

Kim Jong Il Regime and Its Strategic Framework

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Introduction

Officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), North Korea has been given much attention in the world arena today. Putting aside the President Bush's labeling of North Korea as part of an axis of evil along with Iraq and Iran, the peculiar image projected by North Korea triggers a sense of unsettling enigma. North Korea has long been considered a "rogue" state for its disregard for international norms and its outright hostility, especially towards South Korea. Some call it a hermit kingdom, for its reclusive tendencies and the lack of communication with the outside world. Internally, the country has experienced in the recent years a great famine that cost millions of lives, and yet considerable economic resources continue to be injected into military spending and weapons proliferation projects. In spite of international intervention and humanitarian aids, North Korea's welfare condition has not improved significantly, and the number of refugees crossing the highly controlled boundaries of their totalitarian state is increasing. Considering the given scenario, it is difficult to perceive North Korea's intentions other than the desire to secure its autocratic regime, power for absolute control, and readiness for a second war in the peninsula.

The important question now is: How long can this scenario last? Although rumors of possible collapse has occupied the years of famine in the mid to late 1990s, the current North Korean regime led by Kim Jong Il has demonstrated resilience and has survived both external and internal pressures. The Kim Jong Il regime, which officially emerged in 1994, has been

faced with the skepticism of whether or not it will last following the death of North Korea's "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung, but the regime has so far managed to maintain stability. Regime stability does not, however, relate to domestic stability in North Korea. Faced with severed aids from its old time allies—namely Russia and China —since the end of the Cold War, and the problem of starvation infiltrating even the affluent sectors of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) and the military, Kim Jong Il regime is under an enormous pressure for solutions.

The ongoing food and energy shortages seem to be motivating the North Korean leaders towards *change* in their foreign and domestic policies. There are signs of open and reform policies in the realms of economy and foreign relations as "reaching outward" has become an integral aspect of Kim Jong Il's attempt at solving his problems. Most recently, Kim Jong Il has attempted to normalize relations with Japan, hosting Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang on Sept. 17, 2002—an unprecedented bilateral effort between the two countries since the end of WW II. Kim has also indicated serious interest in capitalism and market economy, in fact, he stunned the world with his decision to create an enclave of unfettered capitalist economy within the city of Shinuiju. While these events highlight some of the reform gestures posed by the North Korean leaders, it doesn't necessarily mean that the Kim Jong Il regime is finally relenting to the international environment that has come far from the Cold War era. Moreover, it does not reflect that the regime's priorities have changed in any way. What is clear is that the Kim Jong Il regime is facing a predicament in which serious challenges demand action for solutions. North Korea has come to a critical juncture—a time for change that will determine the fate of its people in times to come.

In light of the challenges faced by the Kim Jong Il regime, the purpose of this research is to answer the questions: What are Kim Jong Il's choices for actions? What is the strategic framework that determines these choices? What are the prospects for their outcome? The final part of the paper will assess policy implications for the U.S. in light of the findings to these issues.

Methodology: The Strategic-Choice Approach

Methodology applied in this research adheres to the strategic-choice approach introduced by David A. Lake and Robert Powell¹. Two of the salient features of the approach are its synthesis and organizational utility. According to the authors, there are three components in the approach: 1) the unit of analysis (regardless of its level) comprises the strategic problems and interactions; 2) its research design is organized into two distinct categories of actors (consisting of beliefs and preferences) and environment (consisting of action choices and information), which mark the strategic setting; 3) it provides a set of methodological bets for the ways to think about strategic interactions. In emphasizing the purposive aspect of a strategic action, this approach "assumes that actors make purposive choices, that they survey their environment and, to the best of their ability, choose the strategy that best meets their subjectively defined goals."²

One of the puzzling aspects of the Kim Jong Il regime is the notion of irrationality and/or immorality that is often tied to its policymaking behavior. How can Kim Jong Il spend so much money on arms and personal luxury while his people are dying from hunger and sickness? If actors purposively choose the best strategy that meets their subjectively

¹ Lake, David A. and Robert Powell. *Strategic Choice and International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1999.

² Ibid. p. 6-7.

defined goals, it is not hard to justify Kim's actions. As such, Kim's rationale follows his subjective goals, which makes him a rational actor (even if he may be an 'immoral' leader.) Kim's policy making is based *not* on public interests but on his personal interests as a dictator; his decision-making is therefore determined by his subjective goals of regime stability and absolute control. Historically, the North Korean people had not suffered with such degree of severity and hopelessness since the Korean War. While their predicament is a culmination of many factors (i.e. natural disasters, collapse of the Soviet Union, etc.), it proves the regime's lack of priority in improving domestic welfare conditions. Apparently, when resources are low, the regime's foremost priorities dictate the policies.

Then there is the immorality question— how can Kim Jong Il's priority of regime stability over the lives and the welfare of his people be legitimized? To begin with, it may be useful to look at the Korean history and empathize with the experiences of the Korean people. Given its geopolitical location, Korea had to endure numerous invasions from abroad for centuries, thus adopting postures of insecurity, suspicion, and distrust regarding foreigners. Such state of mind generates a powerful desire for a strong government with robust force to deter any hostility from belligerent foreign powers. Historically, such posture was more prevalent in the northern portion of the Korean peninsula than the south. The southern portion of the peninsula was relatively safer, being surrounded by protective seas on all of its three facades, but the north frequently experienced invasions by inland forces such as the Mongols and the ancient Chinese.³ To a certain extent, historical experiences legitimize the Kim Jong Il regime's emphasis on security over welfare. Even today, North Korean people are constantly reminded that they are nothing without its government to

³ Of course, one of Korea's major enemies included the Japanese who had invaded from the eastern seas, but this is a much later event with the advent of battleship technology.

protect them from threats from abroad, especially from the Americans who had “viciously started the Korean War by invading the North,” according to, of course, the North Korean version of the story. Furthermore, since the armistice agreement that had finally halted the atrocities of the Korean War in 1953, there has never been a formal peace treaty between North and South Korea that acknowledges mutual statehood and legitimacy. It had always been Kim Il Sung’s top priority to unify the two Koreas by force, and that priority does not seem to have changed with Kim Jong Il in leadership despite the drastic changes that has occurred globally since the end of the Cold War. As long as Kim Jong Il regime’s top priority is to maintain supreme wartime capabilities, domestic welfare issues will continue to face neglect in times of economic hardship.

In briefly addressing the irrationality and immorality questions concerning Kim’s regime, I argue that the North Korean enigma cannot be explained in simplistic terms, but the analytical framework must entail a combination of history, ideology, culture, and politics for a comprehensive and accurate understanding. I chose the strategic-choice approach in creating such a framework because it provides a micro-foundational framework of strategic interactions. The framework is based on a partial equilibrium perspective, focusing on a “box” of strategic interactions. A limitation of this approach, then, is in the static nature of the content of the box, by ignoring, in the given instance, feedbacks and changes that may change the strategic setting in the long run, potentially altering the outcomes. In spite of this limitation, this approach has been chosen for its organizational strengths, and utility in providing flexible explanations. Because the DPRK’s decision making process is highly centralized, often leading to Kim Jong Il’s sole command, it can be argued that we can afford to ignore peripheral feedbacks that affect decision making process in North Korea as a

whole. Focusing on the perceptions and the intentions of his leadership will better explain and predict outcomes. Hence, the Kim Jong Il regime (as an extension of Kim Jong Il himself) will be the unit of analysis. In the following, legitimacy of Kim Jong Il regime is examined in light of the historical experiences of the Korean people and the impact of Kim Il Sung's cult of personality. I will then highlight a few key beliefs and preferences of Kim's regime, and how they have changed or unchanged given the present context of the international environment. Finally, I will conclude with defining what action choices the regime is likely to pursue and U.S. policy implications in light of the findings.

Kim Jong Il Regime: Legitimacy and Historical Roots

Kim Jong Il assumed leadership when his father Kim Il Sung, the founder and the “Great Leader” of the DPRK, died at the age of 82 in July of 1994. When Kim Il Sung was alive, it seemed as though he could live forever, wielding his dictatorial power for as long as half a century. His death in 1994 was shortly after a profound change in the international system—the end of the Cold War followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In a time of global transition from a bipolar to a multipolar (or arguably unipolar) system, the international community attentively observed the transition within the DPRK for any sign of meaningful transformation. It was no surprise when Kim Jong Il succeeded in leadership, for he had been preparing his way for the historical shift in power for three decades. Shortly thereafter, Kim has been quoted by the North Korean press saying: “Expect no change from me.”⁴ Kim Jong Il prioritized maintaining the status quo, by reinforcing existing North Korean system regardless of the changing environment outside its borders. There was indeed

⁴ FBIS translation of *Nodong Sinmun* titled “Nodong Sinmun Commemorates Kim Chong-il’s WPK Career” in *East Asia*, June 20, 2996. p. 21.

no sign of significant change in the new regime and its despotic ways of governance; the legacy of Kim Il Sung's cult of personality continued, now through the leader's eldest son.

North Korea's hereditary succession characteristically reflects the royal succession legacy of the Chosun dynasty. The Chosun dynasty was the last ruling dynasty of Korea preceding the four decades of Japanese colonization that ended with Japan's defeat in WW II. The significance of the dynastic experience rests on its continuity through the new ruling entity that emerged with national independence. In other words, Koreans had to learn how to rule their own country again—partially from the current models of their patrons⁵ and partially from their historical experiences.

Historically, the Chosun dynasty emerged when a military leader named Yi Song Gye forcefully overthrew the last king of the Koryo dynasty (917~1391) in 1392. Upon making himself the first king of his new dynasty, Yi Song Gye systematically purged the royal family of the Koryo house of Wang and their bloodlines, in order to establish a new royal heritage in his name. The Chosun dynasty lasted for 518 years—with Yi Song Gye and his descendents of twenty-six kings—until Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and began its colonization of 36 years. The concept of royal succession in the Chosun monarchy is hereditary in nature—the king as the sole and absolute ruler decides for his successor, usually his firstborn male child. From the moment of birth, the child is handed over to a group of specialized caregivers throughout his early life in preparation for leadership in the monarchy. At an appropriate time of physical and intellectual maturity, the royal prince is nominated by the king's cabinet members to the title of *seja*, an official name given to a future king.⁶ The inauguration of *seja* is accompanied by elaborate ceremonies and pronouncement to the whole kingdom, thus

⁵ Immediately following the end of WW II, the Soviet Union served the north and the United States, the south part of the Korean Peninsula.

⁶ From the translated version of “*The Future King – Seja*” at <<http://net-in.co.kr/dazzleme/>>

marking a divine recognition of the future king. Once the king dies, his royal seal made of jade (called *ok-sae*) is handed to the queen who now can exercise the authority to appoint *seja* to kingship. It is believed that, according to the Confucian belief system of the period, time officially stops when a king dies, and only by a formal inaugural ceremony at which time *seja* is given the royal seal, time restarts with the birth of a new king.

Korea's historical legacy in hereditary succession helps explain the legitimacy and sustainability of the current North Korean regime. Kim Jong Il officially entered the political scene when he graduated from Kim Il Sung University in 1964 (at age 22) and joined the Department of Organization and Guidance of the Central Committee of the KWP.⁷ While he enjoyed privileges of his "prince" status throughout his life, he began to receive serious recognition equivalent of *seja* in the early 1970s. In 1973, young Kim Jong Il became the director of the Organization and Guidance Department, which is the most powerful bureaucratic position in the party or government.⁸ Henceforth, a cult of personality began to form around Kim Jong Il, which was accompanied by more frequent media coverage on his achievements, creating songs to his loyalty, and hanging of his portrait in public places (i.e. schools, factories, etc.) along with the portrait of his father, Kim Il Sung.⁹ The idea of hereditary succession must have been mutually shared by both Kims from early on. Kim Il Sung made continuous efforts to make the idea accepted by others around him, while Kim Jong Il ambitiously drove himself to power, riding on his father's absolute authority that often extended above the law. For instance, making Kim Jong Il the next ruler entailed revising of the *Dictionary of Political Terminologies*--an official literature that contained

⁷ Suh, Dae-Sook, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1988. p. 284.

⁸ Oh, p. 87

⁹ Buzo, Adrian, *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea*. Boulder: Westview Press. 1999. P. 86.

denunciation of hereditary succession in a socialist state; the particular statement of condemnation was deleted from the dictionary in its 1972 edition.¹⁰

In traditional dynasties, the successor's legitimacy and authority is granted unconditionally by the virtue of his biological relationship to the former king. In the context of 20th century in North Korea, leadership succession is a little more complicated than this. Being Kim Il Sung's son did not automatically make Kim Jong Il his successor, but he had to politically maneuver his position to the top. Initial step towards establishing his legitimacy as successor was to advocate his father's cult of personality. Kim Il Sung's recognition as the "Great Leader" and the revered "Father" of the nation was proportional to the recognition and acceptance of Kim Jong Il as his father's heir. Kim Jong Il was given the title "Dear Leader" to honor his own status, which he held until his father's death.

Given its importance, the nature of Kim's cult of personality needs to be looked at. Kim Il Sung is viewed as a legendary figure in North Korea. His active participation in the independence movement during his guerrilla warfare days against the Japanese had made him a national hero. Once in power, he employed extensive propaganda to convince his people of his greatness, artificially creating charisma and authority to his leadership. Further, he managed to develop and inculcate "paternalistic socialism" into the minds of his people. Paternalistic socialism, where the leader is viewed and respected like a father, inherits its idea from the traditional Korean ideology of Confucianism. Confucianism teaches filial piety as one of the top virtues, explicitly tying one's existence in relation to his father. In other words, one's life is graciously bestowed by his father, which makes the father the giver of life, someone to whom he is forever indebted. When this paternalism is translated in the

¹⁰ Oh, Kongdan & Ralph C. Hassig. *North Korea Through The Looking Glass*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. 2000. p. 87.

socialist context, the ruler becomes the provider of all that people have; the mass exists because the ruler exists, without the ruler, there is no mass. However illogical it may sound, this is the ideological context by which North Koreans abide. Naturally, the notion of paternalism in North Korea is not linked to a father of human scale, but more in terms of divinity. Just as God the Father is the ultimate divine figure in Christianity, Kim Il Sung the father is the revered leader of the North Korean society.

North Koreans were not only convinced of Kim's greatness, but apparently accepted Kim's authority quite religiously. To a normal North Korean adult, Kim Il Sung is the reason for her existence, the object of life long veneration and obedience. North Koreans are routinely exposed to mass media (solely controlled by the government) that served as an instrument of political socialization for the people.¹¹ Newspaper articles and television programs centered on praising Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and songs and films were made to their tribute. Controlling information through mass media was one of the most effective ways of conditioning the mass to be subjected to Kim's cult of personality.

Although Kim Jong Il had succeeded in inheriting the throne, he seemed to have understood that he was not like his father—in terms of popularity or charisma. From the start, he never attempted to imitate his father's leadership style, and he was careful to step into the mold of his late father's leadership. Kim Jong Il did not immediately fill his father position upon his death, in fact, Kim Il Sung's position as the president was left vacant for years and eventually abolished, so as to carry on his legend as the first and the only president of the DPRK.¹² In the following year of Kim's death, Kim Jong Il built a sumptuous

¹¹ Park, Han S., *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2002. pp. 55

¹² Oh, Kongdan & Ralph C. Hassig. *North Korea Through The Looking Glass*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. 2000. P. 90.

mausoleum for his father, preserving his body in the most pristine condition. Hwang Jang Yop, a North Korean defector and former aid to Kim Il Sung, condemned Kim Jong Il, stating that if he had spent one-third less on decorating the palace, he could have fed two million tons of corns to starving people.¹³ Spending a fortune on the building at a time of nationwide food crisis, Kim Jong Il has been viewed as being irrational and merciless toward his people. But his action was not without justifications: After all, Kim Il Sung was the only and the greatest leader the DPRK has ever known, hence preserving his body may be viewed as an appropriate measure for extending venerable sentiments in the interest of the mass. Second, Kim Jong Il may be viewed as demonstrating filial piety in the most grandeur manner—a cultural norm that no one could challenge. Third, and most importantly, advocating Kim Il Sung’s immortality had an important political utility for Kim Jong Il—he needed to carry on his father’s cult of personality for people’s support of his regime. This is precisely what Stalin did when Lenin died exactly 70 years earlier; Lenin’s body was preserved as an attempt to appeal the public mass for the support of Stalin’s legitimacy as the next leader. When Kim Il Sung died, Kim Jong Il’s number one priority was to establish himself as an unchallenged leader and his regime as the mechanism to deliver his plans. To do this, Kim had to promote his father’s cult of personality, which in turn reinforced his uniqueness as the eldest son of the “Great Leader.” This is why Kim Il Sung’s cult of personality still stands formidably today, years after his death. Gigantic portraits and statues of Kim Il Sung continue their prominent presence throughout major cities in North Korea, and even foreigners visiting North Korea are required to show respect and bow before the remnants of Kim’s cult of personality.

¹³ Hwang, Jang Yop. *I Have Seen The Truth of History*. (Translated version of the Korean Title) Seoul: Hanwool. 1999. P. 307.

In sum, Kim Jong Il regime's legitimacy stands on the historical legacy of hereditary succession and the ideological basis in the form of Kim Il Sung's cult of personality. These two elements create a powerful illusion for Kim Jong Il regime to thrive in spite of all too tragic problems faced by the North Korean people.

Beliefs and Preferences: Obsession for Control

With legitimacy intact, the regime's next critical task is to amass power for control. Kim Jong Il had some 30 years to achieve this goal; he assumed powerful positions within the KWP to build power base as he gradually gained recognition as the next leader. Unlike his father whose charisma and popularity naturally extended his power to rule, Kim Jong Il's means for wielding power primarily has been terror. Even before 1994, Kim Jong Il is known for his ways of controlling his subordinates: he punishes his opponents and awards his supporters. His carrot-and-stick style of control has served effectively because it guaranteed swift recognition of his absolute authority. Punishment for anyone who displeased Kim is often the gravest kind, and usually involved punishment of family and relatives of the person charged with fault, according to the testimonies of North Korean defectors in the South. Punishments included exile to coal mining camps, political prisoner's camps, and even execution. It seems that when it comes to punishment there was no distinction in terms of one's rank in the hierarchy; everyone is subject to Kim Jong Il's precarious punishment except the leader himself.

Another component that supports Kim's exercise of power is the highly centralized command system. Absolute control over the system meant that he had to know every little detail within the system, and he required that all reports go through his personal desk for review. His office reportedly receives about 300 different briefs and reports for approval on

a daily basis, which Kim Jong Il goes through one by one.¹⁴ Reports being delivered to Kim follow a strict guideline; they are to be delivered within three days of preparation by officials from the party, the government, and security services, and any urgent reports are delivered by phone.¹⁵ When he is not in his office reading and signing documents, Kim Jong Il is likely to be on an inspection outing. Inspection visits are often surprise visits to various government organizations, especially the military sector. Kim seems to prefer such casual contacts with officials as opposed to formal gatherings and speeches, which contrasts with his father's leadership style.

Despite the regime's internal stability and function, pressure has been amounting in light of the food and energy crises that have enervated the whole state over the last decade under Kim Jong Il's leadership. Knowing all too well what goes on in his own country, Kim Jong Il has to be aware of the dire situation, even if he is lacking in solutions or even genuine concern. Apparently, he seems to be more worried about keeping the population under control and eliminating the possibility of public uprising in demand for food. His initial reaction was to augment and maintain the military dominance throughout the state. The change came at a critical time of a great loss—just after Kim Il Sung's death. Kim Jong Il granted, for instance, higher ranks to military officials than party officials, reversing the traditional ranking. Also, he never assumed the role of the president as noted earlier, instead, in 1998 he re-elected himself as the chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), which naturally became the highest post in leadership.¹⁶

¹⁴ According to Young-Kuk Lee, Kim Jong Il's former body guard. *Korean Sunday Newspaper of Atlanta*, Sept. 28, 2002.

¹⁵ Oh, p. 98.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 106.

The Kim Jong Il regime evidently has a top priority in maintaining a robust military force. North Korea is considered the “fifth largest population under arms” with its armed forces—known collectively as the Korean People's Army (KPA)—totaling about 1.13 million in 1993.¹⁷ The active military structure supported by army, air force, and navy reserves amounted to over 3.8 million; in 1991, defense expenditures estimated 20 to 25 percent of GNP.¹⁸ Keeping and developing a strong military capability does not only serve the purpose of domestic control, but also is a critical aspect of national security. The regime’s obsession with control extends beyond domestic boundaries into the international community in which it prefers to maintain a negotiating leverage. Keeping large military forces and developing more powerful weapons assure that leverage. In 1994, the D.P.R.K. signed the Agreed Framework with the U.S., which committed North Korea to give up its development of nuclear weapons in return for supply of fuel oil and two nuclear reactors that are being pursued by multilateral efforts in the form of Korean Energy Development Organization. This is just one example of multiple concessions granted to North Korea for its disarming efforts. Concessions more often than not come in materialized forms of food and energy to aid the devastating economic situation in North Korea. South Korea’s sunshine policy highlights such concessionary efforts towards disarming North Korea. The South Korean government under President Kim Dae Joong has been committed to the strategy of appeasement which has indicated some success in light of the historical June 2000 Summit in Pyongyang where Kim Jong Il and Kim Dae Jong agreed upon conditions towards peaceful coexistence. President Kim’s sunshine policies, however, has been under much criticism given the lack of progress since the summit. While there have been sporadic efforts

¹⁷ [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kp0010\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kp0010))

¹⁸ Ibid.

towards integration—such as joint ventures (i.e. Mt. Kumkang Resort Project), exchange of families, and railroad project connecting North and South—there has not been real changes in the North Korean military forces towards reduction. The Kim Jong Il regime has not shown any interest in reducing its armed forces despite the concessions he has taken. This seems to confirm that his armed forces have direct ties to his need for control; they also provide the basis for his negotiating power within the international community, which explains and predicts that no matter the extent of the concessions, he will not let go of his security blanket of military capability.

Factors for social control go beyond force, and they are inherently unique to the North Korean society. Socialist states that have emerged out of Communist idealism have tended to share the common practice of strictly controlling their citizens, but no other states can match the level of control in North Korea. A key factor in controlling the mass is linked to shaping their belief system. While the use of force control with terror, the use of ideology control with consent. To this end, North Korea has cultivated a unique belief system called *Juche* ideology. *Juche* is a term for “self-reliance” in Korean; it is an idea endorsed by Kim Il Sung since the early 1950s when nation building effort was at its peak following the end of the Korean War (1950~53). Kim Il Sung had several purposes in devising the ideology. First, *Juche* ideology emerged out of the need to counter Korea’s long history of *sa-dae-ju-ui*—which basically translates into worshipping the powerful. *Sa-dae-ju-ui* is a tendency that grew out of historical experiences in having to deal with more powerful neighboring countries. It ensured Korea’s survival as long as it took the position of pleasing the powerful rather than opposing them. Second, *Juche* ideology was necessitated by the desire to escape the sphere of influence created by neighboring hegemony—namely Russia and China. While

these allies played an important role in the formation of North Korea, Kim Il Sung nevertheless longed for national sovereignty. Third, *Juche* ideology was to empower North Koreans for domestic reestablishment. The ideology was the driving power to increase economic output and to strengthen the military. The notion of self-reliance encouraged people to work harder and longer to build up national strength that was necessary for fending off foreign pressure and interference. *Juche* ideology provided a sense of nationalism and solidarity that people had been yearning for throughout the decades under Japanese rule. Furthermore, the ideology reinforced Kim Il Sung's image as an omnipotent leader. It provided the legitimacy for Kim Il Sung's rule which was embedded not only in Marxist-Leninist tradition but also in Korean nationalism, an idea that was more familiar and readily acceptable by the Korean people.

Evidently, *Juche* ideology initially was an important guiding principle for North Korea's future. However, under Kim Jong Il's regime today, *Juche* appears to be an obsolete ideology. What they had initially envisioned was to realize a *kang-sung-dae-kuk* (powerful and wealthy nation) under Kim Il Sung's leadership along the notion of self-reliance, but that vision has proven to be nothing more than an illusion. North Korea's economy is nowhere near self-reliance; its political leverage, ironically, is dependent on its own weaknesses in that its offensive mode of security imposes danger upon itself. Disillusioned by the prolonged food shortage and disintegration of families from death and sicknesses, the notion of self-reliance is losing its ground among the citizens of the DPRK. Nevertheless, *Juche* ideology continues to serve the ruling principles by which North Korean government carries itself. In 1974, Kim Jong Il announced "Ten Principles" based on *Juche* ideology, which included the military doctrine that assured self-reliance and self-defense against foreign

invasion. In this light, *Juche* ideology is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the state of autarky reinforced by the ideology has removed the country far from today's globalized world. The idea of self-reliance is essentially an isolationist posture; it is embedded in distrust and hostility towards others. This precludes North Koreans to integrate into the more cooperative side of the international community and to benefit from the positive externalities of global economy. It can be surmised that Kim Jong Il regime's perception of the international system does not include the more liberal, cooperative, and sanguine aspect. Despite the end of the Cold War, North Korea continues to suffer from a long history of insecurity, which is worsened by its domestic economic failure. On the other hand, however misleading the idea of self-reliance may be in light of the present global atmosphere, it serves to maintain status quo as opposed to disintegration of the North Korean system. Marxist-Leninism ideology died with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and while the same ideology is now probably less meaningful to the North Korean society than it was 50 years ago, *juche* ideology nevertheless persists to be the mainstream ideology. *Juche* ideology sustains the foundation of institutions and culture, providing a thread of cohesion within the system against the currents of the flow of the international system. In short, the ideology enables the government to maintain its control.

Given the lengthy pursuit of self-reliance over half a century, and that North Korea has not known any other ways to relate to the world, its isolationist posture can be expected to continue in the foreseeable future. The problem of North Korean insecurity will only subside when North Korea is able to perceive the more cooperative and benign international environment, which can only be accomplished through bilateral and multilateral efforts to include North Korea into the global system.

Information about the International Community

North Korea finds itself in a very unique situation since the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union shocked the world in 1991, and the subsequent structural changes have profoundly reshaped the international landscape. The former Soviet Union had been the long time ally and patron of the DPRK since its formation as a nation state. Kim Il Sung and his group of nationalist elites had enthusiastically embraced Communism as the ideological basis for consolidating power upon liberation from Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula in 1945. They shaped their newfound country according to the centralized totalitarian model stemming from the Marxist-Leninist tradition of the Soviet bloc. Despite the disintegration of the Soviet Union at which time the Communist ideologies had been altogether rejected, North Korea continues to maintain its socialist identity today. The collapse of the USSR, however, has generated significant implications for the fate of the DPRK. Why did the Soviet Union collapse? How does that change North Korea's position in the world?

Already in the late 1980s, Gorbachev's "new thinking" was culminating revolutionary changes within the Soviet system. His new political thinking entailed changed perceptions on the international system, which translated into drastically different approach to security and economic issues. Gorbachev's new thinking was essentially liberal; he believed that the security dilemma was a shared problem that could only be resolved through multilateral efforts in the international arena. He identified an interdependent world in which cooperation was the optimal way to ensure peace and stability. Then, how was he able to get there from the traditional socialist perspectives? What was the basis for this significant ideological shift? These questions point to the domestic factors prior to the disintegration of

the Soviet Union. Specifically, the competitive spirit of the Cold War era had encouraged senseless arms race with the West that resulted in a faltering domestic economy. Economic difficulties in turn discouraged the imperialist drive of the Soviet leadership in spreading socialism worldwide; instead, they called for a domestic structural reform in the search for a new direction for the future of Russian people. The Soviets had realized that their capabilities could not keep up with their ideological ambition. Eventually, the Soviet leaders opted to vote themselves out of power, hence ending the long legacy of totalitarianism. Following a decade of tumultuous internal changes, Russia stands today as a fledgling democracy with emphasis in rebuilding and strengthening its domestic economy.

The end of the Cold War also brought about profound changes in China. China continues to maintain its centralized government rooted in socialist principles, but has significantly altered its economy according to the capitalist model. Various industries in China have drastically improved in production efficiency and quality control, and they are pursuing heavy trading with the outside world, especially the United States—its largest exporting country. China has recently joined the World Trade Organization, marking its formal integration into the international economic system. Economic changes in China also have accompanied more open foreign policies. China has actively engaged in bilateral relations with the West including the United States, Japan, and South Korea who were considered its long time enemies in the Cold War context.

Although North Korea's closest neighbors have been undergoing some profound changes, North Korea initially was not markedly responsive to these changes. Only at the turn of the new millennium, North Korea has attempted to initiate change, which has been rather sporadic with little achievement thus far. In January of 2001, Kim Jong Il announced

that he will create a special economic zone in North Korea, following the economic model of Shanghai, China's largest city. The announcement was made just after his sixty long days of visit to Shanghai, where he toured the stock market and a General Motors joint-venture plant making Buick, reportedly praising China's economic reform achievements.¹⁹ Motivated by what he saw in Shanghai, Kim announced, again in September of 2002, specific details about Shinuiju city that was to be operated as an unfettered economic zone in North Korea to be modeled after Shanghai. While Kim Jong Il's witnessing of China's miraculous economic growth motivated him to apply same principles within the North Korean domain, he also made efforts to develop economic ties with Russia. In July of 2001, he visited Russia for an extended period of three weeks to discuss railroad issues with President Putin. Both had mutual interest in building a new Asia-Europe freight route by extending Russia's trans-Siberian railway across the Korean Peninsula to bypass China. Their meeting was followed up in Vladivostok in August of 2002, which was followed by the historical opening of the inter-Korean project to build two railroad transportation corridors through the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. This opening ceremony took place just one day after the widely publicized Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang.

Evidently, Kim Jong Il has exhibited more openness on behalf of his country's economic prospects; nevertheless, his political posture at home as well as in the international arena remains unrelenting. In spite of the flexible gestures towards improved economy, North Koreans continue to suffer from a dysfunctioning economy that has manifested in shortages in food, energy, and basic necessities. Then, how long will it be before Kim Jong Il's sporadic reform efforts bear enough fruits to feed his people? It is hard to imagine that any positive changes will occur without the fundamental changes in the North Korean system

¹⁹ Oberdorfer, Don, *The Two Koreas*. Basic Books: 1997, 2001. p. 441.

including its regime, which Kim Jung Il does not seem to have any plans for. Kim Jung Il is facing similar set of problems that Gorbachev had faced in the 1980s. When Gorbachev came to power, he knew he had to do something about the faltering economy of the Soviet Union. By 1980s, Soviet military spending reached 15-20% of GNP as opposed to the U.S. figure of 5-7%, just to keep up with arms race that was becoming increasingly burdensome. This suggested that Soviets were investing too much on guns and not enough on bread. Economic problems unearthed socio-political and structural problems. Gorbachev realized that the whole system needed an alternative framework, and then devised “new thinking” which embraced liberal internationalism that promoted benign international environment where arms competition was no longer necessary. It was a radical shift in the ideological framework, which was followed by a quick dissolution of the largest Communist bloc of the USSR. Put simply, Gorbachev was determined to reform the domestic economy no matter the cost. The cost came in the loss of national identity, mission, and pride. The North Korean situation is not so different. Decades of tense stand-off between the two Koreas has generated uncompromising Cold War mentality in North Korea, which is being fueled by South Korean-U.S. military cooperation and stationing of 37,000 U.S. troops on South Korean soil. This very fact poses as the DPRK’s main source of threat, which provides justifications for its strengthening of military and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

It is unrealistic to expect that Kim Jong Il could follow Gorbachev’s path in dealing with the domestic economic problems. Although they may have faced similar problems, their social, political, and systemic contexts are too different to expect the same solution. I will not go into details of these differences, but the main difference is that Kim Jong Il

regime is here to stay indefinitely (as opposed to Gorbachev's short term in power) with very interest in absolute power and control over the system. In other words, Kim Jong Il does not have the option to vote himself out of power. How, then, does he deal with the burdens of running a country that is lacking stable economic basis? For now, Kim Jong Il seems to rely on international assistance in amassing resources for his political purposes. Kim is seen as someone who is playing a "poor hand" very skillfully; for every move he makes that could be considered "cooperative," he was given generous concessions. For instance, he has demanded unilateral concessions just to engage in talks with his neighbors. In 1995, South Korea and Japan respectively provided 150,000 and 500,000 tons of rice to North Korea, which made no impact in terms of improving their political agenda regarding North Korea; North Korea simply pocketed the concession without reciprocity.²⁰ North Korean leaders have continued to behave this way—pocketing concessions without living up to their part of the deal—and so far that pattern has not changed. As Scott Snyder puts it, this is a good case of "how weaker states can seemingly enhance their negotiating leverage against stronger states."²¹ However, the question of longevity of this scenario still remains. The U.S., on the other hand, does not seem to be as lenient as South Korea or Japan in dealing with North Korea. Since the advent of the George W. Bush administration that has maintained a hard-line policy toward North Korea, Kim Jong Il regime has not had much success in striking favorable deals and extracting concessions. Moreover, the Bush administration's strong opposition against Iraq's Saddam Hussein's regime seems to have elevated North Korea's insecurity vis-à-vis the U.S. North Korea's recent admission of an on-going nuclear weapons

²⁰ Snyder, Scott, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace. 1999. pp. 79.

²¹ Ibid. pp. 7

program is an indication of such insecurity, and of their desperate attempt to sustain the “North Korean Problem” on the global level.

In sum, the changing international system informs that North Korea’s survival is dependent on its adaptability to both external demands and internal needs. In this regard, Kim Jong Il regime is not as skillful in its domestic reform efforts as it is in extracting foreign concessions. It understands that North Korea holds the key to stability in the Korean Peninsula; it understands that others understand this fact, and tries to exploit the situation by demanding unilateral concessions for bilateral talks. However, North Korea has frequently abandoned to keep promises, which has undermined its credibility and reputation in the international arena. It is uncertain as to how long the Kim Jong Il regime will continue such a precarious behavior or whether the regime will ever change. Perhaps this question can be better examined in light of the available choices for action North Korea has.

Choices for Action

Kim Jong Il regime’s choices for action are based on three primary interests that can be surmised from the above discussion: 1) regime survival; 2) domestic economic revival; 3) and to stay engaged within the international community which is needed for acquiring economic aids and other concessions from abroad. These interests are interrelated and they provide a predictive framework as to how Kim’s regime may behave in the short to mid-term prospects.

Regime Survival

Regime survival is directly linked to Kim Jong Il’s political life or his natural life. It is uncertain whether he will stay as the “Dear Leader” of North Korea until he lies on his deathbed, but given the personal importance of his leadership post, Kim Jong Il can be

expected to follow his father's footsteps and continue to be the nation's dictator as long as he is able. This suggests that Kim's despotic dictatorship will continue to have control over the political, social, economic, and military sectors of the North Korean system for an indefinite period of time. And as long as Kim adheres to *juche* ideology—however obsolete it may seem—that has been the crucial ideological foundation for the DPRK for so long, any significant policy change in these sectors is unlikely, except the economic domain where seemingly more flexibility has been applied. Kim has no incentive to change policies because the current system best guarantees the sustainability of his regime. For the most part, he will continue to strengthen military force for the purposes of domestic control and maintaining leverage in international negotiations. Hence, the on-going nuclear weapons development project, which North Koreans have admitted to recently, is of a serious matter to Kim's regime (as well as to the international community); having the ultimate weapon would ensure the survival of Kim's regime given the deterrent power of the weapon. Upon admitting, North Korea has proposed to conclude a non-aggression treaty with the U.S., stating "if the United States encroaches on the DPRK sovereignty, putting pressure on it to disarm itself, its people's army and people would strongly counter it in a do-or-die spirit."²² The possibility of Kim's use of nuclear weapon should not be precluded in the event where he is faced with having nothing to lose.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Il regime will continue to face amounting pressure from external security issues and domestic economic issues, which, in the long run, could pose a threat to the survival of Kim's regime. The regime survival, in this case, will depend on how quickly Kim is able to improve both domestic situation and North Korea's status in the international system. Will North Korea ever be integrated into the global system via

²² Korean News Service, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/contents/08.htm#5>

peaceful transition? Albeit not impossible, it is difficult to imagine this to be realized in any short to mid-term time frame. The clash between the Kim Jong Il regime and the norms of the international system is inevitable because of the regime's inability to accept and adapt to the changes that have manifested since the end of the Cold War. This inability to perceive the world differently partly stems from Kim Jong Il regime's stubbornness in refusing to compromise socialist-nationalist ideologies and pride, and it also stems from the lack of information about the outside world given North Korea's reclusive orientation. The latter aspect informs contrasting experiences of Gorbachev and Kim Jong Il. Gorbachev's journey towards "new thinking" entailed involvement of the epistemic community within which Gorbachev underwent a process of learning. Intelligence sources such as the KGB provided ample information about the outside world, to which Gorbachev took heed in formulating the ideological basis for domestic reform policies and foreign policies. He consulted experts in economy, security, and international relations in devising open policies that forever changed the Soviet empire. Such scenario is highly unlikely in the North Korean context. For one, Kim Jong Il's cult of personality would not allow it. He couldn't take the humble position of learning from his subordinates, who are already conditioned to eulogize the status quo under Kim's leadership. Truth has no meaning in such a system, only survival, and whatever it takes to get there.

No authoritative regimes could last forever because all dictators die in due time. Succession, thus, is an important matter to dictators as its implications are linked to their regime's authority and ruling legacy. In light of the legacy of hereditary succession in North Korea, it is not unlikely that Kim Jong Il will appoint his eldest son, Kim Jung Nam, to be his successor. In fact, there have been reports about Kim Jong Il's indication of his willingness

to make his son his heir. According to Lee Young-guk, a former body guard of Kim Jong Il and presently a North Korean defect in the South, Kim Jong Il told his son in 1999: “If you succeeded me, you would have to grapple with the citizens’ flight out of the country.”²³ The context in which these words took place is not clear, but it does indicate Kim’s thoughts on possibly allowing his son to succeed. Kim Jong Nam, who was born in 1971 between Kim Jong Il and his mistress Song Hye Rim, is known to have studied in Moscow and Swiss in the areas of computer science and information technology. He currently holds multiple leadership posts as the chair of the Korea Computer Center and the deputy director of the ruling party’s powerful Organization and Guidance Department, and his involvement with the National Security Agency includes preventing citizens from fleeing the country, according to his father’s wishes.²⁴ While it is too early to tell if cult of personality is being propagandized on behalf of Kim Jong Nam, there seems to be reasonable basis to conclude that Kim Jong Nam will receive more attention as a candidate for the next North Korean leader.

Economic Revival

The Kim Jong Il regime’s foremost interest in economic revival suggests that the regime will continue to take steps towards domestic economic improvement. Successful economic development calls for appropriate market structure, production efficiency, innovation, and trade, all of which the North Koreans must become more familiar with. Out of the three basic necessities for economic growth—land, capital, and labor—they will have to amass more of capital in the forms of technology and means of production. How can they get what they do not have? Naturally, North Korea’s economic development is dependent on

²³ *The Chosun Ilbo*, <http://english.chosun.com/cgi-bin/printNews?id=200202260259>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

outside resources. This implies that North Korea will have to cooperate with other countries in the region for economic assistance, which will be reflected in more open foreign policies towards economic integration and cooperation. North Korea will continue to study the China's model of economic reform, and to work with Russia towards the operation of the trans-Siberian railroad; it will continue normalization efforts with Japan, anticipating hard currency out of its former enemy in billions of dollars²⁵ in payment for atrocities of Japanese colonial era. North Korea will continue to be engaged with South Korea in light of the cooperative mode of economic dialogue that has generated much hope if not much accomplishment just yet.

However, in spite of the apparent efforts towards improved economic conditions, economists are skeptical whether Kim Jong Il's policies as a whole will bring about needed change. Their concern is that Kim's policies, rather than creating an environment or structure that promotes growth, are isolated policies within the existing command economy. In other words, there is no overarching structural change, only sporadic adjustments in various areas of the economy. As such, Kim's policies contrast the more fundamental reform approaches implemented by China; in 1978, for instance, the Communist Party in China declared privatization of means of production, acknowledging that economy should be in the hands of private business owners and no longer the party.²⁶ This is not only a significant ideological shift but also a structural shift, which allowed a successful transition into a market economy. Perhaps Kim Jong Il is taking the gradual approach to changing North Korea's economy and it is still early to tell how far he will go to reform the state. But his obsession with control

²⁵ Recent Japanese press accounts indicate that the total value of this aid would be between \$8~10 billion, but the official amount has not been confirmed. (Howard French, "Japan and North Korea Reach Agreement on Relations," New York Times, Setp. 17, 2002)

²⁶ You, Chang Hee, <http://cba.chonnam.ac.kr/~jwkoo/class/article2.html>

and absolute power suggests that he is unlikely to pursue any radical structural reforms any time soon. It can be expected that he will change and implement policies that have clear objectives without uncertainties. Structural and macroeconomic policies are too risky for him to change because uncertainties are inherent in its consequences. From a despotic leader's point of view, uncertainties tend to increase the level of insecurity, which is something Kim Jong Il would want to avoid.

Relations within the International Community

Noticeably in the past several years, North Korea has often employed "crisis diplomacy" in stirring up the international community for attention. Crisis diplomacy is meant by North Korea's instigation of a crisis in order to grab attention, to engage in negotiation, and to extract concessions. More often than not, these crises target at weaknesses or concerns of the counterparts in negotiation. Examples are numerous: In March of 1993, Pyongyang announced that it would withdraw from the NPT, and given the importance of nuclear issues (particularly regarding rogue states) in Washington, it expected U.S. engagement in talks with North Korea, which did follow. After a long process of negotiations, the crisis culminated, in August 1994, in the Geneva Agreed Framework that guaranteed construction of two light-water reactors in North Korea and supply of 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil per year. Also in August of 1998, North Korea launched its multiple-stage rocket into the Sea of Japan, creating tension in the region, especially vis-à-vis Japan. North Koreans initially claimed that they were launching a satellite into space, but eventually admitted its missile testing, demanding concessions from the U.S. for a settlement.²⁷ Evidently, North Korean leaders have often used brinkmanship, threats, bluffs, and blackmailing in order to create leverage in negotiations. They did it because these methods

²⁷ Snyder, p. 74

were the only means to engage and gain leverage in negotiating with stronger nations such as the United States. And the methods seemingly worked; more often than not they were given the economic concessions that they badly needed at home. While North Korea's negotiation tendency carries the potential to create much tension in the region, it is the tragic aspect of North Korean state. The tragedy lies in their self-defeating tactics to scrounge whatever they can from the international community. The very element of national pride they so want to preserve by not relenting to the outside world is undermined by their political actions within in the international community.

North Korea's use of crisis diplomacy, however, is likely to decrease as its economic involvement with other countries increase over the years. The more it becomes dependent on other state's economic involvement in North Korea, the more it will lose the leverage in exercising threats, bluffs, and unconditional demands because it would have vested interest to continue negotiation rather than to choose to walk away from it. Such a more "tamed" posture has already been witnessed, as Kim Jong Il recently admitted to Japan the kidnapping of 11 Japanese in the 1970s, stirring up much commotion in Japan. Kim Jong Il also said that he would observe an open-ended moratorium on testing ballistic weapons, assuring Japan of his resolve to normalize their relations. Why the sudden shift in negotiating style? The North Korea simply needs the money now more than ever. Of course, each negotiation involves different concessions and trade-offs, and Kim's regime will weigh these differences in selecting its negotiation style. If economic benefit outweighs the trade-off, Kim Jong Il is likely to relent, but if the trade-off is too great (such as a threat to regime survival) he will employ hard-line stance or even walk away altogether.

U.S. Policy Implications

North Korea has always viewed the U.S. as its foremost enemy and the sole reason for its failure to unite the Korean peninsula by force. At the same time, it recognizes U.S. hegemony in the world, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which makes it tantalizing for North Korea to be engaged with the U.S. especially since this benevolent hegemon always seems to have something to offer. In short, the U.S. is an enemy North Korea cannot live without. As mentioned earlier, North Korea has had to stir up enough attention, via use of crisis diplomacy, in order to bring the U.S. to the negotiating table. In light of the recurring pattern of North Korea's negotiation style, carefully thought out policies towards North Korea can help the North Korean situation, at the same time promoting stability in the Korean peninsula. In light of the discussion thus far, I recommend two policies regarding economic and security issues in North Korea and the larger region of Northeast Asia.

Economic Issue

The word *crisis*, in the Chinese character means both “danger” and “opportunity.” In other words, inherent in a crisis situation is the prospects for an opportunity. Economic crisis in North Korea offers the U.S. and the world an opportunity to help reform North Korea. It is true that domestic factors are important for any economic reform, but in the case of North Korea that needs to reach outward for resources, models, and currency for reform, external assistance is crucial. Since the great famine that struck North Korea in 1995, United States Government has steadily provided assistance to North Korea via international institutions such as the UN, WFP, and CARE, where total provision of food and medical supplies amounted to \$47 million to date.²⁸ The assistance program is targeted to help the hungry and needy North Koreans who have been literally abandoned by their own government that

²⁸ http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/ofda/99annual/asia4_northkorea.html

stopped food distribution to outer parts of the country. While continued aid is important for the sake of humanitarian principles, it is also important for North Koreans to be exposed to the intent and the effort put out by the international community on behalf of their welfare. As one analyst on North Korea puts it, we must “win the hearts of North Koreans.” Improvement of economic situation is bound to take a long time, probably years of assistance accompanied by changes in North Korea’s political economy. But economic assistance should not stop at feeding the hungry; it must encompass helping the North Koreans to become efficient producers, to learn to use better skills and technology, and to learn to apply productive economic principles. What the U.S. can do is to work towards these goals, in partnership with international institutions that are already experienced and committed to helping countries like North Korea.

Security Issues

Security issues in the Korean peninsula translate to the balance of power, which is the key to stability. Along with the U.S., it is in the interest of every country in the region—North and South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia—to maintain stability, a sought after condition in light of numerous violent conflicts that are reflected in history. The geopolitical location of the Korean peninsula was what made the U.S. to be involved in the region in the first place, and continued U.S. involvement in the region is critical to maintaining a stable balance of power. The main threat to stability in the region points to the Kim Jong Il regime and his unrelenting efforts in developing nuclear weapons. The U.S. and other nuclear powers such as Russia and China do not want North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapon precisely because it undermines the balance of power in the region. The North’s possession of unclear weapon would instigate proliferation of nuclear weapons in the South and even in

Japan according to the balance of power logic. The very scenario will increase the likelihood of a nuclear warfare in the peninsula, given Kim Jong Il's unpredictable and crisis oriented diplomacy. Therefore, the U.S. should, through diplomatic means, discourage the North to develop nuclear weapons. Of course, this effort has been in progress since the Geneva Agreement Framework; however, the effort has manifested as a failure with North Korea's recent admission of an on-going nuclear program. While North Korea can be criticized for not living up to the agreed framework, the U.S. also can be blamed for lacking verification measures. These revelations have gravely impacted the North Korea-U.S bilateral relations at the same time increasing tension in the region.

An alternative approach to the security issue is to create a multilateral regime that overlooks the balance of power issues in the region. Such institution would enable other countries in the region to take active role in maintaining peace and stability rather the U.S. taking the sole responsibility. North Korea has been clever to apply the "divide and rule" strategy in that instead of engaging in multi-party talks, it always preferred bilateral negotiations vis-à-vis the U.S. because it would be much harder to employ threats, bluffs, and blackmailing in the presence of say, Russia or China, and hence much harder to exercise negotiating leverage and to extract concessions. With an official regional institution whose primary role is to overlook security matters, North Korea would have no choice but to engage in multilateral talks. Furthermore, such institution will encourage North Korea to be integrated into a multilateral framework in which norms and ideas of cooperation and liberalism can guide its path towards structural reform at home. This clearly would be one of the long-term goals, but not an impossible one. Although it may take some time before North Korea gets used to the idea of taking their security matters to a multilateral institution,

it has done it before, and it can do it again. North Korea joined the United Nations in 1991 after 46 years since it was first established, and has been its member for over a decade now. The success of such a multilateral institution would depend on its ability to cope with the North Korean problem with efficacy and patience and on the effort of the U.S. government to support its credibility and commitment towards making a difference in the region. Such effort in creating a multilateral institution would be far more practical and cost-effective than to deal with hostile North Koreans as negotiating counterpart.