When security met politics: desecuritization of North Korean threats by South Korea's Kim Dae-jung government

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Abstract

This study delves into an empirical case analysis of the desecuritization process of the North Korean threat under the Kim Dae-jung government. Unlike previous studies, it analyzes how domestic and international actors desecuritized traditional threats by taking the pluralistic political processes of a democratic polity seriously. This was the process of competition between different political coalitions and the process of transformation from issues of high politics into issues of low politics. It remains to be seen whether the Kim Dae-jung government's desecuritization of North Korean threats was a deep or a shallow one, but it appears to be clear that the desecuritization of North Korean threats by the Kim Dae-jung government paved the way for another 5 years of

progressive government with Roh Moo-hyun's 'unexpected' victory in the 2002 presidential election.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims at providing the reader with a preliminary analytical framework to explain the comprehensive process of 'securitization' and/or 'desecuritization' of both traditional and non-traditional security threats in East Asia. Second, by using the analytical framework suggested in this paper, we will critically analyze the desecuritization process of North Korean threats within South Korea during the Kim Dae-jung government (1998–2003). This paper is composed of four parts. The first part explains the backdrop against which this research was initiated and shows why our analytical framework is a breakthrough in the study of non-traditional security threats and their securitization process. The second part suggests an analytical framework based upon a 'liberal' approach to international relations. This part will lay out a few propositions and some operational hypotheses concerned with the securitization process. The third and fourth parts will be an application of our analytical framework to the entire process of desecuritization of North Korean threats during the Kim Dae-jung government.

2 The changing security context in East Asia

East Asia has been undergoing a drastic transition toward a post-Cold War security environment, democratization, and globalization. Although there still remain Cold War-type confrontations among Northeast Asian states and the impact of globalization and democratization on the East Asian region generally differs from state to state, this transition seems irreversible and is creating a new security environment in the region. Since the end of the Cold War, the issues that had not been considered traditional security issues, such as illegal migration, environmental degradation, infectious disease, and drug trafficking, have increasingly become security issues. The process and practice of transforming these non-traditional security issues into core security issues is generally called 'securitization' (Buzan and Waever, 1997).

Many security specialists have studied general security implications of the transition. Although some still emphasize the primacy of

traditional security issues (Deudney, 1990, pp. 461–476), an increasing number of security specialists have begun to recognize the significance of the newly rising non-traditional security issues, since they pose new types of challenges to countries. These challenges are viewed as byproducts of the post-Cold War security environment and globalization, which are external to countries, and scholars have dedicated most of their efforts to identifying new security issues (Homer-Dixon, 1991; Waever *et al.*, 1993; Huysmans, 1995; Campbell, 1998; Doty, 1999; Tow, 2000).

Studies on non-traditional security issues, particularly those of East Asia, have focused mainly on factual findings and descriptions of the current state of those issues, and what policy measures will be needed to tackle them (Hemandez and Pattugalan, 1999; Tan and Boutin, 2001; Emmers, 2003, 2004; Caballero-Anthony *et al.*, 2006). Rarely have there been serious theoretical analyses of why certain issues are securitized and desecuritized, while other issues remain outside the realm of the security discourse. For example, there has been no serious theoretical study on why environmental degradation is less securitized in Southeast Asia than in Northeast Asian countries, whereas illegal migration and drug trafficking are more strongly securitized in Southeast Asia than they are in Northeast Asia. The current discourse of securitization in East Asia thus tends to neglect the questions of 'why,' 'who,' and 'how' while paying great attention to the questions of 'what' and 'when.'

To put it simply, as most research has focused on identifying new types of security threats, the complex processes by which these new types of non-traditional threats are transformed into security threats (securitization) have been under-studied.[1] This is particularly true in East Asia, where regional countries have not securitized all the new types of issues, and the degree of securitization and desecuritization vis-à-vis the same issues varies from country to country in the region. When the degree and presence of securitization and desecuritization of the same issues vary

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1 Although Ralf Emmers, Mely Caballero-Anthony, and Amitav Acharya attempted to build a conceptual framework on the securitization and desecuritization processes in East Asia, it still lacks a sophisticated operational hypothesis and comparative framework that is founded on well-developed theoretical constructs (Emmers, 2004; Caballero-Anthony *et al.*, 2006). Other theoretical discussions on securitization and desecuritization processes focus on discourse analyses of securitization processes and criticisms of the Copenhagen School (Smith, 2000; Knudsen, 2001; Stritzel; Wilkinson, 2007; Phillips, 2007).

across the region, it becomes obvious that this variance cannot be explained by external factors such as the end of the Cold War or globalization alone. Systemic external factors usually explain the recurrence of the same pattern within a system (be it regional or global), or similar joint responses and reactions by the countries within the system (Waltz, 1979). Hence, it is necessary to review domestic factors so as to explain the varying degrees of securitization and desecuritization.

At the same time, increasingly pluralistic features of East Asian countries pose different security implications than in the past because political processes tend to become more competitive among more diverse actors possessing diversified interests and values. Given the importance of domestic factors in explaining the variance of securitization, the relative lack of research on the security implications of democratization or increasing pluralism in East Asia leaves a wide gap in securitization and desecuritization studies.

3 A new liberal approach to securitization and desecuritization

3.1 Bringing politics back in

One former theoretical paradigm dealing with securitization or desecuritization is the social constructivist approach, which understood securitization as an act of speech. This approach, developed mainly by scholars like Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, and Ronnie Lipschutz, contends that issues are presented as an existential threat by acts of speech, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal boundaries of political procedures (Lipschutz, 1995; Buzan and Waever, 1997; Buzan *et al.*, 1998; Buzan and Waever, 2003). However, this study is relatively silent and under-sophisticated in suggesting conditions under which certain issues are securitized with varying degrees of success. In other words, the social constructivist study has not suggested a well-developed analytical framework explaining the comprehensive process of the securitization of non-traditional security threats.

The strength of preceding securitization studies is that they encompass a variety of newly developing security problematics which reflect the aforementioned transition in the East Asian region. They can tackle both traditional and non-traditional security issues. They can account

for many different levels of analysis. What is more, they include diverse actors of securitization and referent objects.

As with other social constructivist studies, however, rigorous theory-building remains relatively underdeveloped as far as previous securitization studies are concerned, and empirical analyses of securitization – or desecuritization for that matter – are confined to very contextual descriptions of various security sectors. Moreover, previous empirical studies of securitization were trapped in state-centric descriptive methods that focused on describing which countries were securitizing what new threats. Accordingly, they lacked a precise analytical framework describing and analyzing how domestic and international or transnational actors co-securitize or co-desecuritize. In particular, securitization studies – while reminding the reader of the importance of political process of securitization and desecuritization – do not take pluralistic political processes of a democratic polity seriously.

One of the main weaknesses of securitization studies is the lack of a political framework in theory building. As the previous securitization studies left the domestic political process of securitization and desecuritization unaddressed, it is difficult to grasp the variance of securitization and desecuritization among different issues and countries. Hence, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the entire process of securitization, one needs to define 'threat' and 'security' in a way that reflects the political connotation of these terms. To be more explicit, one needs to develop a sophisticated theoretical framework that encompasses the political dynamics of the (de)securitization process and allows for an empirical analysis of (de)securitization.

An important trend in East Asia is the increasing number of actors trying to maximize their own interests and values in domestic politics, namely increased pluralism. As more and more actors participate in the policy-making and priority-setting processes in their respective countries, diverse domestic interests (groups) compete with one another in order to place their preferences on top of, or higher on, the government's policy agenda. At the same time, globalization poses new challenges to diverse domestic actors, as they must take an increasing number of transnational actors and factors in their interest calculations. In short, globalization poses new threats not only to nation states but also to diverse domestic actors by threatening to deprive them of much of their vested interests and precious values. We can thus hypothesize that, depending on their

perceptions of threat to their preferences and values, different domestic actors will view different transnational threats as security threats and will compete with one another to exert political pressures on the government to securitize the threats of their concern (Risse-Kappen, 1995; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Held *et al.*, 1999). When the threats are securitized, the government will allocate more resources to defend the values and interests that are under threat. In other words, new threats are transformed from issues of low politics into issues of high politics. In the similar vein, desecuritization process is a reversed one.

This rationale shows that globalization and plural domestic political processes are closely intertwined in securitizing new security issues that have emerged from the globalization process. Previous studies have not captured this nexus between globalization and pluralism. More importantly, this nexus has become extremely significant in securitization studies in East Asia, as countries in the region are becoming increasingly plural, if not democratic.

To fill the gap that previous securitization studies have left behind – especially within the context of pluralizing East Asia – we were inspired by Andrew Moravscik's liberal inter-governmentalism in developing our analytical framework and employed a liberal perspective of securitization that takes preferences and pluralism seriously (Moravcsik, 1997). We view (de)securitization as a political process involving the 'authoritative allocation of values (preferences)' that settles the issues of 'who gets what, when, and how' in the face of new or old threats to the values of the people who are involved in the political process (Lasswell, 1935; Easton, 1953).

Security has been traditionally defined as the 'absence of threats to acquired values' or the 'absence of fear that acquired values will be attacked' (Buzan, 1991). If newly emerging threats force one to lose or renounce precious values in the authoritative value allocation process, the individual or state will try to securitize the new threats to protect her precious values with the strongest possible measures. Likewise, if continued securitization of old threats encroaches upon one's precious values in the process of value allocation, he or she will try to desecuritize the old threats. When certain threats to certain values are securitized, those values will become higher priorities of the state (issues of high politics), and for that reason, securitization is synonymous with 'higher prioritization.' On the other hand, when certain threats to certain values are

desecuritized, those values will become lower priorities of the state, thus becoming issues of low politics. When certain values become higher priorities, those values will take a privileged position in the value allocation process, thus extracting more resources from the government for the protection of those particular values than before. This is why securitization is a political process.

In analyzing the political processes of increasingly pluralistic polities, the liberal approach, which takes seriously factors such as diverse preferences and values of domestic actors, the formation of and shift in domestic coalitions, and two-level games between international and domestic actors, has the edge compared with other approaches in international relations (Putnam, 1988, pp. 427–460; Moravcsik, 1997).

3.2 Securitization process in country K

We propose that (de)securitization is a political process pertaining to the allocation of values (preferences) both domestically and internationally. The goal of securitization or desecuritization is 'higher or lower prioritization' so that the government can distribute more or less resources than before to protect certain values. In this vein, securitization is mainly a country's ideational and discursive political practice of a winning political economic coalition to attain and protect more (sometimes excluding certain other values) of their values vis-à-vis others (e.g. environment, wealth, safety, human rights, social integrity, religion, etc.). The securitization of certain values justifies the use of extraordinary physical and institutional instruments to protect values against actual or potential threats. Desecuritization is an ideational and discursive political practice of a winning political coalition to divert more of state resources from the previous priorities to other priorities.

In East Asia, securitized issues are the preferences that a country's powerful winning political economic coalition feels are the most threatened. By the same token, desecuritized issues are the preferences that a country's powerful winning political economic coalition feels increasingly less threatened. In other words, the political economic coalitions of East Asian countries are not just passive actors. In addition to traditional security threats, they try to securitize the preferences that they feel are the most threatened by forces of globalization, and the coalition(s) that wins the political competition regarding securitization will succeed

in securitizing their preferences. Desecuritization processes reflect the reverse process.

The securitization process of non-traditional threats, such as illegal migration, transnational crime, human trafficking, transboundary environmental degradation, starts with the process of globalization. As domestic society is increasingly and newly exposed to global forces, the relatively safe previous status of values of some domestic political forces become newly and increasingly threatened. At the same time, as the political systems of East Asian countries become more pluralistic, more and more domestic, transnational, and international actors become involved in a political process to protect preferences which are being threatened by the forces of globalization. The entire political process therefore becomes intermestic, thereby blurring the boundary separating the domestic and the international.

The winning political economic coalition in a political process will impose its will upon others and, at the expense of others, attempt to protect its preferences against the threats of globalization by securitizing its preferences. If there is no winning coalition(s), then the political process will muddle through without securitizing any preferences. The process of desecuritization is the reverse political process of securitization. A typified model of this securitization process within Country K is as follows (Figure 1):

- Country K is undergoing globalization and pluralization; the role international (e.g. foreign countries, international organizations, etc.) and transnational actors (e.g. multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational criminal organizations, etc.) is growing.
- Stage I: Political Coalition A perceives X and Y as non-traditional security threats, while Political Coalition B perceives Z and W as non-traditional threats.
- Stage II: Political Coalitions A and B, together with international and transnational actors, compete and cooperate to securitize their own priorities.
- Stage III: The securitization process is completed with (i) imposition (X and/or Y, or Z and/or W are securitized); or (ii) win-set (both coalitions' priorities are securitized); or (iii) muddling through without securitization.
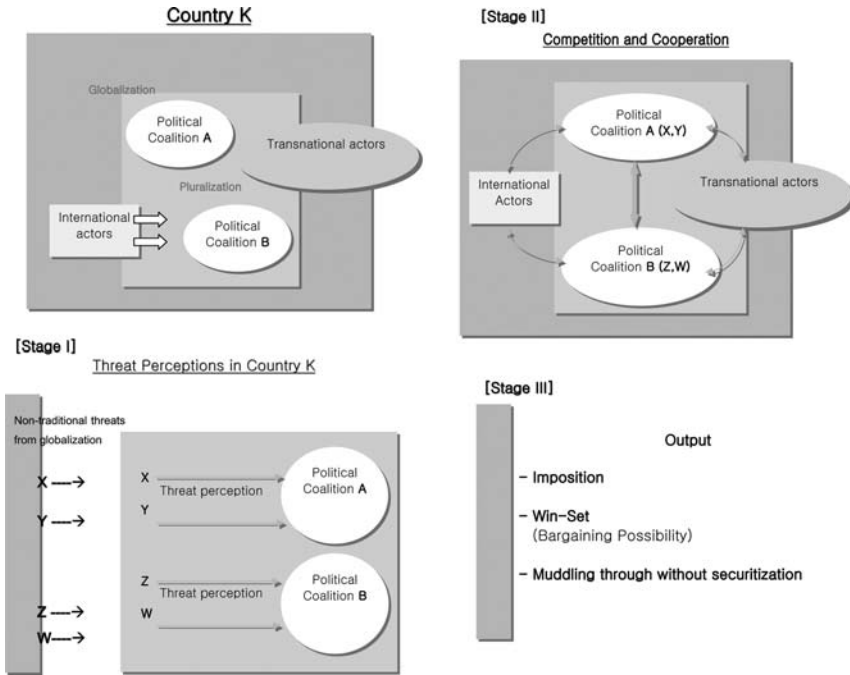
Figure 1 Securitization process in country K.

To elaborate the three-stage process of (de)securitization, one can imagine a political process of securitization of climate change. For example, international organizations and environmental NGOs both in and out of the country increasingly work together to allocate more government resources to the issues of global warming by trying to securitize climate change, while traditional energy industries and security specialists in and out of the country will try to block securitization of climate change to protect their vested interests. These domestic, international, and traditional groups will compete, conflict, and cooperate with each other in domestic politics of country K. They will compete by publishing scientific data for and against climate change, and come into conflict with each other on the street in the form of candle light vigils. Like-minded groups will cooperate with each other to push forward the agenda in congress, and lobby-related governmental agencies.

When the dominant political coalition in country K, together with international and transnational actors, has an interest of securitizing climate change, they will move up the issue of climate change in the

priority ladder of the government policies and allocate more state resources to combating climate change. If there is no clear winner in domestic politics due to shifting coalitions in congress, for instance, securitization of climate change will not be realized for some time until a clear winner appears. However, if the competing groups are able to find an overlapping interest (win-set), such as investing more in alternative energy sources while rescheduling the timetable of the green house gas reduction, securitization of climate change may proceed to a certain extent.

With regard to desecuritization of traditional security threats, similar political process can be observed. For example, peace groups in and out of the country will try to desecuritize the threats being prevented by landmines by spreading discourses about human rights as well as scientific data. If they win domestic politics against traditional security groups and industrial groups manufacturing landmines, that particular security threat will be desecuritized, and the resources that have been allocated to that particular threat will be reallocated to other issues.

Desecuritization has been relatively understudied subject compared with securitization. Most descriptive and empirical researches on securitization have been focused on securitization of new threats while desecuritization of traditional Cold War threats have been taken for granted as the Cold War ended. However, desecuritization of traditional threats has not been so natural as vested interests in the traditional security community resisted desecuritization of traditional threats, and also as many political and economic groups still perceived persistent threats coming from transition countries including Russia and China. At the same time, there still remained cold war structure in some part of the world such as Northeast Asia, and in that particular region, efforts to desecuritize and securitize Cold War-type threats competed and conflicted against each other.

Against that backdrop, South Korea during the Kim Dae-jung government represents a good case for conflict and competition between securitization and desecuritization groups regarding traditional threats of North Korea, as new dominant political groups that captured the state had the preference of moving down the issue of confrontational posture vis-à-vis North Korea on the priority list of the government policies. North Korean issues were gradually transformed from issues of high politics (security) to issues of low politics (economic and cultural cooperation). At the same time, democratization in South Korea

proceeded to a great extent as power change took place from the ruling to opposition parties for the first time in Korean political history by peaceful democratic elections. Pluralization was flourished by liberalizing economy, culture, and politics as well as opening up the previously protected sectors of the economy after the financial crisis in 1997. However, the traditional groups that had seized upon security threats of North Korea did not disappear from the political stage, and competed with the new political groups.

The next section will analyze the desecuritization process of North Korean threats under Kim Dae-jung government in the detailed manner. We intentionally chose the case of desecuritization, not securitization, because desecuritization of North Korean threats in South Korea is a hard case compared with securitization of new threats in other parts of the world although the process of securitization and desecuritization involves similar political processes. If we succeed in proving the utility of our framework in hard cases, our framework would be also useful in analyzing securitization process of newly emerging threats. Further studies on securitization of new threats by applying our framework will be our next task.

4 Key actors of political dynamics in South Korea

How can we then conceptualize desecuritization? It can be defined as denying the conventional wisdom that views a certain country as an enemy, thereby changing the public support for national security, particularly for a military alliance against the enemy. Desecuritization is different from politicization in the sense that desecuritization is a deliberate process of competition between different political coalitions and the process of transformation from issues of high politics into issues of low politics. Then, we can lay out the following hypotheses: (i) (as in the case of securitization) dominant political forces in a country (South Korea) tend to desecuritize (or resist) traditional security issues so that a traditional political map can be changed (or kept intact) in favor of those dominant political forces; (ii) the shifting political economic coalitions in a country (South Korea) reflect pluralization that accompanies democratization and globalization; and (iii) international actors tend to participate in and influence the process of forging political coalitions and desecuritizing when they feel their values and interests are threatened.

At any rate, South Korea's democratization shattered the monolithic South Korean policy line toward North Korea and opened up a policy process. President Kim Dae-jung's inauguration in 1998 placed new leaders with very different philosophies and approaches in key positions throughout the South Korean establishment. It also shifted the social and ideological center of gravity among the elite. In the process, a variety of political groups, perspectives, and interests contended over a more diverse set of policy issues (Levin and Han, 2002, p. 63). Key actors of 'intermestic' dynamics in the Kim Dae-jung government are examined below.

4.1 Progressive coalition

At the center of the progressive coalition was the Kim Dae-jung government. President Kim Dae-jung's 'sunshine policy' replaced decades of invective toward the North with a rapprochement that resulted in the June 2000 summit with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang and a Nobel Peace Prize 4 months later. The sunshine policy was defined and implemented by mainly two people: President Kim Dae-jung and his chief aide, Lim Dong-won. Under these two dominant figures, a handful of senior staff at the Ministry of Unification and the National Intelligence Service monopolized the process of policy implementation, thereby contributing to the desecuritization of inter-Korean relations.

The second component of the progressive coalition was the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP). The MDP muted over its advocacy of the sunshine policy initially in an effort to avoid stirring up problems with South Korean conservatives. However, it stepped up support after the June 2000 summit to reinforce the president's claim to a major policy success. Arguing that the summit had put an end to an era of rivalry and hostility between the two Koreas, the party amended its platform to present itself more aggressively as a political force that was capable of ushering in a new era of reconciliation, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula.[2]

In addition, the United Liberal Democrats (ULD) remained a part of the progressive coalition until late 2001 despite its conservative nature. Although generally regarded as even farther to the right than the Grand

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2 New Millennium Democratic Party, 2000.

National Party (GNP), the ULD formed an 'unholy alliance' with Kim Dae-jung's MDP in order to win the 1997 presidential election.[3] The ULD had supported the Kim Dae-jung government until the establishment of the MDP in January 2000, but the party's strong opposition to the sunshine policy grew increasingly after the June 2000 summit.

The last component of the progressive coalition consisted of the progressive media and liberal-minded NGOs. The progressive media were represented by the Korean Broadcasting System, Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation, *The Hankyoreh,* and Internet-based media, such as OhmyNews. Progressive NGOs included the Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation (KCRC), Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSDP), and the countless anti-US and anti-US military base NGOs. In addition, the progressive coalition virtually included North Korea since most participants of the progressive coalition were sympathetic to North Korea in the name of inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation. We may thus assume that they favored a 'desecuritized' inter-Korean relationship, which also coincided with North Korea's strategic interests.[4]

4.2 Conservative coalition

Representing mainstream conservatives in South Korean politics, the GNP, while supporting engagement vis-à-vis North Korea, opposed many aspects of President Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy. The GNP demanded a tougher stance toward North Korea, including greater 'reciprocity,' the 'verification' of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, and an end to 'one-sided' concessions to North Korea.

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3 The MDP–ULD coalition was being seen imminent when Kim Jong-pil's ULD had decided to support MDP's candidate Cho Soon for the mayor of Seoul in 1995 (The Dong-A Ilbo, 1995).

4 As of March 2009, North Korea wants to resume negotiations and proceed with a step-by-step approach toward denuclearization. Removing what they called their 'weapons' would be the last step. They first want to conclude phase two of the six-party agreement by disabling their plutonium-production capabilities, which is currently held up by the absence of the promised fuel oil and a dispute over the possibility of verification. They would then proceed to the agreement's third phase and dismantle their plutonium structure, but only if we gave them light-water reactors. The North would give up its nuclear weapons under variously expressed conditions related to ending US hostility, removing the US nuclear umbrella, or ending the ROK-US alliance—or perhaps all of the above. Desecuritized inter-Korean relations would provide the North with the rationale to remove the US Forces Korea (USFK) from the South (Abramowitz, 2009).

Incidentally, when President Kim Dae-jung refused to keep his promise with ULD Chairman Kim Jong-pil to amend the constitution to move to a parliamentary system, it intensified the strife between the two coalition leaders. When sunshine policy architect Lim Dong-won was subjected to a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly in late 2001, the ULD bolted out of the ruling coalition and voted with the opposition, forcing the resignation of Lim and the entire cabinet (The Chosun Ilbo, 2001b).

On the other hand, the conservative media played a crucial role in engineering fierce competition between the conservative coalition and its progressive counterpart. *The Chosun Ilbo, The Dong-A Ilbo*, and *The Kookmin Ilbo* were strident critics of the government. *The JoongAng Ilbo* mixed mild support for the principle of engagement with criticism of the way the government fashioned and implemented its policy. Conservative NGOs included the National Congress for Freedom and Democracy, the Korean Freedom League, and the Korean Veterans Association (KVA).

Lastly, unlike their active-duty counterparts, many retired generals were more vocal in their opposition to the sunshine policy. The Korean Association of Retired Generals and Admirals, for example, often expressed concerns over the nature and the speed of the government's approach to North Korea. They constantly argued that the government's policy had prematurely removed the 'main enemy' tag from North Korea, thereby weakening public support for national security in the process.[5] In addition, the United States constituted one of the pillars in the conservative coalition, since it played a very important role in influencing the inter-Korean reconciliation process.[6]

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5 The ROK Ministry of National Defense's *Defense White Paper* removed the expression 'main enemy' in its description of North Korea in January 2005.

6 During the Cold War, South Korea and the United States maintained a staunch alliance against North Korea's communist regime. Owing to the very nature of North Korea, neither ally had any reason to doubt the resolve of the other. However, the demise of the Cold War has enabled North Korea and the United States to explore a new relationship very different from the one that had existed during the Cold War. A new environment emerged, in which South Korea–US and inter-Korean relations were affected by the changing dynamics between Pyongyang and Washington. A delicate 'triangular relationship' thus emerged among North Korea, South Korea, and the United States as Washington began to involve itself deeply in the North Korean nuclear question as part of its post-Cold War global strategy. The triangle had three sets of bilateral relations that affected each other.

5 Desecuritization process of North Korean threats

The desecuritization process of North Korean threats consists of three stages. In stage I (Kim Dae-jung's inauguration in February 1998 to the June 1999 inter-Korean naval clash in the West Sea), the progressive coalition no longer perceived North Korea as a threat, while the conservative coalition perceived it as a continued threat. In stage II (citizens' 'revolt' in January 2000 to the publication of the *Defense White Paper* by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) in December 2000), the progressive and conservative coalitions competed with each other, with the former trying to 'desecuritize' inter-Korean relations and the latter trying to maintain the status quo of the relationship. In stage III (George W. Bush's inauguration in January 2001 to Roh Moo-hyun's victory in the December 2002 presidential election), the desecuritization process was completed with the progressive coalition's victory in the December 2002 presidential election.

5.1 Stage I (February 1998 to June 1999): warming up

President Kim's attempt at desecuritization. In his inaugural address, President Kim Dae-jung emphasized that reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea would be at the top of his policy agenda despite Pyongyang's continued belligerence and the severe financial crisis that had just hit South Korea. Thereafter, he ordered that the word 'unification' be removed completely from the government's policy toward the North. Instead, he began to use words like 'constructive engagement policy' to avoid fomenting North Korea's fear of being absorbed by its stronger Southern brother. By doing so, President Kim sent two major messages: that his administration's goal would be the two Koreas' peaceful coexistence, not unification, and that it would seek to reassure the North Korean regime of South Korea's good intentions.

He did face some constraints in implementing his constructive engagement policy quickly, however: (i) the odd political coalition with Kim Jong-pil, the conservative ULD leader; (ii) the minority status of Kim's party in the National Assembly; and (iii) the financial crisis. Reflecting his awareness of these constraints, Kim moved cautiously at first. He emphasized that he would pursue 'deterrence' and 'reconciliation' simultaneously. At the same time, the president began to move ahead with the

'desecuritization' of North Korean threats. Why did he do this? In retro-spect, he probably wished to change South Korea's internal power struc-ture, thereby attaining 'hegemony' (Anderson, 1976; Gramsci, 1992, 1996).[7] In March 1998, he announced the principle of separating econ-omics from politics in order to create a more favorable environment for the resumption of inter-Korean relations. In April, the government prom-ised to simplify legal procedures for inter-Korean business interactions, ultimately lifting the ceiling on South Korean investment in the North. In November 1998, a luxury cruise ship carrying approximately 900 South Korean tourists set sail for North Korea's scenic Mt. Kumgang.

North Korea–US resistance. Nevertheless, North Korea dismissed a series of South Korean signals and cooperative gestures by clinging to military provocations, which included a series of armed infiltration attempts (e.g. the June 1998 submarine incident; the discovery of a dead North Korean agent in July 1998; the November 1998 submarine intru-sion; the sinking of a North Korean spy vessel in December 1998; and the June 1999 North–South naval clash). At first, North Korea's Kim Jong-il seemed to take President Kim Dae-jung's approach of 'desecuri-tizing' North Korean threats as a threat to his own security, probably because Kim Jong-il believed a certain degree of tension would benefit his regime security. Instead, North Korea provoked the United States to attract US attention and drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington. In August 1998, North Korea test-fired a long-range ballistic missile (allegedly a satellite) over Japan to land it in the Pacific Ocean. In the meantime, a US satellite discovered large-scale underground construction in the summer of 1998, which hinted at a continued North Korean nuclear program in violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework.

Intense US focus on North Korea's nuclear and missile activities in the second half of 1998 provoked anger among South Korean conserva-tives and thus indirectly reinforced criticism of President Kim's approach toward North Korea. Nevertheless, President Kim emphasized that he would continue to seek active engagement, even though he used the

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7 Gramsci's 'hegemony' refers to a process of moral and intellectual leadership through which dominating or subordinate classes of post-1870 industrial Western European nations accept their own domination by ruling classes, as opposed to being simply forced or coerced into accepting inferior positions.

South Korean sinking of a North Korean spy ship in December 1998 and the victory in the June 1999 naval clash with North Korea to demonstrate his determination not to tolerate North Korea's military provocations.

President Kim Dae-jung's coalition with ULD Chairman Kim Jong-pil played a role in alleviating concerns among South Korean conservatives. Kim Jong-pil criticized the sunshine policy; at the same time, however, he emphasized the importance of avoiding a war even at the cost of delaying unification, which suggested that the public could have confidence in the government because he, too, was a part of it.[8] In the meantime, President Kim prepared for the showdown with the conservative coalition at the next stage. The 'Law to Support Nonprofit Civic Organizations' was particularly important in this regard, funneling 15 billion won annually to national and local NGOs so that they may play an important power base for the Kim Dae-jung government.

5.2 Stage II (January 2000 to January 2001): surprise attack and counterattack

Citizen revolt. On 30 January 2000, some 1,000 activists from various NGOs gathered in downtown Seoul to demand political reform. The protesters waved placards and chanted anti-corruption slogans, pledging to 'defeat corrupt politicians and old politics' and 'eradicate the disease of regionalism.' 'We vow to draw a new, clean political landscape,' said Park Won-soon, chairman of an NGO called the PSDP. Similar rallies were held concurrently in other major cities across the country (Suh and Lakarmi, 2000).

The nationwide demonstrations were the culmination of a tumultuous 10 days that followed the birth of President Kim Dae-jung's new political party, the MDP. For Kim, the MDP was the fruit of a long-cherished project to build a progressive and reformist 'super-party' that would replace his own party, the National Congress for New Politics, under whose banner he had won the presidency. Formally launched on 20 January amid much

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8   The two partners were strange bedfellows to begin with: JP was politically more conservative than the president and was once part of the military-led regime that persecuted DJ during his dissident days in the 1970s. Throughout their partnership, they locked horns over relations with North Korea (JP is a hawk) and whether to introduce a cabinet-style government (JP's pet project).

pomp and fanfare, the MDP was hailed by its founders as ushering in a new era of political reform, economic well-being, and peace on the Korean peninsula. Ten days earlier, one organization had caused a stir by releasing a list of 164 allegedly corrupt politicians. On 24 January, the Citizens' Coalition for General Elections (CCGE), an umbrella group of over 450 NGOs behind the rallies in 30 January, followed up with a more refined list of 66 lawmakers it deemed unfit to run in the upcoming general elections. The blacklist included 16 legislators from the MDP, 16 from its coalition partner, the ULD, and 30 from the opposition GNP. The most prominent name was that of the ULD founder and recently resigned prime minister Kim Jong-pil, who was cited for corruption and for his role in the 1961 military coup, which brought strongman Park Chung Hee to power.

The objectivity of the selection procedure aside, the list was an instant hit with a public tired of business-as-usual politics. In opinion polls, as many as 80% of those surveyed supported the CCGE's move and said they would not vote for those on the list in the 13th April elections. One casualty of the blacklist was the relationship between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-pil (popularly referred to as 'DJ' and 'JP,' respectively). ULD members were suspicious that the government was trying to dispense with its weaker, ideologically incompatible partner. They accused President Kim of secretly putting civic groups up to the job in order to undermine his political opponents, including the ULD. 'Many of the NGO activists involved in the CCGE were working closely with the various campaigns that the government had set up,' claimed ULD spokesman Lee Yang Woo.

The Blue House or the Office of the President denied the charges. However, suspicions were not dispelled by the fact that the MDP had been curiously mute in its response to the blacklist. At the MDP's inaugural ceremony, President Kim stated: 'Politics is too unproductive and has betrayed the people. It has caused total distrust and invited denunciation.' Most tellingly, President Kim said NGOs could 'violate the law in the best interest of the nation,' practically giving them a *carte blanche* to act. Moreover, the launching of the MDP was seen as a reflection of President Kim's shift to the political left. Portrayed by past military rulers as a dangerous pro-North leftist, Kim had to counter that image when running for the presidency in 1997, even allying himself with arch-conservative Kim Jong-pil. Now that his position was reasonably secure, however, President Kim was able to return to his center-left roots. President Kim's intention was to bring many of his old progressive

supporters into mainstream politics. Former NGO activist Suh Young Hoon, for example, was made the MDP's acting president, while progressive academic Kim Sung-jae was given the key government position of senior secretary for policy planning.

Moving toward the summit. With the South Korean economy beginning to show signs of recovery from the financial crisis by the beginning of 2000 and his sunshine policy at a standstill, President Kim looked for ways to change the underlying conditions. President Kim decided to found a new political party, namely the MDP. On the day of the MDP's inauguration on 19 January 2000, President Kim disclosed his plan to seek an inter-Korean summit if his new party did well in the upcoming parliamentary elections on 13 April 2000. The name of the game changed from that point on. Instead of pursuing his sunshine policy goals by seeking a broad national consensus based on his coalition with the conservative ULD, President Kim sought to expand his own independent power base so as to give himself a greater latitude in desecuritizing North Korean threats. While enticing members of other parties to defect and join his new party, he moved along a second track – that is, seeking a North–South summit.

On 10 April, 3 days before South Korea's national parliamentary elections, the North and South Korean authorities announced that they had agreed to hold an inter-Korean summit. Although the opposition GNP still out-polled its opponent 39 to 35.9% in the National Assembly elections 3 days later, the MDP established itself convincingly as the only major contender to the GNP-led conservatives in an increasingly two-party dominant system. The summit, held 2 months later in Pyongyang, was the sunshine policy's crowning moment as well as a watershed in the process of desecuritizing North Korean threats.

Returning to Seoul from the Pyongyang summit on 15 June 2000, President Kim sounded more like a proselyte than the president of the nation. 'A new age has dawned for our nation,' he said. 'We have reached a turning point so that we can put an end to the history of territorial division.' He then went on, 'Most importantly, there will no longer be any war. The North will no longer attempt unification by force; at the same time, we will not do any harm to the North' (The Korea Herald, 2000). President Kim no longer viewed North Korea as an 'enemy' after the summit. The South Korean political environment heated up almost

immediately. Images of the televised summit and President Kim's remarks upon returning to Seoul lit a fire under those with a 'one-people' orientation and stimulated a wave of nationalism and unification euphoria throughout the country (Steinberg, 2005).

Showdown and decline: Fall and Winter 2000. After the summit, President Kim touted the success of his sunshine policy and mobilized progressive groups to rally behind the government. He emphasized three points in particular. First, he emphasized that the summit talks ended the danger of war on the Korean peninsula. Second, he emphasized that North Korea agreed to replace the provision in the Workers Party's platform calling for the liberation of the entire peninsula under socialism in return for South Korea's corresponding step of replacing its National Security Law (NSL). Third, he emphasized that Kim Jong Il agreed to the continued stationing of US troops in South Korea even after reunification in order to maintain a regional balance.[9]

With their sharply divergent ideological orientations and political agendas, the progressive and conservative coalitions geared up for a showdown. The KCRC and other progressive NGOs organized collective activities to expedite North–South exchange and prepare for Kim Jong Il's return visit to Seoul. For their part, anti-US military base groups took this as a cue to step up their own activities. Citing the changed conditions due to the summit's success, they intensified their questioning of the need for a US military presence. Many joined in larger coalitions with the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice, the PSPD, and other progressive forces to seek the closure of US training facilities and a revision of the ROK–US Status of Forces Agreement. They also sought a US compensation for the killing of South Korean civilians during the Korean War (e.g. in Nogun-ri), for the environmental damage caused by US military bases, and for a long list of other alleged offenses. The conservative coalition responded in kind. The opposition GNP attacked the government for its 'one-sided' assistance to North Korea and having played into the hands of North Korea's communist leaders. They attacked President Kim for being soft on defense and neglecting, if not endangering, South Korean security. Some denounced him and his

9   Kim Dae-jung, 2000.

Blue House staff as being 'pro-North Korean' and 'anti-liberal democratic.'

Meanwhile, North Korea implemented a two-pronged strategy to cause fissures in South Korean society. One involved Pyongyang's intensified efforts to split South Korean society. North Korea reduced its public criticism of the ROK government by roughly 75% in the months following the summit, for example. At the same time, it repeatedly urged South Koreans to uphold the 15th June Joint Declaration and branded South Korean 'ultraconservatives' and 'rightists' as 'anti-unification forces.' The other track involved efforts to bypass South Korea entirely and deal solely with the United States. North Korea sent National Defense Commission First Vice Chairman Cho Myong-rok to Washington, hosted US Secretary of State Madeline Albright's visit to Pyongyang, and invited US President Clinton to Pyongyang – all in an effort to utilize North Korea's missile program as a vehicle for US–North Korea relations. At the same time, it dragged out a series of inter-Korean talks, apparently buying time to see what would come out of its talks with Washington.

Against this backdrop, in December 2000, the ROK's MND went ahead and published its annual defense white paper, which noted the absence of any change in the North Korean threat despite the June summit and kept its characterization of the North as the ROK's 'main enemy.' Members of the ruling MDP and other progressives denounced the military for its 'unreconstructed' attitude and criticized the government for allowing the white paper's publication, which they argued was inappropriate to the new post-summit situation. Interestingly, North Korea's two-pronged strategy was unsuccessful. Shortly after the summit, only 4.6% of the South Korean public said they viewed North Korea as an enemy. In contrast, nearly half (49.8%) saw the North as an equal cooperation partner to South Korea; another 44% said they considered North Korea as a partner that South Koreans should help (The JoongAng Ilbo, 2000b). By the end of January 2001, the numbers had changed significantly: nearly five times as many respondents (22.1%) indicated that they viewed North Korea as an enemy (a 17.5% increase from the August poll). In contrast, the number of respondents who said they considered North Korea an equal cooperation partner to South Korea declined from 50 to 43.4%, while those who saw the North as a partner that South Korea should help decreased by 11.3 to 32.7% (The JoongAng Ilbo, 2000a).

5.3 Stage III (February 2001 to December 2002): victory or muddling through?

Axis of evil speech and left–right confrontation. President George W. Bush's victory in the November 2000 US presidential election emerged as a dramatic factor in the game of desecuritization of North Korean threats. The progressive coalition in South Korean politics viewed the prospects of a Republican administration with concern while the conservative coalition showed varying degrees of anticipation. Progressives began to talk about the necessity of a 'peace declaration' between the two Koreas. The unification minister said in his 2001 annual briefing to the president that 'the two Koreas are expected to conclude a peace agreement before the president's term expires' (The Chosun Ilbo, 2001a).

Concerned about North Korea's foot-dragging and anxious to enlist the new US administration's support for South Korea's sunshine policy, President Kim pushed hard for an early US–ROK summit. However, it ended up with a fiasco. President Bush's skepticism was directed not only at North Korean leader Kim Jong-il but also at President Kim himself and warned of a split between South Korea and the United States over how to deal with North Korea. The Bush administration appeared to have a firm conviction that 'real peace' (threat reduction) should precede 'declaratory peace' (peace agreement) on the Korean peninsula. The Bush administration's skepticism was confirmed when it announced the result of its North Korea policy review in June 2001.[10]

In response, South Korea's progressive media and NGOs stepped up efforts to defend the sunshine policy, shifting the blame for the stalemate in inter-Korean relations almost entirely to the United States. According to them, the United States was exaggerating North Korea's threats not only to force the ROK to buy advanced US weapons and ensure a continued US troop presence in South Korea but also to provide an excuse for developing missile defenses that would ensure US global hegemony. The GNP, conservative media, and other groups launched a counteroffensive. They denounced their progressive opponents as dangerous, destructive forces, tearing South Korean society apart in the name of

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10 The United States would 'undertake serious discussions with North Korea on a broad agenda'. This would include 'improved implementation of the Agreed Framework', 'verifiable constraints' on North Korea's missile programs and ban on its missile exports, and a 'less threatening conventional military posture'.

'one people' and maliciously fostering anti-US sentiments among the public. In return, unprecedented government attack on the media in the summer of 2001 under the rubric of 'press reform' targeted conservative media such as *The Chosun Ilbo, The DongA Ilbo,* and so forth.

Meanwhile, a group of more than 300 delegates from South Korea participated in North Korea's 15 August celebration of Korea's liberation from Japan. Some of those delegates attended festivities at a site honoring former North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's unification formula and engaged in other political activities praising the incumbent leader, Kim Jong-il. By doing so, they knowingly violated South Korea's NSL. On the contrary, the conservative coalition attacked the government's handling of the incident and called for a review of its engagement policy toward Pyongyang. A confrontation occurred at Kimpo Airport when the delegates returned to Seoul, with members of the KVA and other conservative organizations on one side and leaders of the Korean Federation of University Student Councils and other progressive groups on the other. Although Unification Minister Lim Dong-won, the architect of the sunshine policy, apologized for the entire incident, he refused to resign. North Korea then intervened in an apparent effort to 'save Private Lim.' Breaking a 6-month refusal to engage in talks with South Korea, it proposed the resumption of inter-Korean minister-level talks on the eve of a National Assembly no-confidence vote for Lim Dong-won in early September 2001. ULD leader Kim Jong-pil saw it as an apparent attempt by the North to influence the outcome of the assembly vote. Outraged, he joined with the opposition and the vote passed. Minister Lim resigned the next day, bringing down the entire cabinet as a result. This was the moment that the MDP–ULD coalition had broken apart.

North Korea–US consensus against desecuritization. The Kim Dae-jung government tried to move forward. It accepted the North's proposal for jump-starting talks and hosted the fifth inter-Korean ministerial talks in Seoul on 15–18 September 2001. These talks produced a lengthy list of agreements for future meetings, including the sixth round of inter-Korean ministerial talks in October. These efforts went nowhere, however, primarily because of North Korea's continued antics. For example, North Korea unilaterally cancelled the family reunions scheduled for mid-October 4 days before they were to take place. It suddenly insisted that the next round of ministerial talks could be held only at

North Korea's Mt. Kumgang resort, which delayed the talks for nearly 2 weeks until South Korea capitulated on the venue. It also refused to allow progress in these talks once they were held in mid-November, ostensibly because of the 'hard-line' stance taken by South Korea's new foreign minister. North Korea became defensive after the summit and seemed to prevent South Korea from accelerating the process of desecuritizing North Korean threats.

The long North Korean freeze on substantive dialogue and repeated provocative behaviors took their toll, seriously weakening President Kim politically, souring public perceptions of the North, and undermining public support for the government's policy. In addition, as the world increasingly shifted its attention to the war on terrorism, much of the remaining air was sucked out of the sunshine policy. President Bush's 'axis of evil' remark at his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002 formally elevated Pyongyang to the pantheon of regimes deemed to pose a 'grave and growing danger' to US and global security. This was taken as a warning to the apparently hasty process of desecuritizing North Korean threats. It also set off a barrage of criticisms in South Korea over President Kim's policy to North Korea.

Desecuritization through anti-Americanization?. The cumulative effect of political scandals and disenchantment with the government's domestic policies and sunshine policy led to a landslide victory of the opposition GNP in the 13th June local elections. On the very day, however, a tragic accident happened. Two female middle school students were run over by an armored vehicle of the USFK. Nobody paid attention to it due to the heat of the World Cup. In addition, North Korea's unprovoked firing on and sinking of an ROK Navy patrol boat on 29 June, the day before the closing ceremony of the World Cup, left five South Korean sailors dead and many others injured. The ROK government did not pay much attention to the incident while South Koreans were basking in the extraordinary performance of their national soccer team in the World Cup.

Public opinion as a whole toughened up noticeably after the World Cup was over (The Chosun Ilbo, 2002).[11] For its part, the United States

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11 According to one *Gallup Korea/Chosun Ilbo* poll taken a week after the naval clash, for example, some 70% of the respondents saw the clash as a premeditated provocation. A total of 75% said the sunshine policy should either be complemented with a tougher security stance (59.3%) or replaced altogether (15.8%) (The Chosun Ilbo, 2002).

resisted the ROK government's pressure to continue with a plan to send a high-level US official to Pyongyang to discuss the resumption of US–North Korea dialogue; instead it postponed the plan in July. All this left the ROK government with no choice but to demand an apology from Pyongyang and try to preserve the existing North–South agreements. North Korea then launched a strategy of driving a wedge between Seoul and Washington. On 25 July, the North Korean regime expressed 'regret' for the 'accidental' naval incident and proposed talks to discuss the resumption of inter-Korean dialogue. President Kim chose to interpret the statement of 'regret' as an 'apology' and accepted the North Korean offer. This led to a flurry of activity unrivaled since the months immediately following the June 2000 North–South summit (e.g. the agreement to open two rail links across the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a friendly North–South soccer match, North Korean participation in the Asian Games in South Korea, etc.).

Yet, the warmth that appeared so suddenly in inter-Korean relations turned out to be a false spring. North Korea's admission to US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly in October 2002 that it had been pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program for years in violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework startled the world and rattled inter-Korean relations. However, South Korea's progressive NGOs began to shift the attention from the North Korean nuclear program to the June 13 incident by harshly criticizing the US authorities for not offering an apology for the incident. The USFK made a serious blunder when the military jury handed down a non-guilty verdict in November. Candlelight vigils were orchestrated by progressive NGOs and media and by the government, which apparently showed intentional indifference to those demonstrations. The situation spiraled out of control, thereby contributing to the victory of a progressive presidential candidate, Roh Moo-hyun, in the December 2002 election. That was the moment when North Korean threats had been desecuritized – not by any tangible reduction in the North Korean threat but by the weakening public support for the ROK–US alliance targeting North Korea.

According to a poll conducted by Gallup Korea in December 2002, however, the majority (54.8%) of South Koreans (1,054 individuals) surveyed answered that they did not want US troops to leave, while 31.7% were in favor of their departure (The Korea Times, 2002). The remaining 13.5% did not respond. The problem was that support for the American

military presence dropped significantly compared with a decade ago. The rate of those in favor of the US forces' withdrawal rose by some 10 points, from 21.3 to 31.7%, in a survey conducted by the same company, while the rate of those who wanted US troops to stay decreased by some eight points, from 62.2 to 54.8%. A phone survey was conducted on 14 December 2002, when anti-US sentiments peaked as tens of thousands of citizens joined in candlelight vigils across the country to protest the way the United States was dealing with the June 2002 incident, which led to the deaths of two Korean schoolgirls. Another survey[12] showed that South Korea's dislike of the United States was deeper than that shown by any other US allies. When asked if they were happy or disappointed that the Iraqi military put up so little resistance to the United States and its allies, 93% of the Moroccans polled said they were disappointed; in Jordan, the figure was 91%; in Lebanon, Turkey and Indonesia, 82%; in the Palestinian Authority-ruled areas, 81%; and in Pakistan, 74%. South Korea's disappointment ran the highest among US allies and those countries considered friendlier to the United States: South Korea (58%), Brazil (50%), Russia (45%), France (30%), Spain (17%), and Germany (11%).

In addition, many South Koreans tended to believe that North Korea's nuclear weapons, if any, would target Americans or Japanese, not its Southern 'brethren.' At the inter-Korean cabinet-level talks in Seoul on 22–23 January 2003, North Korea's chief delegate Kim Young-Song said: 'At the moment, all inter-Korean projects face grave obstacles posed by the outside forces, which do not like us joining hands... The North and South should uphold the great cause of national independence and crush attempts by the outside forces seeking to meddle in intra-national affairs and forge ahead, without interruption, with all issues, including economic projects which have been agreed upon by the two sides' (The New York Times, 2003). This was a prime example of North Korea's propaganda strategy aimed at driving a wedge between Seoul and Washington.

As seen in Table 1, as of early 2004, South Koreans no longer viewed North Korea as a threat. The percentage (49%) of those who believed North Korea was beneficial to South Korean security was higher than that (41%) of those who did not think so.

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12   The Pew Global Attitudes Project poll surveyed 16,000 people in 20 countries between 28 May and 15 June 2003. See http://people-press.org.

Table 1 South Koreans' view of outside impact on South Korean security

	Significantly beneficial (%)	Slightly beneficial (%)	No impact (%)	Slightly threatening (%)	Significantly threatening (%)	Total (%)
China	23	48	12	15	2	100
Japan	14	44	24	16	3	100
North Korea	27	22	10	25	16	100
United States	42	36	10	9	3	100
Russia	10	41	33	15	1	100

Source: CCFR-EAI Survey, July 2004.

6 Conclusion

This study has delved into an empirical case analysis of the desecuritization process of North Korean threat under Kim Dae-jung government. Unlike previous studies, it has analyzed how domestic and international actors desecuritized traditional threats by taking the pluralistic political processes of a democratic polity seriously. This was the process of competition between different political coalitions and the process of transformation from issues of high politics into issues of low politics. We chose the case of desecuritization, not securitization, on purpose because desecuritization of North Korean threats is a hard case compared with securitization of new threats in other parts of the world. Since the utility of our framework has been proven in hard cases, our framework could be used to analyze how newly emerging threats are securitized in more convincing ways.

As pointed out in the above analysis, the process of desecuritization under the Kim Dae-jung government was a highly 'politicized' process that involved fierce competition between different political coalitions, including the United States. This proves that 'politics' should be brought back into the study of securitization. The progressive and conservative coalitions perceived 'traditional' security threats from North Korea differently. The progressive coalition led by the Kim Dae-jung government believed that the North Korean threat was grounded in an anachronistic 'Cold War mentality,' while the conservative coalition led by the opposition party believed the threat from North Korea was still real.

Under these circumstances, the progressive coalition tried to desecuritize North Korean threats in order to change the political landscape in favor of the progressives. This was hardly the process that President Kim Dae-jung could do alone since the conservative coalition resisted the move. But the conservative groups were not successful since they rather underestimated the power of progressive NGOs subsidized systematically by the Kim Dae-jung government. International actors, particularly the United States and North Korea, tried to influence the process in certain phases by calculating their interests in the highly political process. As a result, North Korean threats were desecuritized and this impacted upon the US–North Korea–South Korea triangular relationship. A triangular relationship began to take new shape after the inter-Korean summit, since South Korea and the United States started to 'compete' to reach North Korea. The Clinton administration, which had appeared to be worried about losing its leadership role after the inter-Korean summit, invited a North Korean special envoy to Washington, where a US–North Korea joint communiqué was adopted. President Clinton even tried but failed to visit Pyongyang for a historic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il because the US presidential election became controversial in November 2000. In this light, the US factor contributed to the 'successful' desecuritization of North Korean threats in that the United States did not support the conservative coalition in a strong and systematic manner.

It remains to be seen whether the Kim Dae-jung government's desecuritization of North Korean threats was a deep or a shallow one, since the progressive coalition has yet to achieve 'hegemony' if we define hegemony as an expression of broad-based consent manifested in the acceptance of ideas and supported by material resources and institutions. However, it appears to be clear that the desecuritization of North Korean threats by the Kim Dae-jung government paved the way for another 5 years of the progressive government with Roh Moo-hyun's 'unexpected' victory in the 2002 presidential election.

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