

[35] ACoFS J2, USFK, Unclassified North Korea Threat Briefing, May 2000.

[36] See for example Kim Myong Chol's 22 October 1999 Nautilus Policy Forum Online piece, "U.S. Will End Up in a Shotgun Marriage with DPRK," in which Kim, former editor of *People's Korea* in Tokyo, argues that to remove the cold war structure means to end or neutralize the American involvement in Korea, including its military presence.

[37] It is interesting that while many call for removal of the "cold war structure" in Korea, the term is seldom defined. Most seem to use it without explanation. To some, the term conjures up recollections that somehow on the flight home from World War II, Korea got caught in a badminton game between the U.S. and the USSR, and ended up devastated and divided as a result of a proxy war between the two superpowers. Historical evidence, however, would suggest that three factors made Korea a part of the cold war. The first was Kim Il Sung's belief that unification by war under his command was essential to his own goal of becoming the leader of a united peninsula. The second was that Stalin came to believe that war in Korea would prevent rapprochement between China and the U.S. The third was Truman's perception that the North Korean invasion in 1950 was part of Stalin's strategy for global domination, and that by intervening in Korea he could prevent a third world war. There is no compelling reason to believe that Truman would have intervened had he not so believed. If we accept recent scholarship indicating

that the Korean War was first and foremost the product of Kim Il Sung's appetite for the ROK rather than the proxy war we imagined for so long, then the "cold war structure" can be seen as the result of a Munich-oriented western response, i.e., intervention to stop aggression in the embryo stage by defending the ROK. Thus it was none other than Kim Il Sung himself who became the great architect of the U.S. military presence in Korea, but this, of course, meant the frustration of his plan to become ruler of "One Korea." Viewed in this way, "cold war" meant defense of the ROK. There is no reason to believe the ROK would exist today if Korea had not become a part of the "cold war." If one believes that this should not have happened, that unification under Kim Il Sung would have been preferable to continued division, and that unification under the current Kim family group is still the preferred option, then ending the "cold war structure" naturally becomes a code word for removing USFK and dismantling the ROK-U.S. alliance so as to realize this objective at long last. When Kim Jong Il and his apologists talk about the "cold war structure," they understand all this. They mean, "get rid of USFK." What others mean is not always so clear.

[38] See for example Joel Wit's "Clinton and North Korea: Past Present, and Future," Nautilus Policy Forum Online, 1 March 2000, in which the author suggests that "the changes the U.S. seeks in North Korea's security posture -- its foregoing weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles and ultimately reductions in its conventional forces -- are only possible if accompanied by changes in the U.S. posture on the peninsula."

[39] It's conceivable, of course, that governments in Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo might prefer not to face up to the implications of their intelligence. So-called intelligence failures are sometimes really failures of will and judgment at the level of government or high command. Two notable instances of this occurred in 1940 when the Belgian government

could not make a decision to allow French forces to enter Belgium even though they believed reports of an impending German attack, and when the French Commander in Chief, General Maurice Gamelin, ignored reports that the Germans had opted to make their main thrust through the Ardennes rather than further north. See *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, William L. Shirer, Simon and Schuster, 1969, chapter 28.

[40] This applies to top level leadership, as exemplified by the abrupt decision to reverse course and join the United Nations when it became apparent China would not use its veto to block ROK admission. It does not, of course, apply to the north's negotiators, who normally must seek instructions from Pyongyang regarding even small details.

[41] See Nicholas Eberstadt's *The End of North Korea*, AEI Press, 1999, p. 71.

[42] President-elect Kim Dae Jung visited the ROK Navy Fleet Command, the ROK Air Force Fighter Command, and CFC on 5 January 1998 to review defense readiness and ROK-U.S. military cooperation. At CFC, according to Yonhap News Agency, Kim said, "U.S. soldiers stationed here not only prevent a war on the Korean peninsula from breaking out but also contribute to the peace and security of Northeast Asia." In addition, next day editions of the *Joongang Ilbo*, p. 2, the *Donga Ilbo*, p. 4, and the *Hankyoreh Sinmun* on line all quote Kim as saying during his CFC visit that "U.S. forces must remain in the ROK even after unification." Two points would seem in order about these comments. First, President Kim would not appear to agree that North Korea is no longer an enemy, as some who advocate scrapping the National Security Law insist, as his statement implies that the north might attack if USFK were not present. Second, Kim seems to presume unification under the ROK, as it is hard to imagine the north's

leaders opting for a USFK presence. This implied presumption, of course, will likely come across to Pyongyang as inconsistent with Kim's assurances that no absorption is intended.

[43] Lee, of course, does not point out that the U.S. war against North Korea stemmed from the north's attack on the ROK. Neither does he subject the two opposite threat perceptions he outlines to the test of history. USFK did not attack the north during the several decades when the north had no WMD capability, but North Korea did attack in 1950 after U.S. forces were withdrawn. Lee glosses over the difficulty of negotiating with North Korea about a reliable arrangement for general arms reduction and verification of WMD dismantling. He also glosses over the practical reality that the north's WMD and conventional capabilities could be quickly and easily reconstituted, while the reintroduction of USFK would be problematic, to say the least.

[44] *Mal* is a monthly magazine founded by dissident journalists and published in Seoul.

[45] The daily official organ of the KWP.

[46] Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is, of course, the north's official name. Except where in a quotation, we have used throughout this paper "North Korea" as synonymous with DPRK.

[47] See "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," Richard K. Betts, *Foreign Affairs*, January-February, 1998. Betts notes that biological weapons are apt to be the weapon of choice because they are easy to get,

like chemicals, but have mass killing power, like nuclear weapons. He cites a 1993 study by the U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment indicating that a single airplane delivering 100 kilograms of anthrax spores by aerosol on a clear night over the Washington, D.C., area could kill between one million and three million people.

[48] See "Ballistic Missile Proliferation and the Geopolitics of Terror," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 December 1998. The article noted that the launch of Pakistan's Ghauri Hatf-V 1,500-km-range SSM in April 1998, Iran's Shahab-3 1,300-km-SSM in July 1998, and North Korea's three-stage Taepodong rocket in August 1998 all pointed to enhanced ability to use force and threats to achieve political goals. *Jane's* also observed that the devastating psychological effect of such weapons is enhanced if the victim is also suffering military reverses, as in the case of Iran.

[49] See "The Bioweaponers," Richard Preston, *The New Yorker*, 9 March 1998, p. 58. Should Kim Jong Il make the big use-or-lose decision with regard to his burdensomely expensive but still powerful military establishment, we might learn a lot more about these performance characteristics than we would like to know.

[50] For an alarming but realistic treatment of "asymmetric warfare" and "catastrophic terrorism," see *The Plague Wars*, Tom Mangold and Jeff Goldberg, St. Martin's Press, 1999. The hugely disruptive impact of biological warfare in the event of renewed hostilities in Korea and the difficulty the intelligence community faces in assessing North Korea's biological weapons capabilities are covered in Chapter 31, pp. 322-334.

[51] See 28 February 2000, interview with *Der Spiegel* cited in an article by Prof. Yang Hung Mo, formerly of Sungkyunkwan University, in Seoul, *Pukhan Magazine*, July 2000, pp. 18-23, *qv.* for an analysis of Kim Jong Il's reasons for agreeing to a summit.

[52] The announcement on 25 July 2000, that Kim Jong Il has approved Hyundai Asan's plan to build an industrial complex in Haeju would suggest that the latter is more likely.

[53] See *The Korea Times*, 20 July 2000, p. 2, for an article reporting that President Kim Dae Jung told the *Los Angeles Times* in an interview published the same date that "I don't think there are too many people who are naïve enough to believe that things will progress relatively easily with the North."

[54] In a July 2000 *Monthly Choson* article, ROK Army Lieutenant General Kim Hui Sang, Superintendent of the ROK National Defense University, notes that, "On a television talk show a while ago in connection with the recent summit meeting, several participants, including a clergyman and a professor, obstinately called for the withdrawal of USFK, an issue that had nothing to do with the theme of the talk show. A professor who objected to their argument was reportedly harassed in his car for about 30 minutes, surrounded by some student demonstrators who were at the talk show as observers." See "Leading Figures Should Step Forward Against Pro-DPRK Instigators," *Monthly Choson*, July 2000, pp. 167-171.

[55] See "Kim Jong Il's Remark on USFK Examined," *Monthly Choson*, August 2000, pp. 62-66.

[56] See "More Subdued North Korean Media Still Capable of Stinging Attacks," *The Korea Herald*, 17 July 2000, p. 2.

[57] We do not, of course, rule out practical changes such as incentives for farmers and a shift in emphasis from corn to potato farming, or a carefully controlled connection to the Internet. We are

talking about *fundamental* changes, such as abandonment of the goal of "liberating" the south, which would impact on the core of the belief system.

[58] The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, established as the management structure to oversee construction of two nuclear power stations in North Korea in accordance with the Agreed Framework.

[59] We are not unmindful of the June 2000 north-south summit, but Pyongyang's need for immediate help in the form of energy, fertilizer, and fuel, and Seoul's need for vindication of its policies, do not, at least at this stage of the game, add up to a convincing case for reconciliation.
