

**The Impact of North Korea's WMD Programs on Regional  
Security and the ROK-U.S. Alliance**

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**I. Introduction**

While the use of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear programs and missiles has been part of Pyongyang's brinkmanship strategy almost since the very beginning of the Kim Chong-il era, the current string of events that have occurred since the fall of 2002 is unique. Instead of the world and the region having concerns over the nuclear facility at Yongbyon, the situation now exists where North Korea has the potential for weaponizing, using, and proliferating two nuclear programs – both plutonium based, and the Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) program which came into existence during the 1990s.

The situation is also different now because of several different factors. The North's strategy has had to change significantly – in no small part because the current administration in Washington refuses to deal with them the way the Clinton administration did. This has led to what may be attempts to influence the political process in Washington and Seoul. It has also led to increased dealings with other key players in the region – particularly China (and, to a lesser extent, Russia and Japan). Another key change in the current situation from earlier times of confrontation or crises on the Peninsula is the state of the ROK-US alliance. This is an alliance vital to the interests of both nations, yet the perspectives of the governments of these long-time friends are currently in a state of flux. In addition, perhaps more than at any time since the ROK-US alliance began, the perspectives of the people in the Republic of Korea and the United States are undergoing change.

This article will examine these important issues, to include a study of North Korea's nuclear development and its dealings with other rogue states (and some nation-states which are allies or at least tacitly friendly with the U.S.) to get to the point it is at today, as well as an examination of Pyongyang's missile development. Key in this examination will be a close look at how North Korea proliferates its various programs in a way that not only impacts the

regional security of Northeast Asia, but the Middle East and South Asia as well.

This study will also take a close look at a phenomenon which is arguably a new one – Pyongyang's heavy handed and often clumsy attempts to influence the political process in Seoul and Washington. Perhaps because of the harder line that Washington has taken with Pyongyang since 2001, it is important to discuss how North Korea has dealt with other key players in the region, including Russia, China, and Japan, particularly since the recent nuclear confrontation began in the fall of 2002. Finally, there will be a discussion of recent changes in the ROK-US alliance from the perspective of the South Korean people (based in large part on a number of surveys), the South Korean government, and the U.S.

**II. North Korea's Nuclear Development**

This paper, will focus on the development of North Korea's HEU program. Though North Korea reportedly admitted to having an HEU program during talks with James Kelly in the fall of 2002, they now deny its existence.<sup>1</sup> This section, seeks to show that it simply does not matter if North Korea admits to an HEU program or not – because there are simply too many “smoking guns” that point to its existence. Thus, in order to bring about an end to the current confrontation, Pyongyang, in the opinion of the author, will eventually have to admit to the existence of an active HEU weaponization program.

According to several credible experts, North Korea and Pakistan actively began trading missiles for HEU technology around 1997.<sup>2</sup> The relationship that existed between Pyongyang and Islamabad can certainly be categorized as “one of convenience.” Both countries were extremely short of hard currency during the mid-to-late 1990s, thus the best way for each government to get what it desired was to engage in a “missiles for nukes” deal. North Korean missile technicians and Pakistani scientists shuttled back and forth between the two countries throughout the 1990s, and, in fact, even after the Global War on Terrorism had begun, and United States troops were headed for Pakistan. In fact, the missiles and nuclear technology were reportedly being flown back and forth between North Korea and Pakistan on American-built C-130s.<sup>3</sup> Of interest, the aircraft are reported to have flown through Chinese airspace when they ferried the personnel and equipment back and forth – an intriguing

development given China's stated "lack of knowledge" regarding North Korea's HEU program.<sup>4</sup> According to a Pakistani source, on one such trip during the 1990s, the C-130 military transport aircraft actually broke down at Sunan airfield near Pyongyang, reportedly creating "quite a buzz" in the echelons of power, as North Korea obviously had no spare parts for the American-made aircraft.<sup>5</sup>

The amount of evidence showing the extent of North Korea's HEU program grew significantly with the open admission by Dr. A.Q. Khan that he had been actively involved in selling nuclear technology to North Korea, Iran and Libya – and was then immediately granted a full pardon by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. According to U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, "...We would note that Mr. Khan has admitted to assisting North Korea's (uranium) enrichment program, and his admissions have put the lie to North Korea's denials."<sup>6</sup> According to former Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto, "Dr. Khan was asked to fall on the sword in the name of national interest...which means a cover up for Musharraf."<sup>7</sup> The statement by Bhutto supports the assessment of many analysts that this was a government-to-government deal, and not the work of "rogue scientists" in Pakistan. The fact that military transport aircraft were used to shuttle the technology, missiles, scientists, and technicians back and forth, also adds credence to the assessment that this was a barter deal worked out between Pyongyang and Islamabad. U.N. inspectors have also recently remarked that the Pakistani government withheld information about the illegal nuclear deals with North Korea, with one official saying, "It is unbelievable that the Pakistani government did not recognize what was happening right in front of itself."<sup>8</sup>

Further evidence regarding the extent and advancement of North Korea's HEU weaponization program came to light when Colonel Ghaddafi in Libya agreed to give up his effort to develop nuclear weapons, and surrendered all of his materials, all of the designs, the equipment, and the uranium that he had acquired. In a speech given on April 15, 2004, at Fudan University in Shanghai, Vice President Richard Cheney stated, "...the Libyans acquired their technical expertise, weapons design and so forth from Mr. A.Q. Khan, Pakistan...Mr. Khan also provided similar capabilities to the North Koreans. So we're confident that the North Koreans do, in fact, have a program to enrich uranium to produce nuclear weapons."<sup>9</sup> Former Clinton Administration and long-time State

Department official Robert Galluci recently also made important comments regarding North Korea's HEU program, and the reasons that it exists. In a recent online question and answer forum, Galluci stated in part, "...Now I think the North would like to keep its enrichment program as insurance against future US actions. That is something we cannot allow them to do."<sup>10</sup> In fact, the North Koreans appear to have had direct connections with the Libyans regarding HEU development. In May of 2004, it came to light that North Korea had secretly supplied Libya with 1.7 tons of uranium for its weapons program in 2001. The material, in the form of uranium hexafluoride, was not sufficiently potent to use as nuclear fuel, but appears to have been slated for testing in thousands of centrifuges being constructed in Libya – with the help of secret suppliers set up by A.Q. Khan.<sup>11</sup>

Because there have been no public announcements of how far North Korea's HEU program has advanced in comparison to that of Libya, and because it is not clear if the programs began during the same time frame or not, the information remains sketchy as to whether or not North Korea has actually produced an HEU-based weapon. What is clear from a great deal of evidence is that North Korea has had the program for several years, that the government has a great deal of weaponization technology, and that North Koreans have worked closely (and for many years) with scientists who have already successfully completed a highly enriched uranium weaponization program.

### III. North Korea's Missile Development

There are two principal threats from North Korean missiles, the threat to U.S. forces and their allies in Northeast Asia (from a missile fired from North Korea), and the threat of proliferation throughout the Middle East and South Asia. What exacerbates the North Korean threat of missiles is the possibility (as we now know from the information presented above) that North Korea may have the ability to mount a nuclear warhead on one or more of its missiles. This would be possible, if, while conducting the testing and evaluation of the No Dong missile (called the Ghauri in Pakistan, but essentially the same missile – and evidence indicates testing and evaluation has been conducted with complete involvement of North Korean technicians) the North Koreans and Pakistanis were able to stabilize an HEU warhead that could be used on the missile – which, during the late 1990s, was assessed to have

a range of approximately 1,300 kilometers.<sup>12</sup> If the Pakistanis and North Koreans were able to stabilize such a warhead on the No Dong/Ghauri, it would mean that Pyongyang could threaten parts of Japan and U.S. bases on Okinawa with nuclear weapons. According to recent press reports citing ROK government officials, the No Dong missile now has a range of 1,500 kilometers, giving it a capability of hitting even more areas in Japan.<sup>13</sup> Pyongyang is also actively engaged in developing and deploying longer range missile systems – though their ability to carry a nuclear warhead is unlikely (though possible).

Regarding the second key threat to security posed by North Korean missiles, proliferation, it is important to note, that since 9/11, Pyongyang has had deals for weapons programs with Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> These proliferation programs show no signs of slowing down, even as diplomatic pressure builds on North Korea. After a recent train collision in North Korea near the Chinese border resulted in a huge explosion that killed hundreds of people or more, press reports disclosed, and U.S. officials confirmed, that there were about a dozen Syrian technicians among the casualties. The technicians were accompanying a train car full of missile components and other related equipment.<sup>15</sup> North Korea and Syria are reportedly not only engaged in missile transactions developing Syria's SCUD-D system, but also programs for chemical and biological weapons.<sup>16</sup> North Korea's continued proliferation to countries in the Middle East, as documented above, serves to disrupt the stability in an already volatile portion of the world. But perhaps just as disturbing is the likely possibility that if North Korea were to complete weaponization of HEU systems (which are capable of being mounted on a much smaller warhead than a plutonium-based system), they would be just as inclined to proliferate them to terrorists as they would to rogue states such as Syria (given the fact that Pyongyang has been so actively involved in proliferating missiles). In fact, there is already evidence that Pyongyang has sold some \$2 million worth of arms to a well-known terrorist group in the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Front.<sup>17</sup>

Within the past three years, Pyongyang has been stepping up its development of missiles with a much longer range than the No Dong, or even the Taepo Dong I. North Korea continues engine tests on the Taepo Dong II, and has been detected conducting such tests as recently as May 2004.<sup>18</sup> Evidence uncovered recently

reveals that North Korea is also developing a missile identified to date as the "Taepo Dong X," which will have an even longer range than the original Taepo Dong II – perhaps allowing it to reach Hawaii, Alaska, or even the West Coast of the United States. According to a recent report by the Congressional Research Service, the missile design is believed to be based on the former Soviet SS-N-6 submarine-launched missile. It is believed rogue scientists from Russia may have sold the technology to Pyongyang.<sup>19</sup> The South Korean press has also reported recently that the North Koreans have deployed 10 new intermediate range missiles and five launch pads at Mirim airfield, near Pyongyang. What makes these missiles particularly dangerous, is that it appears they will be fired from mobile launchers as opposed to fixed above-ground or underground sites.<sup>20</sup>

Equally disturbing related news regarding other recent North Korean military moves also merits discussion. According to a recent report by the South Korean Ministry of Defense given to the National Assembly, North Korea has recently engaged in developing at least 80 tactical sites to conceal field artillery and missiles. What reportedly differs from past efforts is that the sites are not limited to frontline areas, but have also been detected in rear areas as well. The Ministry report stated that the precision strike capability demonstrated by the U.S. in Iraq appears to have prompted the effort, as precision weapons will reportedly be deployed to the Peninsula in case of conflict.<sup>21</sup> According to the same report, the North Koreans are also in the midst of renovating about 420, 240-mm multiple rocket launchers (with ranges capable of hitting Seoul), and improving the capabilities of 40 "Cheonmaho" tanks, Pyongyang's indigenously produced version of the Russian T-62.<sup>22</sup>

It is obvious from an examination of the evidence already presented that North Korea intends to continue development of both its nuclear and its missile programs. Based on past behavior, there appears to be only three options for the containment of these threats, "buying off the programs" (President Clinton seriously considered buying off the North Korean missile program, but his administration was unable to secure a deal that would have reportedly been worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Pyongyang), diplomatic pressure, or military action.<sup>23</sup> To date, it appears that diplomatic pressure has not been able to contain North Korea's appetite for development

and proliferation of WMD – even during the Agreed Framework time period.

#### **IV. North Korea's Nuclear Strategy Since October of 2002**

North Korea's current nuclear strategy seems to involve two key factors; pushing for bi-lateral talks with the U.S. and demanding a freeze in exchange for foreign aid and trade concessions, as opposed to complete dismantlement of their two nuclear programs. Indeed, in what appears to have been a direct reference to Washington's current policy of complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement (CVID), Kim Chong-il was recently quoted in China as stating, "North Korea cannot agree to scrap its nuclear program in a complete, irreversible and verifiable manner," further stating, "North Korea is taking part in six-party talks to discuss compensation for freezing its nuclear development."<sup>24</sup> About a month later, Kim Chong-il reportedly told Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan that he craved direct conversation with George Bush.<sup>25</sup> Pyongyang has followed this policy since October of 2002 – at the same time constantly hinting that North Korea may or may not actually have an HEU weaponization program, and, in fact, often denying it exists.

Pyongyang's current strategy also appears to be aimed at occasionally reminding the world that North Korea has a "nuclear deterrent." Earlier this spring, Selig Harrison of the Center for International Policy in Washington returned from a trip to North Korea to describe such behavior. At a press conference upon his return to the United States, Harrison stated that North Korean officials had relayed to him that "We are going to use this time 100 percent effectively to strengthen our nuclear deterrent, quantitatively and qualitatively."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Pyongyang continues to issue intense rhetoric, constantly citing the U.S. for "preparing to attack." For example, when a planned withdrawal of U.S. troops from Observation Post Ouellette along the DMZ was recently announced, the state-run North Korean press stated, "The U.S. decision...indicates that the U.S. preparations for a pre-emptive attack upon the DPRK are underway at a final phase."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Pyongyang had, in fact, earlier temporarily cancelled scheduled talks with Seoul because of a routine exercise conducted yearly by combined troops of the ROK-U.S. In a hotline to Seoul citing the exercise, North Korea announced, "The talks cannot be held as South Korea is launching RSOI/FE exercises with the

United States."<sup>28</sup> The actions coming out of Pyongyang since the nuclear confrontation began are predictable and show no signs of ending as the six-party talks continue. What is rather unusual about Pyongyang's behavior recently is their statements and actions regarding the political process in South Korea and the United States.

#### **V. North Korea and the Political Process in the U.S. and South Korea**

North Korean attempts to influence the political process in the U.S. and South Korea appear to be very recent developments (within the past year), but actions aimed at the U.S. administration apparently began even farther back in time. According to Lim Dong-won, the head of the National Intelligence Service during the Kim Dae-jung administration, Kim Chong-il had planned to visit Seoul in the spring of 2001, months after holding a landmark summit with the former South Korean President. Lim, who also served as chief Presidential Security Advisor during the Kim Dae-jung administration, remarked that Kim Chong-il told him he "had no choice" in canceling his visit, because of the outcome of the U.S. elections, since his advisors had informed him that George W. Bush would take a hard line policy that would "threaten the North Korean regime." Lim made his remarks at the Young Korean Academy Forum for Unification, in Seoul during June 2004.<sup>29</sup>

Since the Democrat party primaries ended in the spring, the North Korean state-run media has reported several times on that party's nominee for President, John Kerry, and his criticism of Bush's hard line policy toward Pyongyang. This is generally considered quite unusual, as traditionally North Korea's government has not commented on U.S. domestic politics in the past. It appears that Pyongyang may be hoping for a return to the policies they enjoyed during the final months of the Clinton Administration.<sup>30</sup> While it seems unlikely that Kerry would return US foreign policy with North Korea to the "golden times" late in the Clinton era, the Democratic candidate as of the time of the writing of this essay has stated that if he wins the Presidential election in November of 2004, he will "find ways" to resume the bi-lateral talks with North Korea.<sup>31</sup> Kerry has stated repeatedly that George W. Bush has "failed in his policy on North Korea."<sup>32</sup> Given the recent propaganda releases from Pyongyang, it appears they have been pinning their hopes of wrangling a better deal out of the

nuclear confrontation, with an American President from the Democrat party.

Even more disturbing are the recent and frequent attempts by North Korean propaganda to influence the political process in the South. During March of 2004, when South Korean President Noh Moo-hyun was impeached by what was then a Grand National Party (GNP)-dominated National Assembly, the North Korean state-run press discounted the act for its “illegality and impudence,” further stating that “The U.S. is chiefly to blame for the incident,” and remarking, “The U.S. egged the South Korean political quacks, obsessed by the greed for power, on to stage such an incident in a bid to install ultra-right pro-U.S. regime there.”<sup>33</sup> The unusual propaganda was of course immediately responded to by several daily papers in the South, including one editorial which read in part, “We do not understand why the North is interfering in the South’s domestic affairs. This is a clear violation of the basic principles agreed upon by the two Koreas.”<sup>34</sup>

North Korea’s attempts to influence the political process in South Korea continued during the spring of 2004, as Pyongyang’s print and broadcast outlets urged voters to put the left into power in the ROK National Assembly. In a de facto endorsement of Noh Moo-hyun, the DPRK urged South Koreans to vote against “conservative forces” in the elections.<sup>35</sup> During the same week in April of 2004, the North Korean press again stated that “pro-U.S. conservative forces in South Korea” were plotting to scuttle the National Assembly elections.<sup>36</sup> Pyongyang’s attempted intervention in the elections is seen by many as a rather clumsy effort to build on the division in South Korean society that many see as being between older conservatives and younger more liberal voters, who are more sympathetic to North Korea. In the South, the Uri party has been fighting a reputation (brought on by some rather unfortunate statements made by its leaders) that it only wants to appeal to younger and more liberal voters.<sup>37</sup> The current rift between conservative and liberal voters in South Korea has been categorized as both “class conflict” and “generation gap.”<sup>38</sup> Whether the political climate in South Korea is currently overplayed in the world press or not, obviously Pyongyang feels it has more to gain with a left-leaning government in power – and even more to gain if the same situation exists in the United States.

## **VI. North Korea’s Dealings with Regional Players: Japan, Russia, and China**

Since the nuclear confrontation began in the fall of 2002, North Korea has focused its efforts on dealing with other regional players besides South Korea and the United States, perhaps hoping for their help in resolving the issue, and putting pressure on the United States for a compromise that would favor Pyongyang. During May of 2004, Japan’s Prime Minister visited Kim Chong-il and resolved a key issue between the two countries. North Korea agreed to release the family members of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korean agents, and Koizumi agreed to extend 250,000 tons of food aid and \$10 million worth of medical supplies and humanitarian aid to North Korea. Though Koizumi said the aid pledge was made at the request of international organizations, it appears likely that Japan’s pledge was the main factor in winning the release of the Japanese family members.<sup>39</sup> The resolution of this issue, paramount in the minds of many Japanese citizens, could mean Japan will take a softer stance in future talks involving North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.

Russia is obviously a less important player in the region, but still has dealings with North Korea, and has already been pushing for a softer stance with the United States regarding Pyongyang’s nuclear programs. While the Russian government may truly believe that the threat is not as imposing as many in the current U.S. government have concluded, it appears that the primary reasons for Russia’s current stance could be economic. Putin and Kim Chong-il have developed a plan for connecting the two railway lines on the Korean Peninsula, tying them into Russian Trans-Siberian railroad. Goods could then be delivered to Europe from South Korea and Japan by land, cutting the transportation time from the current average of 34 days to 13-18 days. According to Russian Prime Minister Kasyanov, once the project is completed it will triple current Russian transit fees to \$3 billion per year.<sup>40</sup> While this may not be the only reason that Putin’s government is pushing for a softer stance with North Korea, it is certainly an important factor in the decision-making process of the Russians.

China is easily the most important regional player (at least in the minds of those in the North Korean government) involved with North Korea – and the nation most likely to push for a softer stance on North Korean issues with the United States. China continues to provide economic aid and some military aid to

Pyongyang – though the nature of the autocratic government in Beijing keeps analysts from knowing exactly how much or when the aid has been or is being given. In April of 2004, while on a summit visit to China, Kim Chong-il reportedly tried to negotiate a deal for importing J-10A fighter jets from China, but was refused in a “roundabout way.” China did, however, agree in principle to provide North Korea with grants (unspecified). This was confirmed by Chinese sources who stated, “China has provided North Korea with a grant, and North Korea expressed its gratitude for this.”<sup>41</sup> According to diplomatic sources, the “grant” Kim asked for from China was most likely in the form of crude oil to help solve North Korea’s ongoing electricity and energy shortages.<sup>42</sup>

During Kim’s latest visit to China, he also reportedly discussed the ongoing nuclear crisis with Chinese leader Hu Jintao. Reportedly, Kim told Hu that “the United States is looking to maintaining a hostile policy toward North Korea [and is] looking to destroy North Korea through its CVID policy.” According to press sources, the South Korean government interpreted Kim’s remark as a request to China to convince the United States to end its “hard line” stance.<sup>43</sup>

China may in fact have (at least partially) honored Kim’s request. During working-level talks regarding North Korea held in Beijing during May of 2004, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jinchao indicated that little progress had been made. “There are still some major disagreements,” he said, adding, “We hope all parties can keep patient and flexible in the spirit of understanding and cooperation.”<sup>44</sup> In perhaps more disturbing news, China’s Vice Foreign Minister to the United States, Zhou Wenzhong, publicly challenged the Bush administration’s claim that North Korea is developing nuclear weapons using uranium. In an interview with the *New York Times* on 8 June 2004, Zhou said, “We know nothing about the (North Korean) uranium program, also we don’t know whether it exists,” adding, “The U.S. has not presented convincing evidence of this program.”<sup>45</sup> The recent statement made by the Chinese diplomat is particularly disturbing, given the evidence from several sources articulated earlier in this article that indicates the flights of American-built C-130s shuttling missiles and HEU technology and equipment back and forth between Islamabad and Pyongyang, were routinely flying through Chinese airspace. Thus, the statements given in the interview, obviously speaking on behalf

of the Chinese government, appear to be at the very least, inaccurate and, at the worst, disingenuous.

In July 2004 talks between Condoleezza Rice and China’s military Chief, Jiang Zemin, Jiang appeared to have far greater interest in ongoing issues dealing with Taiwan than in the North Korean nuclear issue.<sup>46</sup> Based on recent activity, while China has not agreed to all of the concessions that Pyongyang has asked for, it appears that the government in Beijing is willing to push the U.S. for a softer stance regarding the North’s nuclear program. China also appears willing to continue providing aid, and perhaps as importantly, making misleading statements regarding the existence of North Korea’s HEU weaponization program – a program which it is likely Beijing has known of and allowed to exist in secret for several years.

## VII. The Alliance: Perspectives of the Korean People

In order to understand the current and recent perspectives of the Korean people regarding the ROK-US alliance, an examination and analysis of several polls and surveys taken within the past year merits discussion. In a poll taken in January 2004, Koreans were asked which country they believed most threatened Korea’s security. Overall, 33 percent named North Korea, and 39 percent named the United States. Among respondents in their twenties, however, 58 percent said the US was the bigger threat, while only 20 percent cited the North.<sup>47</sup> In a poll conducted in March 2004 by the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification, the overall trend seemed to waver somewhat as 65 percent of respondents (overall) in South Korea said they did not agree with North Korea’s claims that the United States was hindering inter-Korean cooperation and posing the greatest threat to peace on the Peninsula.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps what is most interesting about recent polls in Korea is the apparent “generation gap” discussed briefly and earlier in this paper. For example, in another recent survey of South Korean college students also conducted by the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification, 49.1 percent responded, that among the four neighboring “great powers,” the U.S. would most oppose the unification of Korea, followed by Japan (35.7 percent), China (10.3 percent), and Russia (5.0 percent).<sup>49</sup> When another poll that encompasses the Korean population as a whole is examined, the numbers again change significantly. In a poll conducted during

June 2004 by *the JoongAng Ilbo*, 53 percent of those over 50 said that maintaining the ROK-US alliance is more important than achieving “self-reliant” diplomacy. Among those aged 20 to 30, however, 77 percent called for “self-reliant diplomacy.” The same percentage also said that Korea should place its highest priority in foreign affairs and commerce with China, while only 22 percent in the younger age group gave the nod to the United States.<sup>50</sup> In an earlier poll conducted in March 2004 by the *Donga Ilbo*, respondents who had won seats in the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly election, and were from the Pro-Noh Moo-hyun, left-leaning Uri party answered in a very similar manner, with 63 percent saying that Korea should keep in closer contact with China in diplomacy and trade instead of the United States.<sup>51</sup>

In an extensive, 132-page study of South Korean attitudes toward the U.S., recently released by the Rand Institute, the results were also quite interesting. Overall, the report found that the population of South Korea has a “deep ambivalence” about the presence of U.S. forces in their country. The study stated in part, “On the one hand, most South Koreans have said that U.S. forces are important to their security, but, on the other, they believe that the presence of U.S. forces may impede the pace of reunification or adversely affect other goals.”<sup>52</sup>

The Rand study, and the other recent surveys discussed above, seem to indicate several important factors. First of all, there is a fairly significant gap in opinion regarding the importance of the ROK-US alliance, the motives of the United States government, and future relationships with China and the U.S., along generational lines – particularly among the very youngest and the very oldest of those who cast votes in South Korean elections. Secondly, overall, Koreans appear torn between what they see is an important security role played by the United States, and better relations with North Korea. Finally, opinion polls seem to indicate that the majority of South Koreans (albeit by a slim margin) believe that while the US-ROK alliance may be undergoing troubles in this difficult time when so many issues are in flux, it remains an important aspect of security and stability for South Korean foreign and domestic policy.

### **VIII. Current ROK and U.S. Government Perspectives of the Alliance**

The current administration in Seoul has many of the perspectives that are common to those from the “younger

generation” (also often called the “386” generation) discussed earlier. In fact, in the most recently published National Security Strategy document of the Noh Moo-hyun administration, one of the four strategic goals given top priority for the next four years is in part, “The Participatory Government intends to lay the groundwork to realize a self-reliant defense within its term...,” further stating, “...to build up capabilities needed to take the leading role in deterring North Korea, and to secure the ability for independent operational planning and force operations.”<sup>53</sup> The government in Seoul also reportedly plans to push for the transfer of operational command from the Combined Forces Command (currently commanded by a U.S. General) to the Korean military, and to push continuously for revisions in the Status of Forces agreement.<sup>54</sup> During his presidential campaign Noh repeatedly called for changes in the agreement, which he apparently feels is slanted too favorably toward U.S. forces.

That the current administration in Seoul feels the alliance needs to change in ways indicated above may not be a bad thing – as long as the government there is also willing to assume the large financial burden that will be entailed by building a military that can take the lead in deterring North Korea. But there are major foreign policy differences regarding North Korea’s nuclear programs that have caused problems for the alliance since the current South Korean administration assumed office. During March of 2004, South Korea’s President remarked, “The U.S. strategy is adopting a stronger position [toward North Korea]. We however, think it is more favorable for us to adopt a strategy of dialogue and engage North Korea [with the six-nation talks].”<sup>55</sup>

In fact, Noh has made a point of repeatedly making statements that are consistent with the promises he made to his supporters during the 2002 elections, when he was often quoted as saying “...the days of kowtowing to the United States are over.”<sup>56</sup> While there remain differences with the U.S. regarding how to handle the North Korean WMD problem, it appears the administration in Seoul realizes that the ROK-US alliance remains the vital security apparatus for doing so. As ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon said in a recent speech, “The so-called anti-American sentiment which flared up until the early part of last year was not cool-headed ideological opposition to the U.S. but issue-specific complaints that demanded specific redressing concerns.” He went on to comment about the often reported anti-American views of

many young Koreans saying, “Even the views that some young Koreans persistently hold about the Korea-U.S. alliance should rather be considered in the context that they did not experience the War nor witness the birth of our alliance.”<sup>57</sup>

It is of some importance to note that the U.S. perspectives of the alliance have changed to some extent since the fall of 2002. Much of the concern by those who make and implement policy in Washington is because of perceived anti-Americanism in South Korea, and recent difficulties in the alliance regarding the realignment and relocation of troops located there, as well as differing views on the diplomatic strategy needed to handle the nuclear confrontation with North Korea. It is important to discuss these perspectives because unlike in past periods when there were difficulties in the alliance, both conservatives and liberals within the United States government have expressed concerns that current disagreements on several issues have made what is arguably the most important bi-lateral alliance Washington has a matter of great discussion – on both sides of the Pacific.

At a conference recently held in Seoul, Bruce Bennett of the Rand Institute remarked that South Korea needs to improve its military equipment and that the U.S. does not understand why Korea is shortening its military service period and reducing its troop strength, while at the same time telling the U.S. that American forces in Korea should not leave the country.<sup>58</sup> In the opinion of the author, this is a very important statement, because, as discussed earlier in this paper, one of the four strategic goals stated in the recently released ROK National Security Strategy, is building up capabilities in order to take the leading role in deterring North Korea – part of the more “self-reliant” defense posture that Seoul plans to build toward over the next four years. Thus, the apparently conflicting actions taken during the past year have raised concerns. In a recent opinion poll conducted among 23 Korea experts in the Washington, D.C. area by the Mike Mansfield Foundation and the *Kyung Hyang Daily News*, nearly 40 percent of the respondents indicated that Seoul is not playing the role of a trusted ally, while 60 percent indicated that they felt anti-American sentiment in Korea has had an impact on the recent U.S. plans for troop reduction. Interestingly, 65 percent of the respondents blamed *both* Seoul and Washington for recent fissures and fractions in the alliance.<sup>59</sup>

There is also some concern in the United States government that there continues to be a steady increase in anti-

Americanism in South Korea. During April 2004 Congressional testimony, these concerns were voiced to then USFK Commander, General Leon J. Laporte. Representative Kurt Weldon of Pennsylvania asked the General about public opinion surveys (some of which were discussed earlier in this article) that revealed most South Koreans consider the U.S. a bigger threat than North Korea. Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri cited public opinion polls that revealed feelings of good will toward the U.S. had fallen from 53 percent in 2002 to 46 percent in 2003.<sup>60</sup> Such perceptions in Washington are different in some ways from past moments in the alliance – because some in Washington are now questioning the necessity of troops in Korea if they are not wanted (or appreciated) by the majority of Korean citizens.

There has also been an expression of concern from those in Washington because of the problems currently being encountered with the planned troop realignment (and partial withdrawal) that will occur over the next few years. In a recent interview with the *Chosun Ilbo*, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless remarked that because of difficulties regarding discussions of land allocations for base relocations, “...if this rational proposal is not accepted at the military level and instead develops into a political one, finding compromise might prove difficult.” When asked if the delays in finding an agreement on the Yongsan Garrison transfer would influence the U.S. decision to invest \$11 billion to upgrade USFK’s fighting strength, Lawless remarked in part, if “An additional fighting power couldn’t come in and the reorganization of USFK wouldn’t occur, it would inevitably influence that plan.” He added “If a USFK reorganization agreement cannot be reached, I worry that the alliance will lose the confidence and trust of both sides’ citizens.”<sup>61</sup> According to recent press reports, American diplomats have expressed concerns as well. The U.S. embassy is scheduled to be relocated within Seoul, and they are reportedly worried that the Korean government will react the same way with the reconstruction of the embassy as it did with the issue of the U.S. military base transfer.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear from an analysis of recent events that there are many concerns in the United States about the current relationship in the ROK-U.S. alliance. Of paramount concern on all sides is importance of resolving these issues and disagreements. The most important issue is still one that has existed throughout the life of the alliance and is now even more important, given the capability of



Pyongyang to produce nuclear weapons and long-range missiles – how to handle the conventional and unconventional North Korean threat.

### IX. Conclusions

North Korea's continued development of WMD programs is troubling to say the least. The impact of the nuclear and missile programs – and the proliferation of these programs – is felt not only throughout Northeast Asia but in South Asia and the Middle East as well. North Korea's nuclear strategy since the fall of 2002 has been one of continued development mixed with fairly frequent paranoid bursts of brinkmanship. In addition, North Korea has made rather obvious (and probably ineffective) attempts to influence the political process in both South Korea and the United States. Kim Chong-il apparently feels that he can negotiate better terms for the dismantlement or freezing of his nuclear and missile programs from more liberal governments in each of these nations.

Kim Chong-il's diplomatic dealings with China, Russia, and Japan appear to be part of an effort to use whatever leverage he may have with each of these countries to get them to influence the United States into taking a softer stance regarding his nuclear program. Clearly, in South Korea there are many who believe the United States should do exactly that. In addition, differing perspectives between the South Korean people, their government, and the United States are having a strong impact on the alliance, and how it deals with the North Korean threat.

Resolving the complicated problem of dealing with North Korea is interesting if one thinks of it in Cold War terms. After all, North Korea is one of the last remaining governments from that era. Like the former Soviet Union we simply cannot go to war with North Korea – the number of deaths would simply be too disastrous, even in victory. Thus, it is important that containment of North Korea be carried out in a manner which is satisfactory to all who have interests in the region, given the fact that North Korea's WMD programs threaten more than just South Korea.

Getting North Korea on the road to dismantling of its nuclear program is only the first step to peace on the Korean Peninsula. Even with all of its WMD programs (both nuclear and missile) dismantled, North Korea still poses a significant threat to South Korea and particularly Seoul. As with the old Cold War theory of "Mutually Assured Destruction" (MAD), Pyongyang, with

only its conventional weapons (if threatened, or if in a war) can wipe out close to a million people in just one day with hundreds of long-range multiple rocket launchers (240mm) and long-range artillery systems (170mm) that can simply be pulled out of hardened artillery sites and fired, with little to no warning.<sup>63</sup> So, Seoul is literally "held hostage" by this very real conventional threat. This makes it even more important that issues between long-time allies be resolved quickly and responsibly, so that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs can be legitimately contained, and other security issues can be resolved that will ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

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