

Negotiating with South Korea and the U.S.: North Korea's Strategy and Objectives

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Abstract

North Korea has held a representative negotiating strategy. It is basically a double-strategy whose rhetoric masks its true intentions. Under this strategy, North Korea is good at launching a charm offensive in public, and, at the same time, buying time and preparing for a war or military provocation. In the North-South Korean relations context, this double strategy can be named the digging tunnel strategy. While shaking hands with South Korea and agreeing on historically important principles for peaceful unification in the early 1970s, the North Korean leadership ordered its military to dig up an invasion route and open a secret attack corridor. For the last twenty years of nuclear negotiations, North Korea has been persistent and consistent in applying its digging tunnel strategy whenever and wherever possible. As a result, all major nuclear agreements signed in this period have been betrayed by North Korea. North Korea's negotiating objectives have been two-fold. Strategically, it has aspired to win a constitutional struggle *vis-à-vis* South Korea. Tactically, North Korea has placed enormous efforts to undermine American's extended deterrence and alliance with South Korea. For North Koreans, removing the U.S. presence in South Korea has been the highest political and military objective. They consider the ROK-U.S. alliance as the most serious stumbling block to ending the constitutional struggle on their terms

Keywords: North Korea, the Digging Tunnel Strategy, Nuclear Crisis, Constitutional Struggle, ROK-U.S. Alliance

Throughout the history of Korean division, North Korea has held a representative negotiating strategy. It is basically a double-strategy that the rhetoric (*tatema*) is quite different from true intention (*hon*ne), which makes it pretty difficult to read minds or predict actions of North Korean negotiators. The stark discrepancy between their language/action in public and intention/behavior in secret has resulted in a chronic pattern

of deception by North Koreans. Under this strategy, North Korea is good at launching a charm offensive in public, and, at the same time, they either buy time or prepare for war or military provocation behind the curtain. Since North Koreans often “make eyes” at us and send tempting signals at the negotiating table while sharpening their knives in the backyard, we are likely to be surprised (*stabbed*) by their sudden or sneak actions unless we are paying great vigilance to their strategies and tactics.

The Digging Tunnel Strategy

In the North-South Korean context, North Korea’s double strategy can be named *the digging tunnel strategy*. It was in April, 1948, when North Korea first exercised this strategy *vis-à-vis* South Korea. North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, organized the *so-called* North-South political conference in Pyongyang and invited leaders from South Korea to attend. Less than two years before the outbreak of the Korean War, it was when Kim Il Sung was mobilizing all of North Korea and soliciting China and the Soviet Union for military aid in preparing for an all-out war on the Korean peninsula. Mr. Kim’s intention is believed to have been two-fold. On the one hand, he tried to attract South Korean attention from the frontlines and created euphoria for peace and unification by spreading bogus images and fabricating a false sense of security in South Korean society. On the other hand, Kim Il Sung attempted to drive a wedge between South Korean leaders. Mr. Kim Gu, the famous nationalistic and independent leader, accepted Kim Il Sung’s invitation, attended and addressed the political conference. His political rival and pro-western nationalistic leader Lee Syng Man refused to accept Kim Il Sung’s offer, raising his credibility as an anti-Communist leader.

The second visible example of the digging tunnel strategy is that North Koreans secretly began to excavate underground tunnels along the demilitarized zone while holding dialogues with South Korea. In the early 1970s, the Korean peninsula was preoccupied with great hope for peaceful unification—the first wave of unification fever in the history of Korean division. The North-South Red-Cross Talks started in 1971 and led to the first exchange of delegations to each other’s capital. It was a touching moment for South Koreans to welcome whole-heartedly a North Korean delegation standing on the street in downtown Seoul. The Red-Cross Talks were followed by the bilateral political dialogue.

In 1972, Lee Hu Rak, the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, paid a secret visit to Pyongyang and met Kim Il Sung. At the meeting, Kim expressed his regret for the North Korean commando raid to Chongwadae in January 1968. On July 4, 1972, the two sides agreed on a joint statement—the famous July 4th Joint Communiqué. As the first official joint statement, the document proclaimed the following three principles for unification:

- First, unification shall be achieved *through independent efforts* without being subject to external imposition or interference.
- Second, unification shall be achieved *through peaceful means*, and not through use of force against one another.
- Third, *a great national unity*, as a homogeneous people, shall be sought first, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems.

Not long after the Joint Communiqué was signed, South Korea found that this first wave of unification fever was apparently a fake “charm offensive” manipulated by North Koreans. On November 15, 1974, Seoul discovered the first underground tunnel on the DMZ. A North Korean army defector confessed that an order to dig the underground tunnel had been given by the highest authority in Pyongyang in the early 1970s. While shaking hands with South Koreans and agreeing on historically important principles for peaceful unification, the North Korean leadership had ordered its military to dig up an invasion route and open a secret attack corridor. To date four underground tunnels have been found and twenty or so are suspected to exist along the front.

Nuclear Negotiations and the Digging Tunnel Strategy

For the last twenty years of nuclear negotiations, North Korea has been persistent and consistent in applying its tunnel strategy whenever and wherever possible. As a result, North Korea has violated all of the three major nuclear agreements signed in this period.

The Joint Denuclearization Declaration on the Korean Peninsula

North and South Korea signed a Joint Denuclearization Declaration on December 31, 1991 and it was ratified on February 19, 1992. In the document, both governments promised, among other things:

- Not to test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons

- Not to possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities.

The history of implementing this declaration has been one of persistent, systematic, nasty and total violation by North Korea as was verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Scientific investigation by the international community eventually discovered that North Korea had run secret nuclear weapons programs even before signing the declaration, and had utterly betrayed South Korea and the international community as a whole. It has become obvious that the declaration lost legitimacy even before the ink was dried. The declaration was a masterpiece of the digging tunnel strategy.

In contrast, the declaration has been undercut by major violations. In its wake, North Korea:

- Built and ran a large-scale reprocessing plant at Yongbyon
- Extracted 10-14kg of plutonium before May 1992 when the IAEA inspections started
- Produced an additional 20-30kg of plutonium after 1992
- Kept not only a secret plutonium program but also a HEU program that it long denied but was revealed in November 2010
- Withdrew from the NPT in 2003
- Declared in February 2005 that it possessed the capacity to manufacture and possess nuclear weapons
- Conducted nuclear tests twice in 2006 and 2009
- Proliferated nuclear technologies to Syria and possibly Iran and Myanmar

While North Korea develops its nuclear weapons programs, its threat level toward South Korea has become worse than before—from declaring it was dedicated to “turning Seoul into a sea of fire” in 1994 to “incinerating the entire South Korea” after 2005. If a treaty is violated, from the beginning, intentionally and persistently by one signatory, that treaty lacks credibility politically and legally. For one side to abide by such a tattered agreement made little sense. The treaty thus became little more than a symbol of South Korea’s humiliating policy of providing North Korea with unconditional assistance—namely, the policy of “spoon-feeding” or “being led around by” the Kim Jong Il regime.

This policy, widely known in a broader context of inter-Korean

relations as the *sunshine policy*, was based on the wishful thinking that North Korea would change if given security guarantees and economic assistance. The end result of the policy, however, was unqualified betrayal by the DPRK, a nuclear-armed North Korea with, long-range missile launches, a torpedo attack on Cheonan, and the brutal shelling on Yeonpyong Island. That is why this policy has been ridiculed by vast majority of South Koreans, and severely criticized since the presidential election in 2007. To South Koreans, the declaration is not just an icon of disgrace but a matter of national pride and self-esteem in the relations between North and South Korea.

The Geneva Agreed Framework

North Korea and the United States reached a Geneva Agreed Framework on October 21, 1994. It was the end result of eighteen months of intensive negotiations between the two countries. It was also the first major agreement signed by high-ranking officials and endorsed by the leadership of the two countries. North Korea committed itself to stopping nuclear activities at Yongbyon and giving up the development of nuclear weapons. In return, the United States promised to provide a security guarantee and economic assistance to the DPRK. From the standpoint of officials in both South Korea and the United States in the late Twentieth Century, Pyongyang again failed to live up to its promises. In anticipation of reaching a deal at the DPRK-US negotiations aimed at stopping North Korea's plutonium production at the Yongbyon complex, Kim Il Sung apparently was seeking a new route to nuclear development—the HEU program in collaboration with Pakistan. Thus, the digging tunnel strategy regarding the Geneva Agreed Framework centered around the HEU program. North Korea persistently denied the existence of the program until the centrifuge facility at Yongbyon was revealed in November 2011. It is suspected that another facility may exist at an unknown location for producing enriched uranium for weapon purposes.

From December 1993, when Pakistan's then-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Pyongyang and met with Kim Il Sung, secret military cooperation advanced rapidly between Pakistan and North Korea. North Korea provided technology and parts for 1000-km range Nodong missiles, while Pakistan furnished funds as well as equipment and technology for developing HEU. Pakistan, which desired the capability to strike at strategic locations in India, urgently needed North Korean

Nodong missiles, which were successfully tested in May 1993. The nuclear warhead-equipped “Gauri” missiles which Pakistan currently deploys are based on Nodong missile technology supplied by North Korea. In exchange, North Korea received several dozen P1 and P2 centrifuges and related technology from Pakistan. North Korean specialists also toured the Pakistan nuclear development facility “Khan Research Laboratories,” and, in May 1998, they were allowed to visit a Pakistani nuclear test site.

After 9/11, when the Musharraf government began cooperating with the US in the global war on terror, it was revealed that Abdul Qadeer Khan, father of the Pakistani nuclear program and a national hero, had been operating his own secret nuclear trade network. At that time Dr. Khan testified that he had personally visited North Korea more than ten times in the 1990s and early 2000s, and, during one visit, the North Korean authorities showed him an actual nuclear warhead in an underground facility near Pyongyang.

Since the 1990s there have been continuous suspicions and concerns about a North Korean HEU program. In particular, the Republican-led US Congress was sharply critical of the Clinton administration for failing to acknowledge the issue of North Korea’s continued nuclear development in violation of the Geneva Agreed Framework. For instance, in 1999 the then-speaker of the House assigned nine representatives to form a North Korea policy group tasked with determining whether the North Korea threat had diminished in the five years since the Agreed Framework was signed. A report released in November of that year revealed that North Korea had continued to pursue nuclear development through means other than plutonium production, such as operating a uranium enrichment program, in violation of the Geneva Agreed Framework. This conclusion influenced the Bush administration’s North Korea policy.

In October 2002, when James Kelly, the US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, visited Pyongyang as a special envoy from President Bush and brought up the uranium enrichment issue, the North Koreans acknowledged the uranium program, saying “We can have even more than that.” Many people point to this revelation as the start of the second North Korean nuclear crisis, but a realistic analysis of the North Korean nuclear program shows that the North Korean nuclear threat has grown gradually and steadily over time.

The September 19th Joint Declaration

The September 19th Joint Declaration resulted in September 2005 from the Six-Party Talks, which had started in August 2003 as a new forum for resolving North Korea's nuclear crisis. Throughout the sessions negotiators drew several "red lines" that were not to be crossed by North Korea. They included no more operating the 5MWe reactor, no more reprocessing, no uranium enrichment program, and no proliferation of North Korean nuclear technologies and know-how. In particular, "no proliferation" was stressed by all participating states as the ultimate bottom-line for continuing the talks. Breaching this line would mean collapse of the talks. Unfortunately, this was exactly what happened with the September 19th Joint Declaration. Thus, the digging tunnel strategy regarding the Six-Party Talks focused on nuclear proliferation.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Pakistani collaboration ceased and North Korea turned instead to Syria and Iran. In the early 2000s, North Korea secretly began building an improved 5MWe reactor in the Syrian desert area. While appearing to participate earnestly in the Six-Party Talks, North Korea was actually exporting a plutonium-producing reactor to Syria. This reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 by an Israeli airstrike, killing a considerable number of North Korean laborers and technicians.

While advancing its nuclear cooperation with Syria, North Korea also accelerated its cooperation with Iran. Iran's nuclear weapons development began during the Pahlavi dynasty, was terminated after the 1979 revolution, and started up again in 1984. At the time, Iran claimed it was building a nuclear energy program, but it appears that they also secretly began doing nuclear weapons research. The truth of Iran's uranium enrichment program became known to the world in August 2002 when an Iranian opposition group revealed the testimony of exiled scientists. The opposition group, NCRI (National Council of Resistance of Iran), accused Iran, an NPT member state, of having deceived the international community and the IAEA for eighteen years.

Concrete evidence of close cooperation between North Korea and Iran on nuclear development is yet to be published. However there is a high probability that the two countries are working together. One objective indication is the long history of military cooperation between the two countries. In particular, Iran has been a major importer of North Korea's short- and medium-range missile technology. For this reason, at many North Korean missile test launches an Iranian military delegation

is reported as present among the observers. In light of such close military cooperation, it seems very likely that North Korea, with its successful plutonium development program, and Iran, with its large-scale uranium enrichment plant, are engaged in exchanging technologies and materials.

Despite international condemnation, Iran continues to operate its uranium enrichment program. The UN and Western powers, led by England, France, and Germany, are demanding that Iran terminate its uranium enrichment program out of concern that it may be producing HEU for use in nuclear weapons. Yet, Iran has refused to comply, on the pretext that its program is for “peaceful purposes.” Iran’s stance is very similar to that of North Korea, which continued to insist that its plutonium program was for peaceful purposes right up until it confirmed it had nuclear weapons. North Korea’s behavior also resembles that of Iran in claiming to be enriching uranium for use in a light-water reactor, even before such a reactor has been built. This behavior reveals the give-and-take nature of the strategic and technical cooperation between the two countries. Some analysts also suggest that the spent nuclear fuel from the 5MWe reactor in Syria was intended to be shared with Iran. We cannot ignore the possibility that Syria, which is at war with Israel, and Iran, whose president has vowed to wipe Israel off the map, are forming a triangular system of cooperation with North Korea as a go-between.

North Korea’s Negotiating Objectives

North Korea’s negotiating objectives are two-fold. Strategically, it aspires to win a constitutional struggle *vis-à-vis* South Korea. The North Korean leadership believes that winning the struggle is the only sure way to justify its dictatorship and the criminal activities they have. Tactically, North Korea puts enormous effort into to undermining American’s extended deterrence and alliance with South Korea. The leadership in Pyongyang considers the ROK-U.S. alliance as the most serious stumbling block to end the constitutional struggle on its terms. For this reason, removing the U.S. presence in South Korea has been the highest political and military objective to be accomplished. Thus, North Korea’ tactical objective, as a sort of precondition, is closely tied with its strategic objective.

Undermining U.S. Extended Deterrence in South Korea

North Korea successfully used its bargaining leverage to undermine

and diminish the U.S. security commitment to the South. This has been highlighted in the nuclear negotiations of the last two decades. The United States, intentionally or not, tried to allay North Korea's security concerns during the course of various negotiations to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. The North Korean argument, that it had to develop nuclear weapons due to the nuclear threat from the United States, has gained growing acceptance from the United States.

For example, North Korea successfully used the nuclear issue as a lure to achieve the first U.S.-DPRK high-level talks after the Korean War in June 1993. The Clinton administration, shocked by North Korea's announcement of its withdrawal from the NPT in March 12, 1993, entered into direct negotiations with Pyongyang in order to resolve the nuclear issue. Thereby, it rescinded the policy of "no direct US-DPRK talks" which had been a core element of US foreign policy since the end of the Korean War forty years earlier.

In the joint statement, the United States formally pledged not to use or threaten to use armed force against North Korea, including nuclear weapons.¹ The United States made a similar promise in the Geneva Agreed Framework signed on October 21, 1994, as in (Article III.1): "The U.S. will provide formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S."² The September 19th Joint Declaration of the Six-Party Talks in 2005 also made a similar security guarantee to North Korea (Article 1): "The United States affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons."³

In the early 1990s, North Korea used *desertion of nuclear development programs* as bait to extract repeated promises from the United States not to use its military forces including nuclear weapons. And after twenty years later, the DPRK is at present using *abandonment of nuclear weapons* as a pretext for insisting on the signing of a peace treaty and deactivating the armistice agreement which has formed the foundation of the ROK-U.S. joint deterrence against North Korea. This is the reality of the North Korean nuclear crisis today.

Removing the Armistice Agreement and the United Nations Command⁴

This year marks the 62nd anniversary of the start of the Korean War. On July 7, 1950, the United Nations Command (UNC) was formed to fight against North Korean forces that invaded South Korea on June 25

of that year. Twenty-one nations joined the UNC, with sixteen countries sending combat troops and five providing medical and material support. While the armistice, signed July 27, 1953, has been the backbone of subsequent security on the Korean peninsula, the idea of replacing it with a new peace treaty is emerging as a possible solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

On January 11, 2010, North Korea's Foreign Ministry proposed to conclude a peace treaty with the United States before resolving the nuclear problem.⁵ This was the latest version of Pyongyang's peace treaty proposal, linking the nuclear and peace treaty issues. North Korea alleged that its denuclearization was impossible without mutual trust between the two countries, and that trust could only be built with a peace treaty formally ending the war—the source of hostility.

However, the Workers' Party of North Korea and its leadership have devoted three generations to realizing the policy of national revolution and unification by force on the Korean peninsula. To North Koreans, the armistice agreement has symbolized the failure of that policy and an obstacle to the ultimate aim of unification on their terms. That is why replacing the armistice agreement has been a key strategic goal to North Korea. To achieve this goal, North Korea launched a two-prong strategy in the early 1970s: "military provocation" and "peace offensive"—a typical form of the digging tunnel strategy.

North Korea specifically targeted the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West Sea for military provocation as that area, was not included in the initial armistice agreement. Then the United Nations forces occupied the entire sea surrounding the peninsula. Later, it proclaimed the NLL a way to avoid unnecessary naval clashes. While adhering to this line until the early 1970s, North Korea began to question the authenticity of the NLL in challenging the armistice agreement. Since 1999, there have been five naval clashes provoked by North Korea along the NLL in the West Sea. The Yeonpyong Island shelling is the latest purposeful attempt to create regional debates over the armistice agreement.

Pyongyang has proposed to sign a peace treaty with Washington, with the diverse involvement of other relevant parties—China, the United Nations, or South Korea. Initially reluctant to accept Pyongyang's demand, Washington has gradually changed its position over the years. Especially, in conjunction with dismantling North Korea's nuclear programs, growing numbers of American officials and academics have come to accept the idea. While the elder Bush scorned it

in 1992 at the first high-level contact with North Korea, fourteen years later, in November 2006, the younger Bush expressed his willingness to sign a declaration ending the Korean War as a bid to denuclearize North Korea.⁶

It was President Clinton who erroneously accepted North Korea's proclaimed rhetoric that U.S.'s pending threat and the armistice agreement are responsible for the North Korean nuclear problem. In the 1990s, he promised several times not to threaten or use nuclear weapons against North Korea at the bilateral nuclear talks and launched the four-party talks to build a permanent peace regime on the peninsula. It seems that American officials in the Obama administration are taking a similar stance. For example, Secretary State Hillary Clinton remarked in February 2009 that the United States would be willing to "replace the peninsula's longstanding armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty" if North Korea were genuinely prepared to dismantle its nuclear programs.⁷ She made a similar remark at the ROK-U.S. Foreign and Defense Ministers' meeting held in Seoul on July 21, 2010.⁸

Traditionally, conservative governments in Seoul have flatly rejected Pyongyang's demand. They regarded it as a cunning strategy with multiple purposes: to exclude South Korea from the future peace building efforts on the Korean peninsula, to uphold North Korea as the only legitimate entity to represent Koreans on the peninsula, to remove the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) from the peninsula, and to achieve unification on its terms.

The previous progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun took a quite different approach, however. With the political slogans of "dismantling the Cold War security framework" and "establishing a new peace structure" respectively, these pro-North Korea administrations attempted to change the existing armistice structure. Their efforts were carried out under a broader political campaign of denying and correcting the so-called "past of South Korea"—the establishment of previous conservative South Korean governments. In repeated efforts using this approach, the armistice agreement was a key element to overhaul policy in the security area. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice proposed replacing the armistice agreement with a peace treaty, then ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Ban Ki Moon welcomed her proposal with great enthusiasm.⁹ The current conservative Lee Myung-bak administration understands the danger of rushing to conclude a peace treaty, but seems willing to include it as a part of

solution to the nuclear problem.

Even though the denuclearization of North Korea is important, trading it for the armistice agreement is no more than a self-defeating policy for the United States and South Korea. Such a policy would be harmful to long term stability in Northeast Asia. It would create the erroneous impression that the armistice agreement and the UNC are responsible for instability on the Korean peninsula and North Korea's nuclear weapon program—a long-held argument by North Korea. Also, a U.S.-North Korea peace treaty would lead to several critical strategic mistakes:

- Supporting the long-lasting North Korean argument that the Korean War was a national liberation war against U.S. imperialism and that the USFK is a symbol of American aggression
- Accepting the parallel argument that Washington and Pyongyang are the sole parties to the war
- Recognizing Pyongyang as the only legitimate entity on the peninsula after independence in 1945 and endorsing it as a winner of the decades-long constitutional struggle between the parliamentarianism of the South *versus* the communism of the North (It should be noted that West Germany did not recognize the legitimacy of the East German regime)
- Letting Pyongyang win political, ideological, and psychological warfare *vis-à-vis* Seoul and Washington
- Implying that North Korea deserves to play a key role in unification issues and marginalizing South Korean interests
- Strengthening pro-North Korea factions in South Korean society and intensifying ideological conflicts within the South

Even if South Korea is invited to participate in a peace treaty, it is still premature and risky for the following reasons:

- The price of denuclearizing North Korea is less important than reaching an armistice agreement. Hundreds of artilleries along the DMZ and missiles can turn the Seoul metropolitan area into a sea of fire as North Korea has threatened. Pyongyang can deploy chemical weapons and has formidable special troops ready to infiltrate South Korea.

A recent report by the U.S. State Department hints that North Korea has continued to develop biological weapons and may use them.¹⁰ Unless these threats are removed, permanent peace in Korea would be no more than an illusion.

- Peace building is a process; success will take time and effort. Although trust is important, the North Korean argument of building trust solely on completing a peace treaty is absurd. Peace building should be a front-loading process. Without enduring efforts centered on initial confidence-building and arms reduction, enough trust cannot be built to sign a peace treaty. As Alexander Vershbow, then U.S. ambassador to Seoul, remarked in October 2007 at a special seminar in Seoul, a peace treaty is “like the roof of a new house,” to get to that point of construction one first needs to “complete work on the foundation—confidence building measures and increased openness on the part of North Korea and the walls—full denuclearization.”¹¹
- Pyongyang is a chronic violator of agreements. History has shown a notorious habit of North Korea: agreement is one thing and implementation is another. Unless Pyongyang’s leadership undergoes fundamental changes, a peace treaty cannot guarantee genuine peace but only create a false sense of security.

Despite occasional clashes, the Korean peninsula has seen a relatively stable peace since the Korea War, mainly because of the existing peace framework. That framework consists of the armistice agreement, the UNC, and the mutual defense treaty between the ROK and the United States. In particular, any discussion of a new peace framework must be based on a positive appreciation of the armistice agreement and the UNC. As the former UNC Commander General B.B. Bell remarked in March 2006, it is “the longest standing peace enforcement coalition in the history of the United Nations.”¹² To exchange the valuable armistice system with North Korea’s uncertain denuclearization commitment is simply yielding to nuclear blackmail or being deceived by its peace offensive.

Concluding Remarks

The Korean peninsula still witnesses a *constitutional struggle* between parliamentarianism and hybrid communism—the last frontier of an epochal struggle in modern history. According to historian Philip Bobbitt, such a struggle ends only when the superior constitutional order dominates the weaker by bettering the welfare of the (Korean) nation and thus, resolving the underlying constitutional question.¹³ A peace treaty must be a tool to hallmark ending the struggle, not a makeshift to avoid the fundamental strategic questions.

Reviewing the deliberate and repetitive practices of the digging tunnel strategy by North Korea, there should be no illusion about North Korea's intentions. No matter what subject negotiations address, the intended goal of Pyongyang is to win the constitutional struggle against South Korea, and it musters whatever means and resources are available to achieve that goal, using the digging tunnel strategy.

Unfortunately, this obvious lesson, drawn from the last 60 years of history, is less accepted by the United States than by South Korea. For example, one U.S. study argues that “over the past 3.5 decades, the DPRK does not fire off missiles or torpedo ships when their diplomats are sitting down at the table with Americans.”¹⁴ Based on this judgment, Victor Cha concludes “there are clear tactical reasons for the U.S. to re-engage [North Korea].”¹⁵ Having North Korea's enduring digging tunnel strategy in mind; Cha's analysis is only half-truth. He reads the rhetoric (*tatema*) but fails to read the true intention (*hon*ne).

At the same time, it is quite encouraging to see different but more seasoned observations emanating in the United States. According to James Przystup, it is not clear that conversations with North Korea have restrained its provocative behavior. He points out that the 1998 Taepodong test came in the middle of negotiations on a missile moratorium; the 2006 missile and nuclear tests came a year after the September 19th Joint Declaration; and the 2009 nuclear test occurred after the Obama administration announced its willingness to hold dialogues with North Korea.¹⁶

While maintaining a dialogue with the United States, North Korea might not have displayed any provocative behavior in public. But they bought time and prepared for future actions. North Korea will not abandon the digging tunnel strategy as long as it holds onto the possibility of winning the constitutional struggle against South Korea. And unless it undergoes fundamental changes in political leadership,

North Korea will not discard its aim of unifying the entire peninsula on its terms, which will guarantee continuing the digging tunnel strategy in the coming years. All the methods North Korea employs—whether negotiations, dialogues, agreements, verbal threats, or actual provocations—will be the means to achieve this aim.

Notes:

¹ *Joint Statement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States of America*, New York, June 11, 1993.

² *Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, Geneva, October 21, 1994.

³ *Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks*, Beijing, September 19, 2005.

⁴ This section is based on the author's article. Cheon Seongwhun, "The ROK-U.S. military alliance: transformation and change," A paper presented at the conference on *Confronting Security Challenges on the Korean Peninsula* organized by Marine Corps University, on September 1, 2010.

⁵ *Korean Central News Agency*, January 11, 2010.

⁶ In a meeting with President Roh Moo-hyun on November 18, 2006, in Hanoi, President George Bush said, "And as I've made clear in a speech as recently as two days ago in Singapore, that we want the North Korean leaders to hear that if it gives up its weapons -- nuclear weapons ambitions, that we would be willing to enter into security arrangements with the North Koreans, as well as move forward new economic incentives for the North Korean people." *President Bush Meets with President Roh of the Republic of Korea*, The Sheraton Hanoi, Hanoi, Vietnam, Office of the Press Secretary, November 18, 2006, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/11/20061118-4.html>.

⁷ She remarked that "If North Korea is genuinely prepared to completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program, the Obama Administration will be willing to normalize bilateral relations, replace the peninsula's longstanding armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty, and assist in meeting the energy and other economic needs of the North Korean people." Hillary Rodham Clinton, *U.S.-Asia Relations: Indispensable to Our Future*, Remarks at the Asia Society, New York, New York, February 13, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/117333.htm>.

⁸ She said that "North Korea can halt its provocative behavior, its threats and belligerence towards its neighbors, take irreversible steps to fulfill its

denuclearization commitments, and comply with international law. And if North Korea chooses that path, sanctions will be lifted, energy and other economic assistance will be provided, its relations with the United States will be normalized, and the current armistice on the Peninsula will be replaced by a permanent peace agreement.” *Press Availability With Secretary Gates, Korean Foreign Minister Yu, and Korean Defense Minister Kim, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Seoul, South Korea, July 21, 2010*, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/145014.htm>

⁹ Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question* (Joongangilbo News Magazine, 2007), p. 571 (Korean translation).

¹⁰ The document reports that “Available information indicates that North Korea may still consider the use of biological weapons as a military option, and that it has continued its past effort to acquire specialized equipment, materials, and expertise, some of which could support biological weapon development. North Korea has yet to declare any of its biological research and development activities as part of the BWC confidence-building measures.” *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, Washington DC, Department of State, Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation, July 2010, pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Alexander Vershbow, “A peace regime on the Korean peninsula: the way ahead,” The IFANS Special Seminar on *Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula: Visions and Task*, October 26, 2007, <http://seoul.usembassy.gov/utills/eprintpage.html>.

¹² *Statement of General Bell, Commander, United Nations Command; Commander, Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command; and Commander, United States Forces Korea before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 7, 2006, p. 21.

¹³ Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor Books , 2002).

¹⁴ Victor Cha, “Returning to the dance floor North Korea: why now?” Korea Chair Platform, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 25, 2011, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ James Przystup, “Has strategic patience run its course?” *PacNet*, No. 46, Pacific Forum CSIS, August 25, 2011.