

SIX-PARTY TALKS AND U.S.-DPRK RELATIONS*

Tong Kim

*Former Senior Korean Interpreter, U.S. State Department
and
Visiting Professor, School of North Korean Studies,
Kyungnam University*

Basic Positions of the U.S. and North Korea: An Endless Parallel

U.S. Position

When the George W. Bush administration was inaugurated, it harbored strong disapproval of the DPRK leadership and its system. It had wasted four-and-a-half years considering options, including military ones, until it finally opted for a diplomatic approach to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The Bush administration is willing to provide economic aid once the DPRK has dismantled its nuclear weapons and programs. The U.S. believes that any normalization process should address the issue of human rights and other illicit DPRK activities including proliferation of missiles, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, and money laundering, etc. In the event that the six-party talks fail to resolve the nuclear issue, the United States is likely to consider tougher sanctions and enforce a blockade around North Korea.

DPRK Position

North Korea basically wants to improve relations with the United States. In exchange for U.S. respect for its sovereignty and its system, the DPRK would recognize the U.S. role as a balancer in the Northeast Asia region. The DPRK would be flexible on the status of U.S. forces in South Korea, opposing unification by system under the terms of either side of the peninsula. In the event its conciliatory efforts fail, the DPRK is ready to commit itself to a suicidal war to protect its system. On the other hand, Kim Jong Il knows war is unthinkable for it would mean the end of his system.

* This article is based on a presentation delivered by Professor Tong Kim at the 2006 Conference of Visiting Professors of the Kyungnam University School of North Korean Studies, Seoul, Korea, January 9, 2006.

IFES Forum No. 06-1-25-1

No easy or quick resolution of the nuclear issue is in sight without the application of simultaneous actions. It is likely that the DPRK will prolong the negotiation process in order to wait out the remainder of the second Bush administration.

Two Aspects of U.S.-DPRK Negotiations: Format and Substance

We have observed a positive shift in South Korea's role and an interesting development of dynamics among the six parties. However, there has been no change in policy substance on the part of the United States, but only in format. We recognize the importance of format, because if properly applied, it helps achieve policy objectives.

The position of Assistant Secretary is regarded as a high level position in the United States. But President Bush has referred to that level as "tier four." Apparently he sees the summit level as "tier one," the ministerial level as "tier two," and the under secretarial as "tier three." The level of vice president is seen to be somewhere between "tiers one and two," and Deputy Secretary between "tiers two and three."

Meaning of the September 19 Joint Statement: Full of Mutual Distrust

Considering the September 19 Joint Statement that was produced by the fourth round of six-party talks, the principles agreed on in the statement are merely a list of agenda for future negotiation. I foresee a lot of problems with them down the road. I even described the statement as a "linguistic minefield," as it contains ambiguous language and raises the question of appropriateness for inclusion of issues that are not directly related to the nuclear issue.¹

Prospects for Resolution: Washington's Perspective on North Korea

The fallacy of the collapse theory and the lack of a viable military option raise the question of whether Bush is willing to pay a moral and political price from a perspective of American values to

¹ Tong Kim, "You Say Okjeryok, I Say Deterrent: No Wonder We Don't Agree," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2005, p. B01.

achieve a negotiated settlement with the DPRK. If Bush makes up his mind, the nuclear issue can be resolved rather quickly. Undertaking of confidence building measures will be the first step toward resolution. South Korea's role along with the U.S.-Korea relationship will have an important impact on the process.

Bush's Abhorrence of North Korea

The Bush administration's negative perception of the Kim Jong Il system persists. President Bush's disapproval of Kim Jong Il is shared by his closest advisers, including Vice President Dick Cheney and U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Bush believes that North Korea is a member of the "axis of evil," and that Kim Jong Il is a tyrant who starves and oppresses his people and violates their human rights while pursuing his own interest.

There are two views on the source of Bush's negative perception, both coming from those who are close to the President. One view is that Bush, by virtue of his religious faith and values, has long harbored hatred against the North Korean regime even before he came to Washington. The other view holds that his dislike of the DPRK began after he was briefed on the North Korean situation at the White House. The origin of his view is not important. What is important is his overt abhorrence of Kim Jong Il. He conveys his strong feelings to other heads of state. By publicly calling Kim Jong Il a liar and a tyrant, he sometimes complicates the situation.

Bush's advisers and other Neocons in Washington are consumed with the wishful thinking that the North Korean regime will collapse. They believe Kim Jong Il will not be an exception to the fall of tyrants that we have seen throughout history. From an American moral perspective, they are right.

At this point, it will be helpful to review some of the important presidential pronouncements aimed at a target that clearly included North Korea either in relation to weapons of mass destruction or system of government.

During his first inauguration speech, President Bush said: "We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors.... And to all nations, we will speak for the

IFES Forum No. 06-1-25-1

values that gave our nation birth.”² In his first speech to a joint session of Congress in February 2001, he said: “[Threats]...range from terrorists who threaten with bombs to tyrants in rogue nations intent upon developing weapons of mass destruction...we must develop and we must deploy effective missile defenses.”³ Remember this was before September 11. It is clear that North Korea was included in the rogue nations and that the missile defenses would be targeted against North Korea.

In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush said: “Our...goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction...North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens...” and that “States like these [Iran, Iraq and North Korea] constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”⁴

In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush emphasized the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency “to track and control nuclear materials around the world” and said he wanted to “strengthen global treaties banning the production and shipment of missile technologies and weapons of mass destruction.”⁵

On the Korean Peninsula, an oppressive regime rules a people living in fear and starvation...We now know that that regime was deceiving the world, and developing those weapons all along. Today the North Korean regime is using its nuclear program to incite fear and seek concessions. America and the world will not be blackmailed.⁶

Now, I note the timing of that statement that followed former Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly’s October 2002 visit to Pyongyang.

² President George W. Bush’s Inaugural Address, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2001, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/inaugural-address.html>.

³ “Address of the President to the Joint Session of Congress,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., February 27, 2001, online at <http://whitehouse.fed.us/news/releases/2001/02/20010228.html>.

⁴ “The President’s State of the Union Address,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., January 29, 2002, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

⁵ “President Delivers ‘State of the Union’,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., January 28, 2003, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

IFES Forum No. 06-1-25-1

In the 2004 State of the Union message, Bush stated that “America is committed to keeping the world’s most dangerous weapons out of the hands of the most dangerous regimes.”⁷ President Bush then spoke of one of the consistent themes in his foreign policy. “America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs...This great republic will lead the cause of freedom.”⁸

In his second inaugural speech, Bush, deeply entangled with the Iraq war, spoke of even more idealistic goals of American foreign policy, invoking God. In January 2005, he said:

The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world...we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and Earth...

So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.⁹

Then in a message of warning to the oppressors and agitation to the oppressed, he said, “The United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you... The rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe... Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.”¹⁰

By the time of the 2005 State of the Union address, he had turned to the Iranian people: “As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you”¹¹ -- a message by association to the North Korean people. On the nuclear issue, Bush this time reported that he was working with other

⁷ President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2004, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “President Sworn-In to Second Term,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2005, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “State of the Union Address,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., February 2, 2005, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html>.

members of the six-party talks to find a peaceful solution by showing the “North Korean government that nuclear weapons will bring only isolation, economic stagnation, and continued hardship.”¹²

Those of you who support President Bush and want to learn about his religious conviction must read *A Man of Faith* (2004) by David Akin, and *The Faith of George W. Bush* (2003) by Stephen Mansfield. *Plan of Attack* (2004) and *Bush at War* (2002), both books by Bob Woodward, will also give you some insights on the President’s faith and the style of his presidency. *The Rise of Vulcans: the History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (2004) by Jim Mann is also helpful to understand the strategic thinking of the neocons.

For those who do not agree with Bush may find some psychological comfort in *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President* (2004) by Justin Frank. The author is a psychoanalyst who diagnoses Bush to be a sadistic, “untreated alcoholic with paranoid and megalomaniac tendencies.” He also questions the truthfulness of Bush’s religious faith.

Neoconservative Hardliners

Some of the hardliners in Washington believe that Kim Jong Il will not abandon his nuclear weapons. They want to pursue a tougher policy, accepting the reality that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons as it announced. As far as the six-party talks are concerned, they don’t seem to have any great expectations. They prefer to push for containment and isolation of North Korea by intensifying the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), financial sanctions, and by raising the North Korean human rights issue. These conservatives believe it will be increasingly difficult for the DPRK to sustain itself if South Korea and China cooperate with the United States. Some of them complain that South Korean aid is extending the life of the North Korean regime.

The worst scenario for the Bush administration is that the North Koreans transfer their nuclear bomb or fissile material to terrorists. Obviously the administration is mobilizing all its intelligence resources to watch North Korea in order to prevent and interdict such transfer. The hardliners

¹² “President Delivers ‘State of the Union’,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, D.C., January 28, 2003, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>.

believe that Kim Jong Il is on notice that it would bring an end to his regime, if he either starts a war or uses his nuclear weapons. Hardliners argue that the United States should not succumb to North Korean threats or blackmail.

On the other hand, the Bush administration does not seem to have any specific, coordinated plan to bring down the DPRK regime. There are many people who simply wish for its collapse. It is not true that Washington is staging the DPRK's non-nuclear issues -- such as human rights, counterfeits, drug trafficking, etc. -- as a part of an overall plan to "stifle" the DPRK regime, as Pyongyang accuses it of doing.

Based on this policy perspective, the Bush administration is moving to complete its missile defense system and supports a research project to develop a bunker buster bomb (called Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator),¹³ a new weapons system that is most feared by North Korea, which has numerous underground facilities.

The conservatives in Washington see the control of Kim's regime as weakening given the country's bankrupt economy and pressure for change. They believe that in time these will lead to the undermining of Kim's authority to a level that will give rise to either regime change or transformation.

The Bush Administration and the Six Party Talks

Bush maintains his official position to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks. The U.S. objective is to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons and nuclear programs while cooperating with South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia (participants of the six-party process) on denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. Washington clearly wants nuclear dismantlement first before discussing the political issues of DPRK interest. It is highly unlikely that the DPRK would go along with the U.S. preferred sequencing. However, if and only if Kim Jong Il blinks and gives in to the pressure of the United States, it would be one of the greatest foreign policy victories for the conservatives in Washington.

¹³ For a description see <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/systems/rnep.htm>.

Iraq and U.S. Policy on North Korea

President Bush's unswerving stance on Iraq may potentially have either a negative or positive impact on North Korea. If there comes no positive turn around in Iraq, Bush may face domestic pressure to at least make some progress in the North Korean nuclear issue, thereby motivating the administration to stay the course on the six-party process. On the other hand, North Korea's unacceptable demand for the construction of a light water reactor may enforce the Washington hardliners' argument that standing tough is the only stance to take, and the only one that the defiant North Koreans understand.

Ambassador Vershbow and Assistant Secretary Hill

U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Alexander Vershbow's recent characterization of North Korea as "a criminal regime" reflects well the bottom line of Bush's policy. Vershbow's comments accurately manifests the atmosphere of the White House and the attitude of the leadership in the administration. When his predecessor Christopher Hill took the job of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and became chief U.S. negotiator to the six-party talks, the press and pundits in both Washington and Seoul created a false expectation of what he would be able to deliver on the nuclear issue.

Hill did not have new instruction to be flexible on substance but only permission to be flexible on format, shifting to freer and more flexible interactions with his North Korean counterpart. Format is important but it alone cannot solve the problem. It is also interesting to note that Hill has been talking tough -- in line with the mood of the White House and the Neocons -- since the release of the September 19 Joint Statement.

During a speech to the Korean Council of Reconciliation and Cooperation on December 23, 2005, Ambassador Vershbow refused to retract his earlier remark on North Korea, ratcheting up "illicit activities" to "criminal activities." Henry Hyde, chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, publicly praised Vershbow for calling the DPRK "a criminal regime." This was followed

by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's remarks that characterized North Korea as a "dangerous regime."¹⁴

The Problem of Rhetoric

Just like the North Korean state-run media including KCNA that put out harsh rhetoric for the pleasure of Chairman Kim Jong Il and his close confidants, foreign policy implementers have no choice but to echo the strong feelings of the leaders of the Bush administration. This is an inevitable phenomenon that takes place under a presidential system or in an autocracy like North Korea. Ratcheting up the tone of provocative rhetoric complicates the problem. Usually, Washington provokes Pyongyang, and the latter's reprisal is usually quite vulgar.

Pyongyang called President Bush -- who first named the DPRK an axis of evil and its leader Kim Jong Il "a tyrant and a liar" -- an "origin of evil," "a politically immature infant," and "a fool." Of Secretary Rice who called North Korea an outpost of tyranny, the North Korean mouthpiece said, "Now even a woman wearing a skirt around her body is running around uttering the noise of *kang, kang*." (This expression in Korean is an analogy to a female dog.) On Vershbow, "The bastard ambassador who made an insane comment ought to be put on trial at the intersection of Jongro (Seoul) to be judged for deportation."

The North Koreans quote a Korean saying, "When you speak nicely to me, I speak the same way to you." It is close to an American adage, "What comes around goes around." In their verbal attack, the North Koreans are implementing their military slogan, "If American imperialists attack us, we will reprise them one hundred-fold."

The point is that such exchanges of callous rhetoric may please the ears of the hardliners in their respective capitals, but it would not be helpful to the resolution of the nuclear issue.

¹⁴ "Rice Calls on North Korea To End Its Self-Imposed Isolation," U.S. Embassy, January 5, 2006, online at <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/acda462.html>.

Pyongyang's Perspective on the United States: What Kim Jong Il Wants

Improvement of Relations with Washington: A Matter of Survival

Based on the words of those who met with Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il, my assessment is that North Korea has made relentless efforts to improve relations with the United States since the days Kim Il Sung officially ruled the North. In October 2000 I had an opportunity to listen to Chairman Kim Jong Il in person, when I interpreted for former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during her visit to Pyongyang. I also reviewed the reports of former President Kim Dae Jung and recently of former ROK Unification Minister Jung Dong Young. The DPRK leadership believes their survival hinges upon improved relations with the United States. (On December 26, I reconfirmed with President Kim Dae Jung what Chairman Kim Jong Il said to him.) In August 1997, the DPRK leader Kim Jong Il declared, "The United States is no longer a sworn enemy of 100 years." Kim Jong Il wants improved relations with America.

Deeply Rooted Mutual Distrust: The Biggest Impediment

It was Kim Il Sung who first raised the necessity of building mutual confidence when he met with former President Jimmy Carter in the spring of 1994 when the clouds of war were lingering over the Korean peninsula. North Korea's interest in improving relations with the United States can be viewed in the context of the North Korean fear of American military might, which stretches back to the Korean War. North Korea still fears a U.S. military attack. Kim Jong Il must be afraid that he could be eliminated, and the United States could do so if it really wanted to.

Kim Jong Il is well aware that North Korea is seen as one leg of the axis of evil by the Bush administration and he himself as an oppressive tyrant by the American public. Naturally, Kim does not trust Bush. There was a peak level of mutual trust during the Clinton administration when Albright met with him. Considering the absence of trust and confidence at the highest level, it is difficult to expect a negotiated settlement to come out of tier-four level talks. The level of the negotiator may have to be raised to tier three for any final settlement to be formally recognized by the Secretary of State and the President.

Two Missed Opportunities for North Korea

It seems to me that North Korea missed two opportunities to improve relations with the United States. First, if the North had sent Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok to Washington six to ten months earlier in 2000, Clinton would have gone to Pyongyang to close a deal on the missile issue and we might have seen a fast track to normalization. Incidentally, when I saw President Kim Dae Jung the other day, he told me that Clinton, while visiting President Kim at his library last fall, said that he was sorry that he did not work out a final settlement on the North Korean issue while he was in office.

The second chance Chairman Kim Jong Il missed came right after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. Yes, the DPRK issued a general statement opposing terrorism, but being still on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, Kim Jong Il did not take any proactive approach to address the global issue of terrorism. If he had proposed that the DPRK wanted to put aside the pending bilateral issues with the United States in order to support the U.S. effort to fight terrorism, that might have given a different twist to the history of U.S.-DPRK relations. If Kim had called for a bilateral meeting and said his government was willing to give all assistance it could, including “some insights from its own experience,” and fight the war on terror with and on the side of the United States, I wonder what would have been the nine-month-old Bush administration’s response. Remember that Bush was defining the countries either on our side or on the side of terrorists. If Kim Jong Il had done this, the issue of uranium enrichment might not have developed the way it did.

Unsuccessful DPRK Effort to Improve Relations

In 1991, Kim Jong Il sent a message to Washington through Kim Yong Soon, a (North) Korean Workers’ Party secretary, who met with U.S. Under Secretary of State Arnold Kantor, that his country wanted to improve relations with the United States and it would be flexible on the issue of U.S. troop withdrawal. According to Kim Jong Il, his father Kim Il Sung had even before that asked the old Soviet Union, China, Italy and Egypt to convey a friendly message to the United States, but these countries only took advantage of the situation North Korea was in those days. Kim Jong Il has been consistent in that he wants to improve relations with Washington as proved during his meetings with Kim Dae Jung, Albright, Jung Dong Young and others.

In my view, Kim Jong Il would prefer to be on Washington's side rather than that of Beijing or Moscow. From a geopolitical and historical perspective of the Korean peninsula, Kim Jong Il does not want to be caught between China and Japan in their struggle for hegemony of the region. He would prefer the United States -- as it has no territorial ambition in the region -- to play the role of a balancer, and reign in the rivalry of the two neighboring giants. If the United States politically accommodates North Korea, The North's anti-American slogans could disappear overnight. Kim Jong Il has said, "Don't link the demands for American troop withdrawal of some South Koreans with us." "Our anti-American propaganda is a habitual practice without seriousness."

What Kim Jong Il Has to Do First

First he has to officially and publicly renounce the unrealistic goal of unifying the Korean peninsula under Communism, something that is still stipulated in the charter of the Korean Workers Party. Kim Jong Il knows himself that it is impossible to achieve unification under his terms.

Second, Kim must apologize, in some appropriate format, for North Korea's starting of the Korean War. This would be difficult for him to do in view of the influence of the late Kim Il Sung on the legitimacy of the DPRK system and the collective power of the revolutionary generation who supported Kim Il Sung in starting the war. Other hardliners in Pyongyang, too, would not support such an apology.

But in the political reality, the division between the hardliners and the moderates exists only at the working level in Pyongyang. Once the chairman makes a final decision, there can be no opposition to that decision. Kim Jong Il has said his military was divided half and half on the question of improving relations with the United States. Inasmuch as his decision is unchallengeable, he seems to want to be cautious and even prudent. One example of Kim's attempt to play the "gutsy" leader came in September 2002 when he confessed to Prime Minister Koizumi on his visit to Pyongyang that Japanese citizens had been abducted by North Korean agents. As we now know, Kim's confession benefited Koizumi politically; on the other hand, the move backfired for Kim Jong Il and that decision still haunts him today.

U.S.-DPRK Relations and South Korea

The Bush Administration's Concern for ROK Policy

Washington's conservatives are not really thrilled with South Korea's policy of economic cooperation with North Korea. Of course, Washington publicly says it supports Seoul's policy. The United States stresses the need to cooperate on the nuclear issue. This emphasis may imply that cooperation between the two is not going well or that the two allies may have problems cooperating in the future. For sometime now trilateral coordination among the United States, South Korea, and Japan has been quietly disappearing. There were even some cases of disagreement between the traditional allies regarding the matters involving North Korea.

Today, no one can disregard South Korea's economic power. To the extent to which North-South economic cooperation increases and a political framework is developed toward unification, South Korea will affect U.S. policy. Contrary to the view that economic support for the North only contributes to North Korean survivability, if you think of the cost of a possible war versus the "cost of peace" that South Korea is paying now, and the security aspects of the South Korean economy, Washington's inflexibility does not seem to be warranted.

DPRK's Double Track Strategy

Pyongyang is working on two fronts: the United States and South Korea, while it still wants to resolve the issue with the United States. Confronting the intractable policy of the Bush administration, Pyongyang is carrying out a nationalist strategy, called "Between Us the Same Nation," trying to appeal to the emotional side of South Koreans.

In a way this strategy is possible because politics comes first in everything North Koreans do and there are so many political workers in the North. Effective or not, they do it because they have nothing to lose. A fundamental question is whether a unified Korea can preserve its independence even if unification is achieved independently through the campaign of "between us the same nation." A unified, neutral Korea, as envisioned by some people -- including Selig S. Harrison,

author of *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (2002) -- is merely a sentimental notion.

Frequent Change of Unification Ministers in the ROK

Our immediate interest should be on whether the six-party talks resume this month. Recently in the *Korea Times* I wrote that North Korea may well wait until after President Bush's coming State of the Union address to decide when to return to the talks. Kim Jong Il will probably drag out the denuclearization process beyond the term of the second Bush administration. Outgoing ROK Minister of Unification Jung Dong Young said it would take at least three years to complete the process.

Also, the frequent replacement of the Unification minister in the South may not be such a good thing. Learning the job is important and it takes time, but more importantly, a Unification Minister should build a personal relationship of trust with the North Koreans whom he deals with. That takes time. It may be worthwhile to look into the possibility of passing a law stipulating the term of the Unification Minister's office, making it the same as that of a President, for it is mind boggling to see Minister Jung Dong Young, who met with Kim Jong Il last summer, leave his job without finishing it because he wants to campaign for the South Korean presidency.

Reconfiguration and Rebalancing the Power Relationships in East Asia

Absent a visible restoration of good relations with the United States at this point, there are other important variables that may affect the long term interest of South Korea -- such as continuing friction in the U.S.-Korea alliance, a strained relationship with Japan, an increasingly stronger U.S.-Japan alliance, and a steady expansion of Chinese influence. The strengthening of U.S.-Japan relations as well as the worsening U.S.-DPRK relations seem to push North Korea to depend more on China for its security and economic support, clearly more so now than before. China's trade volume with the North is now about \$1.8 billion dollars. China is not afraid of North Korean nuclear weapons but very concerned about a nuclear Japan. China is also concerned about a unified Korea that would fall into the American sphere of influence.

IFES Forum No. 06-1-25-1

(I note that former Unification Minister Chung Sae Hyun wrote in the April 2005 issue of *The Shin-Dong-A* last year, “North Korea cannot collapse even if it wants to, because China would not let it happen due to geopolitical reasons.” I fully agree with him.)

President Roh Moo Hyun’s advocacy for an independent defense, the retaking of operational command and control, opposition to the U.S. concept of strategic flexibility, and South Korea to play a balancer’s role may provide psychological comfort for his political supporters and other progressive forces at home. However, some see these policy statements as not being conducive to the promotion of South Korea’s long-term strategic interest.

With respect to the North Korean nuclear issue, time is not on the side of South Korea or the United States as North Korea would keep adding more bombs to its nuclear arsenal.

Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University
28-42 Samchung-dong, Chongro-ku, Seoul, 110-230, Korea
Tel: 82-2-3700-0700 Fax: 82-2-3700-0707
E-mail: ifes@kyungnam.ac.kr <http://ifes.kyungnam.ac.kr>