

Is it possible to denuclearize North Korea?

Jong Seok PARK
(Center for Asia-Pacific Future Studies, Kyushu University, Japan)

Abstract

This article aims to find the answer to the question whether it is possible for the international society to denuclearize North Korea or not in the situation that North Korea is fast developing nuclear weapons and missiles in defiance of economic sanctions. For this aim, I approached this issue in the following steps. Firstly, I reviewed some basic points related to this issue. 1) I constructed the model for relationships between two countries. The types are confrontation, war and normal relationship. 2) I classified strategies for survival of a country. The types are self-reliance, forming alliance, collective security and world government. 3) I classified statuses of nuclearized countries. The statuses are being recognized, having declared and not having declared. Secondly, I checked the characteristics of the strategies of North Korea for its survival. Even though they are seeking the strategies of self-reliance, forming alliance and collective security, they are laying emphasis on self-reliance. This might be deeply related to their persistent seeking of nuclear weapons. Thirdly, I reviewed the development of North Korean nuclear issue focusing on the movements for nuclearization and denuclearization. Fourthly, I checked the opinions of some experts about the question whether its nuclearization is North Korea's real goal or not. Fifthly, I constructed the dynamics of the North Korean nuclear issue focusing on the goals and means of the key players (North Korea, the U.S. and China). Sixthly, I checked the possibility of denuclearizing North Korea based on the analysis. Seventhly, I raised the task of preparing for the possibility that denuclearizing North Korea is hard to be attained.

Key words :

North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, Nuclearization, Denuclearization.

As North Korea conducted nuclear tests twice just in the year 2016, the concern of adjacent countries, mainly South Korea and Japan, is growing high. Until now the international society, led by the U.S., has tried to block North Korea from nuclearizing itself. This article tries to answer the question whether it is possible for the international society to denuclearize North Korea or not (let alone the question whether it is just or not to denuclearize North Korea). For this aim, I will approach this issue in the following steps.

Firstly, I will review some basic points related to this issue.

Secondly, I will check the characteristics of the strategies of North Korea for its survival.

Thirdly, I will review the development of North Korean nuclear issue.

Fourthly, I will check the opinions of some experts about the question whether nuclearization is North Korea's real goal or not.

Fifthly, I will construct the dynamics of the North Korean nuclear issue focusing on the goals and means of the key players.

Sixthly, I will try to answer the question whether it is possible to denuclearize North Korea or not based on the analysis.

Seventhly, I will raise the task of preparing for the possibility that denuclearizing North Korea is hard to be attained.

1. Some Basic Points

Here I will deal with some basic points that might be helpful to understanding the North Korean nuclear issue.

1-1. Relationships Between Two Countries

Each country has various kinds of relationships with other countries, in some cases facing them at borders. And each country tries to protect their territory surrounded by such borders. That is, they are trying to secure their "survival".¹ North Korea is not an exception.

If a certain country selects a certain strategy for its survival based on its interpretation of the situation where it is located, the countries concerned respond to it in one way or another. And then the relevant country might "confront" another country or establish "normal" relationship with it or fall into a "war" against it. These basic relationships might be expressed like the figure below.

〈Table 1〉 Relationships between two Countries

		War
	→ (Invade)	
Confrontation (Threat, Sanction)		↓ (Peace Treaty)
	→ (Diplomatic Normalization)	
		Normal

In this model, relationships between two countries are classified into three kinds of "statuses". The first status is "confrontation". This status indicates two countries are neither in the war nor in the normal relationship. For example, the "cold war" formed after World War Two falls into this category. The second status is "war". This status literally indicates two countries are fighting against each other mobilizing military capabilities. The third status is "normal" relationship. This status indicates two countries have established normal relationship. Relationship between two countries can change from any of these three types into any of the remaining two (For convenience's sake, in this article, the status of confrontation is used as the "starting point" and only the changes of one direction are marked).

1-2. Strategies For Survival of A Country

It is natural that a country selects certain strategies for its survival after analyzing the situation in which it is located. Therefore, to classify the types of possible strategies will be helpful to understanding strategies for survival of a certain country. Theoretically we could classify these strategies into four types.

The first type is "Self-Reliance". This is the strategy for a country to try to secure its survival depending on its own capabilities, assuming any country on Earth might be an enemy. If we say that "a war of every man against every man" by Hobbes² is self-reliance strategy established on the level of individual person, self-reliance here indicates the strategy established on the "level of country". By the way, we could assume that any country seeks this strategy for its survival in extreme conditions.

The second type is "Forming Alliance".³ This is the strategy for a country to try to secure its survival from the threat of an antagonistic country by forming alliance with a friendly country, assuming some countries are friendly to its survival but other countries are antagonistic to it. For example, Japan or South Korea is trying to secure its survival from the threat of the outside world by forming alliance with the U.S. Like this, in the strategy of

1) But we need to be careful that survival is not the "utmost" goal but the "minimal" goal of a country. If we regard survival as the utmost goal of a country, every country will always be perceived as "defensive". But this is not the case. In some cases, a country might have an "offensive" goal, securing their survival.

2) Hobbes, 1651, Leviathan, p.553. [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3207?msg=welcome_stranger].

3) "Alliance" can be said to be a part of "normal" relationship shown in the table above.

forming alliance, it is an important characteristic that a friendly country is overtly defined and an antagonistic country is (often covertly) assumed in advance.⁴

The third type is “Collective Security”. This is the strategy for each country to try to secure its survival by pledging not to invade another country participating in a pact, and so if a country invades another country, all the other countries will counterattack it. This can be established under the situation that any country might be a threatening factor but it cannot be decided in advance and each country has basic trust in a big portion of other countries (if not in all the countries). In this strategy, contrary to the strategy of forming alliance, it is an important characteristic that which country is friendly or which country is antagonistic is not decided in advance. In the real world, this strategy has been pursued through the League of Nations and the United Nations.

The fourth type is to establish “World Government”. If Hobbes explained that the strategy of each person in the state of nature to secure his survival by handing over his right of self-reliance to the powerful Leviathan (State) is the (logical) ground of the establishment of the state, we can say that establishing World Government might be the strategy of each country to secure its survival by handing over its sovereignty to the powerful Leviathan (World Government). This strategy has not yet been realized. But logically we can assume the process.

By the way, the fourth strategy is exclusive to the other three strategies. In the moment that the fourth strategy is adopted, the previous three strategies are given up. As the fourth strategy has not yet been realized, we can say that each country combines the previous three strategies at a varying ratio.

And among the previous three strategies, if the third strategy work perfectly, the first and the second strategy will be useless. But as in the real world the third strategy does not work perfectly, each country is also pursuing the first and the second strategy with the third strategy at the same time but at a varying ratio.

1-3. Statuses Concerning Nuclearization

To classify “statuses” concerning nuclearization into several categories and analyze their meaning might be helpful to understanding nuclear issues. Physically, we can classify the statuses into three categories. The first category is “nuclearized”. The second category is in the process of “nuclearizing”.

4) Usually an antagonistic country is not overtly mentioned. Even in case a country is covertly considered to be antagonistic, there is no need to incite anger from the country by mentioning it overtly. But forming alliance means that they consider a country to be antagonistic at least covertly.

The third category is “not nuclearized”.

By the way, from the aspect of international relations, we can classify the nuclearized status into three categories again. The first category is “recognized”, which indicates a country is recognized internationally as a nuclearized country after declaring itself to be nuclearized. The second category is “declared”, which indicates a country declared itself to be nuclearized but not yet recognized internationally. The third category is “not declared”, which indicates a country is nuclearized but not yet declared itself to be nuclearized.

The countries in the first category compose the “official nuclear club” (the U.S., Russia, China, France, the U.K.). The countries in the second category are India, Pakistan and North Korea. This status means “open” challenge to the established nuclear order. And the only one country that belongs to the third category is Israel. Even though this status also challenges the established nuclear order, the challenge is not “open”. It leaves the room for the nuclear club countries to “overlook” it, if necessary. That is, this status leaves the room for the nuclear club countries to maintain their “faces”.

North Korea declared itself to be nuclearized after its nuclearization (Declaration in 2005 and Inscription into its Constitution in 2012). It means that North Korea almost removed the room for the nuclear club countries to overlook it and so North Korea showed strong will not to retreat from the nuclearized status. Because, in case they retreat, it will harm their “face” severely. And so, in case they retreat, they will ask for bigger rewards.

〈Table 2〉 Statuses concerning Nuclearization

status		countries
nuclearized	recognized	the U.S., Russia, China, France, the U.K.
	declared	India, Pakistan, North Korea
	not declared	Israel
nuclearizing		
not nuclearized		

2. North Korea’s Strategies for Survival

What kind of strategies is North Korea adopting for its survival?

First of all, as seen in the fact that North Korea became a member of the United Nations in 1991 (at the same time as South Korea did), we can say that they are adopting the third strategy (Collective Security). And they are also adopting the first strategy (Self-Reliance) and the second strategy (Forming Alliance). By the way, it is an important characteristic that among these strategies they have strong liking to the first strategy.

Since North Korea was founded (1945-1948),

while they have been adopting the strategy of forming alliance with Russia and/or China in order to secure their survival from the threat coming from the outside world, they have laid great emphasis on the strategy of self-reliance.

It is obvious from the fact that North Korea has not requested Russia or China to station its army for long time after the Korean War transformed to confrontation by the armistice agreement (July 27, 1953), while South Korea or Japan has been trying to secure its survival through forming alliance with the U.S. by admitting stationing of U.S. troops and from the fact that North Korea has not conducted any joint military drill with China or Russia, while South Korea or Japan has been trying to be prepared for the possible war through conducting joint military drills with the U.S.

It seems that North Korea considers their strategy of laying emphasis on self-reliance to be “independent” and South Korean or Japanese strategy of laying emphasis on forming alliance to be “dependent”.⁵

Like this, North Korea has been laying emphasis on the strategy of self-reliance for its survival. And so, they have raised various political lines, economic lines, slogans, etc. “Develop Military and Economy Together Line”, “Military Industry First Line”, “Heavy Industry First Line”, “Leading Fields First Line” are important examples. The basic viewpoint penetrating these lines is that even though they are pursuing to increase military capabilities and to develop economy at the same time, they are laying emphasis on increasing military capabilities. And so, in order to back up military build-up, even though they are pursuing to develop heavy industry at one side and light industry and agriculture at the other side, they are laying emphasis on developing heavy industry.

“Nuclear Weapons and Economy Together Line” is the evolved version of “Military and Economy Together Line”. It reveals such viewpoint that they are continuously pursuing to increase military capabilities and the current task is to realize nuclearization.⁶

5) It seems that, on the contrary, South Korea or Japan considers their strategy to be “flexible and wise”, but North Korean strategy to be “reckless”.

6) We need to be cautious to understanding names of political lines, economic lines or slogans suggested by North Korea. For example, “National Defense and Economy Together Line” indicates literally that they are going to develop military capabilities and economy at the same time. But their intention is that firstly they will try to develop military capabilities and then if possible they will also develop economy. Therefore, we can say that its real meaning is “Military First Line”. Recently a Chinese scholar Chong Hao (鄭浩), analyzing the current North Korean situation, said “It seems that North Korea has specified their Military-First politics into Nuclear-First politics” on Hong Kong《Phoenix Satellite TV》(Lee, Jun-sam,《Yonhap News》May 08, 2016). His renaming is appropriate.

3. Development of the North Korean Nuclear Issue

Here let’s summarize the development of the North Korean nuclear issue. First of all, let’s do so by dividing various movements into two categories, the movements for nuclearization into one category and the movements for denuclearization into the other.

〈Table 3〉 Development of North Korean Nuclear Issue

Time	Movements for Nuclearization	Movements for Denuclearization
1965	Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center began to operate.	
1985 (Dec 12)		North Korea ratified the NPT.
1991 (Dec 31)		Two Koreas agreed on the Joint Declaration for Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
1993 (Mar 12)	North Korea declared its retreat from the NPT.	
1994 (Nov 01)		North Korea declared to freeze its nuclear activity (Geneva Agreed Framework).
2002 (Dec 12)	North Korea declared to defreeze its nuclear activity (Geneva Agreed Framework fell apart).	
2005 (Feb 10)	North Korea declared itself to be a nuclearized country.	
(Sep 19)		North Korea declared to give up nuclear weapons and plans in the 6-party talks.
2006 (Oct 09)	North Korea conducted its first nuclear test.	
2007 (Feb 13)		North Korea agreed to seal the Yongbyon nuclear reactor and make it unusable in the 6-party talks.
2008 (Sep 24)	North Korea unsealed Yongbyon Nuclear Reactor.	
2009 (May 25)	North Korea conducted its second nuclear test.	
2012 (April)	North Korea inscribed its nuclearization into its Constitution.	
2013 (Feb 11)	North Korea conducted its third nuclear test.	
2016 (Jan 06)	North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test.	
(Feb 07)	Allegedly North Korea put a satellite into the orbit around Earth.	
(Sep 9)	North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test.	

We can notice several characteristics in the development of the North Korean nuclear issue.

Firstly, North Korea began to seek nuclearization in the early era of 1960s. At first it tried to acquire

the nuclear technology in the completed status from the Soviet Union or China. But such request was denied. The Soviet Union, instead, gave basic help for potential nuclearization. The Soviet Union educated North Korean researchers and offered Yongbyon nuclear reactor for experiment.

Secondly, the U.S. raised the issue of potential nuclearization of North Korea in 1985. Therefore, the issue surfaced in the international society.

Thirdly, even though there was a chance of making North Korea giving up its nuclearization before its success (1994 Geneva Agreed Framework), perhaps due to mutual distrust, it failed (in 2002).

Fourthly, North Korea declared itself to be a nuclearized country (in 2005). It means the issue became harder to solve.

Fifthly, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006,⁷ and afterwards it has continuously conducted nuclear tests. As of 2016, it has done five times in total (in October 2006, May 2009, February 2013 January 2016 and September 2016).

Sixthly, after North Korea declared itself to be nuclearized, even though there was a chance once more to make North Korea give up nuclearization (in September 2005), it failed (in September 2008).

Seventhly, since September 2008, confrontation between North Korea and the U.S. has continued without finding any breakthrough. While the U.S. urges North Korea to give up nuclearization strengthening economic sanctions, North Korea insists diplomatic normalization should be first done pushing its nuclearization ahead.

4. Is Nuclearization North Korea's "Real" Goal?

As described above, North Korea has continuously tried to build up their military capabilities laying emphasis on the strategy of self-reliance, and in an extension to this viewpoint they have tried to develop nuclear weapons since 1960's.⁸ By the

way, for North Korea, is nuclearization a "real" goal or a "diplomatic" card for negotiation?

For North Korea, though "Military First Line" is an unchanging "constant", it seems that it was unclear in the first phase of their nuclearization process whether they are pursuing nuclearization as a "real" goal or not. Anyhow in this matter, one important bifurcation was the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework and its failure.

The 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework showed that North Korea had attitude that they might give up nuclearization on the condition that their survival is secured by "some other means." Here "some other means" indicate "diplomatic normalization and peace treaty" with the U.S.

By the way, after the U.S. tore up Geneva Agreement in 2002 on the ground that North Korea is pursuing some new nuclear program, North Korea have come to "proclaim" that their survival will be secured only by having nuclear weapons.⁹

It seems that this shows change of their attitude towards nuclearization. But there still exist different interpretations over their "proclamations". Some researchers think that this kind of speech reveals their real mind.¹⁰ But other researchers still think that it is just a tactics for heightening up their

7) Once Thomas L. Friedman assessed the meaning of this event as follows: One day historians may argue that the post-cold war started on 11/9 and ended on 10/9. The Berlin Wall fell on 11/9 -Nov. 9, 1989, which ushered in the post-cold-war world. The apparent North Korean nuclear test went up on Oct. 9, 2006, which, may have ushered out the post-cold-war world and ushered in a much more problematic era - the post-post-cold-war world. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/11/opinion/11friedman.html?_r=0]. Even though it should be quite exaggerated from the viewpoint of the world history, it expresses clearly it is a severe challenge to the established order.

8) Before North Korea began to develop nuclear weapons "independently", it is said that, they requested the Soviet Union first and then China to hand over nuclear technologies to them. But both countries denied such request. And then North Korea began to develop nuclear weapons by themselves. But the process was not totally independent. First of all, Yongbyon nuclear reactor for experiment was offered by the Soviet Union

9) Let's review some examples of this kind of proclamation.

1) In the law (About the need to consolidate the status of self-defending nuclear country) adopted in April 2013 by the Supreme People's Assembly, there is a description as follows: Nuclear weapons serve to deter and expel the aggressions and invasions to our Republic and to give decisive retaliation and blows to the bases of the enemy until the time of realization of world-wide denuclearization (Kim, Hyo-jeong, (Yonhap News) May 08, 2016). 2) North Korean newspaper (Rodong Shinmun) (Mar 31, 2014) in praising the first anniversary of proclaiming "Develop Nuclear Weapons and Economy Together Line" insisted that "We should not forget the lesson of the Middle Eastern countries that were forced to encounter miserable fates after offering their hard-earned nuclear weapons as items for political negotiations or economic exchange" (Seo, Jae-joon, (News 1) Mar.31, 2014).

10) Let's see some examples of such interpretation. 1) Andrei Lankov, Professor of Kukmin University of South Korea, prospected in a contribution to (New York Times) (Jan 21, 2015) as follows: The (North Korean) regime will never surrender its nuclear weapons. The leaders firmly believe that they need them as a diplomatic tool and as a deterrent, and their worries have not been ameliorated by the fate of Saddam Hussein and Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the only dictator in history who swapped his nuclear weapons program for the promise of economic benefits from the West. 2) In an article of (Weekly Dong-A) (Mar 09, 2016), there is an opinion by Hwang as follows: Even though no country recognized North Korea's nuclearization, there is no expert who denies the fact that North Korean nuclear capabilities are on the track. In the face of provocative steps and declarations of North Korea such as inscribing "nuclear weapons" in its Constitution, the efforts of the international society to nullify such process has already faded away.

negotiating power.¹¹ Their attitude will be made clearer during the possible negotiation process.¹² For me, I think North Korean proclamations reveal their real mind, though.

And North Korea is raising one more logic in the “complementary” manner that nuclearization is also the way to boost economy. This is a revised version from the logic that military industry will boost the whole economy. Though it is unclear how big a ripple effect nuclearization will give to the whole economy, it is evident that this logic is offered as additional mechanism for justifying their nuclearization.

As described above, since its surfacing in 1980’s, North Korean nuclearization issue has experienced confrontation phases and negotiation phases several times. Currently some important points are 1) North Korea is “proclaiming” that nuclearization is the way to secure their survival, 2) They “declared” that they have already nuclearized themselves, 3) They are trying to make the situation to be a “fait accompli”. It seems that this situation means 1) The possibility that they will agree to denuclearization has greatly decreased, 2) In case they agree to denuclearization, “rewards” will be far greater than before and 3) New possibility arises that they might use their nuclear weapons for “reunification” of the Korean peninsula which is considered to be “holy”, exceeding the original goal of their survival.

5. Dynamics of the North Korean Nuclear Issue

There might be various methods for understanding the dynamics of the North Korean nuclear issue. I will approach it through analyzing what kind of goals and means each key player has.

In the issue of the nuclearization of North Korea, we can say that the key players are North Korea, the

U.S. and China.¹³ And South Korea and Japan are complementary players.¹⁴

Firstly, what kind of goals and means does North Korea have?

First of all, we can assume that in the first phase North Korea had “two goals in mind which are interchangeable to each other” according to the specific situation. One goal in mind is “to normalize their relationship with the U.S. acquiring recognition of their nuclearization”. The other goal in mind is to “normalize their relationship with the U.S. securing their survival through some other means (that is through diplomatic normalization and peace treaty) and receiving sizable economic aid”. Now, North Korea is proclaiming that they are only pursuing the former. It will become clearer sooner or later whether their proclamation indicates their real goal or just propaganda to heighten their negotiating power. By the way, after pursuing one of the two interchangeable goals, now they might establish a new goal in the phase that they have succeeded in basic level nuclearization (Or we might say that they originally had such goal but it has come to have reality as they are succeeding in nuclearization). That is, to pursue “reunification” of the Korean peninsula through making use of the nuclear weapons.¹⁵

Then what kind of means does North Korea have for achieving their goals? Basically, the means of North Korea is to urge the U.S. to agree to diplomatic normalization pushing forward their nuclearization further. In addition to this, they might threaten to proliferate nuclear commodities and implement their threat. Let’s discuss later what kind of situations their strategy might lead to.

Secondly, what kind of goals and means does the U.S. have?

The goal of the U.S. with the highest priority concerning North Korea is to block North Korea’s

11) For example, ex-Unification minister of South Korea Jeong Se-Hyon said as follows: Even though North Korea said “we will not give up nuclear weapons” in the statement telling success of the (nuclear) test, they also said “we will not use nuclear weapons first, unless our independency is violated”. This indicates they want to have negotiations. They are ready to give up nuclear weapons if they are given proper rewards. Of course, as time passes by, rewards will be bigger (Lee, Jae-ho, 《Pressian》June 10, 2016).

12) Let alone which interpretation is right, it would be wise to prepare for both possibilities. The countries concerned could induce North Korea to denuclearization by suggesting carrots. If North Korea responds to such suggestion, the countries concerned could push ahead negotiations towards denuclearization. If North Korea does not respond to them, the countries concerned could take proper strategy against nuclearized North Korea.

13) The reason that these three countries are key players is that each of them has big influence on selecting items on the agenda, negotiating them or making conclusions.

14) South Korea and Japan are situated on some ironical condition. If North Korea uses nuclear weapons, those two countries will be the main victims. But their voices are weak.

15) Concerning this point, 《The New York Times》(July 13, 2016) introduces the opinion of Myers, a researcher at Dongseo University in South Korea: B. R. Myers, a North Korea scholar at Dongseo University in South Korea, takes this theory one step further. The nuclear program, he believes, is meant not only to scare off the United States, but to one day coerce the South into accepting the North’s long-stated demand: reunification on its own terms. (Fisher, “Maybe North Korea’s Nuclear Goals Are More Serious Than Once Thought”, 《The New York Times》July 13, 2016). [<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/asia/maybe-north-koreas-nuclear-goals-arent-a-force-after-all.html>].

nuclearization. As the leading country of the “nuclear club” (the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K. and France), the U.S. tries to block the nuclearization of any country that does not belong to the club in the world. That is, they are trying to sustain the “non-proliferation system”.

Then what are the “means” for the U.S. to achieve this goal? The first-step means is “Threatening and Enticing”. It is to “threaten” to impose sanctions on the country that is suspected to pursue nuclearization or to invade it, and to “entice” the country by suggesting some economic aid if they give up nuclearization. Therefore, it is a kind of “carrot and stick” strategy. So, this method is to try to persuade a suspicious country into giving up nuclearization by arguing that nuclearization will make their survival more fragile contrary to their original intention to secure their survival.

The second-step means is “Imposing Sanctions and Enticing”. This is the means to be applied to the country that does not give up nuclearization even after being threatened. As the country does not give up nuclearization in the face of “warning”, the super power is going to take “action”. But also in this phase, enticing continues.

If economic sanctions are posed on the country in the course, the country seeking nuclearization will be economically in difficult situation. Therefore, if the country thinks that it is hard to endure this kind of economic sanctions (but there should be premise that their survival will be secured in some other way), they might (promise to) give up nuclearization receiving some economic aid. Libya or Iran is such a case.

The third-step means is “Invading”. In case the country does not give up nuclearization in the face of either the first-step means or the second-step means, as the last resort this means might be adopted. In this case, the U.S. might try to only strike nuclear facilities or topple the regime.¹⁶

Thirdly, what kind of goals and means does China have?

First of all, China, as a member of the nuclear club, has the goal of blocking nuclearization of North Korea. In this aspect, China has the common goal as the U.S. does. Therefore, if we think highly of this point, we might assume that China will actively side with the U.S. in the North Korean nuclear issue.

16) Reversely speaking, the “hurdles” that a country trying to nuclearize itself needs to overcome are threats, economic sanctions and possible invasion from the nuclear club countries and collaborating countries.

But this matter is not so simple.¹⁷ Probably the U.S. does not have any higher goal than denuclearization concerning North Korea (This implies that there is some real possibility that the U.S. might invade North Korea). But for China, though denuclearization of North Korea is an important goal, there should be some other goal, that is, to block occupation of North Korea by the U.S. (with South Korea and Japan). Probably the priority of “blocking expansion of the U.S. to North Korea” is higher than that of denuclearizing North Korea. So, on one hand China blames quite strongly nuclear experiments by North Korea. But, on the other hand, China opposes to invading North Korea by the U.S. Even though China hates Kim Jong Un, they cannot discard him.

And, what kind of means does China have? Like the U.S., China has the means of “Threatening and Enticing” and “Imposing Sanctions and Enticing”. But, unlike the U.S., China does not have the option of invading North Korea, unless North Korea confronts China cooperating with the U.S.

Then what kind of relationships have these three key players made? (Here, please recall table 1 classifying the relationships between two countries into confrontation, war or normal relationship).

Since the U.S. raised the North Korean nuclear issue, (strictly speaking since the Armistice Treaty of 1953), the U.S. and North Korea have basically been in “confrontation”. During the process, there have been some cases of risky situations of entering into war and several phases of “negotiations” for diplomatic normalization. Particularly, the case of Geneva Agreed Framework in 1994 showed the possibility of “happy ending” by applying the means of “Imposing Sanctions and Enticing”. But since the U.S. tore up the agreement in 2002 insisting that North Korea had breached the Agreement, any “impressive” negotiation phase has not appeared.

In the confrontation, the U.S. has implemented economic sanctions either “partially” by mobilizing its allies, Japan and Korea, or “collectively” on the dimension of the U.N. through some resolutions. In the process, it has been important for the U.S. to urge and persuade China into participating in imposing economic sanctions.

17) Such understanding as the confrontation “between the International Society and North Korea” began with paying attention to the phenomenon that China has come to participate in the sanctions on the level of the United Nations suggested by the U.S., originates in laying too much emphasis on this aspect. For example, 《Yonhap News》 (Lee, Kwi-won, Feb. 26, 2016) described the situation as “Showdown between the International Society and North Korea”. But such understanding is one-sided.

During the process, China, on one hand, has urged North Korea to give up nuclearization cooperating with the U.S. China, on the other hand, has tried to block the U.S. from invading North Korea. It seems that China has tried to persuade North Korea and the U.S. into realizing rapprochement through making North Korea give up nuclearization assuring their survival. Against this kind of background, China emphasizes that imposing sanctions is one way to urge North Korea to come back to dialogues, even participating in imposing sanctions on North Korea.

6. Possibility of denuclearizing North Korea?

As described above, based on constructing the dynamics of the North Korean nuclear issue through analyzing what kind of goals and means do North Korea, the U.S. and China have and what kind of relationships have they made, let's try to prospect how the issue will develop, search for a possible compromise and check the possibility of denuclearizing North Korea.

6-1. Confrontation, War or Normalization?

First of all, we can say that in the face of economic sanctions and threat of invasion North Korea has been seeking one of the two goals, that is, to lead to diplomatic normalization with the U.S. with recognition of their nuclearization or securing their survival through some other way (that is, diplomatic normalization and peace treaty) as the reward of giving up their nuclearization. But in the current situation that North Korea has succeeded in nuclearizing itself, it seems that they are not seeking the latter any more. That is, it seems that they will not agree to giving up their nuclearization. Therefore, it seems that the current goal of North Korea is to normalize diplomatic relationship with the U.S. with their nuclearization being recognized.

Next, for the time being the U.S. does not seem to have the intention to agree to the North Korea's goal. Therefore, the U.S. will weigh two options, that is, to continue imposing sanctions or to invade North Korea deciding that it is impossible to get the goal of denuclearizing North Korea just by imposing sanctions.

The good point of the option of imposing sanctions and enticing is that the conflict usually will not explode. There might be some possibility that North Korea will give up nuclearization after some time or some other possibility that a different

government will appear in North Korea that will give up nuclearization.¹⁸ The bad point of imposing sanctions and enticing is that as time passes by (on the condition that the current North Korean regime continues and they adhere to the current strategy) North Korean nuclearization will proceed further.

In case the U.S. decides that it is impossible to persuade North Korea into giving up nuclearization through imposing sanctions, the option of invasion might be considered. By the way, here are some "obstacles".

The first obstacle is that its "risk" is very high. If the U.S. invades North Korea (even in case the U.S. aims only to destroy nuclear facilities) there is high possibility of a full-fledged war. It means big burden that even the U.S. will hardly undertake. The first burden is the damage U.S. troops will receive and the second burden is the damage its allies, South Korea and Japan, will receive and the third burden is the damage North Korean civilians will receive.¹⁹

Such risks were already prospected when the Clinton government simulated the possible development assuming invading North Korea as the alternative right before concluding the Geneva Agreed Framework.²⁰

The second obstacle is that China is desperately opposing to U.S. invasion to North Korea. In case the U.S. invade and try to occupy North Korea (with South Korea and Japan), probably China will not just let it go. Even though China hates Kim Jong Un who seeks nuclearization being prepared to be isolated from the whole world, as China probably considers

18) But there is some "limit" on economic sanctions. On one hand, when the sanctions get stronger, the possibility of opponent's surrender will get higher. But when the opponent thinks it is hard to tolerate economic sanctions any more, the opponent might explode the conflict, that is, might wage a war. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect China to put pressure on North Korea to the point that North Korea will be afraid of their basic survival. We might call "the dilemma of the intensity of sanctions". The way to escape from this dilemma is to offer the opponent some other way to survive without nuclearization.

19) A recent remark by the U.S. President Barack Obama well expressed this obstacle: While the United States could destroy North Korea with our arsenals, there would not only be humanitarian costs but also a potential impact on South Korea. (Lamarque, Kevin,《The Huffington Post》Apr.26, 2016). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/obama-north-korea_us_571f612ee4b0b49df6a8de92].

20) A CNN article described this point as follows: The United States was on the brink of war with North Korea during a crisis five years ago, former Defense Secretary William Perry revealed. [Robert Gallucci] was sure an attack on Yongbyon would spark another war on the Korean peninsula, a war -- sources say -- in which the Pentagon had forecast up to one-million deaths (McIntyre, Jamie,《CNN.com》October 4, 1999). [<http://edition.cnn.com/US/9910/04/korea.brink/>].

that occupation of North Korea by the U.S. is worse than the current situation, they will send troops to secure North Korea if the U.S. invade North Korea.²¹

The third obstacle is that whether the U.S. has capabilities to wage a new war. The U.S. is already waging a burdensome war in the Middle East. The Obama government has been acting having set a goal to retreat from the war in the Middle East as soon as possible. That is, they are trying to retreat from Afghanistan and Iraq.²² But in case the U.S. retreat from Afghanistan and Iraq, as there is high possibility that the U.S. will not be able to control this area, its original plan to retreat the troops has not been fulfilled as planned. Under this kind of situation, to wage a new war will be big burden on the U.S.

Like this, as the US nervousness that “non-proliferation system” might collapse is far greater than before, the U.S. might invade North Korea. But the risks of invasion can be hardly neglected.

Therefore, considering the current situation overall, we can say that on one hand U.S. desire to invade North Korea is growing bigger from the nervousness that non-proliferation system might collapse and on the other hand as there are several obstacles to invading North Korea, the U.S. continues to impose economic sanctions on North Korea.²³

Then how will North Korea respond to the U.S. strategy? In case the phase of economic sanctions continues, North Korea will move to “break through” such situation. Two kinds of actions are expected. One is to urge the U.S. to come to negotiations for normalizing their relationship by making the situation unstable through conducting a new nuclear test, launching various missiles or waging a limited warfare.²⁴

The other option for North Korea to respond to the continuing sanctions is to threaten to “proliferate

nuclearization” and implement it. Probably getting some economic gains by selling “nuclear commodities” (nuclear knowledge and technology, nuclear material, nuclear weapons, etc.) bit by bit, if the U.S. does not respond to their request for normalization, they will threaten to sell all the nuclear commodities they have.²⁵

Such development will be quite embarrassing to the U.S. Because it means that the U.S. cannot deal with not so big a country that seeks nuclearization without succumbing to economic sanctions even taking the risk of being invaded.

6-2. A Possible “Compromise”?

As analyzed above, if we prospect the future development of the issue of North Korean nuclearization, the phase of “economic sanctions” will last rather long with quite high possibility. And the possibility of U.S. invasion exists a little. And the possibility of leading to the phase of “negotiations” for normalization after quite long bickering exists a little higher than the possibility of war. And in case the phase of negotiations for normalization come, there will be bickering again for normalization with or without recognizing North Korea as a new nuclear power.

Then considering the current situation overall, what might be a reasonable compromise? Considering overall the goals and means of the key players (North Korea, the U.S. and China), to push forward “negotiations for diplomatic normalization with freezing North Korea’s nuclear activity and promising to give up nuclearization” will be a reasonable compromise.

In order to realize this possibility, the principle of “negotiations at the same time and actions at the same time” will be important. There is little possibility that North Korea will accept “negotiations for denuclearization first and then negotiations for diplomatic normalization later” suggested by the U.S.,²⁶ South Korea²⁷ and Japan. And also,

21) In this case, though the “first-mover” is different, the war will be an extended version of the 1950 Korean War.

22) This tendency also appears well in the passive attitude in widening the Syrian war.

23) Denis McDonough, the White House chief of staff said Sunday that the United States will work with allies and partners to “deeply isolate” North Korea and the communist regime will continue to remain “an outcast” unless it lives up to its denuclearization commitments. He made the remark in an interview with CNN in response to a question on what new steps the U.S. will be taking to punish Pyongyang for its fourth nuclear test last week that the North claimed involved a hydrogen bomb (Chang, Jae-soon, 《Yonhap News Agency》 Jan.11, 2016). [http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/01/11/65/0301000000AEN20160111000500315F.html].

24) But probably a full-fledged war is not the option of North Korea to take in this kind of situation. For it will be suicide strategy for North Korea. If North Korea wages a full-fledged war, probably, the U.S, South Korea and Japan will counterattack it and occupy North Korea. In such situation, there will be weak justification for China to send its troops to help North Korea. And in case China save North Korea, it is unclear whether China will save Kim Jong Un.

28) U.S. daily newspaper 《Wall Street Journal》(Feb.21, 2016) reported that the U.S. and North Korea had discussions about establishing the peace treaty just before North Korea dared to conduct the 4th nuclear test. Concerning this, South Korean 《Yonhap News》 reported that, quoting a Washington diplomatic source, at the end of the last year North Korea suggested discussions on the peace treaty and so the U.S. and North Korea exchanged their opinions using an unofficial path. According to the source, the U.S. made clear that negotiations for denuclearization should be done first and after that negotiations for the peace treaty should be done. Then North Korea rejected this suggestion (Park, Byong-yong,《Voice of America》Feb.22, 2016). [http://blog.daum.net/007nis/15869240].

27) The South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its viewpoint that concerning the discussion on the peace treaty suggested by North Korea “South Korea and the U.S. have kept the consistent position that nuclearization should be dealt first in any talks with North Korea”(Park, Byong-yong, 《Voice of America》 Feb.22, 2016).

there is little possibility that the U.S. will accept “negotiations for diplomatic normalization first and then negotiations for denuclearization later” implied by North Korea. The possible compromise by two sides will be to push forward “negotiations for freezing North Korean nuclear activity expecting denuclearization and negotiations for diplomatic normalization” at the same time. That is to begin to negotiate the concrete procedure, mutually promising “North Korea at once will freeze its nuclear activity promising to give up nuclearization and the U.S. will agree to diplomatic normalization and peace treaty”.²⁸

It seems that recently China has suggested this kind of solution.²⁹ That is, among several options suggested on the level of country, the Chinese suggestion seems to be a reasonable one that could compromise the U.S. and North Korea that confront each other from two extreme positions. It seems that there is no other option than this with which two sides will come to the negotiation table.³⁰

7. What if it fails to denuclearize North Korea?

By the way, currently, it is unclear whether this

kind of compromise will be tried.³¹ Neither the U.S. nor North Korea has not raised this kind of solution officially. If this situation continues, a new problem might occur. Because in case “negotiations for freezing North Korean nuclear activity and normalizing their relationship” start in the situation that North Korea nuclearization has proceeded quite much, such kind of negotiations hardly lead to North Korea’s giving up nuclearization.

Therefore, when such negotiations start and when they are concluded will be crucial. If such compromise is concluded at the present level (that is, North Korea has secured about 10 warheads and has not completed ICBMs or SLBMs which can strike the US mainland), threat to South Korea will be “controllable”. But with one reason or another, if such compromise is concluded in the situation that North Korean nuclearization has proceeded “much further” (say, North Korea has secured about 50 warheads³² and has completed ICBMs and SLBMs), threat to South Korea will be “uncontrollable”. If negotiations between two countries, North Korea and the U.S., do not start or are not concluded sooner or later,³³ the North Korean nuclear weapons will be big threat to South Korean security. In the situation that North Korean nuclearization has proceeded much further, freezing the North Korean

28) Seo Hun, ex-official of South Korea’s National Intelligence Service, expressed such opinion: Right now, the most important thing is to freeze (North Korea’s) nuclear development. Firstly, we need to hold them. It is realistic to solve the issue by specifying the aims of denuclearization of North Korea to be short term and medium or long term. We need to mobilize all the means we have. Time is not at our side. (Kim, In-gu,《Newsis》June 15, 2016). [http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20160614_0014149974&clD=10301&plD=10300].

29) Recently Chinese Diplomatic Minister Wang Yi suggested the negotiations which will deal with realizing denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and changing the truce to the peace treaty at the same time on the press interview with Julie Bishop, Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs after having mutual dialogue (Lee, Kwi-won,《Yonhap News》Feb.18, 2016. []). And a little later Chinese President Xi Jinping insisted in the 4th Nuclear Security Summit that “in order to solve international disputes like Iran nuclear issue, (big powers) also deal with right concerns of each country (Park, Eun-gyong,《Kyoungyang Shinmun》Apr.03, 2016). We could interpret Xi said in the meaning that if a country give up nuclearization, big powers should assure survival of the country in some other way.

30) It is said that the U.S. once considered this option. Jeong Se-hyun, ex-Unification minister of South Korea said as follows: In 2009, Hillary Clinton said three times it might be possible to have negotiations for denuclearization of North Korea and negotiations for diplomatic normalization and peace treaty at the same time. But blocked by the policy of “Denuclearization and Opening 3000” of Lee Myong-bak government, it could not be realized. (Lee, Jae-ho,《Pressian》Jan.08, 2016).

31) “Directly” whether such compromise is concluded or not will be decided by North Korea and the U.S. But it seems that “on the background” the relationship between China and the U.S. is quite important. In case of close cooperation between the two countries, there will arise a little possibility of denuclearizing North Korea. But in case of high conflicts between the two countries, such possibility will be lower. North Korea will consolidate itself as a nuclearized country making use of such situation.

32) According to the calculation of Rand Corporation, North Korea will have acquired about 50 to 100 nuclear warheads at around the year 2020(Gang Young-doo, “the U.S. Land Corporation says, North Korea will have acquired 50–100 nuclear warheads by 2020”, 《Yonhap News》Oct. 09, 2016). [http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=shm&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0008739999].

33) Let’s see a gloomy prospect by an U.S. official over the task of denuclearizing North Korea : America’s top intelligence official expressed deep skepticism on Tuesday about the prospect of persuading North Korea to renounce nuclear weapons, saying it was “probably a lost cause.” In a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations covering a range of international crises, the official, James R. Clapper Jr., the director of national intelligence, said. … “I think the notion of getting the North Koreans to denuclearize is probably a lost cause,” Mr. Clapper said Tuesday in response to a question about whether negotiations with North Korea’s leaders could lead to a suspension of the country’s nuclear and missile activities. “They are not going to do that,” he said. “That is their ticket to survival.” (Gladstone, “North Korea Giving Up Nuclear Arms ‘a Lost Cause’, Official Says”, 《The New York Times》Oct. 25, 2016). [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/26/world/asia/north-korea-james-clapper.html?_r=0].

nuclear activity cannot nullify threat to South Korean security.³⁴ How should South Korea be prepared for this kind of possibility?

The first option is just to take defensive measures like introducing missile defensive systems depending on U.S. nuclear umbrella as offensive measures for counterattacking the possible North Korean nuclear attacks.

The second option is to request the U.S. to deploy their tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea.

The third option is to nuclearize South Korea.

Recently, in South Korea these three options started to be discussed. For the present, the Park Geun-hye government is taking the first option and among politicians all the three options are advocated. Among the ordinary people, the second or the third option is becoming more popular than the first option.³⁵ By the way, as the U.S. already clearly said no to the second option, unless the U.S. changes their policy, the third option will be more and more popular according as North Korean nuclear threat becomes more and more realistic. (#)

References

- Chang, Jae-soon, "White House chief: U.S. to 'deeply isolate' N. Korea", 《Yonhap News Agency》Jan. 11, 2016. [http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/01/11/65/0301000000AEN20160111000500315F.html].
- Fisher, "Maybe North Korea's Nuclear Goals Are More Serious Than Once Thought", 《The New York Times》July 13, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/asia/maybe-north-koreas-nuclear-goals-arent-a-farce-after-all.html].
- Friedman, Thomas L., "The Bus Is Waiting", 《The New York Times》Oct. 11, 2006. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/11/opinion/11friedman.html?_r=1].
- Gladstone, "North Korea Giving Up Nuclear Arms 'a Lost Cause', Official Says", 《The New York Times》Oct. 25, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/26/world/asia/north-korea-james-clapper.html?_r=0].
- Hwang, Il-do, "Imagine Unimaginable-Nearly Approaching Nuclearized North Korea-", 《Weekly DongA》Mar. 09, 2016. [http://weekly.donga.com/3/all/11/526911/1].
- Hobbes, Thomas, 1651, 《LEVIATHAN OR THE MATTER, FORME, & POWER OF A COMMON-WEALTH ECCLESIASTICAL AND CIVILL》, Printed for Andrew Crooke, at the Green Dragon in St. Paul's Churchyard . [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3207?msg=welcome_stranger].
- Kang Young-doo, "the U.S. Land Corporation says, North Korea will have acquired 50-100 nuclear warheads by 2020", 《Yonhap News》Oct. 09, 2016. [http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=hm&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0008739999].
- Kim, Hyo-jeong, "International society seems to continue sanctions on North Korea due to its nuclear declaration and denial to denuclearization", 《Yonhap News》May 08, 2016. [http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/05/08/0200000000AKR20160508031000014.HTML?from=search].
- Kim, In-gu, "Seo Hun: Sanctions alone could not solve North Korean Nuclear Issue", 《Newsis》June 15, 2016. [http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20160614_0014149974&cID=10301&pID=10300].
- Kim, Jack, 'Obama: The U.S. Could Destroy North Korea, But Won't ', 《The Huffington Post》Apr. 26, 2016 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/obama-north-korea_us_571f612ee4b0b49df6a8de92].
- Ku Gyong-geun, "Opinion poll, 65% yes to South Korean nuclearization", 《MBC News 》Sep. 15, 2016). [http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/2016/nwtoday/article/4116851_19847.html].
- Lamarque, Kevin, "Obama: The U.S. Could Destroy North Korea, But Won't", 《The Huffington Post》Apr. 26, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/obama-north-korea_us_571f612ee4b0b49df6a8de92].
- Lankov, Andrei, "North Korea Dabbles in Reform", 《The New York Times》Jan. 21, 2015.

36) This strongly implies that North Korea will not easily respond to request to freeze its nuclear activity by the time they have proceeded their nuclearization to the level that they want to proceed.

35) In an opinion poll conducted right after the North Korean 5th nuclear test, 65% of the respondents answered "yes" to the idea of South Korean nuclearization (Ku Gyong-geun, "Opinion poll, 65 % yes to South Korean nuclearization", 《MBC News 》Sep. 15, 2016). [http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/2016/nwtoday/article/4116851_19847.html].

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/opinion/north-korea-dabbles-in-reform.html?_r=0].

· Lee, Jae-ho, "Was the U.S. waiting North Korea to make trouble?", 《Pressian》Jan. 08, 2016. [http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=132374&ref=nav_search].

· Lee, Jun-sam, "A Chinese North Korea specialist: Kim Jong Un seems to have specified Military-First politics into Nuclear-First politics", 《Yonhap News》May 08, 2016. [<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/05/08/0200000000AKR20160508019700083.HTML?input=1195m>].

· Lee, Kwi-won, "China refers to Simultaneous Negotiations for peace treaty", 《Yonhap News》Feb. 18, 2016. [<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/02/18/0200000000AKR20160218065251014.HTML?input=1195m>].

· Lee, Kwi-won, "Super-strong North Korean Sanctions begins", 《Yonhap News》Feb. 18, 2016. [<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/02/26/0200000000AKR20160226137100014.HTML?input=1195m>].

· McIntyre, Jamie, "Washington was on brink of war with North Korea 5 years ago", 《CNN.com》Oct. 04, 1999. [<http://edition.cnn.com/US/9910/04/korea.brink/>].

· Park, Byong-yong, "South Korea: North Korean Denuclearization should be first", 《Voice of America》Feb. 22, 2016. [<http://blog.daum.net/007nis/15869240>].

· Park, Eun-gyong, "Xi Jinping: Dialogues and Negotiations are important solving International Issues", 《Kyoungyang Shinmun》Apr. 03, 2016. [http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201604031045591&code=970204].

· Seo, Jae-joon, "North Korea: There will be No Giving up Nuclear weapons", 《News 1》Mar. 31, 2014

Receiving Date: December 5, 2016

Reviewing Date: December 12, 2016

Reporting Date of Article Appearance: December 12, 2016